



The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire

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THE EPIGRAPHIC HABIT IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Knowing how to communicate in writing is one thing; doing so is another. There are plenty of studies on literacy, none on its use, that I know of. Of the forms taken by literacy, inscriptions constitute not only one of the most familiar but also the most widely reported throughout the Roman world. It is thus a specially useful window through which we may examine that world.

But the history of that window in itself has not been examined. We would have the heart of the matter if we knew why people wrote things on stone everywhere in Italy and the provinces. We must look not for the occasion chosen, such as a life ended, a vow made, or an honor voted, but at the decision itself to give those facts some marble commemoration. After all, there have been in history many peoples to whom the idea never occurred, though they were literate. Even in the Roman empire, there were deaths, vows, and decrees unrecorded, more or less often in different times and places.

My central question, Why people inscribed some fact on stone, I cannot answer. Instead, for the moment I pass by obvious lines of conjecture, mere conjecture, to consider only those "different times and places." At the outset it will be useful to inspect a non-epigraphic form of writing, in order to see if all forms should be treated together. If they should be, then my question would be closely attached to the prevalence of literacy. As will appear, however, the epigraphic habit, within (inevitably within) the boundaries of the literate part of the population, traced its own distinct life-line: people who *could* write did so often or seldom according to motives so far unclear. That can hardly surprise since, within living memory, we are aware of changing fashions among the highly educated to write poetry or not, or letters or not. Some such fashion can be sensed over a long span among the Greeks. In the fifth,

fourth, and third centuries B.C., their productivity lay at one level, in succeeding centuries at another, lower level.¹

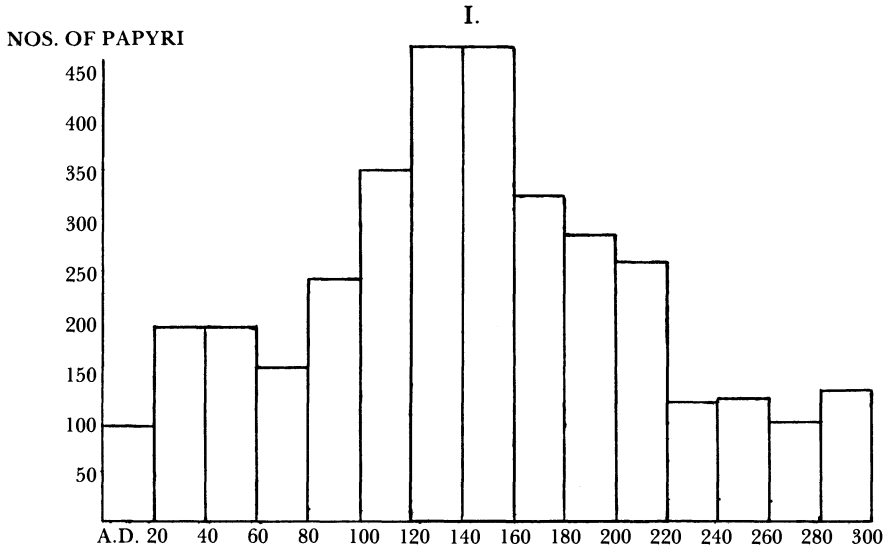
Papyri and ostraca from Roman Egypt survive in sufficient numbers to invite statistical analysis and thus to teach us something out of the numbers themselves that is not evident in the body of any single text. The most obvious starting point for such analysis lies in the distribution of texts of all sorts over time. Their profile is uneven, as appears from a sampling of over 3,500 that can be dated within 20-year periods (including those texts assigned by their editors to the “early,” “middle,” or “late” part of a century). Nearly a quarter of the texts counted are ostraca.²

Does the unevenness of the profile arise, as we would wish, at the point of manufacture of the texts and does it thus tell us about Roman Egypt? Or does it arise through the accidents of preserving and recovering them and tell us only about more recent times? The answer is reassuring. The profile for the period following the one here chosen for study has been traced three times: in 1925, 1965, and 1980. It has never changed.³ That stability unaffected by continual increases in the body of the evidence suggests very strongly that we have been drawing a true

