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Epigraphic Evidence: Ancient History from Inscriptions
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Epigraphic Evidence

Ancient history from inscriptions

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London and New York

((abc))	Any letters or symbols represented differently on the stone, e.g. inverted or backwards letters, numerals ((*decem milia*)), symbols ((*centurio*)), ((*mulieris*)).
⌜abc⌝	Text corrected by the editor.
{abc}	Text included by mistake and removed by the editor.
<abc>	Text omitted by mistake and supplied by the editor.
‖abc‖	Letters erased in antiquity.
«abc»	Letters inscribed in an erasure.
`abc´	Letters added in antiquity in order to correct or supplement the text.
[- c.5 -]	Approximately five letters of text are missing.
(vac. c.5)	The surface is left blank for a space of approximately five letters.

Chapter 1

Epigraphy and the ancient historian

John Bodel

> The province of Epigraphy is, in one respect, wider than that of Palaeography, for, while Palaeography confines itself to the study of the forms of writing found in ancient manuscripts, Epigraphy not only deals with the lettering, but is even apt to concern itself with the subject-matter of ancient inscriptions, thus unduly encroaching on the provinces of History, and of Public and Private Antiquities.
>
> J. E. Sandys, *Latin Epigraphy* (Cambridge 1918: 1)

Few ancient historians nowadays would agree with Sir John Edwin Sandys that the relationship between epigraphy and history is one of undue encroachment of the former upon the latter. Most would concede that the history of classical antiquity could not be written without epigraphy, and many would assert that the proper business of the epigraphist is not only to edit inscribed texts but to set inscriptions into their cultural contexts and thus to demonstrate their contribution to history. And yet epigraphists have often been viewed as narrow technicians whose conceptual myopia prevents them from seeing beyond the edges of their stones. The father of modern historiography, Barthold Georg Niebuhr, did not see things this way. Already in 1815, in his proposal before the Berlin Academy to create a *Corpus Inscriptionum* of all the languages of Roman antiquity, Niebuhr recognized that inscriptions were to the study of antiquity what documents were to modern history: essential primary sources (Niebuhr 1815). But a disparaging perception of epigraphists and their work has a long pedigree. Theodor Mommsen recalled being laughed at more than once, while touring Italy as a young man in search of material to be included in his edition of the inscriptions of the kingdom of Naples, as a "man addicted to stones" (*lapidarius homo*) and, because so many of the inscriptions were epitaphs, a "morbid

undertaker" (*feralis designator*) (Mommsen 1852: xvi; see Frontispiece). By the end of his career Mommsen had published more ancient inscriptions than anyone before or since, and yet most today would not regard him primarily as an epigraphist but as a Roman historian. In fact, most of those specializing in the study of Greek and Latin inscriptions since Mommsen's day have interpreted their role as differing in particulars but not essentials from that of ancient historians exploiting other types of evidence.

Definition and scope

What, then, is an epigraphist, or epigrapher—even the name, in English, is variable (compare German *Epigraphiker*, French *épigraphiste*, Italian *epigrafista*)? The question of definition, famously posed nearly half a century ago by the great French epigraphist, Louis Robert (1953: 8, "qui sommes-nous?"), is deceptively simple. "Epigraphy," according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is "the science concerned with the classification and interpretation of inscriptions"; epigraphists, then, are those who practice this science. But if the first procedure—classification—is technical and specific and to that extent "scientific," the second—interpretation—requires as much art as science and covers a good deal of uncertain ground. Nor is the meaning of "inscription" unproblematic: as the word is used in this book, "inscription" refers to a piece of writing or lettering engraved, etched, incised, traced, stamped, or otherwise imprinted into or onto a durable surface. In fact, certain types of ancient writing squarely included in this definition—the legends on coins or engraved gems, for example—long ago developed their own special disciplines (numismatics, gemology) and are no longer generally considered to fall within the epigraphist's realm. Others not so obviously pertinent, such as words spelled out in mosaic tiles (Gómez Pallarès 1997) or painted on plaster walls (Franklin 1980) or impressed into carbonized loaves of bread (Manacorda 1993: 45), have found a place in epigraphy. The study of Greek and Latin inscriptions inevitably impinges on other areas in the study of ancient writing, notably papyrology and palaeography, and the boundaries between the fields have never been precisely drawn. Some general guidelines may nonetheless help to delimit the field.

Palaeography, focused on letter-forms, embraces both epigraphy and papyrology but excludes much of what the latter concern, notably, as Sandys observed, consideration of the contents of the texts.[1] The territory covered by the other two can generally be divided according to the permanence of the writings each treats; but many documents transcribed on papyri were no more transitory in intent—and have proved no more ephemeral in fact—than the scribblings painted or scratched onto pottery fragments at Athens (Lang 1975) or onto tombs at Pompeii (Sabbatini Tumolesi 1980). Geography has conventionally provided one useful criterion of discrimination: inscribed bone or ivory tags (*tesserae*) found in Egypt have traditionally belonged to papyrologists, whereas those discovered elsewhere in the Roman world are cataloged by epigraphists (e.g. in *ILS* 6118–20; cf. Dar. Sag., s.v., 1912). But the ongoing recovery of inked wooden writing leaves from Roman forts at Chesterholm (Vindolanda) (Bowman–Thomas 1994) and Carlisle (Tomlin 1998) in northern Britain and of various normally perishable documents from throughout the Near East (Cotton–Cockle–Millar 1995) has challenged this arbitrary division by place of discovery and has expanded the papyrologist's territorial range. The inscribed waxed tablets unearthed at Vindolanda are naturally being studied by the same scholars who are editing the wooden writing leaves with which they have been found (Bowman–Thomas 1994), whereas those from Pompeii and Dacia known in the nineteenth century were included in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, and examples found subsequently in the same regions have continued to be handled by epigraphists (e.g. Camodeca 1999).

If neither place of discovery nor vehicle of transmission (the type of object that "supports" the text) provides a clear means of distinguishing the papyrologist's territory from that of the epigraphist, neither does the medium of writing nor the material of the writing surface. The painted signatures and labels that formed part of the original decoration of fine ceramics have traditionally been the preserve of vase specialists and art historians (Immerwahr 1990), whereas words painted on large clay vessels subsequent to their manufacture are studied by epigraphists (see below), and texts written in ink on fragments of broken pottery (*ostraka*) are generally handled by papyrologists—unless they come from an area rich in other types of inscriptions, such as the agora at Athens, in which case epigraphists claim their due (Lang 1990). There is no logical reason, much less necessity, for this fragmentation, and although the development of specialized skills within the subdisciplines of palaeography, papyrology, epigraphy, and numismatics is natural and inevitable, everyone who works in any of these fields sooner or later feels the need to know something about the others, and anyone who wishes to understand the place of writing in the ancient world must try to keep in mind the variety of media in which it was recorded and the range of purposes it served (Harris 1989: 26–9).

Even with parts of the territory parceled off to related disciplines, the temporal and geographical range of the material traditionally included within the field of Greek and Latin epigraphy is wide. To try to describe definitively the body of inscribed writing in Greek and Latin—to say nothing of the dozen or so other ancient languages attested epigraphically throughout the Mediterranean world (Harris 1989: 175–90)—would be an impossible task and would serve no useful purpose. Of the 600,000 or so surviving Greek and Latin inscriptions, produced over a millennium and a half (c. 800 BCE–700 CE), our sample runs from a metrical graffito scratched onto a cup ("of Nestor") deposited in a grave on Pithecusae toward the end of the eighth century BCE (*CEG* 454 = *LSAG* 239 no. 1); to an archaic dedication to Mars on a stone base at Satricum, south of Rome, by the companions (*suodales*) of a P. Valerius, probably the "Publicola" who was consul in the first year of the Roman Republic (the so-called *lapis Satricanus*, *CIL* I² 2832a; Versnel 1997); to a bilingual edict, in Greek and Aramaic, of the Buddhist Indian king Asoka (c. 250 BCE) from Kandahar in eastern Afghanistan (Pugliese Carratelli–Garbini 1964; cf. Millar 1983: 87–9); to the record of personal accomplishments (*res gestae*) composed by the emperor Augustus shortly before his death and originally displayed in front of his mausoleum at Rome (Suet. *Aug.* 101)—probably the most widely studied document of antiquity (e.g. Gagé 1977; Ramage 1987); to a bronze military diploma recording the award of citizenship rights to a Roman soldier serving on the northern frontier in Britain in 146 CE (*RIB* 2041.9 = *RMD* 2.97); to a fulsome honorific dedication by Smaragdus, exarch of Italy, to Phocas, emperor in the East, inscribed over an earlier text on a monument erected in the Roman Forum early in the seventh century (*CIL* VI 1200, 31259a); to a Christian epitaph carved on the cover of a tomb near Osuna (Urso) in Spain in February 708 CE (*CIL* II²/5 1115).[2]

No one has ever tried to control this vast assemblage of material, with good reason. As a body of data, the corpus of ancient Greek and Latin inscriptions is amorphous, heterogeneous, and inert. A category of writing so arbitrarily defined—by a quality (durability) secondary and in many cases incidental to its particular function—does not have the same underlying unity as do medieval manuscripts or coins or even papyri. The purposes for which inscriptions were composed and the types of objects on which they were inscribed are more diverse than those with which the palaeographer, the numismatist, or the papyrologist generally has to contend. Consequently, the range of historical issues they illuminate tends to be wider, and the variety of possible methods of

approaching the texts greater, than they are in the related fields. There is no single correct way to exploit inscriptional evidence, any more than there is a single correct way to write ancient history. In order to yield useful information, the epigraphic corpus must be prodded into responsiveness by well-honed questions directed at appropriate points of its sprawling bulk: asking epitaphs about maritime commerce is less profitable than asking them about commemorative behavior or onomastic practices; consulting amphora stamps for patterns of office holding will provide few answers. For the most part these points are obvious, but some large classes of inscription—notably, epitaphs (see below)—have not always had the right questions asked of them. Others, such as curse tablets (Gager 1992: 3–41) or Greek manumission records (Guarducci 1967–78: 3.263–94; Hopkins 1978: 133–71) or Roman military diplomas (Eck–Wolff 1986) prompt questions about ancient mentalities and behaviors that we might not otherwise have been inclined to pose.

