

JULIEN M. OGEREAU

# 1 Thessalonians

Epigraphical Commentary  
on the New Testament I

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament  
545*

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**Mohr Siebeck**

# Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

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545





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Epigraphical Commentary  
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Published with funding from the Austrian Science Fund (FWF)  
(grant number DOI: 10.55776/PUB 1182).

**FWF** Austrian  
Science Fund

ISBN 978-3-16-164136-7 / eISBN 978-3-16-164137-4  
DOI 10.1628/978-3-16-164137-4

ISSN 0512-1604 / eISSN 2568-7476  
(Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament)

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie;  
detailed bibliographic data are available at <https://dnb.dnb.de>.

Published by Mohr Siebeck Tübingen 2025.

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Printed on non-aging paper. Typesetting: epline, Bodelshausen.

Mohr Siebeck GmbH & Co. KG, Wilhelmstraße 18, 72074 Tübingen, Germany  
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*patientissimae meae*



## Vorwort

Der ECNT ist das Ergebnis einer zufälligen Begegnung zwischen Markus Öhler und Joseph Verheyden während der jährlichen Generalversammlung der *Studiolorum Novi Testamenti Societas*, die 2009 in Wien stattfand. Im Gespräch über aktuelle und zukünftige Projekte stellten die beiden fest, dass sie ein gemeinsames Interesse an Epigraphik haben, genauer gesagt daran, wie inschriftliche Zeugnisse der Antike für die Auslegung des Neuen Testaments fruchtbar gemacht werden können. Das Gespräch endete mit der Verpflichtung, die Möglichkeiten für den Start eines entsprechenden Projekts zu prüfen. Idealerweise sollte dies zu einer Kommentarreihe führen, mehr oder weniger nach dem Vorbild der an der Universität Salzburg eingerichteten *Papyrologischen Kommentare zum Neuen Testament*. Das ehrgeizige Vorhaben würde ein Desiderat systematisch aufgreifen, das seit den Arbeiten Adolf Deissmanns zwar vorhanden war, aber seither nur vereinzelt und sehr fragmentarisch angegangen wurde.

Von Anfang an war klar, dass das Projekt nur als Gemeinschaftswerk gelingen konnte, bei dem Neutestamentler und Epigraphiker eng zusammenarbeiten würden. Die Initiatoren hatten das Glück, in Thomas Corsten, Professor für Griechische Geschichte und Epigraphik an der Universität Wien und Mitherausgeber des *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, einen Mitstreiter zu finden, der mit seinem Enthusiasmus und seinem Fachwissen maßgeblich dazu beitrug, das Projekt auf den Weg zu bringen.

Da alle drei zu diesem Zeitpunkt in andere Projekte involviert waren, war man sich einig, dass ein Forschungsprojekt von solchem Umfang und solcher Komplexität nicht überhastet gestartet werden sollte. Der erste Schritt war die Organisation einer Konferenz im Februar 2014, wiederum in Wien, um ein Gespräch zwischen Neutestamentlern und (griechischen) Epigraphikern zu beginnen, das zwei Ziele verfolgte: Während ein Teil der Beiträge sich mit methodischen Fragen aus der Perspektive beider Disziplinen befasste, zeigte der andere, welche Bedeutung Inschriften für die Klärung von Fragen zur Geschichte und zum Inhalt neutestamentlicher Texte haben können. Dabei traten Bezüge zur Verwendung spezifischer Terminologie und den Konventionen literarischer Gattungen ebenso zutage wie zu allgemeinen Aspekten des Lebens in antiken Gesellschaften und Realien. Die Ergebnisse wurden in einem Band mit dem Titel *Epigraphik und Neues Testament* veröffentlicht, herausgegeben von Thomas Corsten, Markus Öhler und Joseph Verheyden, WUNT 365, Tübingen 2016.

Daran anknüpfend ging es darum, nicht nur zu zeigen, welchen Beitrag inschriftliche Belege in Fällen leisten können, in denen die Parallelen recht offensichtlich sind, sondern diesen vergleichenden Ansatz an einer konkreten neutestamentlichen Schrift in „Probebohrungen“ zu versuchen. Die Wahl fiel auf den Kolosserbrief, der Gegenstand einer Konferenz war, die im September 2015 in Leuven stattfand und Epigraphiker und Kommentatoren des Briefes zusammenbrachte. Die Konferenz konnte den umfassenden Charakter einer epigraphisch-informierten Perspektive für die historischen und exegetischen Fragen rund um diesen deuteropaulinischen Text aufzeigen. Die Ergebnisse der Tagung wurden veröffentlicht als *Epigraphical Evidence Illustrating Paul's Letter to the Colossians*, herausgegeben von Joseph Verheyden, Markus Öhler und Thomas Corsten.

Zwischen den beiden Tagungen gelang es den Herausgebern, den Verlag Mohr Siebeck davon zu überzeugen, das ECNT-Projekt ebenfalls zu beherbergen. Außerdem hielten sie weiterhin Kontakt zu Kollegen, die andere einschlägige Projekte durchführen, darunter das oben erwähnte Salzburger Papyrologieprojekt, die Arbeiten von John Kloppenborg und Kollegen zu antiken Vereinigungen, das Team des neu eingerichteten Projekts *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* und Greg Horsleys Moulton-Milligan-Projekt.

Einer der Referenten der Konferenz in Leuven war Julien Ogereau, der bereits mit seiner Monographie *Paul's Koinonia with the Philippians* das große Potential einer Heranziehung von Inschriften für die historisch-kritische Forschung aufgezeigt hatte. Seine Expertise in Epigraphik und Bibelwissenschaft machte ihn zum idealen Kandidaten für die Ausarbeitung des ersten Bandes des *Epigraphischen Kommentars zum Neuen Testament*.

