Digital Epigraphy and the Study of Ancient Slavery

Kostas Vlassopoulos
University of Crete, Greece

Kyriaki Konstantinidou
Institute for Mediterranean Studies, Greece

Abstract   The digitisation of the overwhelming majority of ancient evidence has made possible the emergence of Big Data and their utilisation by projects which concern the actions of millions of people. SLaVEgents represents the first large-scale project combining digital humanities, big data and history from below in order to explore the agency of enslaved persons in antiquity. It is building an open-access, interlinked digital prosopography that will provide a single point of entry for the study of all ancient slaves, freed persons and possible slaves attested between 1000 BCE-300 CE. Based on and documenting sources across multiple ancient languages, *SLaVEgents* researches the multiple identities of enslaved persons; the networks and communities that they created or participated in and the ways in which slave agency led to major political, social, economic and cultural changes in antiquity. This article offers an overview of the digital epigraphy of ancient slavery made possible by *SLaVEgents* and the surprising patterns that emerge from the collection of the evidence in regards to the distribution of manumission inscriptions, slave epitaphs and dedications, and occupational references.

Keywords   Agency. Big data. Biography. Digital humanities. Epigraphy. Networks. Prosopography. Slavery

Summary   1 Digital Classics and Ancient History. – 2 *SLaVEgents*: A New Approach to Ancient Slavery. – 3 Methodology and Sources. – 4 Ontology and Workflow. – 5 The Digital Epigraphy of Ancient Slavery.

1 Digital Classics and Ancient History

Classics is among the earliest disciplines in the Humanities to engage extensively with the digital revolution that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s (Bagnall, Heath 2018; Christensen 2022). As a result of the forward-thinking of some important pioneers, effectively every single Greek and Latin literary text now exists in one or more digital formats; the same largely applies to Greek and Latin papyri and ostraca. In the case of inscriptions, probably 90-95% of Latin inscriptions have been digitised, while the equivalent rate for Greek inscriptions is probably around 80%; similar percentages apply to ancient coins. It is only in the case of archaeological evidence apart from inscriptions and coins that digitisation lags substantially behind all other forms of ancient sources.

This large-scale digitisation makes possible the emergence of Big Data projects. Despite the constant complaint of ancient historians about the paucity of evidence, the actual reality is that the scale of the available evidence has long overgrown the capacity of any individual living scholar. A huge amount of pertinent evidence is known only to a few specialists of particular times and places; our conceptual models and general narratives tend to focus on certain well-known corpora and largely ignore the majority of the existing evidence, while the specialist work on particular pieces of evidence rarely tries or succeeds to build wider models and narratives on their basis. Thus, the digitisation of ancient evidence and the use of modern technological tools, like digital annotation, tagging and Social Network Analysis, open up the possibility of actually exploiting the Big Data of ancient evidence in ways which have been impossible with traditional scholarly methods.

At the same time, digitisation is particularly important for certain approaches to ancient history. Ever since its emergence in antiquity, historiography has overwhelmingly adopted a top-down perspective, focused on elites and the state apparatuses they controlled. It was only in the 1960s that history from below emerged as a major alternative, with the pioneering work of scholars like Eric Hobsbawm, E.P. Thompson and Eugene Genovese. While history from below has had a major impact on medieval, early modern and modern history, it was largely shunned by ancient historians. Nevertheless, over the last few years history from below has finally started to have a significant impact among ancient historians (Courrier, Magalhães de Oliveira 2021; Gartland, Tandy 2024). History from above can be based on the biographies of relatively limited numbers of eminent people provided by ancient literary sources, or the detailed descriptions of the *cursus honorum* of elite men provided by inscriptions. History from below can only rarely be based on such sources; and given the fact that it focuses on the lives of millions of ordinary people captured only

fragmentarily in the existing sources, any systematic study of ancient history from below must be based on different methods, which require the employment of masses of evidence. It is precisely at this point that the digitisation of ancient sources, Big Data projects and history from below can join hands and mutually benefit from the collaboration.