The challenge for the historian approaching the heterogeneous mass of Greek and Latin inscriptional writing is to choose analytical tools suitable to the particular task and to apply them with care. In many cases this means trying to combine the skills of an archaeologist with those of a philologist in order to understand the physical context in which a document was produced and the significance of the monument that carried the text as well as the message of the text itself (Marcillet-Jaubert 1960; Raubitschek 1964). In others, the expertise of a demographer or a statistician or a prosopographer may be required (e.g. Parkin 1992: 4–19; Hahn–Leunissen 1990; see Chapter 3). Even when the goal is a synthetic analysis of thousands of similar inscriptions, attention to the peculiar characteristics of individual specimens is often essential for their basic interpretation and in many cases leads to a more nuanced appreciation of the entire class of document. Conversely, understanding the significance of any particular inscription requires a broad knowledge of the group of similar texts from which it derives, so that its conventional elements and distinctive features can be recognized. In practice most investigators venturing into this vast territory at one time or another feel lost or inadequately equipped for the expedition, owing to the lack of some specialized knowledge or breadth of experience; and yet the most perplexing uncertainties often center on the most basic questions about the nature of the evidence. How were inscriptions viewed by the persons for whom they were written? What motives inspired those who wrote them? What was the place of inscribed writing in the Greco-Roman world?

The Roman epigraphic habit

Nearly twenty years ago Ramsay MacMullen, in a celebrated essay (MacMullen 1982), noted that the number of Latin inscriptions apparently grew steadily over the first and second centuries CE before falling off sharply in the third (cf. Mrozek 1973, 1988) and that throughout the western provinces, much of the Danube region, and most of North Africa, the practice of inscribing documents on stone, particularly epitaphs, seems not to have been a native tradition but was instead a custom learned from the Romans (Móesy 1966: 419–20). With these two observations MacMullen outlined the contours of an "epigraphic habit" he found to be characteristic of the Romanized peoples of the western empire, a habit that peaked around the turn of the second and third centuries CE. A few years later, he noted a similar pattern of epigraphic production in the Greek east, from which he concluded that the habit was cultural rather than linguistic, "Roman" rather than "Latin" (MacMullen 1986; cf. Roueché 1989: xix–xx). MacMullen did not attempt to interpret this phenomenon but suggested only that the rise and fall of epigraphic production was controlled by a "sense of audience" (MacMullen 1982: 246). When the custom of inscribing memorials in stone experienced a resurgence in late antiquity, beginning in the second half of the fourth century CE, it was virtually restricted to epitaphs and had a distinctly Christian cast, centered on a belief in resurrection and the afterlife (Galvao-Sobrinho 1995; cf. Shaw 1996: 101–7). The causes of the earlier growth and decline are more difficult to identify.

E. Meyer, focusing on epitaphs, has argued that Roman tombstones were a distinctive badge of Roman citizenship and that, when the latter lost its cachet following the emperor Caracalla's extension of the rights of citizens to all free inhabitants of the empire in 212 CE, the fashion for inscribed epitaphs likewise lost its appeal (Meyer 1990: 78–81). But Roman tombstones were never restricted to citizens, and the methods of dating and periodization used to chart the supposed rise and fall of their popularity are suspect (Cherry 1995: 143–50). G. Woolf has pointed out that in Roman Gaul, as the epigraphic habit spread during the second century CE, the number of Roman-style epitaphs erected by and to persons without Roman names and Roman citizenship actually increased (Woolf 1998: 103). In his view, names provide one key to understanding the phenomenon. Woolf remarks the prominence in Latin inscriptions of naming as a means of asserting identity and suggests that the epigraphic habit may be viewed as a barometer of social anxiety expressed by individuals seeking to establish their place in an increas-

ingly changing world; the diffusion of the Roman epigraphic culture during the first and second centuries is a sign of the expansion of Roman society (Woolf 1996). This idea may help to account for the rise of the phenomenon but seems ill suited to explaining its decline, for if the number of epitaphs fell off sharply after the time of the Severi, in Italy, at least, where Roman citizenship had long been a prerogative of the freeborn, the number of honorary inscriptions, which even more than epitaphs linked social identity to a name, not only did not decrease during the third century but may even have grown (Forbis 1996: 101). A single explanation for such widespread changes, based on an isolated political act or a presumed commonality of psychological responses to the world, is perhaps unlikely.[3] More probably a variety of mundane and interconnected forces—economic, demographic, and social, as well as psychological and, perhaps, political—gradually shaped the prevailing cultural practice in different localities, with the result that a microcosmically variegated galaxy of epigraphic behaviors appears to us deceptively regular and uniform when viewed from a distance. With greater confidence, we may assert that the epigraphic universe of the Roman empire began with a bang.

The explosion of epigraphic activity at the start of the period of expansion, around the end of the first century BCE, can be plausibly traced to the first emperor, Augustus. Building inscriptions, milestones (recording not only distances but the names of the officials responsible for constructing the road), votive dedications on altars and statue bases, honorific texts, boundary markers, epitaphs—all these types of inscription not only proliferated in number but changed in form as a result of the influence of the first Princeps, who effectively transformed the existing epigraphic culture of Rome into an empire-wide vehicle of Augustan ideology (Alföldy 1991). Whether or not Augustus purposefully set out to reshape the epigraphic landscape, the example he set at the capital for acceptable forms of public display established a pattern and a set of standards that quickly spread throughout Italy and the western provinces (Eck 1984; Wallace-Hadrill 1990). Earlier in the first century BCE Roman epigraphy in two of its most characteristic forms—honorific inscriptions and epitaphs—had already left its mark in northern Italy, parts of southern Gaul, and much of the Iberian peninsula, where it variously transformed and conformed to the diverse native epigraphic traditions it encountered (Beltrán Lloris 1995). But it was not until the time of Augustus, when a ready supply of strong, fine-grained white marble, quarried in the Apuan Alps north of Pisa (modern Carrara) and shipped to Rome through the port of Luni (whence its name, Luna), made possible the carving of

artistically refined lettering, with contrasting thick and thin strokes formed by a V-shaped groove ("shading": Gordon–Gordon 1957: 80–2), that the popularity of stone-cut inscriptions as verbal monuments began to spread throughout Italy, parts of western Europe, and North Africa.

Subsequently, the epigraphic revolution of Augustus swept unevenly across the western provinces, manifesting itself differently in various parts of the territory. In North Africa the wealth of surviving Latin inscriptions (more than 60,000), mainly tombstones, so dominates our view of the region that it creates a misleading picture of pervasive Romanization and threatens to obscure the persistence of native Libyan and Punic institutions (Mattingly–Hitchner 1995: 169–79). In Roman Britain, on the other hand, where stone suitable for carving is largely restricted to the highland zone to the north-west (the region occupied by Roman troops: Mann 1985), and where the largest category of surviving inscriptions is votive altars (Biró 1975: 42), funerary commemoration on tombstones was shunned by the elite but was embraced instead by those seeking to establish their place in the new order, notably auxiliary soldiers and women (Hope 1997). In the western provinces of Aquitania, Lugdunensis, and Belgica, the practice of inscribing texts in stone never caught on at all, although those areas became highly Romanized in other respects (Eck 1993: 378). Among individual regions of the empire, the discrepancies in epigraphic density (as measured by the approximate number of surviving Latin inscriptions found per 1,000 square kilometers) are striking: of all the western provinces, Africa Proconsularis ranks highest, with 127, Mauretania Tingitana lowest, with only three. Within peninsular Italy, Campania is first, with 411, Lucania last, with 19 (Harris 1989: 265–8; cf. Duncan-Jones 1982: 339, 360–2). To put these figures in perspective, excluding inscribed *instrumentum domesticum*, the city of Rome, the most densely "epigraphic" zone in the ancient world, has yielded nearly 100,000 Latin inscriptions within an area of approximately 30 square kilometers, more than half again as many as in all of North Africa, the most thickly blanketed region in the Roman West outside Italy.[4]

