

1. Record Nr.	UNISA996234749403316
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Titolo	Athenian lettering of the fifth century B.C. : the rise of the professional letter cutter / / Stephen V. Tracy
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Berlin, [Germany] ; ; Boston, [Massachusetts] : , : De Gruyter, , 2016 ©2016
ISBN	3-11-040759-0 3-11-040763-9
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (256 p.)
Disciplina	481/.1
Soggetti	Inscriptions, Greek - Greece - Athens Lettering - Greece - Athens Greek language - Alphabet
Lingua di pubblicazione	Tedesco
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Description based upon print version of record.
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references and indexes.
Nota di contenuto	Front matter -- Contents -- List of Figures -- Abbreviations -- Preface -- Introduction and Methodology -- Inscriptions Discussed and/or Assigned -- The First Decrees and Laws of ca. 515 to ca. 450 B. C. -- Unique Examples of Writing of ca. 450 to ca. 400 -- The Inscribers of the Lapis Primus and Lapis Secundus (IG I3 259–280) -- The Inscribers of the So-called 'Attic Stelai' (IG I3 421–430) -- The Cutter of IG I3 263 Dates: 454/3–450/49 -- The Cutter of IG I3 270, 448–ca. 438 -- The Cutter of IG I3 35, 440/39–432/1 -- The Cutter of IG I3 364, 434/3–433/2 -- The Cutter of IG I3 392, ca. a. 425 a. -- The Cutter of IG I3 50, 424/3 -- The Cutter of IG II2 1386, 423/2–394/3 -- The Cutter of IG I3 80, 421/0 -- The Cutter of IG II2 17, 414/3–386/5 -- The Cutter of IG I3 102, 413/2–410/09 -- The Cutter of IG I3 316, ca. 408/7 -- The Cutter of IG II2 1401, ca. 395 -- Summation -- Appendix One: Hands in Fifth-Century B. C. Attic Inscriptions (reprint of Studies Dow 277–282) -- Appendix Two: The Wrongful Execution of the Hellenotamiai (Antiphon 5.69–71) and The Lapis Primus (reprint of CP 109, 2014, 1–10) -- Appendix Three: Down Dating Some Athenian Decrees with Three-Bar Sigma: A Palaeographic Approach (reprint of ZPE 190, 2014, 105–115) -- Index of Passages Cited -- General Index

This book has chapters on methodology, on the writing of the first decrees and laws of the years ca. 515 to 450 B.C., on unique examples of writing of ca. 450 to 400, on the inscribers of the Lapis Primus and Lapis Secundus (IG I3 259-280), and on those of the Attic Stelai (IG I3 421-430). These are followed by studies of 11 individual cutters arranged in chronological order. This study brings order to the study of hands of the fifth century by setting out a methodology and by discussing the attempts of others to identify hands. Another aim is to bring out the individuality of the writing of these early inscribers. It shows that from the beginning the writing on Athenian inscriptions on stone was very idiosyncratic, for all intents and purposes individual writing. It identifies the inscribing of the sacred inventories of Athena beginning about 450 B.C. as the genesis of the professional letter cutter in Athens and traces the trajectory of the profession. While the dating of many inscriptions will remain a matter for scholarly discussion, the present study narrows the dates of many texts. It also pinpoints the origin of the mistaken idea that three-bar sigma did not occur on public documents after the year 446 in order to make those who are not expert more aware that this is not a reliable means of dating.

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