

**Alison E. Cooley**, *The Cambridge Manual of Latin Epigraphy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. xxii + 531. ISBN 9780521549547 (paperback). \$42.00.

This book, a wide-ranging and accessible guide to the study of Latin inscriptions, is divided into three sections: the first offers an examination of the epigraphic record of a specific region (the Bay of Naples), the second a discussion of epigraphic culture in the wider Roman world, and the third a technical manual of Latin epigraphy. Cooley's methodology permeates each section as she delivers a nuanced overview of the field and of the many and varied considerations necessary for successful interpretation of the medium.

Cooley begins with a case-study of the range of inscriptions found in the Bay of Naples region. This area, with its ties to Rome, contained several cities of varying origin, composition, and status as well as rural regions; the early presence of Greek colonies and later connections with the Greek East add another cultural element to the picture. Furthermore, the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius caused to be preserved certain types of inscriptions that do not often survive.

In the first section Cooley discusses the various kinds of civic inscriptions: municipal decrees, painted notices of elections or games, boundary markers, honorific statues, and building inscriptions. For some of these their function is inherently bound up in their existence as inscriptions, but Cooley emphasizes that in the case of certain others (e.g., municipal decrees) monumentalization was not a requirement for efficacy, and as such the texts would only be inscribed if it was in some party's interest to do so; with these inscriptions especially, then, it is critical for interpretation to ask for whose benefit, and with whose money, they were set up.

Cooley then addresses the various kinds of personal inscriptions found in this region: epitaphs, private religious inscriptions, and writing tablets. She warns against using epitaphs, numerous as they are, to draw any demographic conclusions; she argues rather for their value as a window into commemorative practices. Addressing private religious inscriptions, Cooley suggests that the recording of these dedications and vows on various media, even impermanent ones, shows that writing itself was an important part of these religious acts. Finally she discusses writing tablets (rarely preserved but numerous here due to the eruption), which can offer great insight into private business transactions.

In the third sub-section Cooley investigates the interpretive possibilities of inscriptions of "production, distribution, and ownership." As a result of the Vesuvius eruption, inscriptions have been preserved on a wide range of objects that make up the category of *instrumentum domesticum*: bricks and tiles, *amphorae*, *dolia* and *terra sigillata*, water pipes, *signacula*, and tools of weights and measures. Cooley argues that while many of these inscriptions must have been purely functional, others can have commemorative or promotional overtones as well.

Finally Cooley describes the various uses of inscriptions in works of art: artists' signatures, speech bubbles, explicatory name-labels, and labels on illustrated glass flasks.

She ends this sub-section with a discussion of graffiti, ultimately suggesting that a sense of audience plays only a minimal role in most cases of this more spontaneous and ephemeral kind of inscribing; like certain kinds of private religious inscriptions, the act of writing itself is enough.

In the second section of the manual, Cooley addresses epigraphic culture in the wider Roman world. She begins by discussing the difficulty of defining epigraphy: the variety of writing tools and surfaces defeats any attempt at a comprehensive description, nor should one be too insistent on durability. Certain inclusions and exclusions in the field are somewhat arbitrary, she says, based on tradition rather than sense. Any definition must be a compromise, she concludes, and adhering too closely to traditional divisions can cause a reader to miss parallels and interpretive insights outside of the genre.

Equally difficult, she says, and perilous, are attempts to categorize inscriptions, due to the inevitable overlap between categories and also to the danger of imposing categories that reflect our modern sensibilities rather than those of the Romans. Consideration of the original physical context and of other background information (e.g., the instigator of the inscription, and the source of funding for it) is more illuminating than a simple categorization. Cooley does ultimately offer categories of her own, as she discusses the history and interpretation of each kind of inscription: epitaphs, honorific inscriptions, building inscriptions, milestones, juridical epigraphy, religious inscriptions (although these in particular she considers “not a unified category”), *instrumentum domesticum* (“least helpful of all the usual categories”), inscriptions within artistic media, graffiti, and rock-cut inscriptions.

In her next section, “Epigraphy in society,” Cooley reiterates her point that we must, in cases where the act of inscription was not integral to the function of a text, investigate what precisely was being memorialized and for whose benefit. She then discusses the question of Christian epigraphy, concluding that such a category did eventually emerge, not absolutely divided from previous epigraphy, but recognizably distinct in certain ways.

In the fourth sub-section of her wider look at Roman epigraphy, Cooley offers a second, smaller case study, of Tripolitania, where the relative isolation of the region combined with the marked difference between the coastal region and the pre-desert interior occasioned a remarkable variety of epigraphic cultures involving multiple languages. In examining inscriptions from the urban areas, the pre-desert interior, and the army camp at Bu Njem (an especially interesting window into how the soldiers interacted with their environment), Cooley points out that in cases of bilingual inscriptions the information presented, and how it is presented, can differ markedly in two versions of the “same” inscription; she argues that in bilingual inscriptions each language has a different role and goal.

