

Preface

The *Epigraphic Database Claus–Slaby* (EDCS), now encompassing 541,333 records and registering an average of 10,000 to 20,000 queries per day, is by far the world's largest electronic repository for Latin inscriptions. The database remains in a state of continuous expansion: new inscription texts, publications, corrections, revised readings, additional metadata and photographs are being integrated on an ongoing basis. Since 2021, Greek inscriptions —primarily from the western part of the Roman Empire— have also been incorporated. The extraordinary success of the EDCS can be attributed to several additional factors. For instance, it is exceptionally user-friendly, free of charge, and accessible without requiring an account or password.

However, it is fundamentally its conceptual framework that sets the EDCS apart from all other epigraphic databases. The EDCS is a powerful research tool, designed to enable users to locate inscription texts or text fragments with maximum speed and minimal effort. It has never been, nor will it ever be, the aim of the EDCS to replace scholarly editions—whether in print or digital form—but rather to serve as a gateway to them. Unlike the model of printed corpora, which present all metadata, descriptions, categories, photographs, drawings, and commentaries on the readings and content, the EDCS more closely resembles an extended *checklist*. It provides the best available published text of an inscription, concordances, the most essential core information, and free-text search capability. In this way, the EDCS is ideally adapted to the online medium and, unlike databases modelled after the traditional corpora, has been able to achieve remarkably rapid growth.

This was achieved thanks to the exceptional foresight of Manfred Claus. As a result, the EDCS now encompasses almost the full extant body of Latin inscriptions. Even incised, punched, or stamped inscriptions are incorporated into the database in considerable numbers. The corpora and other collections have not become obsolete; rather, the material assembled in them has been made vastly more accessible to the scholarly community. In this manner, the EDCS has fundamentally transformed the work of epigraphers over the past forty years. Thanks to the EDCS, it is possible, anywhere in the world, to obtain the results of a search within fractions of a second—where previously, one might have needed to devote many hours or even days of research in highly specialised libraries. The time once spent on laborious mechanical searches can now be devoted to employing inscriptions as primary sources for historical, linguistic or cultural enquiry. It is no exaggeration to claim that the EDCS has revolutionised the discipline.

Forty years after its creation, the EDCS is relocating from Eichstätt to Zurich. Regrettably, Manfred Claus did not live to witness the completion of this transition. For all these reasons, it is fitting to pause and reflect on both the accomplishment represented by this modern research tool and on its founder, Manfred Claus. The present volume, which is dedicated to his memory, is offered as a tribute.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude at this point, firstly to the Swiss National Science Foundation and the University of Zurich for funding the publication, and secondly to Till Kappis and Nicola Steger for their outstanding support in the printing process, as well as to the team at De Gruyter, especially Mirko Vonderstein and Jessica Bartz, for their attentive cooperation.

Zurich, 1 April 2025, Anne Kolb and Michael Speidel