

Latin Epigraphy, an interdisciplinary approach to the ancient world*

PEDRO PAULO A. FUNARI¹
RENATA S. GARRAFFONI²

The first Conference on *Instrumenta Inscripta Latina* was held at Sopiana (Pécs, Hungary), in the beginning of the 1990's. About thirteen years later, the second international Conference took place at Klagenfurt, Austria, in early May 2005 (figure 1 and 2). It was organized by the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the Landesmuseum Kärnten, under the patronage of the *Association Internationale de l'Épigraphie Grecque et Latine*, to discuss Latin ordinary epigraphy and the role of new technologies, such as electronic databases. The meeting put together a host of scholars from several countries, with different approaches and encouraged theoretical and methodological discussion.

FIGURE 1





FIGURE 2

The study of ordinary Latin inscriptions, the *instrumenta inscripta Latina*, has a long tradition, since the inception of the *Corpora* of inscriptions in the nineteenth century, but it has developed hugely in the last few decades. This is due to several reasons, not least the archaeological finding of several thousand inscriptions on *amphorae*, *mortaria*, tablets, bricks, glass, *tesserae nummulariae*, leather, samian ware, among others. Furthermore, there has been a growing attention paid to ordinary life in the recent epistemological historical, archaeological and anthropological theoretical discussions. Both moves explain the setting up of an international commission³ on ordinary Latin epigraphy and the conferences on the subject, which proved a huge success in fostering a broader understanding of economic, social, cultural aspects of the ancient world. The Commission has established as its main task the discussion about the specific features of ordinary Latin epigraphy, considering that there will be a special attention paid to the subject in the next overall Congress on Ancient Epigraphy⁴, to be held in Oxford, in 2007 (figure 3).



FIGURE 3

FIGURE 4



The conference was conceived as a scholarly workshop, with the participation of a limited number of speakers, enabling all the forty or so participants not only to read their papers but also to take part in the discussion of each and every paper. Most of the speakers were German speaking, and consequently most of the discussion was in German, but Italian, English and French were also used during the sessions. There were speakers from Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, Brazil, Bulgaria, Slovenia, France, Hungary, Luxembourg, the United Kingdom and epigraphists with a variety of scholarly background, most of them historians and archaeologists, but there were also Latinists.

As part of the conference, the participants visited Roman archaeological sites in the region, namely, Virunum (figures 4, 5, 6), Magdalensberg (figures 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12) and Teurnia (figures 13, 14, 15, 16), where participants were scholarly lectured by local scholars on the sites themselves and their impressive exhibitions and museums. Professor Hainzmann chaired the opening and concluding sessions, and was always the nicest host. Senior Professors, Pedro Paulo Funari, Manfred Hainzmann, Marc Mayer, José Remesal, and Claudio Zaccaria, who contributed to a most useful discussion of the issues dealt with in each and every session, chaired the sessions.

FIGURE 5





FIGURE 6

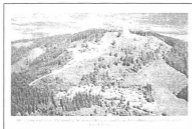


FIGURE 7



FIGURE 8

FIGURE 9



FIGURE 10



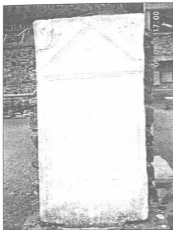


FIGURE 11

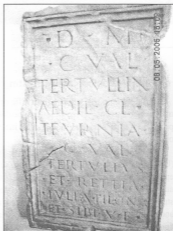


FIGURE 12

FIGURE 13



FIGURE 14



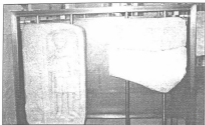


FIGURE 15



FIGURE 16

There were three main subjects.

Methodological issues relating to data base management

In these sections, scholars from different Universities discussed the role of informatics in construction of recent Epigraphic databases. Different kinds of databases were proposed for ordinary and monumental inscriptions and they explored the potentials of this new technology.

Professor Remesal presented the databases, which has been developed at CEIPAC (University of Barcelona) in the last years. The CEIPAC's members focus on amphorae epigraphy and their different kinds of inscriptions: stamps, *tituli picti* and *graffiti ante* and *post coctarum*. Each inscription is related to different aspects, which means that stamps and *graffiti ante* and *post coctarum* are related to the amphorae's production and their contents, while the *tituli picti* are related to the commercialization of different contents (figures 17, 18).