¹ In L. Berkowitz, *Canon of Greek Authors* . . . (1977), I count 1353 datable writers, disregarding those assigned to a span of more than 200 years, distributing as halves those that are assigned to two centuries, and assigning as halves to the two preceding or succeeding centuries those listed as being *ante* or *post* a given century. The results are: VIth cent. B.C., 42½ names; V, 142 (+7); IV, 212½ (+6); III, 217½ (+16); II, 111½ (+26½); I, 111½ (+88); A.D. I, 109 (+103½); and II, 130 (29½). I separate and put in parentheses the medical writers, and in the second century I do not count 61 Christian writers, orthodox or heterodox, whose chances of being preserved, by recentness and by their relation to the transmitting processes, seem to me to be of a different order from pagan authors. In the fifth century B.C., I suppose results are somewhat skewed downward by opposite processes, i.e. worse processes of conservation. The general level of activity suggested by the Canon is quite compatible with the half-million and more book-rolls in the Alexandrian library. See P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (1972) 1.329.

² Included were all texts datable among *PAmh.* 14–137; *PFlor.* 1–105; *PHamb.* 1–84; *PMilVogliano* 23–299; *PSI* 153–475; *PRyl.* 74–698; *PStrassb.* 2–78; *POxy.* 34–746, 825–1160, and 2825–3205; *PLon.* 1–1298; *BGU* 697–1201 and 1563–1712; *PMich.* 155–221; *PMerton* 1–100; *PFay.* 19–123; *PCorn.* 6–55; *PAberd.* 13–182; *PMeyer* 3–81; *POslo* 17–193; *PPrinceton* 1–75; *PRendelHarris* 1–100; all of *PKalen.*, *PBonon.*, *PLips.*, *PSocAthen.*, *Pland.*, *PWarren*, *PVindob.*, *POxford*, and *PFamTebt.*; and *OTait* vols. 1 and 2 nos. 411–1000.

³ As pointed out by R. S. Bagnall and K. A. Worp, *Miscellanea Papyrologica* (Papyrologica Florentina VII, 1980) p. 14, for the period A.D. 337–540, compared with R. Rémondon, in *Atti dell' XI Congresso int. di papirologia* . . . 1965 (1966) p. 149 Table I.



sample from Egypt of Constantine's reign up to Justinian's. The burden of proof must therefore rest on anyone denying the same truth to a sample drawn from the three hundred years prior to Constantine.

But of course there are some distortions in my graph. The ratio of counted ostraca to papyri, one to three, is an approximation perhaps set a little higher than their actual numbers; and since ostraca are, for whatever reason, a phenomenon mostly of the Antonine reigns, they may exaggerate the rise in the bars for the first 75 years of the second century. Perhaps, too, the proportion of papyri that are hard to date and thus cannot be used at all is greater in the third century (again: for whatever reason), thus producing an underestimate for that period. Then there are the odd hoards or archives that turn up by chance, once belonging to some particular office or individual and therefore to some one time—the hundreds of papyri from the *grapheion* of Tebtunis or the correspondence of a certain Heroninus.⁴ Finally, some excavated

⁴ On the Tebtunis *grapheion*, see A. E. R. Boak, *Aegyptus* 4 (1923) 39, and E. Husselman in *Proc. Twelfth Int. Congress of Papyrology* (1970) 223, the texts falling in the first half of the first century; other similar office hoards, e.g. *PRyl.* 124–152, A.D. 28–42; and Heroninus' correspondence of the A.D. 150s, ca. 160 letters, traceable through F. Preisigke, *Namenbuch* (1967) p. 125 s.v.

towns out of their own history provide documents concentrated in some particular swell of prosperity and population—for example, Antinoopolis' 214 texts beginning only in the third century.

Allowance for these distorting influences, however, is not hard to make both in the assembling of data and in the application of the final results. Moreover, there is some comfort in two facts. First, I have used somewhat different samplings for Graphs I and II: yet, if the latter were re-drawn so as to combine its two categories of texts into single bars, their profile would closely resemble that of Graph I. And I refer again to the consistency appearing in different samples of the fourth- to sixth-century data: there is no reason why that later period should have provided documentation of special reliability. It seems to me safe, then, to rely on the general outline presented above.

Its interpretation is suggested by the profile below, using a somewhat smaller total of texts, just over 3,000.⁵ They are divided into the public—meaning tax receipts, census lists, registrations of births or land transfers, petitions, orders for arrest, judicial hearings, reports of public bodies, and so forth—and private documents such as letters, leases, sales, contracts, loans, wills, prayers, and horoscopes, the writers of all of which had no official contact with the persons they addressed. In interpreting their numbers, allowance must be made for the distortion produced by ostraca, which belong overwhelmingly among the public documents and which are largely datable to Antonine times. Otherwise, the ratio of public to private seems to have remained fairly constant over the centuries until the reign of Diocletian. At that point and thereafter the private outnumber the public.

