

Christer Bruun/Jonathan Edmondson (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press 2018. XL, 888 p., 154 figs., 2 maps, 31 tables. £ 35.99. ISBN: 978-0-19-086030-1 (paperback).

What did the Romans ever do for us? The question is perhaps most memorably posed in a brilliant scene in Monty Python's "Life of Brian", even if the question and the debate to which it belongs can be faintly discerned as informing Roman reflections on their imperialism (e.g. Vergil's injunction *Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento*) and therefore going back to the moment when the Romans first began their overseas expansion as a political and military power. When adjustments are made for change in context, a similar question might in all ingenuousness be posed as regards Roman epigraphy. Surely, the reviewer's experience of such a question being asked during the oral comprehensive examinations for the Ph.D. in Classics is not unique. Of what use is Roman epigraphy to the student of the Graeco-Roman world of antiquity? The handbook in question brilliantly offers a comprehensive, variegated, and eminently readable response to this question, furnishing an excellent introduction to the subject while also offering something of use to the "militant epigrapher". Thirty-five contributions cover the full spectrum of the study of inscriptions from the earliest centuries of Rome to the end of the later Roman empire in the early seventh century CE. Moreover, seven appendices offer an expedient review of the fundamental technical information useful for the publication, interpretation, and location of epigraphic texts. It only remains to note that the editors have eschewed use of the traditional designation of "Latin epigraphy". The more ambitious term "Roman epigraphy" is employed in the title instead because, while the principal focus is upon texts composed in Latin, there is acknowledgement of the significance of the use of Greek and other languages. Often in this field, as elsewhere in the study of the Roman world, a just estimate of the Latin remains requires a knowledge of the Greek and/or Etruscan background at the very least.

The volume is divided into three parts.¹ The first part offers a survey of the discipline in five chapters (1–85: Roman Epigraphy: Epigraphic Methods

1 Readers are referred to the table of contents given at the end of this review. In view of the wealth of detail and breadth of coverage offered in each of these chapters, this reviewer's table of contents is more than a mere replication of what is to be

and History of the Discipline), covering its history and practice. The editors start things with a brief description of the epigrapher at work that offers a check-list of best practices and proper procedure for publication (3–20: Bruun and Edmondson, *The Epigrapher at Work*). There follow chapters dedicated to manuscript sources for inscriptions (21–41: Buonocore, *Epigraphic Research from Its Inception: The Contribution of Manuscripts*) and the problems constituted by *falsa* (42–65: Orlandi, Caldelli, and Gregori, *Forgeries and Fakes*). This part concludes with brief but thorough reviews of the printed resources (66–77: Bruun, *The Major Corpora and Epigraphic Publications*) and the digital resources (78–85: Elliott, *Epigraphy and Digital Resources*).

The second part provides a survey of the production of inscriptions in the Roman world in three chapters (87–148: *Inscriptions in the Roman World*). Things begin with an overview of the different categories of inscriptions (89–110: Beltrán Lloris, *Latin Epigraphy: The Main Types of Inscriptions*), classifying them according to function, content, and support. There follows a discussion of the practicalities and mechanics of creating inscriptions in the Roman world (111–130: Edmondson, *Inscribing Roman Texts: Officinae, Layout, and Carving Techniques*). A concluding chapter examines Roman inscriptions as cultural artefacts that can offer information regarding the expectations and behaviour of their creators (131–148: Beltrán Lloris, *The ‘Epigraphic Habit’ in the Roman World*). This offers a detailed statistical response to questions concerning the chronological, geographical, and social distribution of inscriptions in the Roman world.

The third part furnishes a survey of the study of inscriptions as evidence for the life and history of the Roman world (149–782: *The Value of Inscriptions for Reconstructing the Roman World*), with twenty-seven chapters distributed in four subdivisions. The first subdivision (151–393: *Inscriptions and Roman Public Life*) deals with public life in terms of chronology (153–177: Salomies, *The Roman Republic*; 364–393: Salway, *Late Antiquity*), ruling elites (178–201: Hurlet, *The Roman Emperor and the Imperial Family*; 202–226: Bruun, *Senators and Equites: Prosopography*; 227–249: Mouritsen, *Local Elites in Italy and the Western Provinces*; 250–273: Schuler, *Local Elites*

found in the handbook itself. Chapter subdivisions are also listed, so as to offer a just estimate of what is involved.