Es stellte sich jedoch bald heraus, dass der Kolosserbrief wegen der offenen Fragen zu seiner Autorschaft, seiner Lokalisierung und den Bedingungen, unter denen er geschrieben wurde, nicht die geeignetste Schrift für den Beginn des Projekts war. Das Team beschloss daher, sich zunächst mit einem der unbestrittenen Paulusbriefe zu befassen. Die Wahl fiel auf das älteste erhaltene Schreiben des Paulus – auf den ersten Brief an die Thessalonicher. Sein historischer Hintergrund ist relativ unumstritten und seine Inhalte sind von großer Bedeutung. Zugleich schien es aufgrund der vergleichsweise geringen Länge realistisch, im Rahmen eines vierjährigen Projekts einen Kommentar aus inschriftlicher Sicht zu erstellen. Die Ausarbeitung und Bewilligung eines Förderungsantrags durch den Österreichischen Wissenschaftsfond FWF (P 31343) waren die letzten Schritte, bevor das Projekt schließlich 2019 anlief. Im Laufe der Arbeit, die nicht zuletzt durch die Covid-Pandemie behindert wurde, stieß dankenswerterweise Riet van Bremen zu den Herausgebern, um ein besseres Gleichgewicht zwischen Exegeten und Epigraphikern herzustellen.

Die Hauptlast des Projekts wurde von Julien Ogereau getragen. Er hat die genaueren Arbeitsstrategien auf der Grundlage des Projektvorschlags formu-

liert, angewandt und zur Vollendung gebracht. Dass sein Kommentar zum 1. Thessalonicher nun als *tomus primus* des epigraphischen Kommentars erschienen ist, erfüllt die Herausgeber mit Dankbarkeit und Genugtuung. Dieser erste Band zeigt, wieviel Potential in der Erforschung von Form und Sprache der Inschriften für die Auslegung des Neuen Testaments liegt, aber auch, wie viel hier noch schlummert. Die Aufgabe, eine epigraphisch-informierte Exegese des Neuen Testaments fortzuführen und damit eine empfindliche Lücke in der neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft zu schließen, wird noch viel Zeit und Kraft erfordern.

Neben dem großen Dank an Julien Ogereau gilt der Dank auch dem Wissenschaftsfonds und den vielen Kolleginnen und Kollegen, die das Projekt mit Interesse verfolgt und beraten haben. Dazu gehören Walter Ameling, Peter Arzt-Grabner, Richard S. Ascough, James R. Harrison, Greg Horsley, und John S. Kloppenborg. Nun, da der erste Schritt getan ist, sind die Herausgeber und die Herausgeberin gespannt, wie dieser erste ECNT Band bei den Kollegen und Kolleginnen beider Fachgebiete ankommen wird. Sie freuen sich über Verbesserungsvorschläge für künftige Bände sowie über Vorschläge von jenen, die einen Band zu diesem Projekt beisteuern möchten.

Riet van Bremen, Thomas Corsten, Markus Öhler, Joseph Verheyden  
Leuven/London/Wien, Juni 2024



## Preface

The Epigraphical Commentary on the New Testament (ECNT) is the result of a chance encounter between Markus Öhler and Joseph Verheyden during the annual General Meeting of the *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*, which was held in Vienna in 2009. While talking about current and future projects, the two found that they had a common interest in epigraphy, more specifically, in how inscriptional evidence from the ancient world could be used for the interpretation of the New Testament. The discussion ended with both committing themselves to exploring the possibility of such a project. Ideally, it would take the form of a commentary series, modelled more or less on the Papyrologische Kommentare zum Neuen Testament project conducted at the University of Salzburg. The project, ambitious as it was, would fulfill a desideratum first expressed by Adolf Deissmann, but which hardly anyone has carried out in a systematic fashion since then.

From the outset, it was evident that the project could only succeed as a collective enterprise in which New Testament scholars would work closely together with epigraphists. Öhler and Verheyden were fortunate to find a fellow colleague in Thomas Corsten, Professor of Greek History and Epigraphy at the University of Vienna and a co-editor of the *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*. His enthusiasm and expertise helped to place the project on its tracks.

Since each of these three editors were involved with other projects at the time, they agreed that a research project of such a scale and complexity should not be launched too quickly. The first step was therefore to organize a conference in Vienna in February 2014, with the aim of starting a formal conversation between New Testament scholars and (Greek) epigraphists with two objectives in mind: (1) to address methodological questions from the perspective of both disciplines and (2) to illustrate how inscriptions can significantly help to clarify questions about the history and contents of the New Testament. Such questions might be concerned with the use of specific terminology and the conventions of literary genres, the presentation of all aspects of life in ancient societies and realia. The proceedings were published in 2016 in a volume entitled *Epigraphik und Neues Testament*, which was edited by Thomas Corsten, Markus Öhler, and Joseph Verheyden.

The next task was not only to show what contributions inscriptional evidence could make in cases where parallels were rather obvious, but to test this comparative approach on a specific New Testament text by way of “sample drillings.”

The decision was made to focus on the letter to the Colossians, and a conference was held in Leuven in September 2015 that brought together epigraphists and commentators on the letter. The conference succeeded in demonstrating the all-encompassing benefit of an epigraphically-informed perspective for the historical and exegetical questions surrounding this deutero-Pauline letter. The proceedings of the conference were published in 2018 in another volume titled *Epigraphical Evidence Illustrating Paul's Letter to the Colossians*, which was edited by Joseph Verheyden, Markus Öhler, and Thomas Corsten.

In between these two conferences, the editors convinced the publishing house Mohr Siebeck to embrace the ECNT project as well. They also maintained contact with colleagues conducting other relevant projects, including the Salzburg papyrological project mentioned above, the project on ancient associations conducted by John Kloppenborg and his colleagues, the team of the revived project entitled Documents Illustrating Early Christianity, and Greg Horsley's Moulton-Milligan project. One of the speakers at the Leuven conference was Julien Ogereau, who had already shown the great potential of using inscriptions to conduct historical-critical exegetical research in his monograph *Paul's Koinonia with the Philippians*. His combined expertise in epigraphy and biblical studies made him the ideal candidate to prepare the first volume of the ECNT series.

However, it soon became apparent that the letter to the Colossians was perhaps not the most suitable text to start the project, since questions about its authorship, its provenance, and the conditions in which it was written remain open. The team therefore decided to tackle first one of the authentic Pauline letters. The choice logically fell to the oldest letter, First Thessalonians. Its historical background is relatively undisputed, its content is definitely significant, and its relative length suggested that it should be possible to produce a commentary from an inscriptional perspective within the framework of a four-year project. The preparation and final approval of a funding application by the Austrian Science Fund (P 31343) were the final steps before the project finally got underway in 2019. In the course of the project, which was in no small way hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic, Riet van Bremen joined the editors to provide a better balance between biblical scholars and epigraphists.