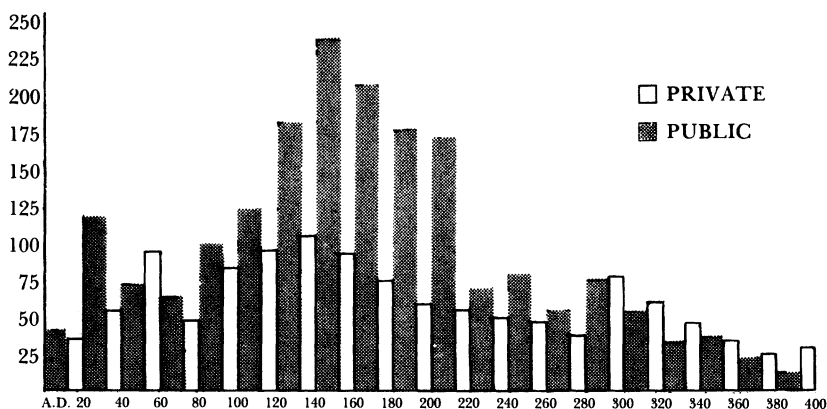
Rémondon, working with a different period, noticed the same phenomenon.⁶ He attributed it to the simplifying and shrinking of governmental activities. The case is well argued, but useful to our own discussion of an earlier time only in one implication: it implies that the quantity of documents generated in Roman Egypt, during the Principate also, may have reflected the amount of governing that went on and the number of people engaged in its processes.

⁵ Drawing on *OTait*, *PPrinceton*, *PSI*, *PAntinoopolis*, *PThead.*, *PKalen*, *PBon.*, *PFay.*, *PCorn.*, *PMich.*, *POxy.*, *PMerton*, *PMeyer*, *PVarsov.*, *PAmh.*, *PLon.*, *PRyl.*, *PSocAthen.*, *PMichael.*, *Pland.*, *PLugd.-Batauv.* vols. 1–4, *PFamTeb.*, *PMichKaranis*, *BGU*, *POslo.*, sometimes in selections of texts different from those for graph I.

⁶ Rémondon (note 3 above) 141. In his graph on p. 149 he shows a ratio of public to private differing from my results: the public outnumber the private documents at any given moment. The difference arises from the fact that private documents (e.g. letters) are less often dated so precisely as the public (e.g. tax returns), and Rémondon makes use

II.

NOS. OF PAPYRI



That likelihood certainly seems acceptable in itself. Moreover, it can be used to account for the rise in the number of public documents in the second century. Not of the private ones, however. These seem to reflect general prosperity, being more numerous in good times under the early Antonines, just as they later trace a decline to a third-century low in the 260s and another long decline from Constantine's reign downward to the end of the fourth century. Overall, the frequency of private documents of all sorts in our second graph follows in outline the economic fortunes of the province, as those latter are usually conceived. Together with changes in the amount and shape of government, the economy must be used to explain the one fact that emerges incontestably from the first graph: namely, the broad rise in the second century and the long low from Severus Alexander to Diocletian. The only surprise lies in the continued diminishing of government after Diocletian.

The use to which people put their literacy is not the same thing as the level of literacy itself; if perhaps less interesting, however, it is a great deal easier to measure. The data are most easily sampled in the

only of texts that can be assigned to one specific year rather than to a 20-year period. The texts for his later time-span, however, in their rise and fall over the course of the fourth century resemble my own data if they are computed by one and the same method: Bagnall and Worp pp. 16-21 list their data which, collected in 20-year periods (if the 22 texts for the years A.D. 337-338-339 may be extrapolated to a hypothetical 129 for A.D. 320-339) yield totals of 1297, 101, 92, and 76; while my own texts in the same four periods total 76, 67, 47, and 38. So the lines of our two counts trace nearly the same decline.

Corpus of Latin inscriptions. Making whatever allowance one chooses for accidents in discovery, completeness of publication, the level of a modern nation's interest in the past and the wealth available for research, nevertheless there is surely something to be learned from the distribution of the texts we find there: 156,000 all told (in round figures), of which a majority comes from Italy (77,000, with 40,000 from Rome itself).^{6a} A. Mocsy in his 1966 study of inscriptions was right to take them as a sign of Romanization⁷—right, that is, to see the publishing of statements on stone as a characteristic activity within the Roman (of course, not only the Roman) way of life. In northern Italy, most of north Africa, much of the Danube lands, and throughout Spain and northwestern Europe, it was a characteristic not native but acquired from the conquerors.