This article aims to present a large-scale digital project titled *SLaVEgents: enslaved persons in the making of societies and cultures in Western Eurasia and North Africa, 1000 BCE-300 CE*. Funded by an Advance Grant of the European Research Council, the 25-strong international team of the project aims to take advantage of the digitisation of ancient sources and the emergent Big Data this generates in order to make a major contribution to the study of history from below in antiquity by transforming the study of ancient slavery and enslaved persons and consequently the very study of ancient history.[1] The article also shows how digital *SLaVEgents* will influence the study of specific fields in ancient history, namely the epigraphy of ancient slavery, by presenting some surprising patterns that emerge from the collection of evidence.

2 *SLaVEgents*: A New Approach to Ancient Slavery

Slavery was an ever-present feature of ancient societies to the extent that numerous studies have explored its implications for writing the history of those societies (Schumacher 2001; Andreau, Descat 2006; Hunt 2018). Traditional approaches to the topic have overwhelmingly adopted a top-down perspective, in which slavery is seen as unilaterally determined by the masters (Finley 1980; Bradley, Cartledge 2011). Over the last decade, this status quo has come under increasing challenge, as studies from different theoretical traditions have started to complement the study of *what happened to* ancient slaves with the exploration of *what slaves did* (Vlassopoulos 2021). Building on these developments, *SLaVEgents* represents the first large-scale digital project to focus on the agency of enslaved persons and to explore how they actively shaped the ancient societies in which they lived. Slave agency (Johnson 2003; Schiel et al. 2017) consists of the strategies and actions of enslaved persons, shaped by the roles created for slaves by their masters and other slaving actors, as well as by the identities, networks and communities that slaves created for themselves.

To achieve in-depth analysis of slave agency, *SLaVEgents* is building a digital prosopography that will transform the study and understanding of ancient slavery across the board. This open-access,

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1 See the project's webpage: `https://www.ims.forth.gr/en/project/view?id=272`.

interlinked prosopography will provide a single point of entry for the study of all slaves, freed persons and possible slaves attested between 1000 BCE and 300 CE from Mesopotamia to the Atlantic. *SLaVEgents* not only collects the names of all known enslaved persons from antiquity, but also identifies other pertinent factors, such as biographical information (masters, family and kinship, ethnicity, recorded activities, known associates). Its research objectives focus on identifying, tracing and investigating the multiple identities of enslaved persons (Vlassopoulos 2022); the networks and communities that they created or participated in (Taylor, Vlassopoulos 2015); and the ways in which slave agency led to major political, social, economic and cultural changes in antiquity (Vlassopoulos 2026).

In contrast to most existing digital prosopographies, which are effectively limited to providing lists of names accompanied by source references,[2] *SLaVEgents*' digital prosopography includes all relevant sources in the original ancient languages (Aramaic, Assyrian, Babylonian, Hebrew, Egyptian, Greek, Latin, Phoenician) and in modern English translation. In addition, it also records the relevant archaeological data, by offering links to online collections of archaeological materials, or references to printed sources. In this way, *SLaVEgents* creates the evidentiary foundation for innumerable future Big Data projects. At the same time, the open-access form of the database and the translation of the sources in English will expand massively the availability and accessibility of this mass of evidence to people without access to restricted resources and without the linguistic skills to understand all the various ancient languages.

3 Methodology and Sources

SLaVEgents is based on a wide range of sources, many of which have never been used for the study of slavery before. It draws upon published evidence from all kinds of sources: documentary (inscriptions, ostraca, papyri, curse tablets, letters, registers, contracts); legal (court records, juristic texts, law collections), and literary, both fictional (drama, novels, poetry) and non-fictional (historiography, biography, oratory, epistolography, philosophy, medicine, astrology, patristic texts); it also collects archaeological evidence attributed to individual ancient slaves (tombstones, votive reliefs, artefacts). The identification and collection of the relevant evidence is one of the major aims of *SLaVEgents*, not least because

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2 E.g. *The Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*: https://www.lgpn.ox.ac.uk/home; *The Digital Prosopography of the Roman Republic*: https://romanrepublic.ac.uk/; *Prosobab*: https://prosobab.leidenuniv.nl/index.php.

slave prosopographies for most ancient societies simply do not exist; currently there are only those for the cities of Athens and Rome (Fragiadakis 1988; Solin 1996). Most of the evidence for enslaved persons remains unidentified and scattered across all the kinds of primary sources mentioned above. The work of documenting those references utilises so far as it is possible open-access digital databases with large-scale collections of:

- literature (Perseus, https://scaife.perseus.org/library/)
- epigraphy (PHI, https://epigraphy.packhum.org/allregions; EDCS, http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/epi.php; EDR, http://www.edr-edr.it/default/index.php)
- papyrology (papyri.info, https://papyri.info/)
- documentary sources (CDLI, https://cdli.ucla.edu/).