The main burden of the project was borne by Julien Ogereau. He first formulated and then applied the specific working strategies based on the project proposal and brought them to completion. The fact that his commentary on 1 Thessalonians has now been published as the *tomus primus* of the epigraphical commentary fills the editors with gratitude and satisfaction. This first volume demonstrates how much potential there is in studying the form and language of inscriptions for the interpretation of the New Testament, but also how much remains dormant. The task of continuing an epigraphically-informed exegesis of the New Testament, and thus of filling a major gap in New Testament scholarship, will require a great deal of time and energy.

In addition to the enormous thanks to Julien Ogereau, we would like to thank the Austrian Science Fund and the many colleagues who have followed the project with interest and have offered their advice. These include Walter Ameling, Peter Arzt-Grabner, Richard S. Ascough, James R. Harrison, Greg Horsley, and John S. Kloppenborg. Now that the first step is taken, the editors are eagerly looking forward to seeing how this inaugural volume of the ECNT will be received among colleagues in both fields and welcome suggestions for improvements to future volumes as well as promising proposals from colleagues to contribute to the project.

Riet van Bremen, Thomas Corsten, Markus Öhler, Joseph Verheyden  
Leuven/London/Vienna, June 2024



## Acknowledgments

This commentary stems from the research project entitled “First Thessalonians in the Light of Greco-Roman Epigraphy” (P 31343) funded by Austrian Science Fund (*FWF*) from 2019 to 2023. Its publication in open-access has been enabled by Austrian Science Fund (grant number DOI: 10.55776/PUB 1182).

Its author has incurred many debts over the course of its composition. Thanks are due primarily to the initiators and editors of the ECNT project who secured funding and reviewed numerous drafts of the manuscript, namely Markus Öhler, Thomas Corsten, Joseph Verheyden, and Riet van Bremen. Benedict Dopplinger and Eleni Theodorou helped develop the database that holds the primary epigraphic evidence relevant to the commentary. Adalbert Raab regularly and dutifully assisted with the collection of research resources. Members of the New Testament Institute of the Protestant Faculty of Theology at the University of Vienna provided valuable feedback at various stages of development, as did the series editors and the final reviewers. Lastly, Jacob Cerone prepared the manuscript for publication with diligence and care.

It is the author’s sincere hope that this commentary will prove useful to generations of students and scholars of Paul and 1 Thessalonians. May it highlight the enduring significance of inscriptions to help us better appreciate the socio-cultural context in which the New Testament was produced.

Julien M. Ogereau

Vienna, April 2023



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## Abbreviations

Abbreviations of epigraphic sources follow the “List of Abbreviations of Editions and Works of Reference for Alphabetic Greek Epigraphy” of the Association Internationale d’Épigraphie Grecque et Latine (available at <https://www.aiegl.org/grepiabbr.html>). Biblical and related texts have been abbreviated according to *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014). Additional abbreviations are listed below.

ABSA	<i>The Annual of the British School at Athens</i>
ArchD	<i>Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον/Archaologikon deltion</i>
BMC	R. S. Poole et al., eds. <i>A Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum</i> . 29 vols. London: British Museum, 1873–1922.
DGE	<i>Diccionario griego-español</i>
EDH	Epigraphische Datenbank Heidelberg
EpigAnat	<i>Epigraphica Anatolica</i>
Gaius, <i>Inst.</i>	Gaius. <i>Institutiones</i> . Edited by U. Manthe. Texte zur Forschung 81. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004.
GRA I	J. S. Kloppenborg and R. S. Ascough, eds. <i>Greco-Roman Associations: Texts, Translations, and Commentary; I. Attica, Central Greece, Macedonia, Thrace</i> . Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 181. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011.
GRA II	P. A. Harland, ed. <i>Greco-Roman Associations: Texts, Translations, and Commentary; II. North Coast of the Black Sea, Asia Minor</i> . Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 204. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014.
GRA III	J. S. Kloppenborg, ed. <i>Greco-Roman Associations: Texts, Translations, and Commentary; III. Ptolemaic and Early Roman Egypt</i> . Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 246. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020.
<i>I. Berenike</i>	J. Reynolds. “Inscriptions.” Pages 233–54 in <i>Excavations at Sidi Khrebish Benghazi (Berenice)</i> . Vol. 1: <i>Buildings, Coins, Inscriptions, Architectural Decoration</i> . Edited by J. A. Lloyd. Supplements to Libya Antiqua 5. Libya: Department of Antiquities, Ministry of Teaching and Education, People’s Socialist Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, 1977.

- I. Faras* J. Kubińska, ed. *Inscriptions grecques chrétiennes. Faras 4.* Warsaw: PWN, 1974.
- LGPN* P. M. Fraser and E. Matthews, eds. *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names.* 5 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1987–2014.
- MDAI (A)* *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts (Athen. Abt.)*
- I. Milet 1,7* H. Knackfuß. *Milet: Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen und Untersuchungen seit dem Jahre 1899.* Vol. 1,7: *Der Südmarkt und die Benachbarten Bauanlagen.* Berlin: Schoetz und Parrhysius, 1924.
- Mouseion Smyrna* Μουσείον και Βιβλιοθήκη της Ευαγγελικής Σχολής (Σμύρνη)
- OCD*<sup>3</sup> S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth, eds. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary.* 3rd rev. ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- PHI* The Packard Humanities Institute
- PIR*<sup>2</sup> E. Groag et al., eds. *Prosopographia Imperii Romani saec. I. II. III.* 8 vols. 2nd ed. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1933–2015.
- RAC* *Rivista di archeologia cristiana*

## Editorial Conventions

The epigraphic texts included in the commentary generally replicate those of the referenced editions and follow the Leiden conventions laid out below.<sup>1</sup>

Αὐρ(ῆλιος)	expansion of words abbreviated on the stone
Αὐρῆ[λιος]	restoration of lost letters
ΑΒΓ	letters clearly read but interpretation uncertain
ΑΒΓ̄	doubtful reading of letters
<u>ΑΒΓ</u>	letters read by previous editor but no longer visible
[..]	known or estimated number of lost letters
[-]	unknown number of lost letters
[[ΑΒΓ]]	letters deliberately erased in antiquity
{ΑΒΓ}	letters suppressed by the editor
⟨ΑΒΓ⟩	letters added or substituted by the editor
<i>vac</i>	space on the stone
or	line demarcation on the stone (a double bar is used when the line demarcation is a multiple of five)

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<sup>1</sup> For an introduction on epigraphic conventions, see McLean, *Greek Epigraphy*, 27–39.