In general, inscriptions seem to have been concentrated in urbanized areas and militarized zones, places where distinctions of social rank, and hence, perhaps, the attraction of publicly asserting one's status, were especially acute (Woolf 1996: 36–7). Clustering at particular sites is pervasive throughout the empire, and within individual provinces the patterns of distribution frequently conform to the natural and human landscape in predictable ways. In Roman Gaul, for example, inscriptions

are found predominantly along river valleys and around communities located at key points along the major Roman roads, reflecting the patterns of habitation and communication. Less easy to explain are the concentration of inscriptions in larger groups located more closely together the further east in the province one looks and the striking discrepancies in epigraphic density between individual towns: whereas more than a thousand inscriptions survive from Narbonne, a city of perhaps 10,000 to 15,000 inhabitants during the second century CE, Paris, with a population of between 5,000 and 8,000, has yielded fewer than 50 (Woolf 1998: 82–91, 98–102). A similar phenomenon, but a different pattern, of predictable and unpredictable distribution emerges from a consideration of one particular type of inscription—votive dedications—in northern Gaul: very few are found in the southwestern part of the region (a demilitarized area), whereas a great number are concentrated along the Rhine (a frontier zone); within the Rhineland, however, notable discrepancies between individual settlements are difficult to account for (Derks 1998: 81–7).

Naturally, the patterns of distribution of many types of inscription reflect the purposes of the objects that carried them: stamped amphorae are prevalent along the coasts (Peacock–Williams 1986: 64 and Figures 21, 35, 82, 88, etc.); milestones are found beside major thoroughfares (*CIL* XVII); epitaphs derive from tombs along the roads outside of towns (Hesberg–Zanker 1987); official decrees and commemorative statues are concentrated in civic centers and "the most frequented places" (e.g. *CIL* V 532, VI 31883–4; *AE* 1984, 508, IIb.26–7; *SCPP* 170–1); and so on. In individual communities, however, puzzling exceptions to the expected patterns are common enough that we must be wary of overestimating the pervasiveness of even widespread epigraphic trends. The important Roman colony of Colonia Agrippinensis (Cologne), for example, yields a number of Latin inscriptions of various sorts but, oddly, not a single honorific dedication to a Roman official (Eck 1982: 542–3). At the commercial port of Puteoli on the Bay of Naples, on the other hand, two lengthy and unique marble inscriptions recording public contracts, one detailing specifications for the construction of a wall (*CIL* I² 698 and p. 936; see below and Figure 1.7), the other recording the terms of the funerary concession let to the local undertakers (*AE* 1971, 88; cf. Bodel 1994: 72–80), point to a local custom of carving in stone certain administrative documents that elsewhere must have been posted in more ephemeral media, such as on whitened boards, if they were publicly displayed at all. Cases such as these remind us that while certain epigraphic behaviors became prevalent throughout the Roman West, parochial

traditions and conventions always exerted a powerful influence on local practices.

Sometimes it is the surprising diversity of the Romans' "sense of audience" that raises questions about the nature of the Roman epigraphic habit. The discovery in a private room of a large luxury villa at Lucus Feroniae outside Rome of two honorific inscriptions detailing the public careers of two early imperial consuls (of 3 and 56 CE) from the prominent family of the Volusii Saturnini provides an unprecedented glimpse of commemorative behavior in action (*AE* 1972, 174, 175). In form and formula both inscriptions fully conform to the protocol of honorific inscriptions on statue bases and other public monuments; if we did not know their origin, we would without hesitation assign them to an official civic context. Their placement instead in a sort-of family museum, at the heart of a rural residence, is striking and leads one to wonder how many similar inscriptions from Rome and its environs, conventionally assigned because of their texts to public civic spaces, might have originated instead in private domestic settings (Eck 1992; Bodel 1997: 26–32). The case of the Augustan senator P. Paquius Scaeva (*PIR*^{2} P 126) presents another surprise. A funerary inscription erected at Rome by three freedmen to the divine shades (*Dis Manibus*) of P. Paquius Scaeva (*CIL* VI 1483) would normally be taken to suggest that the man was buried there, but in fact the marble sarcophagus in which both he and his wife were laid to rest survives intact at his home town of Histonium (Vasto) in Samnium (cf. Eck 1984: 156 n. 36). On that monument a pair of epitaphs recording the joint burial of husband and wife and detailing the senatorial career of Scaeva are duly inscribed—on the inside of the sarcophagus (*CIL* IX 2845, 2846 = *ILS* 915; cf. *Suppl. Ital.* n.s. 2: 108–9). For whose eyes were these texts intended? It is difficult to say. For all its broad, clear outlines, the nature of the Roman epigraphic habit remains in many respects enigmatic and obscure.

Greek epigraphic cultures

In the Greek world, the contours of the epigraphic culture—or rather cultures, for diversity is the hallmark of Hellenic epigraphy—are even more sharply defined than in the Roman West. This has not always been apparent. Until recently, the study of Greek epigraphy was so dominated by research on the public inscriptions of Athens that it was easy to forget that in one important area—the invention and early development of the Greek alphabet—Athens was a relative late-comer (Immerwahr 1990: 175–6; Jeffery–Johnston 1990: 66–78, 431–3) and that among the

earliest Greek inscriptions (those of the archaic period, c. 800–650 BCE) we have not one specimen of any of the types of public document (decrees, treaties, inventories, catalogues, building specifications) that later came to characterize the epigraphy of the *polis*, nor does our surviving sample include a single commercial text of the sort one might expect to find in an age of colonial expansion and far-ranging maritime trade. Writing in Greece seems to have emerged around the late ninth or early eighth century BCE from contacts between Phoenicians and Greek traders, probably in the northern Levant (Wachter 1989; Marek 1993), but the existence from this period of commercial inscriptions other than trademarks (Johnston 1979: 1, 27) can only be postulated, since no examples survive. The epigraphic culture of the Greek archaic age centered instead on the individual and private concerns: the ownership or authorship of portable possessions, the relationship with a god, remembrance after death (Powell 1991: 123–80; cf. *SEG* 39.1764).

In Attica the earliest inscriptions seem to have been intended to ennoble their writers by perpetuating the association of their names with the heroic past, but with the proliferation of writing in public and civic contexts during the sixth century BCE, this elevating power of inscriptions became dissipated and was lost (Várhelyi 1996; cf. Harris 1996). Elsewhere, the purposes and early development of inscribed writing varied considerably. If there was an epigraphic revolution in the Greek world, it arrived sometime in the latter half of the seventh century BCE, when the first laws were written down on stone—by Drakon at Athens (*IG* I^3 104; Stroud 1968), possibly at Tiryns (*SEG* 30.380), and (our earliest example) at Dreros in Crete (*LSAG* 315 no. 1a = Meiggs–Lewis 2). It appears to have caught on only sporadically and variously: quickly in some places, such as Attica, where the number of surviving inscriptions down to the end of the seventh century BCE (some 130, almost all graffiti and dipinti —painted texts—recording personal names) increases ten-fold over the next 120 years; much more slowly at others, such as Crete, where the total count down to the middle of the fifth century BCE comes to fewer than seventy, more than half of which are legal texts on stone or bronze, and where personal names are notably rare (Whitley 1997: 641, 651–2; cf. Stoddart–Whitley 1988: 763–6). The great growth in numbers of inscriptions in Attica (Hedrick 1999: 390–2) and throughout the Hellenic world came only in the fourth century BCE with the general expansion of the various civic organizations of the *polis* and the conquests of Alexander.

During the archaic and classical periods local variations in natural resources and political systems produced very different epigraphic

profiles in different cities and regions. Classical Attica, with its ready supply of marble and its peculiar democratic institutions, such as ostracism (Lang 1990), does not look much like Corinth, where stone suitable for carving was not readily available and where government by oligarchy did not result in the same passion for the public display of documents. The distribution of inscribed pottery fragments from the same two cities, on the other hand, paints a very different picture of the commercial ambitions of the two maritime powers (Lorber 1979). On Cyprus, where monarchical rule flourished and where the distinctive syllabic system of writing remained virtually unchanged from the third millennium down to the classical age, public inscriptions are notably rare before the Ptolemaic period.[5] At Sparta, where the assembly voted by acclamation and civic life was conducted without reliance upon the written word, the total number of surviving inscribed texts down to the middle of the fifth century BCE comes to under one hundred (cf. Détienne 1988: 56–8; see Chapter 2). What is more, in contrast to Attica, where graffiti and dipinti greatly outnumber dedications on stone and where inscribed tombstones become common after the middle of the sixth century, at Sparta not a single graffito, only seven dipinti, and a solitary inscribed gravestone are known before the middle of the fifth century BCE. From Crete, down to the end of the seventh century, we know of 15 dedications (of which 13 are inscribed on armor), seven graffiti, a single tombstone, and three legal texts; subsequently, down to the middle of the fifth century, we have four more dedications (none on armor), six graffiti, four gravestones, and no fewer than 35 laws (Whitley 1997: 645–51).[6]