Where necessary, these materials are supplemented by restricted-access digital collections (such as the TLG, http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/) and printed publications of original sources.

Although prescriptive sources give the impression that there was a clear dividing line separating slave from free in ancient societies, in reality it is often very difficult to establish the status of the individuals attested in our sources; this partly results from the descriptive vocabulary of the sources, which often uses categories which are vague or not specifically related to slaves (Zelnick-Abramovitz 2018). *SLaVEgents* does not explain away this complexity and ambiguity, but puts it at the centre of our attention; it aims to make a major contribution towards the systematic study of the vocabulary of slavery and the identification of criteria for distinguishing the status of individuals, as well as to explore the historical reasons for this complexity and ambiguity.

SLaVEgents draws on over a decade of work that has aimed at determining guidelines for a linked data ontology for historical prosopographies. Emerging out of the pioneering work of the Lexicon of Greek Personal Names (https://www.lgpn.ox.ac.uk/), which continues to collect and publish with documentation all known ancient Greek personal names, came, in 2014, the Standards for Networking Ancient Prosopographies: Data and Relations in Greco-Roman Names (SNAP:DRGN) project. Largely inspired by the Pelagios linked data initiative, which connects online resources through references to place (Vitale et al. 2021), SNAP:DRGN has sought to formulate a comparable method for linking people. Taking a pragmatic approach to the absence of any widely accepted database format or even print-based approach to the representation of ancient prosopographical information (let alone a standard linked data format), SNAP:DRGN has published a set of guidelines for representing core person disambiguation data in linked data RDF (Bodard et al. 2017). As explained below, the digital prosopography of *SLaVEgents* is based on these guidelines.

4   Ontology and Workflow

The database itself uses Nodegoat (`https://nodegoat.net/about`), a humanities' web-based research and data-visualisations environment. By being rooted in the world of the humanities, Nodegoat offers rich flexibility in the creation and development of a data structure for representing any given content; equally, however, it allows for data export in standard formats, which facilitates data sharing beyond the single project for reuse among the wider research and learning communities (van Bree, Kessels 2013). Borrowing from actor-network theory, Nodegoat treats people, networks, and sources as equal 'objects', offering powerful relational, spatial and temporal analysis and visualisation. This object-centred approach aligns well with *SLaVEgents*' focus on documenting the multiple identities of enslaved persons in a flat, non-hierarchical structure, based on the various ways in which they conceptualised their classification as slaves and their entanglement with a range of other identities that were partly related to slavery ('objects' such as work and function) and partly independent from it ('objects' such as gender, family, kinship, ethnicity, religion).

As a reflection of their importance, inputting data starts not with the enslaved person, but with the source material: all work stems from the primary sources themselves. Data entry generally takes the following two steps.

First, the *SLaVEgents* researcher navigates to the Source tab. After adding the source, they then work through a series of fields **[fig. 1]**:

Figure 1 Epigraphic sources

- source name
- URI
- material > e.g. stone altar, literary text, wax tablet, ceramic vase, papyrus, etc.
- type of text > e.g. legal, letter, philosophy, graffiti, epitaph, etc.
- language > e.g. Aramaic, Hebrew, Latin (including bi-lingual, tri-lingual for epigraphic evidence)
- transcription (the original text)
- online text link (sometimes = URI)
- printed text reference (if the text is not digitised)
- translation (English)
- translation online link
- translation print reference (if there is no online translation)
- online image link (e.g. reliefs, vases)
- image print reference (if there is no online image)

The Source tab divides the database according to ancient languages and to the material of the source and its genre. This ensures adequate attention is given to particular kinds of sources and issues that arise from them. Each source is also linked to other open-access databases of ancient documents where possible. All primary sources are available in English, thereby providing access to a wider audience and enhancing the comparative study of slavery across different ancient societies.