# Introduction

## 1. Preliminary Remarks

A century after the publication of Adolf Deissmann's much acclaimed *Licht vom Osten* (4th ed., 1923), it seems almost out of place to offer, by way of introduction, a justification for an epigraphic commentary.<sup>1</sup> As has been noted,<sup>2</sup> however, the study of the New Testament in the light of inscriptions almost came to a halt after the appearance of James H. Moulton and George Milligan's small catalogue published in *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-literary Sources* in 1929, and after Deissmann's death in 1937. In the following decades, hardly anyone took up Deissmann's challenge to "set themselves seriously to labor in this field of biblical research,"<sup>3</sup> to the effect that Greek epigraphic sources have been relatively neglected in New Testament studies in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

As it stands, it can be said that New Testament scholars generally "try to keep away from epigraphy when studying the texts they are focusing on,"<sup>5</sup> rather than engaging with epigraphs and exploring their historical and linguistic potential. Three main reasons have been advanced for this regrettable situation, namely, the apparent difficulties of working with inscriptions (for those without any formal training), a certain skepticism toward their heuristic value, and the false assumption that all the relevant epigraphic material has already been collected and systematically exploited.<sup>6</sup> As a result, little epigraphic evidence has been

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<sup>1</sup> For recent appraisals of Deissmann's scholarship, see Gerber, *Deissmann the Philologist*; Breytenbach and Marksches, eds., *Deissmann*.

<sup>2</sup> Arzt-Grabner, "Auswertung inschriftlicher Zeugnisse," 28–29.

<sup>3</sup> Deissmann, *Bible Studies*, viii.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Horsley, *NewDocs* 5:39, 81–82; Gerber, *Deissmann the Philologist*, 2; Aitken, *No Stone Unturned*, 23–24.

<sup>5</sup> Corsten, Öhler, and Verheyden, eds., *Epigraphik und Neues Testament*, 1. Cf. Ogereau, "Χειρόγραφοι," 93–97.

<sup>6</sup> Corsten, Öhler, and Verheyden, eds., *Epigraphik und Neues Testament*, 1. Cf. Arzt-Grabner, "Auswertung inschriftlicher Zeugnisse," 43–44. Little do New Testament scholars realize that about 600,000 Greek and Latin inscriptions dating between 800 BCE and 700 CE have been published in hundreds of epigraphic corpora and specialized publications. See Bodel, *Epigraphic Evidence*, 4.

brought to bear on the New Testament, and the majority of specialists continue to rely on lexica that contain a limited amount of epigraphic material.<sup>7</sup>

Yet not all is as bleak as it may first appear, and the last four decades or so have witnessed a notable resurgence of interest in documentary sources within biblical scholarship.<sup>8</sup> In the 1980s, the Ancient History Documentary Research Centre at Macquarie University, Sydney, led the way with the publication of the first five volumes of the *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* series edited by Gregory H. R. Horsley that reinvigorated the study of inscriptions and papyri and further illustrated their importance for understanding the historical and linguistic context of early Christianity.<sup>9</sup> Due to the painstaking nature of the work, however, the output of scholars working in this field has been somewhat sporadic over the last thirty years. The number of studies giving serious consideration to inscriptions has indeed remained limited,<sup>10</sup> while, generally speaking, commentaries rarely interact with epigraphic evidence.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, papyrological sources have comparatively received greater attention and have been fully utilized to produce useful resources such as the *Papyrologische Kommentare zum Neuen Testament* (PKNT) series edited by Peter Arzt-Grabner, John S. Kloppenborg, and Mauro Pesce. This series has further demonstrated, if it needed to, the insight that documentary sources can offer on early Christian texts.

Recognizing that inscriptions had yet to be investigated more comprehensively, two New Testament scholars (Markus Öhler and Joseph Verheyden) and an epigraphist (Thomas Corsten) from the universities of Vienna and Leuven resolved to address the situation and to stimulate new research in this field.<sup>12</sup> Two interdisciplinary conferences were convened in Vienna and Leuven in 2014 and 2015 “to explore possibilities and avenues for a more systematic study of the

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<sup>7</sup> The revised supplement of the ninth edition of the renowned Liddell-Scott-Jones lexicon (1996), the *Diccionario Griego-Español* (1980–), or Bauer’s *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (2000) do incorporate some epigraphic data. However, newer dictionaries such as *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (2018) and *The Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (2021) hardly survey inscriptions. See Aitken, *No Stone Unturned*, 23–26; Lee, “The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek,” 426–28.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ogereau, “Χειρόγραφοι,” 95; Arzt-Grabner, *Philemon*, 40–42; id., “Auswertung inschriftlicher Zeugnisse,” 29.

<sup>9</sup> S. R. Llewelyn and J. R. Harrison produced five additional volumes between 1992 and 2012. Five more volumes are currently in preparation.

<sup>10</sup> Significant recent contributions include the three-volume set *Greco-Roman Associations* (2011–2020) edited by J. S. Kloppenborg, R. S. Ascough, and P. A. Harland, and the multi-volume series *The First Urban Churches* series (2018–) edited by J. R. Harrison and L. L. Welborn. See also the bibliography in Ogereau, “Χειρόγραφοι,” 95 (n. 7), to which can be added Peres, *Griechische Grabinschriften*, and Burnett, *Studying the New Testament through Inscriptions*.

<sup>11</sup> Most commentaries only adduce papyrological sources. Notable exceptions are Green, *Thessalonians*; Bormann, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Kolosser*; Holloway, *Philippians*; and Standhartinger, *Der Philipperbrief*; all of whom do give consideration to inscriptions.