in the Greek East), government institutions (274–298: Bruun, *Roman Government and Administration*; 299–318: Rowe, *The Roman State: Laws, Law-making, and Legal Documents*; 319–344: Speidel, *The Roman Army*), and politics (345–363: Potter, *Inscriptions and the Narrative of Roman History*). The second subdivision (395–468: *Inscriptions and Religion in the Roman Empire*) examines religious practice in terms of both the traditional cults and the so-called Oriental cults of the Graeco-Roman world (397–419: Kajava, *Religion in Rome and Italy*; 420–444: Rives, *Religion in the Roman Provinces*) and in terms of Christianity (445–468: Mazzoleni, *The Rise of Christianity*). The third subdivision (469–695: *Inscriptions and Roman Social and Economic Life*) deals with the texture of urban life (471–494: Bruun, *The City of Rome*; 495–514: Fagan, *Social Life in Town and Country*; 515–536: Horster, *Urban Infrastructure and Euergetism outside the City of Rome*; 537–558: Carter and Edmondson, *Spectacle in Rome, Italy, and the Provinces*), social groups traditionally overlooked by political history (559–581: Edmondson, *Roman Family History*; 582–604: Caldelli, *Women in the Roman World*; 605–626: Bruun, *Slaves and Freed Slaves*), and socio-economic practices at large (627–648: Chioffi, *Death and Burial*; 649–670: Kolb, *Communications and Mobility in the Roman Empire*; 671–695: Edmondson, *Economic Life in the Roman Empire*). The fourth and final subdivision (697: *Inscriptions and Roman Cultural Life*) of this part covers various aspects of the topic of inscriptions as a mirror of the linguistic landscape, still frame shots as it were. It begins with a survey of the other languages that were spoken and used in writing in the western half of the Mediterranean (699–720: Clackson, *Local Languages in Italy and the West*). There follows a survey of Latin in terms of linguistic use and change over time (721–744: Kruschwitz, *Linguistic Variation, Language Change, and Latin Inscriptions*). Next comes a review of the evidence that Latin epigraphy can offer as regards literacy in the Roman world (745–763: Bodel, *Inscriptions and Literacy*). An appropriate conclusion is furnished by a discussion of Latin verse inscriptions, (764–782: Schmidt, *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*), which covers the phenomenon as it can be traced between the *elogia* of the Scipiones and that of Ambrose for his brother Uranius Satyrus and thus nicely ties things together as a sort of *envoi*.

Seven appendices (783–816) provide extremely useful and fairly comprehensive coverage of the essential technical aspects involved in reading, editing, and publishing inscriptions. Illustration credits meticulously indicate the

sources of these indispensable visual aids (817–820). The index of sources (821–850) will help readers to find documents rapidly. The general index (851–888) sensibly distinguishes between (A) Ancient Persons, (B) Places, and (C) Subjects, including modern scholars in the last-mentioned category.

Of especial interest to the readers of this journal will be Benet Salway's contribution on Late Antiquity (Chapter 18 = 364–393). Covering the whole of the Graeco-Roman world between the reigns of Diocletian and Phocas, this examines a vast and varied epigraphic production ranging from the Edict on Maximum Prices that was published in the East (CE 301) to the final dedication of an honorific column in the Forum Romanum (CE 608). Extraordinarily dense and thoughtful, this piece manages to make reference to over 200 inscriptions and offer detailed discussion of some two dozen within the brief compass of twenty-four pages of text. Examples cited include: the column of Phocas (364); a statue base for Julian that was re-dedicated to Theodosius I or II (368); the rescript to the people of Hispellum (369); a letter of Julian (371); a constitution of Maurice (372); the epitaph of Eusebia by her husband Successus (374); a commemoration of the poet Claudian (376); dedications by the corporations of the pork butchers and sausage makers (377); seating in the Colosseum (377); imperial acclamations (377); a commemoration of the prince Arcadius II (378); anniversary bowls celebrating Licinius (380); the epitaph of Aurelius Gaius (381); a statue base for the Roman senator Flavius Olbuis Auxentius Draucus (383); the municipal career of Aurelius Antoninus at Hispellum (385); and a letter of pope Gregory the Great to the subdeacon Felix (387). Many of these are represented by black-and-white photographs of the highest quality or critical editions of the text accompanied by an English translation; occasionally use is made of both. Salway opens this chapter with methodological considerations that highlight the continuities and discontinuities of the evidence and the problems inherent in their presentation in the modern *corpora* (364–366). Next he proceeds to discuss the general features of the inscriptions (Greek as well as Latin) of this period, remarking upon issues such as material support, letter-forms, overall style, and linguistic confusion as well as evolution (366–373). The intromission of Greek letters into the Latin text of an inscription set up on the island of Amorgos in the Cyclades and the contrast of the Latin *litterae caelestes* of the closing dating clause with the Greek text of a constitution set up at Ephesus, for instance, are clearly treated and beautifully illustrated (figs. 18.3, 18.4). Thereafter, Salway dedicates space (374–378) to the ways in