Mocsy focusses more narrowly than we need to on a particular kind of statement put on stone: in the form, "Here lies Marcus, who lived 40 years." In large samples of such declarations, the given ages that are multiples of ten (less strikingly, of five) appear more often than they should. They represent approximations. No one knew exactly how old the deceased was, though it was somehow important to try to say how old. The degree of ignorance can be expressed as a percentage and plotted on a map and a time-line. What that shows is the local level of interest in a person's exact age, itself due to various legal consequences. But beyond all that, why bother to put the figure on a tombstone? What purpose would it serve? Mocsy sees the question and rightly answers, that the habit was an aspect of culture, not a practical necessity. It was part of the package that we call Romanization, perhaps the only one that we can hope to describe statistically—other than the entire epigraphic habit itself.

That larger trait of civilization is now beginning to be studied. The results are sometimes quite striking. For example, in such substantial cities as Mainz and Carnuntum to the north, three-fourths of the epitaphs will belong to soldiers, veterans, and their kin.⁸ Epigraphy

^{6a} I see no reason to mistrust the *CIL* as a representative sample of known inscriptions; but in any case, the tables I use also pillage *AE* etc. The total of published Latin texts may be close to double the *CIL*: 280,000, "a high estimate," says E. J. Jory, *BICS* 20 (1973) 147.

⁷ *Acta Antiqua* 14 (1966) p. 407 and esp. 419f.

⁸ See my *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven 1981) p. 200 n. 13 and p. 201 n. 16, with other proofs of the same patterns of frequency among inscriptions of the Rhine and Danube provinces—very much like those of Lambaesis in Africa, below, graph IV.

was an importation brought in by them along with such quintessentially Roman things as castrametation and *disciplina*. The more directly a person stood in line of cultural descent from old Cato the Censor, let us say, the more likely was he to set up some sort of epigraphic record. But so remote and specific a figure as Cato has to be brought in because the term “Roman” in the period of our study might include deeply Hellenized individuals and customs, while “Italian” might include the Greeks of the south or the Celts of the upper peninsula. Indeed, Mocsy can indicate the need for caution in handling the evidence, since he discovers in Italy itself a more marked degree of “Romanization” in the epigraphy of towns and villages than in the epigraphy of the cities.⁹

In asserting a special Roman-ness in epigraphy, we may seek support from K. K. Ery. He notes a difference distinguishing Greek and Roman habits of commemoration of the deceased; and since epitaphs make up so big a part of the epigraphic corpus, his findings are significant: a group like the Romans, careful to record early deaths (given the high proportion that children constituted in the ancient population), will produce many more epitaphs per thousand than the group that pays less attention, like the Greeks, to deaths before age 30.¹⁰ (See graph III.) Where Greeks, then, were numerous in a mixed population, the total number of inscriptions that population would produce would be correspondingly smaller—as Mocsy discovers.

Moreover, inscriptions from Roman Egypt seem to confirm that the epigraphic habit was stronger in Romans than in Greeks or native. So we may infer from the names appearing on the stones, by far the majority of which are Roman.¹¹ But it is well known that the Latinity of nomenclature is reflected generally in inscriptions: Romans or Romanized natives, identifiable by their names, will appear in the epigraphy of the provinces more often than their actual numbers warrant and in a far larger majority than their claim on literacy warrants, likewise.¹²

⁹ Mocsy (note 7 above) 406 f.