After the primary Source information is filled in, the *SLaVEgents* researcher navigates to the Network tab and works through a second set of fields **[fig. 2]**:

Figure 2   Networks

- ID (given by system)
- network type > e.g. slave group, slave-master link, kinship network, work community

- enslaved person > existing (type name) or new: opens 'enslaved person' category from object (see below)
- master > ditto (new master category: name, family name, master URI, identical with enslaved person)
- third party > ditto
- slave group
- action (e.g. what's the action in which the enslaved person is involved, e.g. work, sale, sexual liaison, punishment, theft, etc.)
- source (connecting network to the source or sources)
- cult (documenting the participation of members of the network in religious activities)
- then: subobjects > add event: period and location (when and where the incident takes place)

Network types are an important aspect of the project's investigation into slave agency, and in this respect alone Nodegoat delivers on its value as a network-based research environment. Built on the different persons involved in an action in which an enslaved person participates in each source, the Network tab shows all the social networks and communities that slaves created on the basis of their various roles and identities. By virtue of the Network tab, examination is not limited to the broader groups and communities to which a slave belonged and acted or the vocabulary that is related to and used for the slaves; it is also possible to explore the great variety of activities (through the 'action' option) in which the slaves were involved, as well as the similarities and differences in all the above domains over time.

As already mentioned, *SLaVEgents* models the object 'enslaved person' in ways that build on the SNAP:DRGN recommendations; equally, the researcher can also take into consideration particular features that relate to the figure of the enslaved person **[fig. 3]**. Each enslaved person has:

- a canonical URI for publication, type (enslaved person), and citation;
- names (both transliterated and in the original);
- area (associated place of origin), time period (associated date), and other external URIs.

Additionally, the enslaved person object has the following categories: gender; status; legal, kin and public role term; work role term; age group; specific age in years; price; fictional or real status; and, finally, associated manumission conditions.

5 The Digital Epigraphy of Ancient Slavery

SLaVEgents' digital prosopography currently includes 28,000 enslaved and freed persons, 15,000 masters and 12,000 free third parties. These individuals are recorded in 19,000 sources, 14,000 of which are Greek and Latin inscriptions, thus illustrating the fundamental role of epigraphy in our database. Our projection is that, when finally completed, the prosopography will include upwards of 50,000 enslaved and freed persons and an equivalent number of masters and free third parties, recorded in upwards of 35,000 sources. These numbers demonstrate how *SLaVEgents* combines digital humanities, big data and history from below. Digital humanities provide a number of tools like digital annotation, tagging, and social network analysis in order to make the data amenable to discovery, processing, and quantitative and qualitative interpretation. Big data offer the opportunity to move beyond normative and structuralist models of ancient societies and study relations and interactions distributed across space and time.

Finally, the evidentiary foundation of *SLaVEgents* is quintessential for studying the agency of millions of subaltern people and tracing its conjunctural and cumulative historical consequences.

In this respect, it is important to point out two important contributions of digital *SLaVEgents* to the study of ancient history. The first concerns our insistence on creating Linked Open Data, rather than just another self-enclosed database (Middle 2024). Our digital prosopography includes systematic interlinking with all relevant digital databases of ancient Open Data: collections of literary, epigraphic, papyrological, numismatic and archaeological sources; prosopographies; encyclopaedias; and gazetteers of ancient settlements. This is a crucial step for opening up the study of ancient slavery and enslaved persons to the study of all other aspects of the ancient world. To give one example, all inscriptions recorded in our digital prosopography are linked to their relevant URI in Trismegistos. Through Trismegistos, the user can find references to most printed or digital editions of the relevant inscription; at the same time, Trismegistos includes digital tagging of the place at which each inscription has been found, while also listing all other inscriptions that have been found at the same place. As a result, the interlinking of our digital prosopography with Trismegistos makes possible the study of a particular inscription mentioning enslaved persons alongside the complete epigraphic output of the place involved; it will thus facilitate the study of local epigraphic habits and their patterns, a crucial issue, as the discussion below shows (Nawotka 2020). It will also enable the study of enslaved persons alongside the totality of the recorded local population and the study of slavery alongside all other institutions and practices recorded in the local epigraphic evidence. Our digital prosopography aims precisely to break the conceptual apartheid within which slavery studies in antiquity have been largely pursued and to open up a way in which it can have an impact on the study of all other aspects of ancient history.