which the epigraphic evidence reflects late antique society, whether as an idealising image of the virtues of married life, a means of social identification and self-affirmation, or a tool in the repertoire of control and repression on the part of the imperial government. This is followed by observations on the evidence of inscriptions for the continuity – or not – of the role of the imperial state in government as regards such sundry items as the administration of the city of Rome, the redistribution of wealth, and the collecting of taxes (378–381). That leads into more detailed reflections regarding the honours accorded to and sought by the imperial elite, with insightful comments on the eclipse in the epigraphic record of urban magistracies by ranks and offices held in the imperial service and the roughly concurrent rise in the production of ivory diptychs (381–384). There follow remarks and observations on epigraphic record at the municipal level (384–386), where useful items may be teased out regarding local careers even if the subject is “in many regions [...] an epigraphic desert” (384). Salway offers a handful of detailed observations on the inscribed letter of Gregory the Great still to be seen at S. Paolo fuori le mura (Rome) as an epilogue that constitutes a fitting valedictory (386–387). Preconceptions about late antique inscriptions are belied at the same time that it is possible to discern observation of Justinian’s norms on the dating of documents and papal activity as the foremost proprietors in the territory of Rome and central Italy.

Another contribution likely to be of especial interest to those working on Late Antiquity will be Danilo Mazzoleni’s piece on epigraphy and Christianity (Chapter 21 = 445–468). Dealing with the subject of “Early Christianity”, this contribution covers the period extending from the beginnings of Christianity to the pontificate of Gregory the Great (590–604). Mazzoleni begins with an introduction (445–448) in which he sets forth the relationship of this topic to the academic discipline of Early Christian archaeology, indicates that he will be focussing upon Latin instances and excluding those in Greek, Syriac, and Coptic, and lists the salient types of inscriptions to be discussed. He then (448–450) proceeds to offer a survey of the history of Christian epigraphy (thus narrowly defined) since the close of the sixteenth century and the work of Antonio Bosio (1575–1629). Next follows an examination of onomastic practice as it can be discerned in the epigraphic evidence for the early Christian communities as of the third century onwards (450–453). While names such as *Martyrius* and *Deusdedit* were peculiar to Christians, others such as *Mercurius* or *Stercorius* were common in society at large and might in fact

seem surprising in a Christian context but for the fact that their meaning was attenuated or appropriate to the personal history of the individual in question. Mazzoleni then goes on to consider how epitaphs give voice to Christian beliefs (453–458), ranging from simple ideas of peace or participation in a banquet to anguish at separation to more complex thinking as regards the possibility that the dead might intercede with divinity on behalf of the living. Next Mazzoleni discusses the evidence for martyrs' cult that is furnished by epitaphs (indicating proximity to a particular saint) as well as votive inscriptions and graffiti (459–460), citing items such as those naming Sts Peter and Paul in the so-called *triclia* of the Apostolic Memorial on the Via Appia. He goes on to observe the sorts of information to be had from epitaphs as regards the social status and economic activities of the various members of the Christian community (460–463). Not surprisingly, given the ample chronological limits of the material, one finds a cross-section of society going from the *clarissimae feminae* Toribius and Immola (who paid for a mosaic at the Basilica of St Felix) to the *fossores* (who dug graves) and *cubicularii* (who acted as the guardians of martyrs' shrines). Discussion concludes with a brief review of the epigraphic evidence for sacraments (463–465). Baptism naturally appears most frequently, thanks to the tendency to baptise in anticipation of death (in view of the fact that marble inscriptions provide this evidence, we might wonder whether this was in fact a trait of the elite experience of Christianity, with the possibility that the poor were less reluctant to make the irrevocable transition), but references to confirmation, penance, and the eucharist are also to be found. Black-and-white photographs of examples such as the epitaph of a five-year-old girl who died during the pontificate of Liberius (352–366) and the funerary plaque of a twenty-three-old grain merchant who was “everybody’s friend” tastefully offer a visual supplement to the written evidence presented.

There are yet other references to Late Antiquity of especial interest scattered throughout the volume. What follows is a sampling. Christer Bruun and Jonathan Edmondson refer to the inscription on the attic of the Arch of Constantine (16) when raising the question of letter-forms and the dating of inscriptions. Marco Buonocore returns to the Arch of Constantine when citing the testimony of the Einsiedeln Itinerary as an instance of manuscript witnesses to inscriptions, before going on to offer as other examples the epitaphs for papal burials at the Vatican (24) and commemorative pieces associated with the Baths of Diocletian and the Baths of Constantine (35 fig.