The discrepancies are significant: whereas in Attica both the number and the variety of inscriptions seem to have increased steadily throughout the sixth century, at Sparta during the same period only dedicatory inscriptions are at all common, and on Crete the numbers drop in every category except inscribed legal texts, which outnumber the total from Attica by an order of nearly six to one (Attica n. = 4; Crete n. = 23; Laconia n. = 0). Where the figures are small, statistical arguments are precarious, and we cannot forget that in any community significant numbers of texts may have been written on perishable materials that have not survived. Even so, the implications are arresting: contrary to a commonly held belief in the association of widespread literacy, the publication of laws, and the growth of democracy, the surge of popular epigraphic expression at Athens during the sixth century evidently did not inspire any wholesale inscribing of public texts in the civic sphere, whereas on Crete during the same period the monumentalization of law accompanied an overall decline in epigraphic production in other

contexts and did not lead to any adoption of democratic reforms (Whitley 1997). Even at Athens, where publicly inscribed documents later came to be seen as a cornerstone of democracy, the practice of recording laws on stone probably in origin had more to do with religious than with civic life and was perhaps reserved for procedural matters of secondary importance, those lacking the authority of the time-honored unwritten laws (Thomas 1995). During the archaic period at Athens, as elsewhere, inscribed laws seem to have been deliberately kept at a distance from the public civic spaces they later came to occupy and were displayed instead at the temples of the gods (Hölkeskamp 1992: 99–102; 1994). In this respect, unusually, there seems to have been some consistency of practice among the archaic *poleis*. Nor can the proliferation of inscriptions in classical Athens be explained as simply a byproduct of democracy: other Greek democracies produced few epigraphic texts. The peculiar democratic ethos associated with the epigraphic habit at Athens must be sought instead in distinctive features of Attic epigraphy, such as the formulae of disclosure regularly appended to honorific inscriptions, rather than in the sheer volume of Athenian epigraphic production (Hedrick 1999).

Even after Alexander, when Greek became the common language of business throughout the eastern Mediterranean, no unifying panhellenic influence comparable to that emanating from Augustan Rome ever encouraged any uniformity of epigraphic practice across the region.[7] In some places, such as the great sanctuaries of Asclepius at Epidaurus (Pausanias 2.27.3; *IG* IV^2 380–588; Peek 1969, 1972) and Pergamum (Habicht 1969), or of Apollo at Didyma (Rehm 1958), or of Isis on the island of Philae in Egypt (Bernand–Bernand 1969), the epigraphic character of the site was determined by pilgrims from elsewhere and was shaped by the nature of their quest. In others, such as the international centers of Delphi (*Fouilles de Delphes* III; cf. Daux 1936) and Delos (*IG* XI; *IDelos*; cf. Reger 1994), a welter of specialized documents, many involving foreigners and foreign relations, dominates and complicates the epigraphic profile of the site. Elsewhere, native customs and traditions produced idiosyncratic classes of inscription, such as the debt-marking boundary stones (*horoi*) of Attica (Finley 1952; Lalonde–Langdon–Walbank 1991), or the so-called confession inscriptions of Lydia (Petzl 1994; *SEG* 44.951), or the thousands of rock-cut Safaitic graffiti inscribed by nomadic tribes in the Syrian desert—an epigraphic culture geographically and linguistically on the edges of the Greek world—which reflect a range of functions peculiar to the itinerant character of the peoples who carved them (Winnett 1957).

Sometimes the epigraphic profile of an otherwise ordinary community is inexplicably prominent. The minor Hellenistic city of Oenoanda in northern Lycia, which seems to have minted only a single coin during the nearly 400 years of its existence, is home to four of the most remarkable inscriptions to survive from antiquity: the lengthy dossier of a local citizen "personally known to the emperors," C. Iulius Demosthenes, concerning the foundation of an artistic festival (*agon*) in 125 CE (with more than 2,250 words, the most complete such record we have: Wörrle 1988; Smith 1994); the philosophical dogma of a local Epicurean, Diogenes, carved for the benefit of future generations (in part, it seems, by the same stonecutter who inscribed Demosthenes' text) across several courses of a wall eighty meters long in a stoa in the center of town (more than 200 fragments survive, but most of the text remains buried: Smith 1993; Etienne–O'Meara 1996); parts of a lengthy epitaph (seven columns comprising some 225 lines of text) composed around 210 CE and tracing the genealogy of a certain Licinnia Flavilla back more than 300 years, over twelve generations, to a Spartan, Cleander, who founded the neighboring town of Cibyra (*IGRR* 3.500; cf. Hall–Milner–Coulton 1996, identifying another lengthy genealogical inscription on the opposite façade of the tomb); and a theological oracle of the late second or third century CE from Claros, carved high onto the exterior town wall so as to catch the rays of the rising sun, in which Apollo speaks as a messenger of God (Robert 1971; Lane Fox 1986: 168–77). None of these documents is typical—each, indeed, is uniquely informative about its subject—but each can be placed within a well defined category of similar inscriptions, which allow its distinctive characteristics to be recognized. Collectively, they illustrate two features of the epigraphic culture of western Asia Minor: its local variety and its dominant physical presence in the public life of the city. What we should like to know is "why Oenoanda?" The town was located on a major road joining Lycia to the north, but nothing we know about the community explains this profusion of public writing in stone.

Elsewhere, local epigraphic cultures exhibited distinctive linguistic or formal characteristics equally difficult to explain. In the Syrian trading emporium of Palmyra, unlike in all other Greek cities in the Roman Near East, the residents used the local Semitic language (a dialect of Aramaic) not only in private epitaphs but in public inscriptions (normally beside Greek and, occasionally, Latin), although Greco-Roman terms for civic institutions were regularly transliterated rather than translated, and although the epigraphic habit of inscribing texts was not native but had been acquired from the Greeks and Romans (Millar

1995: 408–19). In the upper Hermus valley in Lydia, in the region of Saittae, all the standard types of inscriptions (votive dedications, honorific decrees, above all epitaphs) are to be found, but, for reasons that remain obscure, almost half (405) of the nearly 850 surviving examples from the imperial period include a precise dating formula in the first line (*TAM* 5.1). Although certain broad trends in the production and display of inscribed documents throughout the eastern Mediterranean can and should be recognized, in many respects (to paraphrase a well-known dictum about politics), all Greek epigraphy was local. The customs of one community were not necessarily followed by neighboring communities and were, moreover, likely to change with time. In this sense, the diversity and autonomy of the various epichoric alphabets that marked the beginning of writing in Greece set a pattern for the development of independent epigraphic cultures throughout the Hellenic world.

Inscriptions, orality, and literacy

Who read inscriptions? The concept of epigraphic cultures inevitably raises the question of literacy, since inscriptions, it is generally assumed, were meant to be read. Not all inscriptions had an obvious readership—witness the epitaph of P. Paquius Scaeva at Histonium or the oracle of Apollo at Oenoanda (see above)—but the sheer number of inscribed texts surviving from the classical world has often been taken to indicate that reading was common in antiquity. W. V. Harris has argued forcefully, however, that the level of literacy in most parts of the Greco-Roman world at most periods did not rise above ten per cent: notwithstanding the impressions created by a profusion of humble graffiti at sites like Pompeii (Harris 1983: 102–11) or the mass-produced stamps on common objects of daily use (Harris 1995), the necessary preconditions for mass literacy simply did not exist in antiquity, and reading and writing skills are unlikely ever to have been acquired by more than a small segment of the population (Harris 1989: 11–12, 260–4). Debate about numbers and percentages will no doubt continue, and it is clear that more subtly articulated views of the phenomenon are needed: what level of reading and writing was practiced by what segments of what populations for what purposes? (Harris 1996: 70–4). But even if one grants more plausibility than Harris is willing to concede to the idea that many in antiquity learned to read from perusing inscriptions, without the benefit of formal schooling (a freedman in Petronius' satiric novel of Neronian Italy claims to know *lapidariae litterae*, *Sat.* 58.7), or believes that in certain periods the evidence for literacy below the elite level is far from

negligible, Harris' arguments have usefully focused attention on the question of the place of writing in a culture in which only a minority of the population could read and write. On this issue inscriptions, of course, provide only part of the picture, but since their texts were by and large more publicly accessible than most others in the ancient world, their position in the debate is central.

One obvious question concerns the interrelation of orality and literacy (Thomas 1992: 15–28). At the most basic level, certain inscribed texts simply put into writing words that were originally and primarily enacted orally. Inscriptions of public laws and decrees generally fall into this category and were in fact frequently preceded by oral publication: the text of the statute was read out loud by a herald in a prescribed location, so that all concerned might learn its contents (Mommsen 1887: 391, 418; Crawford 1996: 9, 33; Rhodes–Lewis 1997: 6). The prescripts of Roman statutes bearing the names of witnesses to the oral passage of laws and decrees were normally inscribed in larger letters because it was the witnesses' authority that sanctioned the documents (Williamson 1995). The ratifying act was not the inscribing of names but the oral expression of intent—*censuerunt* in senatorial decrees, *velitis*, *iubeatis*, in *rogationes* to the people (cf. Crawford 1996: 10, 14–15). Even some official communiqués composed for written publication, such as the edicts and epistles of Hellenistic kings and Roman emperors to their subjects (Figure 1.1), normally represented spoken responses to petitions that were originally submitted orally (Welles 1934: xxxix–xl; Oliver 1989: 18–21). In these cases, the inscribed texts were corroborative but not constitutive of the official acts they recorded; they merely commemorated an oral performance.

