

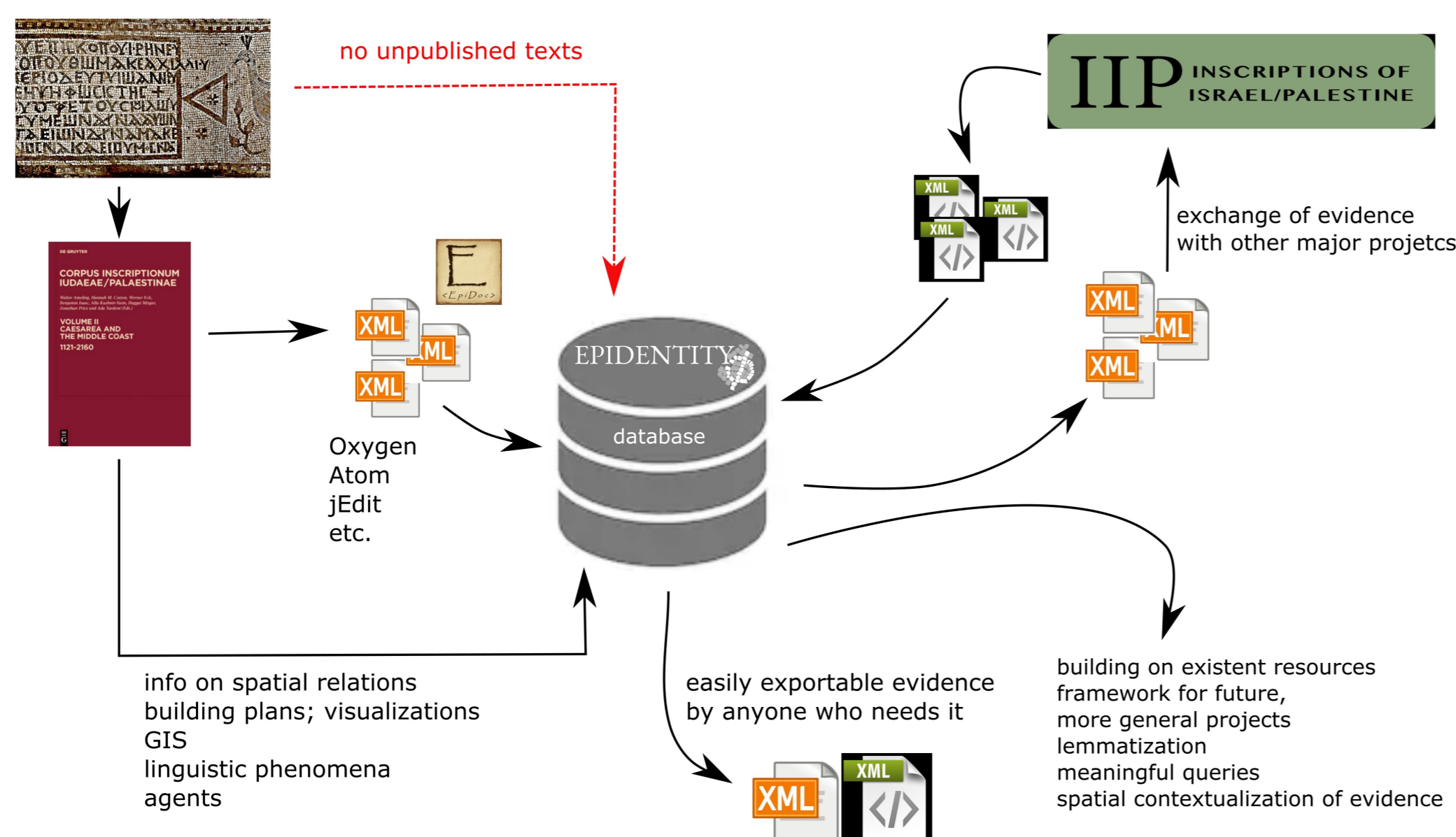
# INDIVIDUALISM AND THE COMMUNITY FACING THE CULTURAL CHANGES: EPIDENTITY PROJECT