2.5). In the chapter on forgeries and fakes by Silvia Orlandi, Maria Letizia Caldelli, and Gian Luca Gregori, attention is drawn to the case of two modern copies of a dedication to Jupiter Optimus Maximus Sol Sarapis by Scipio Orfitus (53–54). Francisco Beltrán Lloris, in a survey of epigraphic categories, does well to remind us that the Acts of the Arval Brethren continued down to CE 304 (98) and subsequently has occasion to cite Late Antique *tabulae hospitales* and *tabulae patronatus* (101) as well as the “Tablettes Albertini” (105). In his subsequent chapter on the “epigraphic habit”, Beltrán Lloris cites as examples of *tabulae patronatus* those adorning the house of the Aradii on the Caelian hill (133) and closes his discussion by quoting an evocative poem by Ausonius on Roman epigraphy in crisis (146). Frédéric Hurlet, in a chapter dedicated to the emperor and imperial family, cites the testimony of a milestone near Verona and the preamble of the Price edict to illustrate the collegiality that characterised the Tetrarchy under Diocletian (191). An intriguing inscription from Tarraco is also cited to illustrate the hyperbole of praise that is evident in fourth-century inscriptions (198). Michael Speidel cites the epitaph of Aurelius Gaius (334) and the short-lived revival of military diplomas under the Tetrarchs (340) in the course of a wide-ranging discussion of the Roman military. In considering the relationship between epigraphy and the traditional narratives of Roman history, David S. Potter cites the epigraphic dossier from Orcistus to shed light upon the continuity of civic institutions and discontinuity in religious practice under Constantine (361–362). Mika Kajava, in covering religious practice at Rome and in Italy, makes excellent use of an inscription adorning a joint altar dedicated to Cybele and Attis by the senator L. Cornelius Scipio Orfitus in CE 295 (399–400) and cites the infamous graffito depicting Alexamenos worshipping his god (412), offering photographs together with the original texts, English translations, and brief, incisive discussion. James Rives, in a thorough and wide-ranging discussion of religion in the provinces, likewise cites to good effect a celebrated “theological oracle” that was inscribed at Oinoanda (436). Jonathan Edmondson, in a wonderfully detailed survey of familial histories known through the epigraphic record, makes the striking observation that widows (*viduae*) rarely appear in the record until the conversion of the Empire to Christianity (572). Maria Letizia Caldelli, in her discussion of women in Roman society, uses the epitaph of Fabia Aconia Paulina († 385) – perhaps better known as the wife of Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, together with whom she was buried – to good effect as an example of the virtues prized in a Roman matron (585–586) and duly takes note of the fact that the last

known dedication to a Vestal is that set up for Coelia Concordia in CE 380 (597). Christer Bruun, in his treatment of slaves and freed slaves in Roman society, cites the collar of a slave belonging to a certain Zoninus, an artefact probably of the fourth or fifth century that makes perfect sense in the wake of a Constantinian prohibition (Cod. Theod. 9.40.2)² on branding the foreheads of slaves (620–621). In her excellent synthesis of the epigraphic evidence relating to death and burial in the Roman world, Laura Chioffi fittingly cites the epitaph of Licinia Amias as an illustration of thought regarding death (643, with fig. 29.4 on p. 644). This bilingual inscription in Latin and Greek combines pagan and Christian motifs in an extraordinary juxtaposition of the traditional and the new, for *D(is) ⊂ laurus cum vittis ⊃ M(anibus)* is followed by *ἰχθῦς ζώντων* and then *⊂ piscis ancora piscis ⊃* and then the name and a eulogistic description of the deceased. Anne Kolb, in discussing the communications network of the Roman empire, takes note of a community in Thrace that was named Diocletianopolis (653), draws attention to the testimony of the *Theodosian Code* (Cod. Theod. 8.5) regarding the *cursus publicus* (662), and quite rightly cites the soldier Aurelius Gaius and his visitation of twenty provinces during the reign of Diocletian as evidence of mobility (666). In describing the epigraphic evidence for economic life in the Roman empire, Jonathan Edmondson observes that the Albertini Tablets of CE 493–496 point to continuity in legal forms even after the end of Roman control in north Africa (681). Peter Kruschwitz, in dealing with linguistic variation and change, cites the evocative example furnished by the epitaph that Montana set up for her husband Mauricius at Gondorf in the sixth century CE (733–734). Manfred G. Schmidt, in covering inscribed Latin verse, finds occasion to refer to authors such as Ambrose, Damasus, and Luxurius (765) as well as cite the verses on the celebrated sarcophagus of Iunius Bassus (774) and those of Damasus that are reported to have adorned an annex to the former basilica of St Peter in the Vatican (774).

