

## Introduction to Epigraphy

### Editing Conventions

A stone inscription, even in the best condition, is quite different than a page of text. Turning an inscription into easily read text, therefore, raises some issues.

Most of these will be covered in greater detail in any "Intro to Epigraphy" book you can find online or in the library, but here are some of the basics to get you started.

[ ]           **Square brackets** - used to indicate letters the editor believes were inscribed but are too damaged to be definitively read. This kind of editorial assumption is possible because so many Greek public inscriptions were formulaic and a reasonable guess as to what was originally inscribed is generally possible.

( )           **Round brackets** - these enclose letters that are added by the editor to fill out a common abbreviation. The names of demes are often abbreviated.

< >           **Angled brackets** - these indicate mistakes made by the original engraver, either letters missing entirely or the wrong letter was originally engraved and the editor has corrected it.

{ }           **Hooked brackets** - used when the engraver has put in too many letters or mistakenly repeated words.

*Rasura* - erased letters. This may be done by the original engraver when he noticed a mistake and tries to erase it, or deliberately as is the case with *damnatio memoriae*.

[ [ ] ]           **Double square brackets** - if the letters once erased are still legible, or they have been replaced with new text.

[ [....] ]           **Double square brackets with dots or dashes** - indicates that nothing is legible in the *rasura*.  
[ [---] ]

Ḃ           **Sublinear dots** - these dots are placed under a letter that is broken or damaged so it is difficult to tell exactly what the letter is. The sublinear dots indicate that the letter is incomplete but that the visible remains agree with the editor's interpretation.

....           **Ellipsis** - dots on the line, not below a letter, indicate missing letters that the editor has no suggested restoration for. Each dot represents one letter, when the number of letters missing can be reasonably judged.

----           **Dashes** - when the editor is uncertain how many letters are missing, they use dashes. The number of dashes does not indicate how many letters are assumed to be missing, though in some cases an editor will print a number above the dashes as a suggestion.

v, *vacat*      **V or vacat** - This indicates a blank space that the editor expected to contain a letter. Each 'v' indicates a single letter, and the word *vacat* or *vac.* will indicate an entire line is missing.

In addition, editors will often give commentary on the choices they have made in transcribing the text. When a reader has only a transcription of an ancient inscription, they have to take the editor's decisions on faith. When the opportunity presents itself, it is preferable to have an image of the inscription at hand so the reader can make their own decisions about missing, partial and questionable letters.

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### **A Handy Cheat-Sheet for Critical Signs: Leiden system plus additions**

[ ab ] Letters restored by editor as once having been inscribed but now lost

{ a b } Superfluous letters added in error by the inscriber and excised by the editor

< a b > Letter added by the editor which the inscriber of the text has either omitted or for which he has by error inserted other letters.

(ab) Letters which complete words abbreviated in the text

[[ab]] Letters or spaces deliberately erased in antiquity (*rasura*)

a/ b/ Letters of which sufficient traces remain to print them in the text, but not enough to exclude other readings

[ . . .5 . . ] Lost or illegible letters equal to the number of dots for which no restoration is proposed

[ - - - - ] Lost or illegible letters of an uncertain number

v One un-inscribed letter space

vacat The remainder of the line has been left un-inscribed

In some recent publications of Latin inscriptions, you may also find:

↔ a b ↔ Letters or syllables corrected by the editor

+ Letter of which only traces are visible