In other cases, inscriptions engendered speech. Epitaphs, for example, implicitly—and sometimes explicitly—addressed themselves to an audience as well as a readership. The gravestone set up for an Aeginetan, Mnesitheos, at Eretria in Euboea sometime during the first half of the fifth century BCE urged a passerby to "read out" (*ἀνάνεμαι*) the name of the man buried there and declared that "someone" (i.e. the reader) would tell passersby that the monument had been set up by Mnesitheos' mother (*GVI* 1210 with Svenbro 1993: 44–56). Some 700 years later, a Pannonian foreigner (*barbarus*) erected at Sulmo in central Italy a long verse epitaph in which he wished well to "whoever read, or listened to one reading, the inscription" (*titulumque quicumque legerit, aut lege[ntem] ausculta(ve)rit*) (*Suppl. Ital.* n.s. 4: 78–84 no. 58, vv. 42–3; cf. *AE* 1989, 247). In a world in which reading out loud was normal (Hendrickson 1929)—a fact not refuted by recognition that the ancients

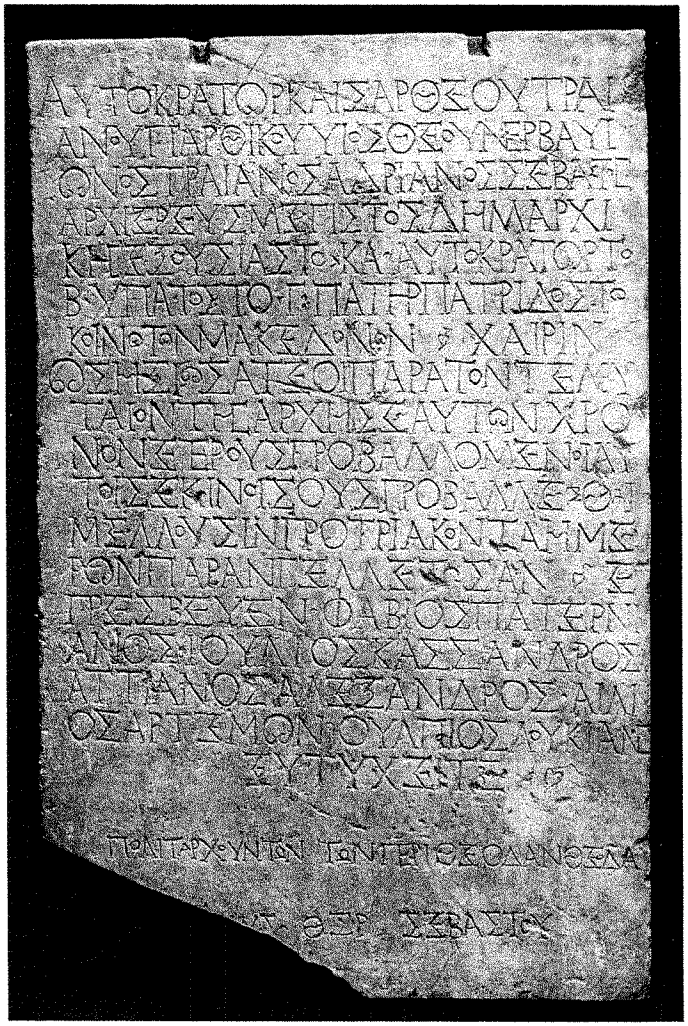

Figure 1.1 Letter of the Roman emperor Hadrian to the Macedonian *Koinon*, from Chalkidike (?). Marble stele (75.2 × 48.3 × 3.1 cm), 137 CE (*SEG* 37.593). Hadrian confirms a request from the *Koinon* that officials intending to nominate successors to their positions inform the potential nominees thirty days in advance. The heading and first paragraph are distinguished by oversized letters protruding beyond the left margin; sentences are concluded with decorative ivy leaves (*hederae*), except in line 17, where space did not allow (lines 7, 13, 18); the date (deducible from the titles in the heading) is formally recorded at the end (Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design; Mary B. Jackson Fund. 1988.060; photographed by Cathy Carver. RI.Prov.RISD.MA.G.1988.060).

could and often did read silently (Burnyeat 1997; Gavrilov 1997)—any inscription potentially motivated a voiced communication. That fundamental reality imparted to ancient inscriptions a dynamic quality not naturally felt by modern readers accustomed to a more passive reception of the written word. Thus epitaphs sometimes invoked a contrast between the silence of the gravestone and the "voice" given to their inscribed words, whether activated or merely imagined by the reader (e.g. *CIL* I² 1210 = *CLE* 53; cf. Theognis 568–9; Häusle 1980: 41–63; Svenbro 1993: 56–63). Tombstones that urged passersby to pause and read their texts often invited not only contemplation but conversation (cf. Lattimore 1942: 230–4, 256–8). In the most elaborate cases, they engaged the reader in actual dialogue, represented in amoebean form of question or command and response: "Who died?" "Herois." "How and when?" "Being pregnant she died in labor . . ." (*GVI* 1842 = *SEG* 8.802; cf. *GVI* 1831–87); "Hail, traveler, come here and rest a little. You refuse and say no? You'll have to come back here anyway" (*CIL* XI 4010 = *CLE* 120; cf. *CLE* 513, 1097, 1212; see also Figure 1.2).

The location of the "voice" in this last inscription is ambiguous, for if the marker in the salutation points to the monument itself ("come here"), the one in the response to the presumed refusal ("come back here") suggests a more general provenance of the grave or the underworld. A whole class of inscribed texts of various types—labels declaring ownership or authorship, *ex-voto* dedications, honorific inscriptions, as well as epitaphs—gave voice to inarticulate objects by imprinting upon them words imagined as originating from the objects themselves (Burzachechi 1962; Agostiniani 1982; Colonna 1983). The so-called "speaking inscriptions" not only enabled objects to "speak" for themselves, as, for example, with the message painted around the mouth of an Athenian amphora of the mid-sixth century BCE, "Kleimachos made me and I belong to him" (Guarducci 1967–78: 3.482), but also for persons associated with them but unable or unwilling to speak, as with a silver sheet from an archaic tomb at Poseidonia, which declares, on behalf of the deceased, "I belong to the goddess Kore (Persephone)" (*LSAG* 260 no. 4; cf. Agostiniani 1982: 23), or the Roman slave collar from Velitrae, which advises "hold on to me, because I have run away" (*CIL* XV 7172 = *ILS* 8727; cf. *ILS* 8726–33, Bellen 1971: 27–9). It is not, of course, the silver sheet that belongs to Persephone or the tin collar that demands to be held but rather the persons found with them. This sort of metonymic transference of a verbal capacity represents a feature of ancient writing peculiar to inscribed texts. Whether or not their words were pronounced out loud is irrelevant to their purpose; indeed, in the case of the Poseidonian

inscription, the participation of any earthly reader may be doubted. Conceptually they belong to a world in which inscribed writing enacted the function of speech by imparting to inanimate objects an independent identity and a mode of discourse normally conveyed by the spoken rather than the written word.

In the earliest inscriptions the perspective seems always to have been that of the first-person—the object "speaks" as "I"—as already, probably, with the archaic cup from Pithecusae that proclaimed its ownership by Nestor (*CEG* 454 = *LSAG* 239 no. 1, a piece of erotic magic, it seems, rather than a sophisticated joke: West 1994, Faraone 1996). Subsequently, beginning around the middle of the sixth century BCE, the use of a demonstrative adjective signifying the object introduced ambiguity into these egocentric texts, an ambiguity that was articulated by the flexibility of Greek syntax, which allowed such expressions as "I am this tomb of Gleukitas" (Pfohl 1967: no. 152). This linguistic ambivalence was not simply the manifestation of a primitive animism (Burzachechi 1962: 53) but rather an emphatic assertion of the physical presence of the object that bore the text (Svenbro 1993: 26–43). The physicality of ancient inscriptions, the fact that their writing was inextricably linked with the surfaces on which it appeared, lent itself to a potential expansion of their significance beyond a straightforward verbal communication of their texts. The ambiguous epitaph quoted above, with its dual perspective from monument and grave, is one manifestation of this semiotic flexibility. In other cases, the meaning of an inscription seems to have had very little at all to do with the verbal message of its text.