Cooley then explores the “life-cycle” of Roman inscriptions. She investigates how much influence a commissioner might have in the design and production process, and discusses in detail the various stages of a text on its way to inscription and the errors that

can result. She then discusses language choice, returning to themes already touched on in the preceding case-study. As for the reading and viewing of inscriptions, she argues that settling on an across-the-board percentage of literacy is not especially helpful, but that we should rather acknowledge varying levels of literacy, and think in terms of “pockets” of literacy in urban and military areas; furthermore we should understand a broader kind of “reading” of an inscription, i.e., how a viewer would react to its wider physical characteristics. Turning to the after-life of inscriptions she addresses various kinds of updates, intentional damage done in the process of memory-sanctioning, and finally the motivations for the recycling of inscription-bearing material.

In the third section of the manual, Cooley offers a “technical guide” to Latin epigraphy, an excellent entry point for any would-be epigrapher. The first sub-section, “Finding published inscriptions,” begins with the *CIL*; impressive and integral as the collection is, Cooley says, earlier volumes have certain drawbacks, specifically inconsistent information about the appearance and context of inscriptions, and only minimal historical analysis. New fascicles are working to correct these faults, and she offers as a (compelling) example two versions of the same inscription, as published in an old and in a new volume. Cooley lists indexes available for the collection, and the specific content of each of its many volumes and fascicles; she provides a similar list for the major collections of Christian inscriptions. She also notes other places to look for inscriptions, offering an excellent summary of the databases of inscriptions available on the internet, as well as listing pertinent journals and other, smaller corpora.

The second part of this third section, “Reading an epigraphical publication,” begins with a detailed look at a specific entry in the *CIL*. Cooley then addresses the ever-changing conventions of transcription, including a list of the symbols currently in use. The importance of these conventions is shown as she discusses the dangers of drawing conclusions from editorial supplements. Turning then to abbreviations, she forbears to offer a comprehensive list of her own, noting the many lists elsewhere; she does offer smaller lists of abbreviations for numerals, symbols, etc. Finally she emphasizes the importance of consulting stemmata; this is a delightful section in which Cooley details the various sources of the inscriptions in the *CIL*, and asserts the importance of being aware of the source of any given inscription for evaluating its authenticity and the reliability of its reading.

In the third sub-section of the technical guide, Cooley offers advice as to how to go about examining an inscription in a museum or on-site. She provides practical lists of necessary information and tools to bring, discusses the respective merits of photographs and “squeezes” of inscriptions, and lists what information to record when viewing an inscription. She then discusses forgeries: the question of authenticity can be a difficult one, as many of the early collectors of inscriptions (most famously Pirro Ligorio) also created their own inscriptions and “enhanced” real inscriptions. The best approach, Cooley says, is an awareness of the source of each inscription and of the reliability of that source.

In the fourth part of the technical guide Cooley discusses the various methods for dating an inscription. First and foremost she mentions archaeological information: stratigraphy, building techniques, and small finds in the area of discovery. She then describes the many kinds of internal evidence that can be available: an actual date, given in one of several systems of dating (she offers a list of the consular *fasti* in an appendix); the changing use of imperial titulature (also summarized, in a second appendix); mention of historical events; onomastic patterns; linguistic formulae; and finally, paleographical characteristics and orthography. Finally, the physical appearance of the monument as a whole — its material, decorative elements, and abbreviations — can also be informative.

In her final section, on restoration, Cooley describes how, although no reconstruction can ever be considered certain, many damaged inscriptions can be at least partly restored based on extant parallels; again she emphasizes the importance of observing the editorial conventions that indicate various levels of restoration. She then, as a conclusion, offers a case-study of the re-editing of a particular damaged inscription, showing modern photographs of the monument, the original *CIL* entry, the first published version of the text (tracked down via the stemmata in the *CIL*), and finally a new, carefully edited version that offers detailed notes about previous scholarship, possible restorations, and historical context.

The content described above is supplemented throughout with illustrated specimens of every kind of inscription, themselves excellent examples of how best to present these texts and the necessary background information; in most cases a commentary is provided that allows even an inexperienced reader to appreciate the complexities and nuances of interpretation. Also rich are the footnotes: a beginner looking to read further on a particular issue will find ample and up-to-date references to pursue.

Some may find the arrangement of the three sections counter-intuitive — the understanding of epigraphic conventions that a beginner can gain from the last section would be useful in reading the first and second sections — and in certain places there is repetition due to the fact that Cooley addresses similar material in both the first and second sections. These are minor criticisms, however, as readers can approach the sections in whatever order they please, and some repetition is expected and even useful in a basic guide such as this.

This book will be an excellent introduction for any would-be epigrapher, and also has much to offer more advanced students who wish to explore further the methodological and interpretive issues involved.

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