The second digital contribution concerns changing the experience of how to conduct research in ancient history. Our digital prosopography is shaped by the parameters of space, time and interaction. By using the digital work of *Pleiades*, it is possible to locate enslaved persons, masters and third parties on a map, which also includes temporal co-ordinates **[fig. 4]**.
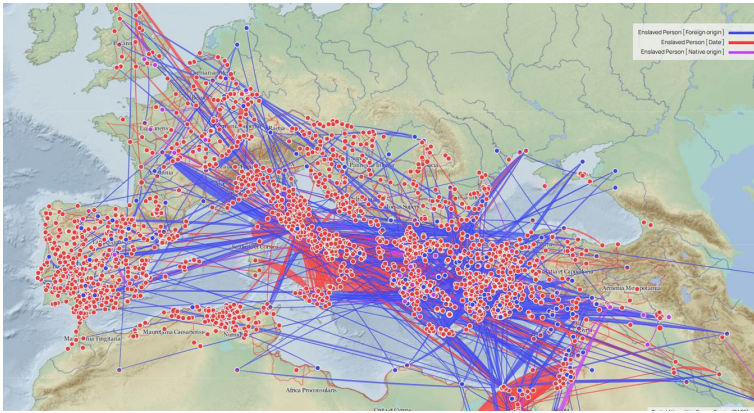
Figure 4   Enslaved and freed persons, 1000 BCE -300 CE

Users can select which settlements or regions they want to be depicted on the map, as well as the temporal duration that is of interest to them. As a result, users will be able to find within seconds in a visual form the answer to questions like 'in which places are manumission inscriptions recorded', 'how many and which enslaved persons are attested in Larissa between 100 BCE and 150 CE', 'in which places are enslaved and freed persons belonging to Roman soldiers attested', or 'how many and which enslaved persons are attested across the ancient world between 500-200 BCE? At the same time, the incorporation of the tools of Social Network Analysis in our digital prosopography makes possible the visualisation of the various networks involving slaves, masters and third parties and their complexity; the social network of imperial slaves and freed persons is a telling example **[fig. 5]**.

It is a radically different experience of approaching the material than the printed text of ancient sources or modern scholarly literature that still accounts for the vast majority of scholarly work.

We would like to illustrate these features of the project by tracing a number of patterns that are already emerging from the collection of data, their digital processing that we described in the previous sections, alongside the digital mapping of the evidence in spatial and temporal terms. These patterns are often highly surprising, and they raise important methodological questions that we need to discuss in order to be able to interpret historically the relevant data. Given the overwhelming preponderance of Greek and Latin inscriptions among our collected evidence, we shall focus here on digital epigraphy and the various epigraphic habits associated with enslaved and freed persons.
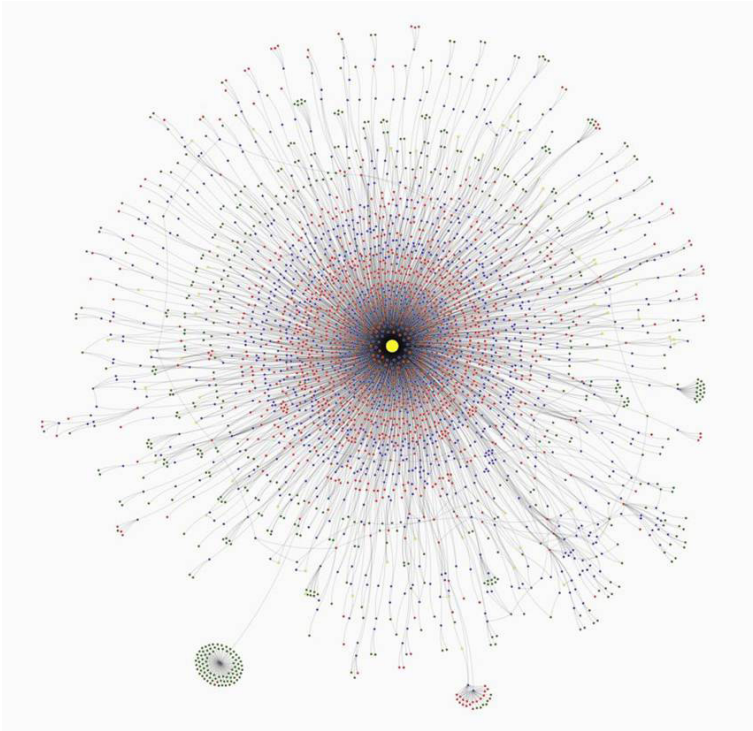
Figure 5 The social networks of imperial slaves and freedpersons