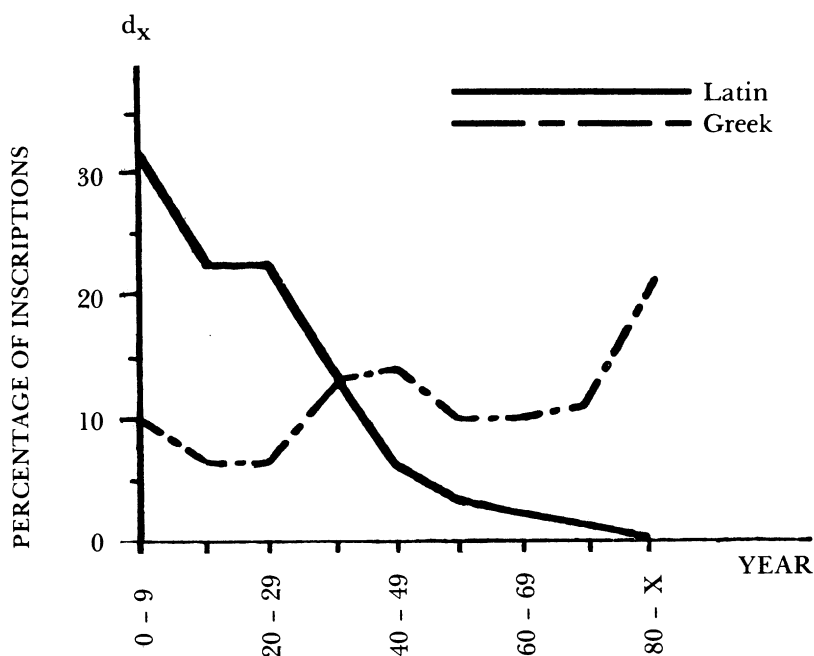
¹⁰ K. K. Ery, *Alba Regia* 10 (1969) 60. He notes, p. 56, that in Africa the epigraphic habit even more sharply favored commemoration of the mature and the old. This has been often remarked.

¹¹ In *CIL* 13.1–85, the names that appear include one Greek, one native, the rest Roman (23 army-connected, 33 civilian including a few freedmen with Greek cognomina; similar proportions in 13.6576–6633). In *IGR* 1.1043–1373, all the names are Greek in 31 inscriptions, at least partly Roman in 146, partly Egyptian in only 66 (Isidore, Sarapion, Sephaeros, Panesneus, Ammonius, Sochotes, Nepheros, Petesouchos, Petemenophis, etc.).

¹² Examples abound: e.g. those cited in my *Paganism* (note 8 above) 117 and n. 17. There are some exceptions or oddities, e.g. in second-century Narbonensis, where native

III.

Age-group frequencies among 9980 Greek and Latin tomb inscriptions in Rome



names increase from the first to the second century, see M. Clavel, *Béziers* (1970) 581, or in Lycaonia and Isauria, where native names make up a plurality (40 percent) in inscriptions; Latin 37 percent; Greek 23 percent. See S. Mitchell in *ANRW* II 7:2 (1980) 1065. For an easy check on whether non-Romans put up few inscriptions because they could not write at all, compare the proportions of names of Egyptians in the preceding note with any collection of ostraca: the natives in the latter will bulk vastly larger than the Greek-named, let alone the Roman.

Ery also mentions certain facts generally familiar: that the denser the population (most of all in cities compared to the countryside), and the richer, the more likely to produce inscriptions. But we can add that these two conditions in the provinces coincided more or less with Romanization in its totality; so it is hard for us to know what weight to assign to some minimum level of wealth rather than to acculturation, when we find a group at a given moment taking up the epigraphic habit. The moment itself can be only occasionally sensed, at best assigned to a period of a half-century.¹³

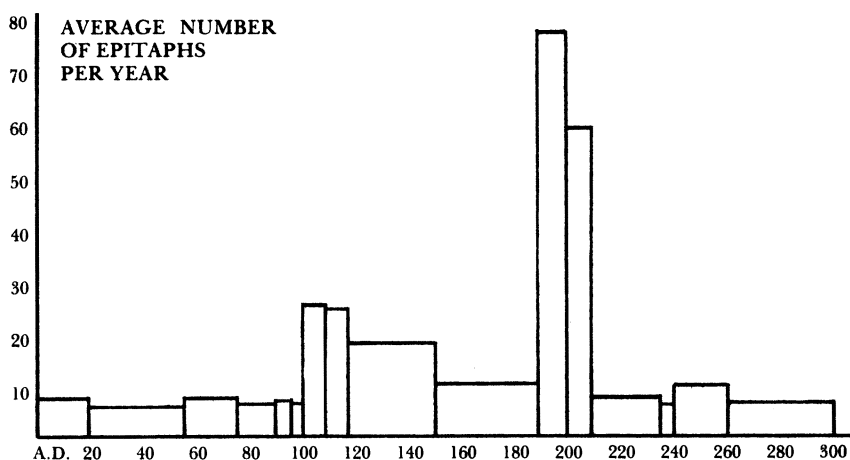
Lassère, in a study of seven centers in the province of Africa, could approximately date over 4,000 of their epitaphs; but for this he was obliged to use categories like "end of Republic/mid first century," "first century before A.D. 75," "first century/beginning of the second." If numerical termini are assigned to these categories, if the texts within each are distributed evenly throughout the time-span of the category, and if they are thus assigned to years and then re-grouped into 20-year spans, the results can be shown in a bar-graph.¹⁴ It makes no pretense to great accuracy. It only renders visual and quickly intelligible the data that Lassère described in his own terms; and various distortions can be sensed. Three of the seven sites canvassed were successively a home for the province's legion, the Third Augusta. Around them veterans settled and married; and all three sites gave rise to civilian centers containing quite untypical concentrations of immigrants from Italy and elsewhere in the empire. One of the three, Lambaesis, also yields "by far the greatest collection of texts found in Africa," as Lassère