Nowadays, there are more than 20.000 entries that can be found on the CEIPAC's databases. As it is an on-line catalogue, professor Remesal emphasized that this technology allows scholars to introduce new evidence found on archaeological excavations. This facility stresses the aim of the project: to create an international group under the patronage of the *Union Académique Internationale*.

FIGURE 17

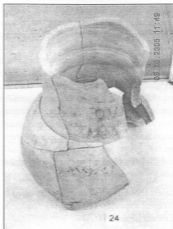
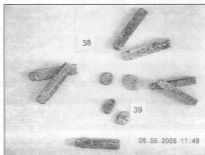


FIGURE 18



Professor Zaocaria (University of Trieste) presented the database, which has been developed by the *Laboratorio di Epigrafia di Trieste*. This database also focuses on *instrumentum domesticum*, although the main subject is the bricks' stamps from *Regio X*. The methodological approach is related to a former project that produced a catalogue of tombstones and it is also connected to the EAGLE project (Electronic Archives of Greek and Latin Epigraphy). This database, as the CEIPAC's one, is a digital system, which also allows the researchers compare different kind of evidence as well as to find bibliographical references.

Last but not least, professor Hainzmann (University of Graz) presented another type of database. He focused on monumental inscriptions and discussed methodological approaches for their transcription to the database. Professor Hainzmann has also emphasized that the electronic system and the new technology are helpful tools, which have allowed different kind of dialogue among scholars as well as challenge them to a global perspective.

Although the three data bases have different subjects (amphorae, bricks and monumental inscriptions) and methodological approaches, the discussions refer to a common effort of these scholars and theirs groups to share information and to work on an international perspective.

Discussion of recent epigraphic evidence

Many scholars presented their researches on several types of inscriptions. These papers showed new inscriptions that came to light on the latest excavations as well as different approaches on studying amphorae, tablets, bricks, glass, leather, and *terra sigillata* (figure 19).



FIGURE 19

In depth, theoretical discussion of interpretive models

The papers that drew upon theoretical discussion focused on the importance of inscriptions for the understanding of the Roman economy and society. The authors explored the *instrumenta inscripta*, and their potential as independent (cf. Funari, Hall & Jones 1999) and relevant evidence on the ancient world, as material discourse (cf. Funari, Zarankin & Stovel 2005).

A keynote speech by Geza Alföldy on the importance of inscriptions for the understanding of the Roman world summed up the overall ethos of the conference, as it stressed the key role played by inscriptions in shaping social life at Rome, particularly those on ordinary artifacts. Two decades ago, in his by now classic *Roman Social History*, Alföldy proposed that it was no longer possible to think about ancient history without archaeology and he proved right, for the archaeological evidence has multiplied manifold since then, reshaping both our discipline of Classical Studies and our wider understanding of the role played by material culture in shaping not only ancient life, but also our own, modern perceptions of the ancient world. Material culture is not simply a product of society, it is integral to it and archaeological remains are a part of that entity which is still with us in the present. Ordinary inscriptions are neither a reflection of ancient literature, nor its illustration (Thomas 2005: 15, 25), they constitute a most relevant, and independent evidence on the ancients. Ordinary inscriptions enable us to discuss economic relationships in the ancient world otherwise mentioned only en passant by ancient authors. Amphora stamps, painted inscriptions and graffiti have been essential for rethinking ancient economic life and for questioning interpretive models grounded on normative readings of ancient literature.

The *Instrumenta Inscripta* have also been important for a deeper understanding of a plethora of social and cultural aspects of ancient life, even in such subjects as the uses of the Latin language, sometimes misleadingly considered as an exclusive philological issue. During the conference, several inscriptions showed everyday uses of the Latin language, strikingly distant from the official, classical Latin of the literary sources. Last but not least, the open atmosphere of scholarly discussion has proven once again the importance of international cooperation and dialogue for the advancement of our knowledge about the past.

NOTAS

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² Campinas State University, Brazil, Research Associate, Illinois State University and Barcelona University, Former World Archaeological Congress Secretary.

³ Parana Federal University, Brazil.

⁴ The three current chairmen are M. Hainzmann, J. Remesal and C. Zaccaria.

⁵ *XIII International Congress of Greek and Latin Epigraphy*.

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