Our first example illustrates how digital mapping can radically change the interpretation of even well-known sources. Manumission inscriptions constitute the most abundant source of evidence for Greek freed persons (Vlassopoulos 2019). It is normally assumed that the purpose of manumission inscriptions was to achieve the widest possible publicity for the act of manumission and thus to safeguard freed persons from seizure and re-enslavement. Manumissions were always witnessed so that in the future there would be persons capable of verifying the status of the liberated slave; by inscribing the manumission record in publicly accessible places, like temples and agoras, knowledge of the manumission would be continuously publicized to a much greater audience than the few witnesses of the act. The theory sounds plausible, until we examine which Greek communities developed the habit of inscribing manumission acts **[fig. 6]**.
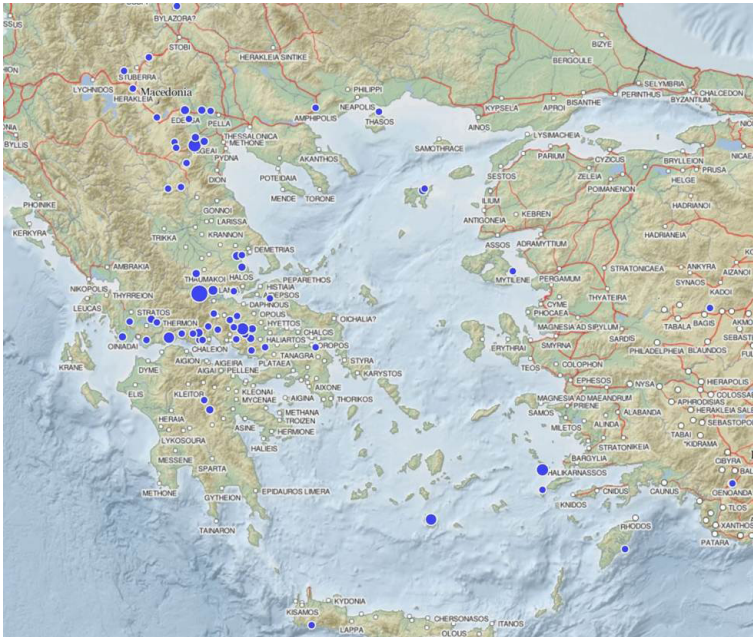
The vast majority of manumission inscriptions occur in central and northern Greece; there are very few manumission inscriptions from the Peloponnese, the Aegean islands and Asia Minor. Furthermore, one would have expected that most manumission inscriptions would be erected in large urban communities, where people would not know each other, and the need to publicize manumissions to a wider audience would be stronger. Surprisingly, the evidence points the other way round. We have no manumission inscriptions from large urban centres like Athens, Ephesus and Miletus, or large Aegean islands like Rhodes and Chios, where we know that thousands of slaves were employed. Instead, manumission inscriptions crop up in small island communities like Thera and Calymnos and relatively small rural communities, like Chyretiai and Leukopetra. The need to publicize manumission acts cannot therefore sufficiently account for manumission inscriptions; any account of manumission inscriptions must explain why they are overwhelmingly absent from large urban communities with strong and diversified epigraphic habits, where the problems of publicity would be particularly acute, and why they are present where they are. In other words, we need to understand the epigraphic habit of manumission, as well as the social dynamics of those communities that set up manumission inscriptions (Hewitt 2023).