¹³ Ery (note 10 above) 52 on the productivity levels; M. Nielsen in *Studies in the Romanization of Etruria* (1975) 299 f. on the appearance of epitaphs on cinerary-urn lids among the Etruscans, coinciding with the style called "Roman" because of the weight of the sculptured figures shown, their hairdo, and their wreaths; and M. Bénabou, *La résistance africaine à la romanisation* (1976) 495 f., on "sépultures à caissons," with Latin inscriptions, the form of burial being, like the Etruscan urns, indigenous, but the written memorial being an alien habit. The African material shows a stratum of rising wealth, possibly.

¹⁴ J.-M. Lassère, *Antiquités africaines* 7 (1973) 133–51: 4,160 texts, only two datable to a single year, the rest in 25 categories that touch on the empire, for example, "Augustus," 25 texts, where I have divided that number by the years of the reign, $25 \div (27 \text{ B.C. to A.D. } 14 = 41) = .61$ texts per year over A.D. 1–14. There is also "end of Republic/Trajan," 602 texts running from 40 B.C., the date somewhat arbitrarily chosen, down to A.D. 117, i.e. 157 years = 3.83 per year. For a specific single year, e.g. A.D. 2, I would add 3.83 to .61 to produce the total for that year, and add still more from other overlapping categories. To the categories "early", "mid", and "late" I assign the values 0–9, 40–60, and 90–99.

says; and it was greatly expanded, enriched, and personally visited by the emperor in the 120s, thus accounting for the first rise on the graph.¹⁵ The second rise might be attributed to the well-known patronage offered to the province by a native of the neighboring region, Septimius Severus. One senses, too, the probability that, within Lassère's largest category, "second/third century," the 1,350 texts cannot have been evenly distributed; surely they were bunched toward the middle; and thus they should give a gentler rise and fall to the bar representing ca. A.D. 190–210.

IV.



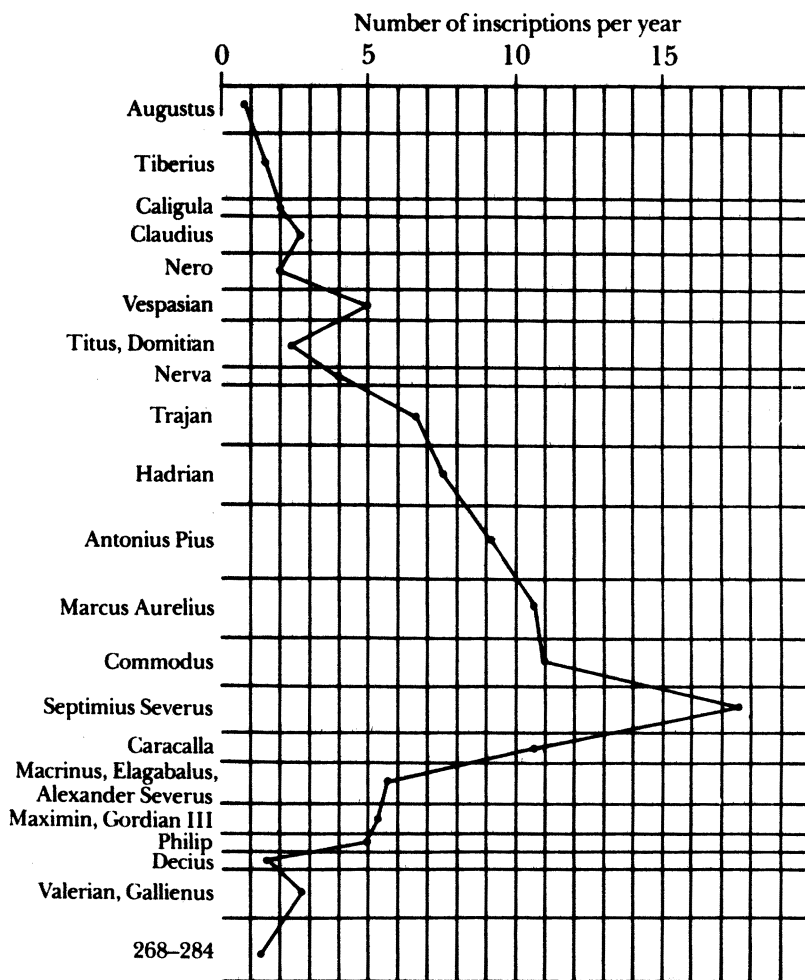
But in accounting for the chief feature of the graph we cannot be quite certain that it was the emperor Severus at work rather than other, even grander influences; for there is a similar feature in our last graph. It was published by Mrozek in the same year with Lassère's article, in 1973. It assigns some 1,680 inscriptions, from all over the Latin-speaking area, to successive emperors' reigns as far as Diocletian. The texts were those discussed and dated by a dozen scholars in as many

