

*Epigraphic Evidence. Ancient history from inscriptions.* Edited by JOHN BODEL. Routledge, London – New York 2001. ISBN 0-415-11624-4. XXVI, 246 pp. GBP 14.99.

This little book aims to familiarise non-specialist readers with an immense topic: the nature and proper use of epigraphic evidence of classical antiquity as a historical source material. The topic is wide but is well covered by the following delightfully diverse papers: Epigraphy and the ancient historian (John Bodel); Local languages and native cultures (Maryline Parca); Names and identities: onomastics and prosopography (Olli Salomies); The family and society (Richard Saller); Civic and religious life (James Rives); Inscribed *instrumentum* and the ancient economy (Giuseppe Pucci); Appendix: A brief guide to some standard collections (John Bodel).

The first chapter by Bodel is both an introduction and a kind of résumé of the whole topic. Fifty-six densely packed pages present epigraphic sources (especially epitaphs) and their often problematic use as historical source material; the local and temporal variations in inscriptional material; the readership of the inscriptions and their relationship with literature and, finally, the symbolic use of inscriptions.

Not all of this is of equal value to a student of ancient history. One especially wonders why so many pages (20–30) are devoted to curse tablets and visual aspects of the inscriptions (e.g., palindromes). On the other hand, the kaleidoscopic variety of themes – interesting as it is as such – occasionally leads to sections that just vaguely refer to a topic and record a modern study dealing with the subject (see, e.g., p. 42: "Even graffiti have yielded insights into the world of letters in antiquity, for example by evoking the literary culture of Pompeii (Gigante 1979).") A reader who is unfamiliar with the subject must be puzzled; moreover, the whole idea that the quotations of poets preserved in graffiti could reflect literary tastes is suspect. See Solin, *Enciclopedia Virgiliana* II (1985) 333–4. Focusing more on the essential topics (from the point of view of a historian), would have clarified the presentation.

Some too broad generalizations apart (see, e.g., p. 8 for overestimated description of the role of Augustus in "the epigraphic revolution") Bodel's exposition is, generally speaking, reliable. One must point out, however, that on page 46 he presents an obsolete theory on the Roman building inscriptions. The idea that building inscriptions not only distorted but fundamentally misrepresented the historical reality was soundly refuted by Garrett G. Fagan, "The Reliability of Roman Rebuilding Inscriptions", *PBSR* 64 (1996), 81–93. In spite of these shortcomings, this chapter offers a readable and admirably many-sided introduction to a difficult theme.

In the second paper, Parca analyzes local languages and native cultures in the light of the epigraphic source material. Because so wide and a difficult topic is to be dealt with in sixteen pages, the author had to be content with brief observations on several groups of inscriptions originating from all over the ancient world and covering the period from archaic Greece to the third century AD. The discussion is brief, but what emerges clearly is how difficult it is to paint a picture of ancient multiculturalism and how little inscriptions often have to offer such a study. Thus, though it is known from literary sources that the Gaulish language was spoken widely until late antiquity, we possess few inscriptions written in that tongue (p. 68–9). On the other hand, "Libyan" inscriptions are found all over the North Africa (p. 70) but the extent of its spoken use and, indeed, much

of their content remain a mystery.

The third chapter is written by Salomies. As the author is a member of the editorial board of this journal, I shall refrain from assessing this particular paper. For a review, see *BMCR* 2002.10.39.

Saller's paper on the family and society is a magisterial one, deep but admirably concise, precise and still astonishingly many-sided. The first part discusses the importance of the inscriptions for social historians of antiquity, explains what can be learned about Greek and especially Roman family life by analyzing funerary inscriptions and illustrates the role of two women using funeral eulogies. The second part analyzes the position of slaves, freedmen and free labourers, examines the question of social mobility and ends with a note on social relationships. A reader not only receives a clear idea of the problematic character and the importance of inscriptions as a source material but also an understanding of how inscriptions are and have been used in social history.

Saller's exposition is excellent, but perhaps he could have underlined even more the problems of analysis caused by the stereotypicality of funerary inscriptions. It is not only that the stock epithets present a very limited picture of happy family life but that they were often employed so mechanically that they seem to have been rather unimportant to their commissioners. In Thugga, for instance, the 1617 published funerary inscriptions seldom mention commemorators and describe the deceased almost invariably by the phrase *p(ius) v(ixit) a(nnis)*. (See *Mourir à Dougga. Recueil des inscriptions funéraires*, M. Khanoussi - L. Maurin (eds.) [Ausonius, Mémoires 8], Bordeaux - Tunis 2002, 63–65). This is an extreme example, but one still wonders how often the people, especially in provinces, just reproduced Roman funerary inscriptions without really thinking about their content and, consequently, how generally accepted were the notions of happy family life that these stock epithets in Roman funerary inscriptions seem to reflect.

