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The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy, edited by Christer Bruun and Jonathan Edmondson, Oxford University Press, 2015, 928 pages, 155 illustrations, 248x171mm ISBN 978-0-19-533646-7

The following book focuses on many aspects of the Roman world, aspects that can be found and understood mainly with the help of inscriptions. As it can be seen in the title, we are dealing with a *handbook*, a treatise on a special subject, in our case the Roman epigraphy. The dimensions of this writing in hard cover edition are not really suggesting that we handle a pocket reference, measuring 9.9 x 1.8 x 7 inches, and this is due to the very large subject the book encompasses. In the title it can be seen the term *Roman epigraphy*, and not *Latin epigraphy*, the last one being the one most historians are used to. The reasons behind this are very logical, one of them being the fact that for a better understanding of the Roman culture we also have to check the Greek inscriptions.

The two editors, Christer Bruun and Jonathan Edmondson represent only a small part of the people who worked at the creation of this product. Specialists from different parts of the world were involved in the process of writing this book along with institutions like museums or universities, collaborative programs and other contributors.

Targeting not only historians but also students or scholars interested in the Roman world in general, this book wants to answer to the question *why inscriptions matter* and *what do they have to offer*.

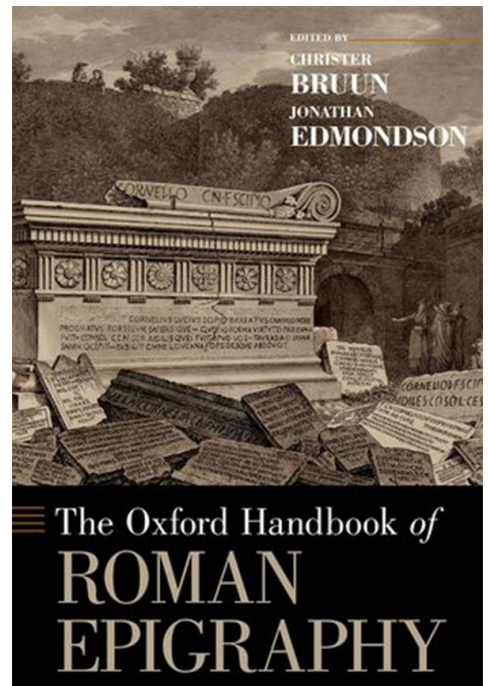
The language used in this book is simple, clear and concise, as the volume was designed to be useful to any kind of readers interested in the arts of decoding inscriptions that contain information about the Roman religion, administration, society etc.

The volume is structured thematically on three main parts, every part containing a number of articles written by different authors. The way of organizing the book is very helpful especially when one is interested in one particular aspect of the Roman life or a specific type of inscriptions, making it easier to find that subject. Pictures, photos and drawings of inscriptions can be seen all over in this book with some of their texts being explained and translated in English. The inscriptions used for information are/were made from different materials, such as stone, bronze, or paintings in the style of graffiti. They can be found on different works like milestones, funerary altars, brick stamps etc.

The first part, called *Roman epigraphy: epigraphic methods and history of the discipline* is made up by five chapters, providing data about how the deciphering of inscriptions started, who were the pioneers of this domain, how to date and interpret these products. Another interesting subject that can be found here is the topic on faking the inscriptions for various reasons and ages together with the methods to identify them. Other information can be found about 'The major corpora and epigraphic publications' in Chapter 4, publications like *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum* (CIG) or Thomas Mommsen's well known work *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (CIL), the part ending with the new technology possibilities such as online epigraphic databases or photos of

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inscriptions uploaded online for an easier accessibility.

Part II, *Inscriptions in the Roman World* presents in the first chapter the two main types of inscriptions in the Roman society, public and private, with all their subtypes. The next chapter, *Inscribing Roman texts*, explains the phases that take place in order to create an inscription, starting from the *officina*, moving then to the stonecutter's tools, *ordination*, the main letterforms, like *scriptura monumentalis* or *capitals quadratae* and how were the errors corrected.

In my opinion, the most intriguing chapter is the last one, 'The "Epigraphic habit" in the Roman world'. The topic discussed here is on the "trend" that the Romans were kin on producing inscriptions. This chapter provides impressive figures like plans of buildings and the "hotspots" where the stone texts were sitting or various graphs with the number of inscriptions created in the time of certain emperors.

The last part, 'The value of inscriptions for reconstructing the Roman world' represents the core of this volume. The four main subparts are about the most common types of inscriptions in the history of the Romans. The first one refers to inscriptions about the Roman public life and the most important ranks in their society. It starts with the history of the inscriptions in the time of the Roman Republic with details about the structure of the texts, differences referring to the name format such as *praenomen*, *cognomen*, abbreviations, and of course, the most common types of inscriptions from this time.

The chapter dedicated to the most powerful persons of Rome, the emperors, covers everything bound to their names as they appear on inscriptions, their powers, their family members, virtues, and the purpose of those epigraphic works had, mostly propaganda.

The Roman knights – *equites Romani* – and the senators, both part of the elite troops, are also explained along with their names on inscriptions, with some practical examples used to help anyone interested in decoding epigraphic texts.

The following chapters are about other Roman elites in different parts of the empire, the army with all their ranks and decorations and other epigraphic works like laws or documents emitted by authorities, ending up with inscriptions from the period between Diocletian and Phocas and how they changed their texts frames.

'*Inscriptions and Religion in the Roman Empire*' is the second sub-part, with the first chapter only about the piety in Rome and Italy space. Here we are dealing with some of the deities appearing on inscriptions, the priests and

worshippers, and few data about curses, oracles or dreams, the last one not being so specific to the Romans. The second chapter is about the piety in other Roman provinces and their gods with some epithets, the sub-part ending with the changes Christianity brought to the Roman civilization.

The next two chapters are related to other Roman life aspects, as the social, economic and cultural ones. Things like associations are being explained here and also a dedicated part to the sex life in the Roman world with some funny examples of epigraphic writings in the form of graffiti. Another part is about the acts of evergetism, very common in the Roman society. Such events helped people increasing their ranks or become better known, this being possible by aiding the towns' needs with different things.

Other information can be found about the members of a family and the changes that took place in their name structure after a marriage or adoption or the names of the slaves and the freed slaves on inscriptions, submitting the most important clues to identify those individuals, such as words like *liberto*, filiations or the groups they were associated with. Other aspects discussed in this chapter are about death and road communication in the Roman world, with inscriptions like epitaphs, *tabulae*, milestones and the epigraphic attestation of *cursus publicus*.

The last two chapters deal with linguistic aspects, semantics, phonology, different local languages and other stuff related to this domain with the third chapter being the most interesting in my opinion. This one is about *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* (CLE), the Latin verse inscriptions created for particular reason, taking the form of hymns, prayers or epigrams, and being the rarest type of those writings, the author providing illustrations of stone works, paintings and graffiti.

Some very useful appendixes follow up this chapter, designed to help the beginner epigraphists decoding the inscriptions. A list of epigraphic abbreviations is included here about very common terms along with Roman onomastic elements, kinship terms, voting tribes, Roman numbers and some online websites with epigraphy databases.

The many authors of this volume succeeded in creating a unique piece of work, combining Roman history with epigraphy and linguistics for the matter of a better understanding of the Roman civilization and the importance of inscriptions. They also managed to offer the reader many examples consisting in photographs, drawings, or texts that were only explained and not translated, giving the lecturer the possibility to exercise his epigraphic skills.