¹⁵ Lassère (note 14 above) 96. Among his seven sites, Theveste and Ammaedara also had been homes to Legio III Augusta. Moreover, the former in particular had benefited from Trajan; and a fourth site, Thugga, especially benefited from Hadrian; so the first 30-odd years of the second century we would expect to see well represented among the epitaphs. Finally, Bénabou, *op. cit.* 551 n. 278, finds Lassère's "chronologie proposée parfois discutable," an undeveloped remark which I cannot control.

works on various aspects of Roman history: military, administrative, religious, and social; and the rise and fall of the graph is less precisely repeated and confirmed by a further 1,970 texts datable only within

V.

Table of Frequency of Latin Inscriptions of the Empire



Source: Mrozek (1973) 115.

half-century spans and 922 within spans of a century.¹⁶ Mrozek's samples neatly complement Lassère's in the areas of life from which they draw, the one scholar looking at the private and domestic, the other scholar also at the public—for instance, at texts inscribed by officials.

Rigorously considered, the two graphs seem incontestably to prove a pronounced increase in the number of all varieties of inscription in every broad area of the Latin-speaking world up to a high point under Severus, and thereafter a much sharper decrease to a low point in the second quarter of the third century. But they do not lend themselves to interpretation in the way that papyri do. Indeed, they do not offer any obvious element that might explain their shape. They do, however, suggest three comments.

First, the epigraphic habit they represent was taken seriously, and by a large part of the population—especially seriously by the very people whom the rest of the world looked up to: property-owners, city senators, imperial agents. Of how many other traits of Roman civilization can we say as much? That is: putting ourselves in the shoes of the man who chose or composed the text to be inscribed and took it to the stone-cutter and paid for the job, surely we find ourselves giving closer attention to that particular train of actions than to anything else we are likely to have done during the week—nay, during the month or the year, perhaps; for with our chosen words we address our whole community or posterity itself. Such close attention constitutes a clear sign of cultural significance viewed from the inside.

Second, it is in terms of this trait that many others are discussed. Modern scholars of the Roman world will say that this or that activity or behaviour was prominent, vital, declining or the like according to the frequency of epigraphic attestation. That assumes, however, that the body of all inscriptions against which attestation is measured does not itself rise or fall—a false assumption. So administrative, economic, social, and religious history need to be rewritten.¹⁷ Furthermore, these

¹⁶ S. Mrozek, *Epigraphica* 35 (1973) 114–16. Of course other lists of inscriptions could be used, having the same distribution across time, e.g. the 230 texts in R. Duthoy's study of *curatores rei publicae*, *Anc. Soc.* 10 (1979) 225 ff.