<sup>12</sup> Corsten, Öhler, and Verheyden, eds., *Epigraphik und Neues Testament*, 1–4.

epigraphic material and its relevance for interpreting the New Testament,” and to put a research plan into place.<sup>13</sup> The meetings and their proceedings underlined once again the enduring value and pertinence of inscriptions and made original contributions on a variety of texts and topics such as 1 John, Colossians, or the eschatological expectations of the first Christ-believers.<sup>14</sup>

They also laid the foundations for a larger collaborative project whose aim is to produce a series of epigraphic commentaries on the New Testament.<sup>15</sup> The present volume is the first concrete step in this direction and, hopefully, the first installment in a long series of commentaries emulating, with respect to the inscriptions, what the PKNT series has accomplished with the papyri. The decision to begin with 1 Thessalonians has been primarily motivated by practical reasons and only needs a brief word of explanation. The uncontested authorship and early date of the letter, the absence of major text critical issues, its manageable size, and the rich epigraphic contexts of its place of composition (Corinth) and its place of reception (Thessalonica and Macedonia more broadly), made the completion of the commentary realistically feasible within the period of funding. Besides, the letter addresses a number of topics, such as Paul’s work ethic or the Thessalonians’ eschatological hope, that open interesting avenues of enquiry and promise new insights on the letter when examined against its socio-cultural background.

## 2. Objectives, Methodology, and Structure

The primary objective of this commentary should be clear enough in light of the preceding section. To put it succinctly, it is to shed some socio-cultural and linguistic light into Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians by investigating epigraphic sources as thoroughly and systematically as possible. In this respect, it aims neither to emulate nor to supplant traditional exegetical commentaries that offer a comprehensive interpretation of the text that has matured over many years of teaching, research, and reflection. Rather, with the help of inscriptions it explores new avenues by which the text may be read or understood. Not unlike the PKNT series, it must therefore be conceived as a supplementary resource, a “wichtige Ergänzung” to borrow Arzt-Grabner’s expression,<sup>16</sup> which enriches our comprehension of 1 Thessalonians and of the cultural world in which it was composed and received, by approaching it from a different angle. Namely,

<sup>13</sup> Corsten, Öhler, and Verheyden, eds., *Epigraphik und Neues Testament*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> See Corsten, Öhler, and Verheyden, eds., *Epigraphik und Neues Testament*; and Verheyden, Öhler, and Corsten, eds., *Colossians*.

<sup>15</sup> Corsten, Öhler, and Verheyden, eds., *Epigraphik und Neues Testament*, 4; Verheyden, Öhler, and Corsten, eds., *Colossians*, ix.

<sup>16</sup> Arzt-Grabner, *Philemon*, 38.

it adopts the perspective of someone immersed in the language and cultural environment of the author and his audience as evidenced in inscriptions, so as to better appreciate the message the author likely intended to convey and how the audience might have received it. And it endeavors to do so without any theological apriorism, as it is not interested in defending a certain exegetical tradition or in proving a particular interpretation. Rather, following Arzt-Grabner's recommendation with respect to the PKNT series, it seeks to remain open to "möglichen Überraschungen" that may confirm or challenge a generally accepted interpretation.<sup>17</sup>

In other words, the originality of this commentary is to give prominence to inscriptions that shed light, directly or indirectly, on linguistic features of the letter and on its social-cultural context. An "inscription" is understood to be any "piece of writing or lettering engraved, etched, incised, traced, stamped, or otherwise imprinted into or onto a durable surface," which could be made of stone, bronze, lead, or ceramic.<sup>18</sup> Excluded from this definition (and from the field of epigraphy in general) are, evidently enough, documents made of papyrus sheet or parchment (which are examined in the PKNT series) and coins (which belong to the field of numismatics).<sup>19</sup>

The reasons for our narrow focus on epigraphic evidence are several. At a linguistic level, inscriptions are particularly useful insofar as they introduce us to the *lingua franca* of the ancient Mediterranean, the Koine dialect (κοινή διάλεκτος) that was spoken and written more or less ubiquitously (though with some regional variation) in the Greek East from the Hellenistic period onwards.<sup>20</sup> As Deissmann and his successors have demonstrated, the New Testament and the Septuagint were in fact written in Koine Greek (and not in some sort of Jewish-Greek dialect) and present closer linguistic affinities with that of documentary sources than, for example, Attic orators or Homeric poetry.<sup>21</sup> Or as Gregory H. R. Horsley and John A. Lee have put it, "the language of inscriptions [and papyri] is *on the whole* of a similar linguistic level to the NT, compared with the Greek found in most of the literature," in spite of some slight variations

<sup>17</sup> Arzt-Grabner, "Auswertung inschriftlicher Zeugnisse," 43.

<sup>18</sup> Bodet, ed., *Epigraphic Evidence*, 2. Cf. McLean, *Greek Epigraphy*, 1.

<sup>19</sup> A strict delineation between these fields of study based on the type of writing material has not always been practically possible due to the provenience of some of these documents. For instance, inscriptions on ostraca or wooden tablets discovered in Egypt have usually come under the responsibility of papyrologists, and are therefore examined in the PKNT series. See Bodet, ed., *Epigraphic Evidence*, 2–3; Bagnall, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Papyrology*, xvii–xx, 3–29; Arzt-Grabner, *Philemon*, 37–39; id., "Auswertung inschriftlicher Zeugnisse," 27. This commentary nonetheless adduces a few (curse) lead tablets from Greece and North Africa.

<sup>20</sup> See chs. 4–6 in Horrocks, *Greek*; and Browning, *Medieval and Modern Greek*, 19–52. Cf. Lee, "The Vocabulary of the Septuagint," 101–103.