The second example demonstrates another curious pattern of the epigraphic habit. If manumission inscriptions are reswtricted to certain communities, epitaphs and dedications constitute two epigraphic genres that were effectively universal across the eastern Mediterranean world. Given this, one would assume that the distribution of epitaphs and dedications that were erected by enslaved and freed persons would be determined by the size of ancient communities and the significance of slavery in them; the bigger the community and the number of slaves in it, the larger the number of epitaphs and dedications attested. But this assumption is highly misleading. There is a very wide dispersal of enslaved and freed epitaphs across Asia Minor and Macedonia, almost exclusively dating from the early imperial period; on the contrary, in mainland Greece there are very few epitaphs by enslaved and freed persons attested in any period **[fig. 7]**.
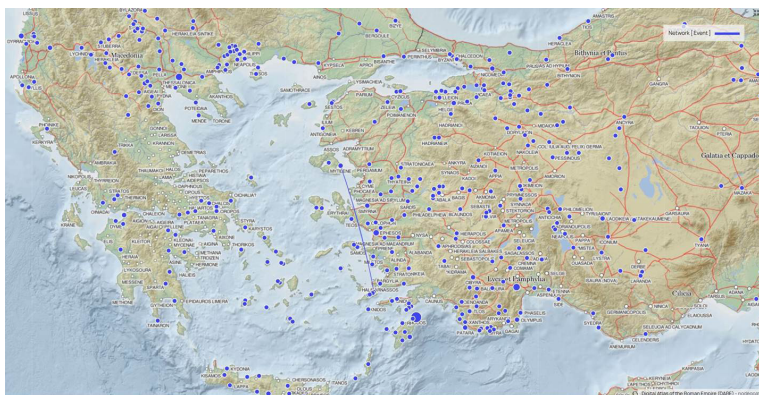

Figure 7   Epitaphs by enslaved and freed persons in the eastern Mediterranean

This pattern becomes even more pronounced when we examine dedications; with the exception of Delos, dedications by enslaved and freed persons are almost exclusively attested in Asia Minor and Macedonia **[fig. 8]**.
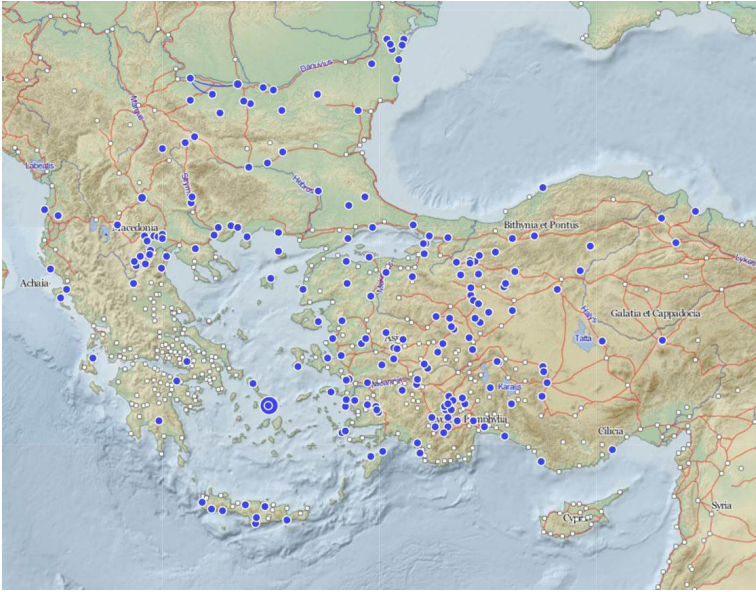
Figure 8 Dedications by slaves and freedpersons in the eastern Mediterranean

It is highly unlikely that sizeable slave populations only existed in Asia Minor and Macedonia (Vlassopoulos 2025); it is equally unlikely that enslaved and freed persons in mainland Greece did not erect epitaphs and dedications. What is more probable, is that enslaved and freed persons in mainland Greece chose not to advertise explicitly their legal status, and thus are invisible in the existing documents, while large numbers of enslaved and freed persons in Asia Minor and Macedonia made precisely the opposite choice. How should we explain these very divergent choices made by enslaved and freed people even during the same temporal period?

The third example concerns epigraphic attestations of the work identities of enslaved and freed persons (Joshel 1992; Tran 2013), and more specifically of the identities of estate managers and business agents (*institores*, *vilici* and *negotiatores* in Latin; *oikonomoi* and *pragmateutai* in Greek), recorded in epitaphs and dedications (Aubert 1994; Carlsen 1995). Adopting a Mediterranean-wide vista has some very surprising results **[fig. 9]**.
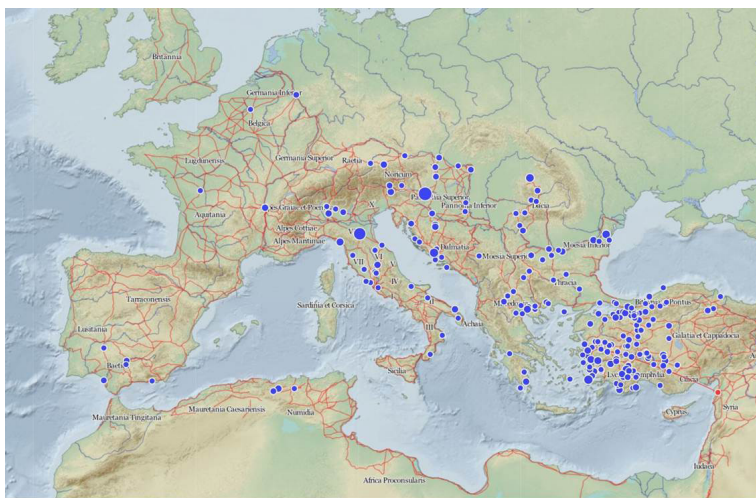
Figure 9 The epigraphic habit of *vilici* and *negotiatores*