Symbolic epigraphy

The term "symbolic" has been aptly invoked to describe an aspect of ancient epigraphy that defies precise definition but that broadly pertains to the extra-textual meaning inscriptions always, to some extent, conveyed and that sometimes constituted their primary purpose (Beard 1985: 115, 139–41; 1991: 38). In certain religious contexts, for example, texts seem to have been inscribed not in order to be read but to represent through their writing that particular acts had been duly performed. The inscribed temple inventories at Delos, which belong to a period between around 430 BCE and around 130 BCE, record the annual rendering of accounts by boards of administrators turning over the treasure to their successors. Carved in small letters half a centimeter tall in long lines (of more than 100 letters, in many cases) of continuous narrative

disposed in tall columns, often of more than 200 lines, across expanses of stone nearly a meter wide and two meters tall, these texts would have been difficult to read in the best of circumstances and were certainly not designed to facilitate consultation. More plausibly they were inscribed as symbolic monuments to pious duties duly discharged, the records themselves perhaps being offered as tribute to the gods whose property they protected, just as, for instance, the so-called Athenian tribute lists (*ATL*) are records, not of the total amount of tribute collected from Athens' allies, but of the one-sixtieth portion of it dedicated to Athena (Linders 1992). Similarly, at Rome during the first three centuries CE, the Arval Brethren every year at their headquarters at the grove of the Dea Dia just outside the city inscribed on marble tablets and, when space constraints intervened, on the sides of the stone furniture within their precinct, a detailed and, with time, increasingly expansive record of their cult activities—not in order to guide subsequent generations of priests in the performance of the same tasks but as a formal part of their own ritual; the monumentalizing of a written record was itself, it seems, an act of cult (Beard 1985).

Private religion and magic, too, made use of inscriptions in non-utilitarian, symbolic ways. It is difficult to understand precisely the function of an Orphic prayer engraved on a small gold sheet sometime in the latter half of the fourth century BCE found folded up in a bronze cinerary urn in a grave in Thessaly, but the text was designed to help the deceased gain access to the underworld, and the material on which it was inscribed and the way in which it was deposited were evidently instrumental to this purpose (Breslin 1977, *SEG* 27.226 *bis*; Figure 1.2). There is no mistaking the general intent of the authors (or commissioners) of the numerous inscribed curse tablets (*defixiones*, κατάδεσμοι) found throughout the Mediterranean world (Audollent 1904; Jordan 1985), though often the precise sense of their imprecations remains obscure. Figure 1.3 reproduces a drawing of one side of an opisthographic lead curse tablet (that is, one inscribed on both sides) deposited along with fifty-six others in a small terracotta sarcophagus in a tomb beside the Via Appia outside the Porta San Sebastiano at Rome sometime around 400 CE.[8] Alternating lines of text are written upside down and backwards with respect to one another, evidently because the tablet was turned around, top to bottom, after each line was inscribed, probably in order to twist the intended target (a certain Cardelus, son of Fulgentia) homeopathically by the process of writing. The text includes a number of cryptic incantations (*voces mysticae*) and signs (*charakteres*) and, beneath the left arm of the horse-headed figure, a vowel series (the seven Greek vowels,

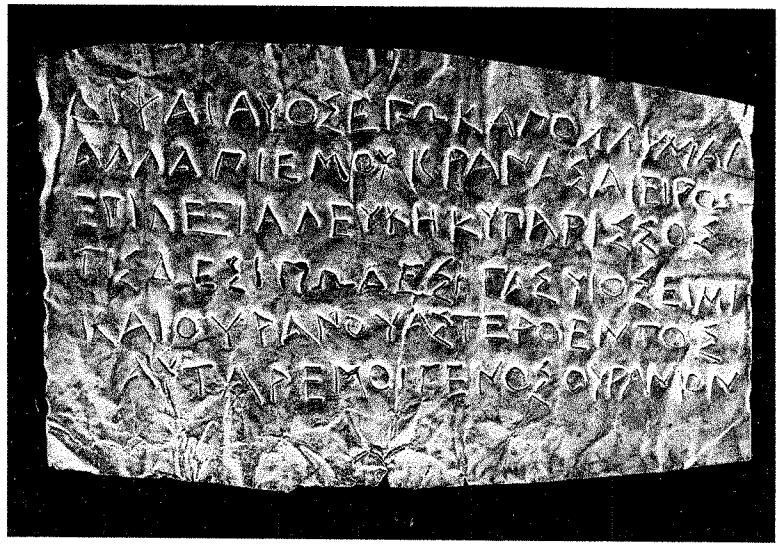

Figure 1.2 Orphic prayer from a grave in Thessaly (?). Gold sheet (2.2 × 3.7 cm), c. 350–300 BCE (*SEG* 27.226 *bis*; cf. Breslin 1977). Probably inscribed as a reminder for the deceased of the formula needed to gain salvation in the underworld, the text presents a dialogue (in dactylic meter) between the dead man's soul and a stream springing from the lake of Mnemosyne (Memory): "Parched with thirst I am, and dying." "Then drink of me, an ever-flowing stream; on the right is a white cypress. Who are you? Where are you (from)?" "I am the son of Earth and of starry Heaven, but my race is from Heaven." (The J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California, unknown artist, *lamella Orphica*. CA.Malibu.JPGM.G.75.AM.19.)

repeated in order, here with eta represented in both upper and lower case)—all designed to enhance the efficacy of the spell (cf. Dornseiff 1925: 35–60; Gager 1992: 7–11).[9]

The purpose of this sort of inscribed writing was not to preserve or to convey information but to effect an action through its physical presence; its function was not descriptive or commemorative but, in the useful formulation of the anthropologist Stanley Tambiah, persuasive and performative: the ritual of inscribing was meant to encourage the result it described (Tambiah 1968, 1973). Sometimes words were of secondary importance to the delivery of the objects that carried them. The imprecations imprinted on lead sling bullets (*glandes*) hurled at their enemies by combatants at the siege of Asculum in the Social War between Rome

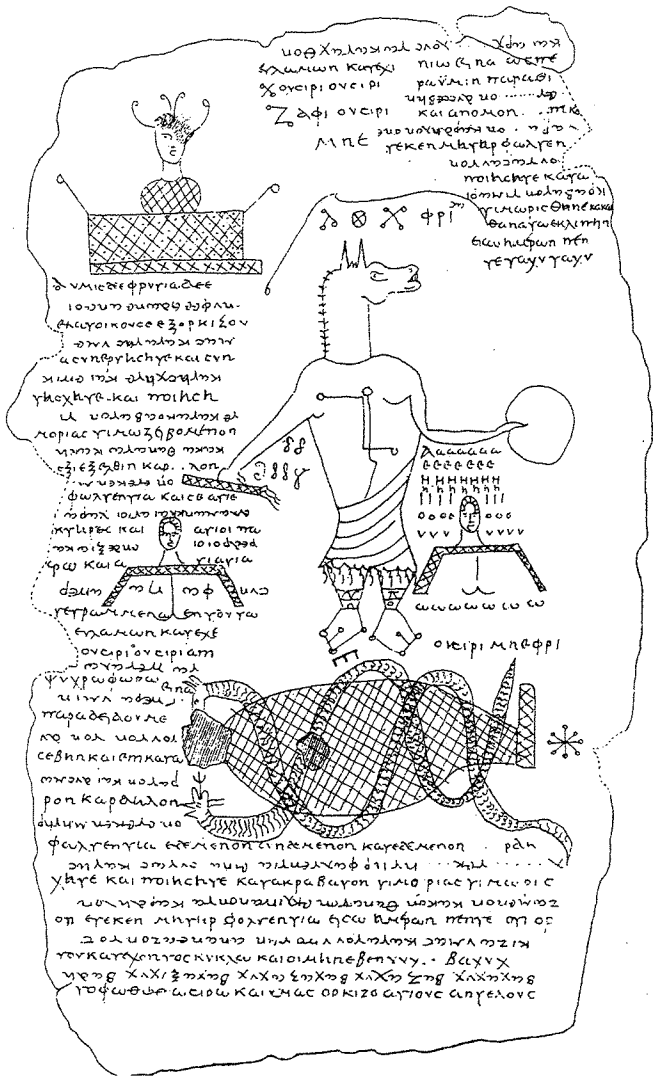

Figure 1.3 Drawing of the first side of an opisthographic curse tablet from a tomb beside the Via Appia, Rome. Lead (13 × 21 cm), c. 400 CE (Audollent 1904: no. 155). The horse-headed figure probably represents a horse-spirit (*daimon*) from the circus; the figures to left and right are "assistants" (*paredroi*). The mummified figure entwined by two biting snakes below represents the target of the spell, duly killed and buried. At the upper left, Osiris emerges from his coffin (Preisendanz 1972: 17–18). For the writing and other symbols, see pp. 20–1 (after Wünsch 1898: 16).

and her rebellious allies in 90 and 89 BCE suggest a variety of purposes: threats such as "You're dead, runaways!" (*CIL* I² 861 = IX 6086, xiii) were evidently designed to demoralize the rebels, whereas the exhortation "Strike Pompeius" (*CIL* I² 857 = IX 6086, ix) seems to have been intended to guide the missile itself to its target, the Roman commander Cn. Pompeius Strabo (cf. Plut. *Marc.* 8). Half a century later, the sexual insults hurled in both directions on sling bullets at the siege of Perugia in 41/40 BCE aimed to humiliate as well as to intimidate the opposing leaders, Octavian and his enemies Fulvia and L. Antonius (*EphEp* 6.52–78; cf. *CIL* XI 6721, Hallett 1977; for Greek *glandes* see Guarducci 1967–78: 2.516–24).