<sup>21</sup> See, e. g., Deissmann, *Philology of the Greek Bible*; id., *Licht vom Osten*, 48–115. Cf. Horsley, *NewDocs* 5:5–48. See also the discussion and literature review in Voelz, "Language of the New Testament"; Ogereau, *Paul's Koinonia*, 53–63.

in register that are similar to those observed in contemporary literary or documentary sources.<sup>22</sup> Inscriptions can therefore illustrate common contextual usages of lexemes (or clusters of them) and, occasionally, offer insight into unsuspected meanings or nuances. Thus, they can afford a new range of semantic possibilities for understanding a particular lexeme or passage.<sup>23</sup> Yet, just as with the papyrological evidence, by no means do they provide the “einzige und letztgültige Bedeutung.”<sup>24</sup>

Further, as items of ancient realia, inscriptions furnish invaluable information on various aspects of Greco-Roman society that do not necessarily transpire in literary sources. Monumental dedications to deities, manumission acts, honorific inscriptions, imperial letters, or even epitaphs can highlight, respectively, popular religious beliefs, socio-economic dynamics and hierarchies, forms of political propaganda and ideology, or commemorative practices. In the words of Paul Trebilco, inscriptions indeed offer us “access to people in their contexts, to the language they used, to the cultures and social structures of which they were part,” and give us “unique glimpses into what they did, thought, and valued.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, they sharpen our heuristic lens and help us become more attuned to the socio-cultural conventions and practices that may be alluded to or implied in a particular text.

Having established the value of inscriptions, a set of linguistic, spatial, and temporal criteria ought to be laid down from the outset in order to select inscriptions that are most relevant to the task at hand. For obvious reasons, priority has been given to material engraved in Koine Greek, which, outside of Roman colonies such as Philippi or Corinth, was the dominant language in the Greek peninsula in Roman times and throughout the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>26</sup> As noted earlier, the latter was characterized by a certain linguistic unity throughout the imperial era (regional diversities notwithstanding), which renders a philological comparison of inscriptions from Asia Minor (and beyond) with epigraphic material from Greece not only possible, but by all means desirable and fruitful.<sup>27</sup> Naturally, Latin inscriptions have also been consulted, though less with linguistic aims in mind than for what they can contribute to our appreciation of the socio-cultural world of 1 Thessalonians.

<sup>22</sup> Horsley and Lee, “Lexicon of the New Testament,” 60. In other words, the New Testament is not solely written in vernacular Greek, just as documentary sources are not all written in vernacular and literary sources in literary Greek (cf. p. 59).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Ogereau, “Χειρόγραφοι,” 94–96; Arzt-Grabner, “Auswertung inschriftlicher Zeugnisse,” 41–42.

<sup>24</sup> Arzt-Grabner, *Philemon*, 49. Cf. id., “Auswertung inschriftlicher Zeugnisse,” 42–43.

<sup>25</sup> Trebilco, “Epigraphy,” 90.

<sup>26</sup> See Destephen, “La coexistence du grec et du latin,” 134, 138–39; Rizakis, “Le grec face au latin”; Giannakopoulos, “Greek Presence”; Brélaz, “La langue des *incolae*”; id., *Philippes*, 73–95.

<sup>27</sup> For a similar rationale (with respect to the papyri), see Arzt-Grabner, *Philemon*, 50–56.

In this respect, any epigraphic evidence from the Greek East dated between the late Republican and the early imperial eras could potentially be significant, despite the spatial distance with early Roman Thessalonica. This said, prominence has generally been given to material originating from Macedonia, which in some aspects can be rather idiosyncratic, and from Achaia, the place where the letter was composed. Indeed, the closer the geographic connection with Thessalonica is, the more relevant the evidence is likely to be. Or in the words of Arzt-Grabner: “Der Evidenzgrad des Vergleichs ist umso größer, je näher die geographischen Rahmenbedingungen der Texte beieinander liegen, d. h. der Vergleich von Texten kommt dort an seine Grenzen, wo die betreffenden Text hinsichtlich der genannten Rahmenbedingungen zu weit voneinander entfernt sind.”<sup>28</sup> Given that Greco-Roman culture dominated the Eastern Mediterranean, documents from further afield can nonetheless be adduced when no relevant evidence can be traced locally, or when a widespread cultural practice or phenomenon needs to be illustrated. This, of course, does not deny the existence of local epigraphic phenomena, such as the Macedonian dedications to Zeus Hypsistos (Διὸς ὑψιστος) or the so-called confession or propitiatory inscriptions (*Beichtinschriften* or *Sühninschriften*) from Lydia and Phrygia, which have no comparable equivalent in the rest of the Mediterranean world, or which are at least not found elsewhere with the same frequency.<sup>29</sup>

A slightly accommodating approach has also been applied to the question of dating, which in many cases cannot be established precisely. Whenever possible, precedence has been given to inscriptions that are, or appear to be, the closest to the date of composition of 1 Thessalonians (ca. 49/50 CE), or more generally, that can be dated fairly confidently to the early or high imperial era, that is, the period spanning from the beginning of Augustus’s Principate (27 BCE) to the middle of the third century CE when the Roman epigraphic habit peaked.<sup>30</sup> Material from the classical, Hellenistic, or late antique eras is thus only referenced when it is particularly pertinent and/or when no other inscription from the Roman imperial period could be found – later material that reflects a certain awareness of the themes and language of the New Testament are of course only useful in illustrating reception traditions in the early church.<sup>31</sup>

Although they have been frequently consulted, secondary scholarly sources (e. g., academic articles, monographs, or other commentaries) have not been

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Arzt-Grabner, “Auswertung inschriftlicher Zeugnisse,” 35. The same principle applies to “zeitlichen” and “kulturellen und sozialen Rahmenbedingungen” (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 32, 38). See also *id.*, *Philemon*, 47–48.

<sup>29</sup> On the former see, e. g., Mitchell, “Theos Hypsistos,” 126 (with epigraphic examples nos. 34–59, pp. 130–31) and *id.*, “Further Thoughts,” 170–71 (with inscriptions A11–A29, pp. 199–200). On the latter, see Petzl, “Beichtinschriften,” and Öhler, “Beichtinschriften.”

<sup>30</sup> On the Roman epigraphic habit, see MacMullen, “Epigraphic Habit”; Meyer, “Epigraphic Habit”; Woolf, “Monumental Writing.”