Of course, as is only natural in a work of this scope and ambition, there are lapses on occasion and regrettable omissions. The second member of the imperial college that issued a letter to Heraclea Sintica in Macedonia in CE 307/308 (AE 2002, 1293 = 2004, 1332), for instance, was Maximinus and

2 M. Giovagnoli: Un collare per schiavi. In: R. Friggeri/M. G. Granino Cecere/G. L. Gregori (eds.): Terme di Diocleziano. La collezione epigrafica. Milano 2012, 523.

not Maximian (378). The text of the verse epitaph on the cover of the sarcophagus of the *praefectus urbi* Iunius Bassus the Younger († 25.8.359) was manifestly improved and provided with a reliable translation by Alan Cameron (2002), in contrast with the unreliable work cited as a guide to translation (375 n.31).³ The brick-stamps reported by Giacomo Grimaldi and brought to light by Glen Bowersock⁴ ought to have been mentioned, even if one disagrees with that scholar's interpretation.⁵ No less remarkably, there is an entire chapter dedicated to "[t]he rise of Christianity" (Mazzoleni: 445–468), but nothing of particular substance regarding the spread of Judaism. That lacuna is particularly regrettable in view of the fact Christianity would be inconceivable without Judaism.⁶ Moreover, notwithstanding the slight updating for this paperback edition, no reference is made to the valuable contribution made by Dennis Trout to the study of the epigrams of pope Damasus.⁷ Last but not least, notwithstanding the vast scope and variety of coverage, one senses that the focus of the discipline still remains strongly skewed in favour of the first century of the Principate and the tradition of political and military history with its inherent concept of the great man. The *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, as is well known, was termed the "queen of inscriptions" by Theodor Mommsen, and it is therefore no surprise that there is a relatively lengthy discussion of this inscription accompanied by two photographs that nicely capture the reality of its bilingual transmission (179–182, with figs. 10.2–3). It would have been appropriate to find similar treatment accorded to the much longer, far better attested, and no less important Maxi-

- 3 A. Cameron: The Funeral of Junius Bassus. In: ZPE 139, 2002, 288–292. Of particular relevance is the observation that Cameron makes at p. 288 n. 5. Language without rhythm is not poetry.
- 4 G. W. Bowersock: Peter and Constantine. In: J.-M. Carrié/R. Lizzi Testa (eds.): *Humana sapit. Études d'antiquité tardive offertes à Lellia Cracco Ruggini*. Turnhout 2002 (Bibliothèque de l'antiquité tardive 3), 209–217; idem: Peter and Constantine. In: W. Tronzo (ed.): *St. Peter's in the Vatican*. Cambridge 2005, 5–15.
- 5 It is perhaps worth adding that this regrettable silence has likewise been observed by the editors of the annual volumes of *L'Année épigraphique*, even when a person makes the effort to write and inquire into why this silence.
- 6 It is to be observed that this treatment of Judaism reflects the treatment of the Jewish catacombs in the environs of Rome.
- 7 D. Trout (ed.): *Damasus of Rome. The Epigraphic Poetry. Introduction, Texts, Translations, and Commentary*. Oxford 2015 (Oxford Early Christian Texts). For this, readers are referred to: Plekos 19, 2017, 165–169 (URL: <http://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2017/r-trout.pdf>).

mum Prices Edict of Diocletian (378, 379), whether in the contribution by an author who has published useful pieces on this artefact (Salway on Late Antiquity) or one of the other contributions (e.g. Edmondson on the Roman economy).⁸ This volume is a marvellous achievement, even though clearly a child of its time, both for better and (sometimes) for worse. These are things that merit rectification in future editions, but they do not compromise the fundamental integrity of individual contributions or the volume as a whole.

In closing, it is worth remarking the extraordinarily high standard of copy-editing discernible in the production of this volume. Authors, editors, and press have taken great pains to produce a remarkably clean text. Such rigor is essential for reliability and assures that this ambitious volume will be a fundamental reference work for those teaching epigraphy or using epigraphic materials in their work for many years to come.

8 Of no little interest and significance is the contribution made by R. W. B. Salway: *Mancipium rusticum sive urbanum*. The Slave Chapter of Diocletian's Edict on Maximum Prices. In: U. Roth (ed.): *By the Sweat of Your Brow. Roman Slavery in its Socio-Economic Setting*. London 2010 (Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London. Supplementary Papers 109), 1–20.

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