¹⁷ For example, G. Camps, *Rev. Afr.* 98 (1954) 243 assumes “un caractère officiel et militaire” in the cult of the Mauretanian *dii Mauri* from the dedicants being so often soldiers and officials; but that is the tendency of the epigraphic corpus in almost any frontier province, see the ref. in my *Paganism* (note 8 above) 200 f. nn. 13 and 16; and 202 n. 23 for indication of another error of interpretation arising out of epigraphic evidence. Or again: J. J. Wilkes in his *Dalmatia* (1969) 235 infers changes in the ruling class from persons of a certain type coming to prominence in inscriptions; but that type, made up of indigenes, may simply not earlier have had the epigraphic habit.

several aspects of history when taken all together influence assessments of the fortunes of the Roman empire overall. Yet its downward turn began under Marcus Aurelius, or perhaps under Commodus—so it is agreed by a consensus little changed since Gibbon.¹⁸

This matter of consensus, and the collection of authorities to illustrate it, are needed to introduce my last comment: that it is awkward to explain the high point of the two graphs in political or economic terms, although those would be the instruments of interpretation thrust upon us by modern teaching. Among Lassère's 4,160 texts, only seven postdate A.D. 250; Mrozek takes "exactly the mid-third century as the hinge in the habit of epigraphy;"¹⁹ but the nadir of the imperial currency and the period of anti-empires in the east and west under their various rulers are then yet to come. Their full effects in turn would hardly be expected save after another decade or so. As to the peak of frequency of inscriptions, it should be found in A.D. 150, perhaps, or earlier. I think no one would have expected it to follow in the wake of the protracted several bouts of civil war that marked the ascendance of Severus to the throne, nor in a time of harsh proscriptions and novel taxes. Finally, the initial rise in the number of Latin inscriptions in Italy, back in the Republic, though never carefully examined, clearly would not trace a curve fitting such obvious other curves as the demographic or economic. Accordingly, it can only have been controlled from the beginning to the end by forces other than those conventionally invoked to explain such things. Put more sharply (no doubt too sharply): history is not being written in the right way.

¹⁸ P. Petit, *Histoire générale de l'empire romain* (1974) 153 f., sets "l'apogée" in the period A.D. 96–161 and, in surveying "les ouvrages classiques," finds them in agreement, or linking those late Antonine reigns to the Severan in one age of recession. Cf. further, *ibid.* 192 f. and 414; R. Rémondon, *La crise de l'empire romain* (1964) 77 f. and 85 (decline under Marcus, in terms of security, stability, and productivity); A. Bernardi in *The Economic Decline of Empires*, ed. C. M. Cipolla (1970) 37, recession begins with Commodus' death; J. Vogt, *The Decline of Rome* (1967) 25, "general regression" with the beginning of Severus' reign; M. Rostovtzeff, *Soc. and Econ. Hist. of the Rom. Emp.*² (1957) 377 f. and 411, economic deterioration in the second century, esp. under Commodus; F. Oertel in the *CAH* 12 (1939) 260 f.; and decline in specific regions in the second half of the second century, e.g. Gaul, A. Grenier in *Econ. Survey of Anc. Rome*, ed. T. Frank, 3 (1937) 574; Britain, A. L. F. Rivet, *The Villa in Britain* (1969) 201, recession from late second century; or Africa, R. M. Haywood in *Econ. Survey* *cit.*, 4 (1938) 73, and J.-M. Lassère, *Ubique populus* . . . (1977) 235 and 293. There is some confirmation in the apparent steep decline in maritime commerce after A.D. 200, see K. Hopkins in *JRS* 70 (1980) 105; but the evidence he adduces is not, and on inquiry appears not likely soon to be, in print.

¹⁹ Mrozek (note 16 above) 116.

What those forces were, I have no idea—or rather, no idea that can be substantiated. But clearly they were of a magnitude suited to the seriousness and ubiquity of the habit they modified. Some clue to an explanation may lie in the contrast between statements on papyrus and on stone. What was written on the former arranged itself in more intelligible patterns because it was addressed by one person to another (occasionally to himself, as a memorandum) and because it served some material and evident utility; but what was written on stone almost always addressed nobody in particular—rather, the whole community. Here lies the value in having glanced at other uses of literacy (above, pp. 237f.). Apparently the rise and fall of the epigraphic habit was controlled by what we can only call the sense of audience. In the exercise of the habit, people (I can only suppose) counted on their world still continuing in existence for a long time to come, so as to make nearly permanent memorials worthwhile; and they still felt themselves members of a special civilization, proud (or obliged) to behave as such. Later, in not bothering any more to record on stone their names or any other claim to attention, perhaps they expressed their doubts about the permanence or importance of that world. Perhaps. At least I cannot see in the evidence anything less than the sign of some very broad psychological shift.

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