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Arzt-Grabner, *Philemon*, 45–46; *id.*, “Auswertung inschriftlicher Zeugnisse,” 30–31.

referenced systematically in order to avoid inflating the commentary and obscuring the contribution of inscriptions. For practical reasons, other literary and papyrological sources could not be investigated in any comprehensive fashion either, even though, ideally, they ought to be studied together with epigraphic sources.<sup>32</sup>

Each section of the commentary begins with the Greek text and a translation of the passage under scrutiny, before proceeding to examine the relevant inscriptions for each important lexeme. The linguistic and socio-cultural significance of the gathered material is then briefly discussed both from the perspective of the author and from that of the audience in a short commentary section. Lexemes or topics are treated only once, in the order they appear in the letter. For all subsequent occurrences, readers are simply referred back to the commentary section where they were first investigated. When a lexeme is not attested at all in inscriptions, or when no relevant material has been found, no evidence is adduced and the lacuna is simply noted. In many cases, however, the relevant material far exceeds the capacity of this commentary. In such instances, only a small sample of the evidence that is thought to be the most illustrative or insightful is presented.

### 3. Sources

A word on the available epigraphic sources in and around Thessalonica is apropos. As the cradle of Hellenistic civilization and one of the earliest Roman provinces to be established (in 148 or 146 BCE),<sup>33</sup> Macedonia has yielded a rich harvest of (mostly) Greek inscriptions that can be dated,<sup>34</sup> for the great majority, between the third century BCE and the sixth century CE (when the few hundreds of late antique Christian inscriptions are taken into consideration).<sup>35</sup> Although not all the evidence has been published yet – corpus editions for Dion, Amphipolis, and Philippi are still in preparation – we are fortunate to have two corpora dedicated to Thessalonica itself. The first volume published by Charles Edson in 1972 (*IG X 2,1*), which was complemented by Despoina Papakonstantonou-Diamantourou *et alii* in 2017 with a *Supplementum* containing corrections and recent bibliographic references, comprises all the material from Thessalonica

<sup>32</sup> See Ogereau, “Χειρόγραφον,” 121.

<sup>33</sup> The date of the creation of the province is debated but likely to be 148 BCE. See Tod, “Macedonian Era.” Cf. id. “Macedonian Era II”; id., “Macedonian Era Reconsidered”; Papazoglou, “Macédoine,” 302–309; Vanderspoel, “*Provincia Macedonia*,” 252, 255.

<sup>34</sup> For all the Latin inscriptions from the Greek peninsula that were known to T. Mommsen, see *CIL III* (though care must be taken with the readings given therein; cf. Bérard, *Guide de l'épigraphiste*, 102).

<sup>35</sup> For the late antique inscriptions from Macedonia edited by D. Feissel, see *I. Chr. Macédoine*. All this material is discussed at length in Ogereau, *Early Christianity in Macedonia*.

and its environs – more than a thousand inscriptions (including those of dubious origin or authenticity) – which he collected and edited over a period of thirty years between 1935 and 1960.<sup>36</sup> In addition, Pantelis M. Nigdelis published a supplement (*IG X 2,1s*) in 2016 that includes all the material discovered in Thessalonica and its vicinity between 1960 and 2015, that is, more than six hundred new inscriptions (some of which had already appeared in Greek publications).<sup>37</sup> While inscriptions continue to emerge thanks to the rescue excavations being undertaken in the city center to build the new metro line, it will take a few years before these are made available to the wider public. They could therefore not be consulted for this commentary.

The material gathered outside of Thessalonica is no less abundant. To the east, the large territory of the Roman colony of Philippi has delivered more than fifteen hundred inscriptions and fragments, the great majority of which are in Latin.<sup>38</sup> While about half of them have already been included in Peter Pilhofer's catalogue (*I. Philippi*<sup>2</sup>), a new corpus series entitled *Corpus des inscriptions grecques et latines de Philippes (I. Philippes)* will provide revised critical editions of all the material already published and make the remaining *inedita* available.<sup>39</sup> Most of the material originating from the lower Strymon valley, however, has yet to be edited in systematic fashion. Thus, it is hoped that the collection of inscriptions from Amphipolis that is currently in preparation will be completed in the near future.<sup>40</sup>

The state of publication with regard to western and northern Macedonia is slightly more advanced, even though the Roman colony of Dion still awaits its own corpus.<sup>41</sup> A set of four volumes covers “Lower Macedonia” (*I. Beroia and I. Kato Maked.*) and “Upper Macedonia” (*I. Ano Maked.*). The former, the area delineated by the Bottiaean and Pierian plains, has yielded more than eleven hundred inscriptions – five hundred come from Beroea alone, the seat of the Macedonian *koinon* – whereas only about two hundred inscriptions have been discovered in the latter, the vast area comprising the mountainous regions west-northwest of Mount Bermion and Mount Olympos. Finally, most of the material from northern Macedonia has been edited in two volumes of the *In-*

<sup>36</sup> On the preparation of the corpus, see Edson's collection of letters exchanged with Greek and American archaeologists and epigraphists and edited by P. Nigdelis, *Γράμματα από τη Μακεδονία*.

<sup>37</sup> See Nigdelis, *Επιγραφικά Θεσσαλονίκεια*; id., *Επιγραφικά Θεσσαλονίκεια II*; id., *Παπαγεωργίου Επιγραφικά Μελετήματα*.

<sup>38</sup> Brélaz, *Philippes*, 73–77. Cf. id., “La langue des *incolae*.”

<sup>39</sup> For the first volume on the civic inscriptions of the colony edited by C. Brélaz, see *I. Philippes 2/1*. See esp. pp. 24–28 for an historical overview of epigraphic explorations at Philippi since 1945.

<sup>40</sup> Until then, see Samsaris, “Bas-Strymon.” Great caution should be taken with any inscription from the lower Strymon valley published in Kaphtanzis, *Ιστορία της πόλεως Σερρών*.

<sup>41</sup> Almost twenty years ago, Rizakis (“Recrutement et formation des élites,” 12) estimated the number of published and unpublished inscriptions from Dion to about two hundred.