Asia Minor shows again a very remarkable dispersal of evidence, accompanied by an equally significant number of attestations from the Danubian provinces. What is truly remarkable in this respect is the evidence from the Iberian provinces. Our digital prosopography includes over 3,000 enslaved and freed persons from the Iberian peninsula, which is one of the highest frequencies of attested slaves outside Italy; the equivalent number for the whole of Asia Minor is 2,000 enslaved and freed persons. Notwithstanding the high numbers from Iberia, it is fairly evident that the recording of occupational identities was very rarely adopted by enslaved and freed persons in Iberia. This clearly cannot be attributed to a supposed insignificant role of slaves and freed persons in the economic processes of Roman Iberia: the voluminous evidence of Iberian *instrumentum domesticum* leaves little doubt about the significance of enslaved and freed managers and business agents (Olesti Vila, Carreras Monfort 2013). Why did enslaved and freed managers and business agents in Iberia choose so rarely to record their occupational identity in epitaphs and dedications, and why did the same people in Asia Minor or the Danubian provinces make such a different choice? This is even more remarkable when we take into account the fact that recordings of occupational attestations in the Latin inscriptions of the Western Mediterranean are substantially more common than those in Greek inscriptions from the Eastern Mediterranean (Varga 2020).

Our final example concerns the epigraphic attestation of another occupational identity of enslaved and freed persons, that of *gladiators*. Although of course by the imperial period significant numbers of

gladiators were free, there is no doubt that slaves always constituted the most substantial group among the gladiatorial population. Thousands of Latin inscriptions from the Western Mediterranean concern the amphitheaters and the various games and activities that took place in them, prime among which were the gladiatorial shows (Sabbatini Tumolesi et al. 1988-2017).[3] Although the old idea that gladiatorial shows were shunned in the Greek-speaking Eastern Mediterranean has long been laid to rest by careful scholarly work (Robert 1940; Carter 1999), there is no doubt that the gladiatorial phenomenon had its origins in the Western Mediterranean and a very deep presence there. It would be natural to assume, accordingly, that epigraphic attestations of gladiators, usually in the form of epitaphs, would be primarily a Western Mediterranean phenomenon. But the opposite is rather the case; outside of Italy,[4] most of the epigraphic references to gladiators come from Greek funerary inscriptions from the Eastern Mediterranean [fig. 10].[5]

Figure 10 The epigraphic habit of gladiators

Why did enslaved and freed gladiators adopt the epigraphic habit of erecting epitaphs in the Eastern Mediterranean, but made very different choices in the Western Mediterranean?

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3 See the digital database *Amphi-Theatrum*: https://www.amphi-theatrum.de/home0.html.

4 For the few tombstones of gladiators from Rome and Italy, see Hope 2000.

5 See the *Gladiators' Tombstones Database (GlaToDa)*: http://www-v115.rz.uni-mannheim.de/index.php?page=home.

The above examples have hopefully illustrated the substantial possibilities opened up by the digital epigraphy of ancient slavery offered by *SLaVEgents'* prosopography. The tools of digital humanities make possible the collection of big data on the agency of enslaved persons and its historical interpretation. For the first time it becomes possible to plot the evidence using spatial and temporal parameters, thus enabling the study of spatial diversity and temporal change. But these data are patterned by the diverse epigraphic habits of different groups and communities. The various patterns of epigraphic habits that we have discussed above raise fascinating questions about the historical agency of enslaved and freed persons and the various processes that lie behind them. The short space of this article forbids any detailed discussion; but we have hopefully convinced readers that the digital epigraphy of ancient slavery has a very bright future ahead.

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