# EPIDENTITY

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One of the main EPIGRAPHY & IDENTITY project outcomes is an epigraphic database, which collects published monumental building inscriptions in **Syriac, Christian Palestinian Aramaic (CPA), Jewish Palestinian Aramaic (JPA), Samaritan Aramaic (SA), Hebrew and Old Arabic**. The database will be freely accessible to all users at a late stage of the project. Work is currently underway to ensure the highest publication standard for the epigraphic material. For now, the database contains almost 300 texts from 140 archaeological sites in the Middle East.



The proper object of the project's investigation is the interplay of these languages in a 'closed linguistic space': mainly churches, baptisteries and synagogues, which is dictated by the nature of the epigraphic evidence in the period studied. The relations between epigraphic monuments and so called 'written space' are highlighted by three-stage structure of the database.

#### Site:

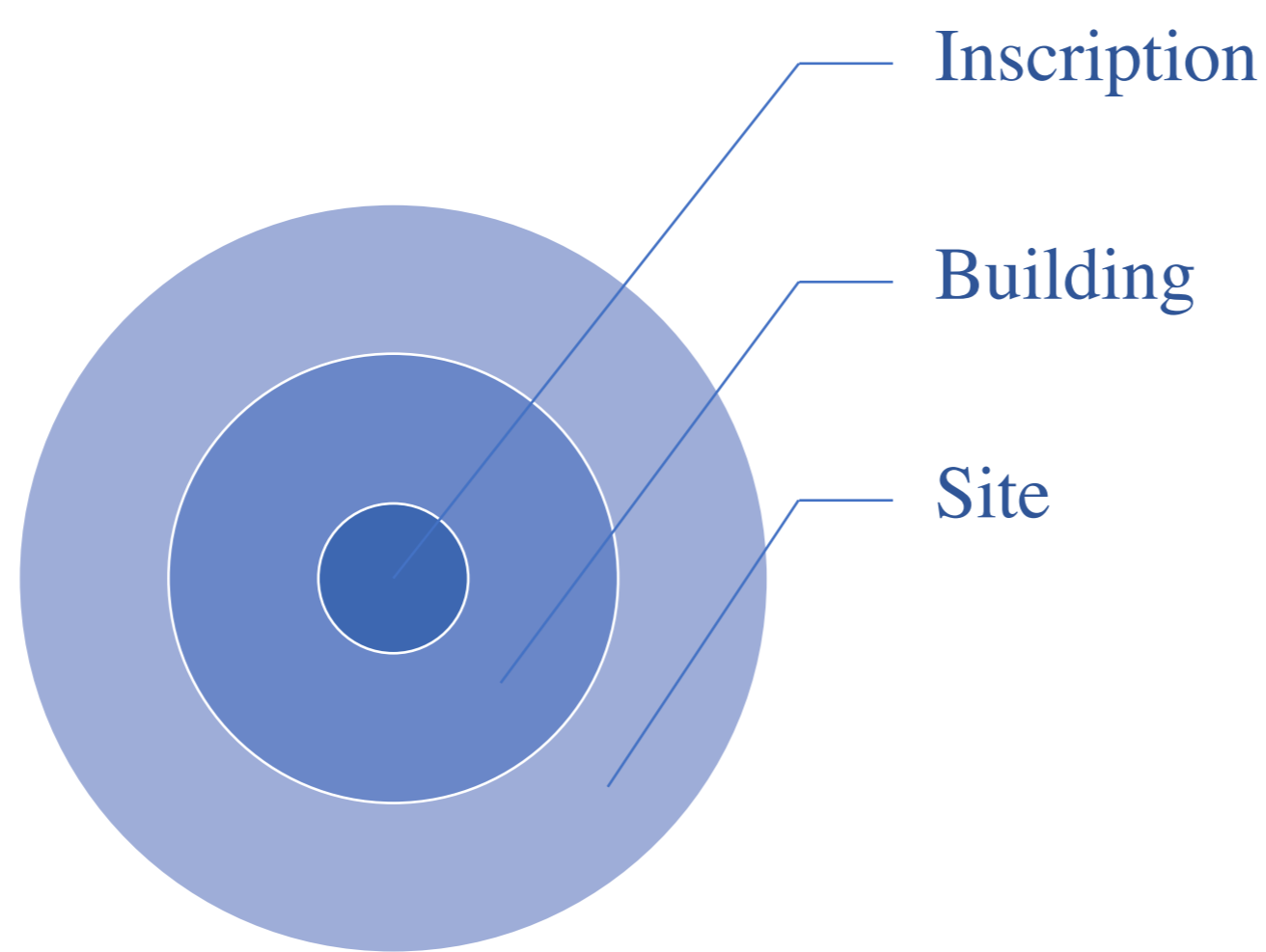
- general map
- Syriaca.org toponyms
- plan of the site