The article by Rives is basically a catalogue of various types of inscriptions related to civic and religious institutions. He focuses especially on *leges sacrae* and picks up several colourful examples evoking ancient rites and occasionally strange customs. Two points in his paper deserve closer attention. First, on pp. 123–4, he claims that, because *duoviri* were elected without real competition, electoral advertisements in Pompeii were just a form of self-promotion. This is based on Franklin, but on pp. 152–3, Franklin actually says that the quinquennial duoviral elections and the aedilician elections were keenly contested as we can judge from electoral advertisements. Moreover, H. Mouritsen, *Elections, Magistrates and Municipal Élite. Studies in Pompeian Epigraphy* (Analecta Romana Instituti Danici Supplementum XV) Roma 1988, p. 41 has questioned the dating of candidatures established by Franklin so that (p. 44) the post of a duovir also seems to have aroused competition. The discussion on the electoral advertisements continues and since publication of the book two lengthy studies on the subject have appeared: J. Franklin, *Pompeii difficile est: studies in the political life of imperial Pompeii*, Ann Arbor 2001 and C. Chiavia, *Programmata. Manifesti elettorali nella colonia romana di Pompei*, Torino 2002. Secondly, the picture given on euergetism is based on very old studies and misses the essential point: it was not just the "desire of people to obtain prestige in any way they could" that explains the munificence of private persons. Such a munificence was a convenient way for the rich to participate in

the expenses of their own community. When they acted as benefactors instead of paying high regular taxes, they were not only able to decide when and how much to pay but were also able to obtain more social prestige and keep the political offices restricted to the richest members of the society by expecting similar acts from all the aspirants to public offices.

The last paper, written by Pucci, focuses on the use of inscribed, especially stamped, *instrumentum domesticum* as a source for the ancient economy. The beginning of the article is devoted to an interesting outline of the history of the discipline and the continuation deals with the different types of graffiti or stamps, their temporal and geographical distribution and especially the possibility of understanding what was the role that the persons mentioned in the stamps had in the production. The discussion is occasionally quite abstract (Greek stamps, for instance, are discussed at length without citing any of them *in totum*) but always sticks to the point and, thanks to the narrow focus (e.g., the importance of stamps as indicators of the extent of trade or of the economic activity of a particular region in the *imperium Romanum* is hardly mentioned), it manages to say quite a lot in a few pages on the reconstruction of the structures of ceramic (especially brick) production in Antiquity.

The appendix by Bodel presents well the older standard epigraphic *corpora* and the new internet resources but only mentions the major epigraphic handbooks on p. 157 (and again in the notes on p. 190) and, what is more regrettable, omits all studies on the use of inscriptions as historical sources. For instance, *Épigraphie et histoire: acquis et problèmes. Actes du congrès de la Société des Professeurs d'Histoire Ancienne*, Lyon 1998 discusses the same topics and complements nicely the present work while *The Epigraphic Landscape*, A. Cooley (ed.), (Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies Supplement 73), London 2000 includes interesting papers on how information offered by inscriptions should be interpreted.

Taken as whole, *Epigraphic evidence* is a valuable introduction to the subject. Bodel, Parca and Rives focus more on the presentation of various epigraphic sources while Salomies, Saller and Pucci are more interested in interpreting that material. Both approaches complement each other and leave the reader willing and waiting to face that challenge the inscriptional sources always are.

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*Epigraphica. Atti delle Giornate di Studio di Roma e di Atene in memoria di Margherita Guarducci (1902–1999)*. Opuscula epigraphica 10. Dipartimento di Scienza Storiche, Archeologiche, Antropologiche dell'Antichità. Università degli Studi di Roma – La Sapienza. Edizioni Quasar, Roma 2003. ISBN 88-7140-225-1. 252 pp., 39 ill. EUR 30.

Chi ancora non conosceva la straordinaria persona di Margherita Guarducci e l'incredibile impegno da costei profuso negli studi epigrafici, sarà lieto di poter ricavare, dalla lettura del presente volume, e soprattutto dei ricordi introduttivi, l'immagine di una vita vissuta intensamente per l'amore della verità e quindi dedicata totalmente al lavoro. "Io ho fatto quel che potevo, quel che dovevo: ho sentito come un dovere quello di non lasciare