Performative writing operated in reverse as well, when the cancellation of an inscribed text signaled the negation of its contents. The practice of erasing a condemned person's name from public monuments, particularly common during the Roman empire, symbolically represented the abolition of the memory of his or her existence (*damnatio memoriae*) (cf. Kajava 1995b). Since the chiseling out of carved lettering normally left a visible scar on the face of the stone (see Figure 1.6), the obliteration of the name did not in fact achieve its purported objective but instead demonstrated graphically the punishment it was designed to effect. The condemned was conspicuously eliminated, removed but not forgotten.

Other extra-textual, metaphorical elements often reinforced this kind of symbolic writing. The material on which the text was inscribed, the location of the inscription itself, and the way in which it was presented were variously significant. Curse tablets were normally of lead, not only because lead was cheap and easy to inscribe but because its density and pallor conveyed negative associations appropriately directed at the target: "Just as this lead is cold and useless, so let them [my enemies] be cold and useless" (*IG* III, 3 105–7; cf. Gager 1992: 3–4; Graf 1997: 132–4). Orphic prayers were engraved on gold, because the words they carried were valuable and the world to which they promised access was golden (cf. Giangiulio 1994). Roman statutes were inscribed in bronze, because bronze was thought to impart an inviolability and permanence not conferred by other materials (*CIL* VIII 17896; Pliny, *NH* 34.99; Williamson 1987). Greek treaties and decrees were carved in stone partly, it has been suggested, because in archaic Greece rocks had served as monuments and mnemonic aids (Thomas 1992: 87–8).

Location too was important. Curse tablets were deposited in graves, particularly of those who died before their time, so that the written spells would be close to the restless spirits who could put them into effect (Faraone 1991: 9–10; Gager 1992: 18–20); often, graves located near the customary

haunts of their intended targets, such as race courses, were preferred (Heintz 1998). At Rome the Capitoline hill around the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus was sheathed in bronze documents—statutes, treaties, honorific decrees and, especially, military diplomas (some 3,000 were reportedly destroyed by fire in 69 CE: Suet., *Vesp.* 8.5)—which derived authority from being displayed near the religious center of the state (Williamson 1987: 165–6, 179–80). With the military diplomas, prestige accrued also from their proximity to the military treasury and to monuments associated with victorious battles (Dušanić 1984). The oracle of Apollo at Oenoanda was carved high on the outside of the town wall, facing east, so that it would catch the first light of the rising sun (see above, page 14). For the same reason, pilgrims to the "speaking" colossus of Memnon in the Valley of the Kings (Bernand–Bernand 1960) and to the temple of Mandulis at Talmis in upper Egypt carved or scratched or painted their testaments to the manifest power of the sun on the eastern faces of those monuments (Lane Fox 1986: 166–7).

Presentation mattered. Curse tablets were folded and pierced with nails, because the transfixing of the object was thought to reinforce the binding power of its textual spell (Piccaluga 1983). In the example from the Via Appia described above (Figure 1.3), holes were punched in the lead at the places where the head and heart of the intended victim were represented, to pinpoint the location of the target. Orphic leaves were placed in the mouths of corpses, so that the words of their prayers would be ready on the tongue and thus easy to deliver (Guarducci 1974: 15–17). Votive dedications were carved on miniature altars, so that the inscription would not only verbally attest but could physically represent the fulfillment of the vow (Veyne 1983: 286–8). Similar thinking no doubt inspired the fashioning into the cylindrical shape of Roman milestones of four silver cups dedicated at the thermal springs of Vicarello on the shores of Lake Bracciano north of Rome sometime during the third century BCE, which record a complete itinerary of the land route from Gades to Rome, with the names of more than 100 towns and stopping points and the distances between them (from five to 32 miles) engraved in parallel vertical columns around the circumference (*CIL* XI 3281–4).

Examples could be multiplied. The point to note, in all these cases, is that the material on which the text was inscribed or the place in which the object was located or the way in which the inscription was displayed had nothing to do with its legibility but was dictated instead by some extra-textual function it was meant to serve.

Visible words[10]

Other than their power to activate speech or to represent writing symbolically, inscriptions conveyed their meaning visually, in a variety of ways. As integral elements of the monuments they accompanied, inscribed texts from an early date contributed to a complex semiological message of which their contents constituted only a part. The funerary statue of a Greek girl buried in the Attic deme of Myrrhinous around the middle of the sixth century BCE holds in its hand a closed lotus flower, a symbol of the domestic hearth and hence of the source of her reputation, and thus engages in iconographic dialogue with the "speaking" text of the accompanying epigram (*IG* I² 1014 = *GVI* 68), which declares itself to be the monument (σῆμα) of the maiden Phrasikleia, whose name means "she who draws (or pays) attention to her fame" (Svenbro 1993: 8–25). Seven hundred years later, toward the end of the second century CE, someone at Ostia erected to a certain M. Modius Maxximus, a chief priest (*archigallus*) in the precinct of the Magna Mater, a curious monument consisting of a stone cylinder in the shape of a Roman corn-measure (*modius*) crowned by a cock (*gallus*) whose tail turns into ears of corn (bounty of Cybele, for the *modius*?); on the side of the cylinder are inscribed Maxximus' name and office, with the anomalous double Xs of the *cognomen* slightly outsized and centrally disposed, and with the words of his title divided by a sculpted representation of Pan-pipes (a distinctive instrument of the cult); around the inscription are depicted scenes from the life of Attis, beginning with his abandonment as a baby on the banks of the river Gallus (*CIL* XIV 385 = *ILS* 4162). Each of the artistic elements of Maxximus' monument responds verbally or visually to some aspect of his life, his name, or his position as a priest of Cybele (Beard 1998: 83–8). During the classical and Hellenistic periods of Greece and especially under the Roman empire, beginning with the age of Augustus, grave monuments of this sort presenting visual puns in the form of artistic representations of objects or ideas associated with the name of the deceased—and, occasionally, as with Phrasikleia, suggesting an essential character trait—enjoyed a notable vogue (Ritti 1974–5, 1977). The inscriptions of Maxximus and Phrasikleia are unusual only in going beyond mere word play: not only the verbal content but the graphic presentation (MaXXimus) and acoustic vocalization (Svenbro 1993: 17–18) of the texts support the iconographic imagery of the monuments in representing the lives of their subjects.

The lettering of epitaphs inscribed on Roman gravestones and tombs regularly worked with other visible features of the monuments to entice passersby to approach and learn the identity of the deceased: lines of writing defined vertical and horizontal spaces and articulated architectural forms; names written large beneath sculpted busts labeled portraits and established identities; funerary epigrams in smaller letters explained figured scenes or described familial relationships or enumerated personal qualities of the deceased (Sanders 1970; Koortbojian 1996). How the letters were laid out and marked on the stone determined how they were read and understood. Beginning in the second century BCE in Greek epitaphs (*GVI* 662 seems to be the earliest example) and from the second century CE in Latin texts, acrostichs (sometimes telestichs, rarely mesostichs) spelled out the name of the deceased or, less often, that of the dedicator or some other message (Barbieri 1975: 364–71; 1977: 339–42; Sanders 1979). When a name was inscribed both vertically and horizontally, with the first letter serving as the pivot (as, e.g. in *CLE* 301, 514; *AE* 1967, 113), the narrative and visual elements of the inscription coincided. Reading and viewing were in these instances inextricably combined.

Inscribed palindromes (e.g. *CIL* IV 2400a, ἤδη μοι Διὸς ἆρ' ἀπάτα παρά σοι Διομήδη), word patterns keyed to a central letter (Bua 1971; cf. *SEG* 8.464) and magic word squares (Guarducci 1965) took this synthesis of reading and viewing to an extreme. Letter games that seemed to embody mystical qualities of harmony and balance were eventually coopted by religious sects (notably Christianity), which imputed to them a symbolic significance, but they originated in the pagan world as epigraphic *jeux d'esprit* (Guarducci 1978).[11] One type of inscribed gameboard popular in Rome for the game of "Twelve Writings" exploited a widely perceived relationship between letters and numbers (Dornseiff 1925: 11–14) by employing a standardized grid of letters arranged in six groups of six to spell out various banal exhortations designed to attract players (Purcell 1995: 18–19, 28–37).