#### Building:

- plan of the building showing the position of inscriptions
- building type (church, synagogue, other)
- context (urban, rural, monastic)
- description of the findspot

#### Inscription:

- text and translation
- commentary: formulae; quotations from literary texts; notable linguistic features
- description: medium (stele, mosaic, small object, other); placement; visibility; figural depiction
- information on donors: reason for the donation; names of donors; number of donors; family status; ethnic/community allegiance; religion of donors; funds (private, public, both)
- bibliography and editions



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<p><lb n="1" style="text-direction:r-to-l"/>
<persName type="attested"><name nymRef="Simon">שמעון</name></persName> בר
<lb n="2" style="text-direction:r-to-l"/>
בר <supplied reason="lost">א</supplied> דחה בר</p>
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Every inscription in the database has an individual downloadable **EpiDoc** file with text, translation and lemmas, lemmatized words, tagged people and places. The EPIDENTITY database as one of the few uses the EpiDoc standards to encode texts in their original Semitic scripts applying the Leiden Conventions, tagging and lemmatization.

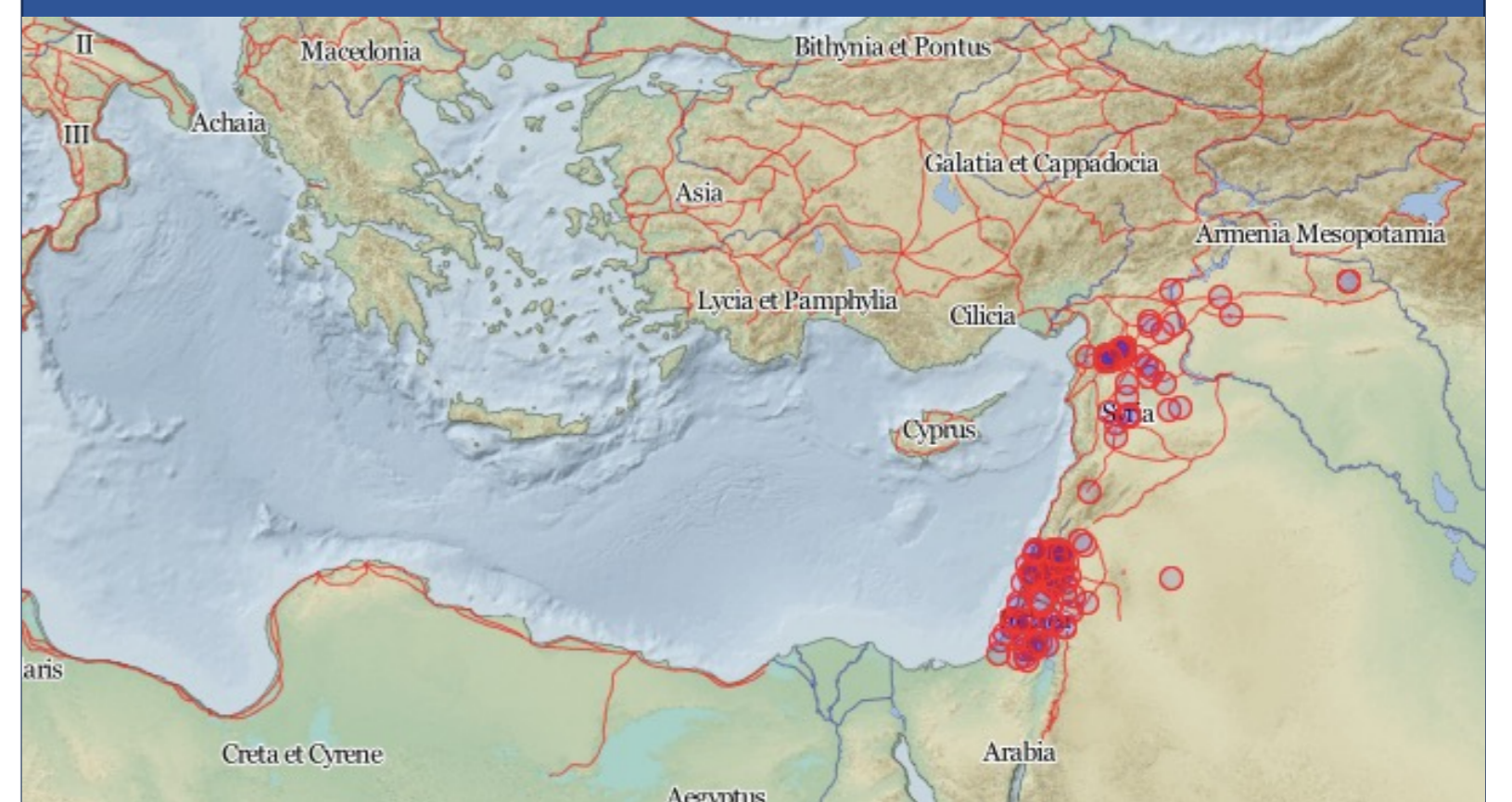
## EPIGRAPHY & IDENTITY IN THE EARLY BIZANTINE MIDDLE EAST

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Late Antiquity, or the early Byzantine period, was a time of fast-paced social, religious, and political changes for the inhabitants of the Roman Middle East. This includes the transformation of Rome into the Christian state, the revival of Jewish and Samaritan religiosity in Palestine and in the diaspora, the beginning of the