*scriptiones Graecae* series. The first one published by Fanoula Papazoglou *et alii* (fasc. 2,1 of *IG X 2,2*; 1999) contains about four hundred inscriptions discovered in the north-western corner of the province, the regions of Lyncestis, Heraclea, Pelagonia, Derriopos, and Lychnidos. Meanwhile, the latest volume by Slavica Babamova (fasc. 2,2 of *IG X 2,2*; 2023) includes about eight hundred inscriptions from the northernmost region of Macedonia, the areas watered by the Axios, Astibo, and Strumica rivers.<sup>42</sup>

Outside of Macedonia, most of the Greek epigraphic material from Greece has been published in the various *Inscriptiones Graecae* volumes produced by the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, among which the revised volumes of the inscriptions of Attica (*IG II/III*<sup>2</sup> and *II/III*<sup>3</sup>), of the Argolid and Corinthian region (*IG IV*<sup>2</sup>), and of central Greece (*IG IX*), are the most relevant (geographically speaking). It must be noted, however, that the recent corpus on Corinth and its environs by Erkki Sironen (*IG IV*<sup>2</sup> 3) only features the late antique, and thus mostly Christian, inscriptions. The dated collections published by Benjamin D. Meritt (*Corinth* 8.1; 1931) and John H. Kent (*Corinth* 8.3; 1966) under the aegis of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens must therefore be consulted for the earlier material, which consists of a few hundred, mostly fragmentary, Greek inscriptions from Corinth.<sup>43</sup>

Except for those recently published, most of these collections have already been integrated in online databases such as The Packard Humanities Institute,<sup>44</sup> the Epigraphische Datenbank Heidelberg,<sup>45</sup> the Telota database of the *Inscriptiones Graecae*,<sup>46</sup> or the Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby.<sup>47</sup> These databases have been generally taken as a point of departure for lexeme-based searches.

#### 4. The Epigraphic World of the Thessalonian Christ-Believers

One only needs to walk around an ancient city, be it a Roman colony or a Greek polis, to begin to appreciate how inscriptions were an integral part of the monumental civic landscape. Lined up along the streets, scattered around the forum, or lying around a temple precinct are indeed usually found, sometimes in their original location, dozens of inscribed artefacts (e. g., steles, statue bases, columns, architectural elements) that once used to proclaim decisions of the city council, honor Roman emperors, commemorate benefactions of wealthy patrons, or

<sup>42</sup> See also S. Babamova's earlier collection *Inscriptiones Stoborum*.

<sup>43</sup> For the Latin inscriptions, see West, *Corinth* 8.2.

<sup>44</sup> See <https://epigraphy.packhum.org/>. At the time of writing, *I. Philippi*<sup>2</sup>, *I. Philippes*, *I. Kato Maked.*, *I. Stobi*, and *IG X 2,2* (fasc. 2,2) have not yet been entered into the database.

<sup>45</sup> See <https://edh.ub.uni-heidelberg.de>.

<sup>46</sup> See <https://telota.bbaw.de/ig/>.

<sup>47</sup> See <https://db.edcs.eu/epigr/>.

even address prayers to the gods. As a free Greek polis and as the seat of the Roman governor in Macedonia, Thessalonica would have been little different, even though it is difficult to reconstruct with certainty what its streets, which are now buried underneath the modern city, would have looked like in early Roman times. Judging from the hundreds of inscribed monuments discovered in the past century, one can confidently assume that its public spaces would have been equally filled with a multitude of inscriptions competing for the attention of passersby with sometimes bold, red painted letters or shiny bronze fittings.<sup>48</sup>

As noted in the previous section, to this day more than sixteen hundred inscriptions have been found in Thessalonica and its vicinity, although some four hundred of them cannot be securely traced back to Thessalonica itself as many were brought from the environs or found in the depots of the local archaeological museum without their exact provenience being known or having been recorded.<sup>49</sup> To this number should certainly be added hundreds, if not thousands, of inscriptions that have been lost, destroyed, or which simply remain underneath the surface. The current tally, therefore, likely represents only the tip of the iceberg of what used to be displayed publicly – in comparison, Ephesos, the capital of the province of Asia, and Philippi, a colony of modest size and importance, have yielded no fewer than seven thousand and fifteen hundred epigraphic documents respectively.<sup>50</sup>

Inscriptions at Thessalonica come in all shapes and sizes, and cover almost the whole spectrum of epigraphic genres commonly found throughout the Greek Mediterranean world. They include civic decrees or laws, royal or imperial letters and edicts,<sup>51</sup> catalogues of names,<sup>52</sup> dedications of all kinds,<sup>53</sup> honorific inscriptions,<sup>54</sup> epitaphs,<sup>55</sup> graffiti,<sup>56</sup> etc. They illustrate the public and private life of the city in all its richness and diversity, giving us valuable insight into important historical events or figures, civic institutions and their magistrates, economic structures, religious cults, or even the social background of its inhabitants. Written in Greek for the most part (95%), they can be dated between the middle of the third century BCE at the earliest and the seventh century CE at the latest, though the bulk of them clearly originate from the Roman era (first

<sup>48</sup> See, e. g., the spectacular invitation to gladiatorial games and wild hunts carved on a fine marble plate with depictions of combatants and beasts (*IG X 2, 1s.1074*; III CE), which has been on display lately at the archaeological museum of the Roman forum at Thessaloniki.

<sup>49</sup> An asterisk usually precedes the reference number of inscriptions of unknown or uncertain origin in Edson's (*IG X 2, 1*) and Nigdelis's corpora (*IG X 2, 1s*). See, e. g., *IG X 2, 1.129–133*, 248–253, 676–931, 965–999; *IG X 2, 1s.1615–1648*.

<sup>50</sup> About two thousand inscriptions from Ephesos have yet to be published.

<sup>51</sup> *IG X 2, 1.1–24*; *IG X 2, 1s.1042–1048*.

<sup>52</sup> *IG X 2, 1.236–253*; *IG X 2, 1s.1077*.

<sup>53</sup> *IG X 2, 1.125–133*; *IG X 2, 1s.1049–1058*.

<sup>54</sup> *IG X 2, 1.134–235*; *IG X 2, 1s.1059–1071*.

<sup>55</sup> *IG X 2, 1.284–931*; *IG X 2, 1s.1083–1483*.

<sup>56</sup> *SEG 34.1682*.

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