oppressive policy of the Roman state towards the Jews and Samaritans as well as Christian deemed 'unorthodox' by religious factions currently taking the upper hand, the incursions and settling of Arab tribes, the turmoil caused by the Persian invasions, and many others. Scholars attempted to answer the question about the correlation between these events, and the shaping of particular identities which intensified social and religious tensions, and eventually contributed to the fragmentation of the Eastern Roman Empire. Usually, this is done by referring to identity factors such as, for example, religion, politics, wealth, social structure, etc.



This project aims at exploring the role of linguistic distinctiveness of different communities, publicly manifested through their commemorative, monumental inscriptions. Monumental epigraphy, which in the early Byzantine period is largely represented by religious building inscriptions (on stone blocks and mosaics), could be an efficient way of public asserting linguistic distinctiveness for Aramaic-speaking Christians, Jews, and Samaritans, and could reciprocally impact the viewers. This is because in every culture monumental inscriptions are particularly prone to representing even the slightest ideological shifts, as they are per se designed to convey the message found worthy of promulgation at present, and passing down to the future generations. They are spectacular 'banners' of communities' historical memory. They are the social 'litmus paper' which immediately reacts to the fluctuations of the cultural and political ambience. Therefore, if we expect to see that language choice did matter to the early Byzantines, it is first of all the monumental epigraphy where we should seek the answer.