Funerary and gaming texts were not the only types of inscriptions that conveyed their messages through their visible form. The names and formulae stamped or scratched onto small portable objects (*instrumentum domesticum*) were often repeated, as if to reinforce their texts in compensation for the object's mobility and consequent instability. Large bronze letters inset into pavements were designed to be read by walking across their epigraphic fields: their fixed stability imposed mobility on the viewer (cf. Susini 1987–8). Certain inscriptions depended upon the interplay of light and shadow to activate their texts. The vast sundial laid out by

Augustus in the Campus Martius in Rome in 10 BCE presents a striking example of the last two types (Buchner 1996). Inlaid on either side of a meridian line stretching across a travertine pavement some 160 meters wide and 75 meters long, large bronze Greek letters, twenty-five centimeters tall, set one to one-and-a-half meters apart, spelled out the signs of the zodiac. In order to read the sundial, the viewer had to walk across the face of the monument where the shadow fell and thus to experience the relationship between the Greek text, the Egyptian obelisk (the first in Rome) that served as the gnomon, with its hieroglyphics commemorating Psammetichus II, the pedestal from which it rose, recording in Latin that "Augustus gave it as a gift to the Sun, Egypt having been brought under the sway of the Roman people," (*CIL* VI 702 = *ILS* 91), and the Roman Ara Pacis axially aligned to the east, which celebrated the peace that united Greece and Egypt under the benevolent light of the new Roman sun god, Apollo. Monument and inscriptional text, or rather texts—in Greek, Latin, and pictographic Egyptian—here combined to express the triumph of the Augustan peace.

Sometimes visual aesthetics compromised comprehensibility. The earliest inscribed writing generally followed the contours of the objects it adorned and eventually, when words came to be inscribed in their own right on flat surfaces, replicated the pattern of an ox plowing, first in one direction then in the other, turning at the end of each furrow (*boustrophedon*), so that the reader's eye never had to leave the text. The fashion that developed in Attica during the classical period, however, of inscribing texts, particularly decrees, in a checkerboard pattern (*stoichedon*) made reading difficult, since the treatment of individual letters as figures in a geometric design obscured word-division and broke words irregularly at the ends of lines (Woodhead 1981: 24–34). Clarity and beauty, as measured by balance and symmetry and the precise carving of individual letters, were in these cases paramount, and legibility was not a primary concern (Austin 1938; see Figures 1.4, 1.5).[12] By contrast the Roman penchant during the early Empire for scaling and framing produced texts that were not only laid out logically in accordance with their contents (Sartori 1995) but were designed to be read from the perspectives from which they were viewed—by readers moving along a road or gazing upward at a monumental facade (Susini 1988; 1992; see Figure 3.2). Aesthetic considerations in these instances served the interest of functionality.

Human figures in paintings and mosaics were regularly identified by labels, and captions of other sorts accompanied figured scenes in both media. The so-called *tabulae Iliacae*—stone plaques depicting episodes from

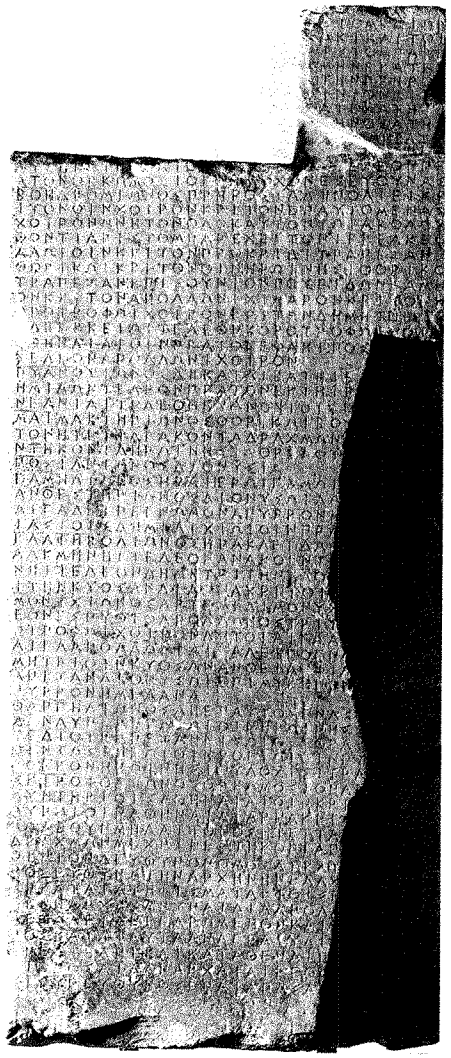

Figure 1.4 Calendar from Thorikos, Attica, exhibiting *stoichedon* writing. Pentelic marble (132 × 56 × 18–19 cm), c. 385–370 BCE? (*IG* I³ 256 *bis* [addenda]; cf. Daux 1983; *SEG* 33, 147; *Bull. ép.* 1984, 190). The text, written continuously, records the sacrifices due each month, beginning with Hecatombeion (July–August), which is named at the end of line 1 and the beginning of line 2. Traces of the horizontal guidelines used to align the letters are visible along the left side of the stone. (The J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California, unknown artist, religious calendar of Thorikos, 440–430 BCE? CA.Malibu.JPGM.G.79.AA.113.)

Figure 1.5 Calendar from Thorikos, Attica. Detail of Figure 1.4 showing the beginning of lines 32–44 (the left side of the stone, about half way down). Despite the quality of the lettering, the text is replete with carver's errors, and its checkerboard layout, with no spaces between words, does little to facilitate reading of the monthly record (The J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California).

the Trojan cycle (and other legends) sculpted in low relief and surrounded by inscribed summaries, commentary, quotation and a miscellany of obscure and often faulty erudition—present an interesting case, inasmuch as the carved letters are so small and the texts, which are not always related to the images they accompany, are so full of mistakes that the writing seems designed to decorate rather than to explicate the figured scenes (Sadurska 1964; Horsfall 1979, 1983b). In other media inscriptions were incorporated into pictorial representations as part of the image itself. Written texts insinuated themselves into the pictorial field as ornamental parts of the design, and recognizable types of inscribed monument—funerary stelae, building dedications, portable placards, and the like—appeared as realistic or symbolic elements in pictorial compositions (Lissarague 1988; Corbier 1995).

Sometimes inscribed writing bridged the gap between figural and verbal representation. The funerary altar erected at Rome for a boy, Q. Sulpicius Maximus, dead at the age of 11, commemorates his success in the Capitoline poetic competition of 94 CE with a Latin epitaph dedicated by his parents, a full-figure sculpted portrait of the boy clad in a toga, and three Greek poems: two ten-verse funerary epigrams about the boy and the 43 extempore hexameters for which he won acclaim, of which the last three verses (completing a text carved mainly along the left side of the front face of the altar) are inscribed on an open book roll held in the boy's left hand (*IG* XIV 2012 = *CIL* VI 33976; cf. Gordon 1983: no. 52). Here the conventional vocabularies of the standard vehicles of commemoration in Greek and Roman funerary monuments—a portrait of the deceased and an inscribed epitaph—have been transposed and blended into a synthetic whole: the verbal text not only describes but represents, in the Roman *tria nomina* and the Greek hexameters, the boy's virtues as Roman citizen and poet; at the same time the words themselves lead physically into a visual portrayal of the boy that conveys, in the sculpted toga and the book roll (symbolically rather than factually, inasmuch as he had not yet reached the age for assuming the *toga virilis* and his performance at the Capitoline contest had been oral and extempore), the sources of his well deserved fame. The interplay between visual and verbal representation is in this instance unusually rich, but many less elaborate monuments similarly drew upon the physical visibility of inscribed writing to effect a unifying and integrative relationship between image and text.

Epitaphs

Epitaphs account for perhaps two-thirds of all surviving Greek and Latin inscriptions and provide our most informative epigraphic evidence—indeed, overall our best ancient evidence—for the lives of persons below the upper levels of society.[13] They are instructive in a variety of ways, some of which have been suggested in the preceding paragraphs and several of which are discussed below in Chapter 3, on onomastics and prosopography, and Chapter 4, on the family and social status. Here it will be enough to indicate briefly two fundamentally different ways in which they can be of use to the ancient historian by providing both a macroscopic and a microscopic view of the ancient world.

Epitaphs are helpful for two apparently contradictory reasons: because they tend to exhibit recognizable formal and rhetorical conventions and survive in sufficient quantities to permit meaningful statistical

analysis and because, in individual instances, they depart from the predictable patterns and offer unexpected glimpses of particular lives. They are usefully studied, in other words, both in bulk, where they can illuminate broad historical trends, and individually, as unique documents, where they add flesh to the skeletal structures of ancient society. Often the same inscription can serve both purposes, although it is normally difficult to consider a text from both perspectives simultaneously. In fact epitaphs are most beneficial for statistical arguments when the constituent elements of their texts are isolated and registered singly, and for individual study when they are considered in their entirety, both as verbal documents and as physical artifacts; in practice, the two approaches cannot—and should not—be divorced from each other: each benefits the other. A gravestone set up at Puteoli sometime in the late first or early second century CE by a certain L. Herennius Epaphroditus may illustrate the point (Figure 1.6).

The text, as printed in *L'Année épigraphique*, reads as follows:

> Dis Manibus. / L. Herennius Epaphroditus / sibi et Herenniae Clade et He/renniae Marcellae patronabus /[5] et Herennio Fideli et Herennio / Crescenti et Herenniae Tyche con/iugi suae et libertis meis liber/tabusque posterisque eorum et / Volussio Lamyro nepoti et Herennio Synergo /[10] et Herennio Africano et Hereniae Meniadi.
>
> (*AE* 1974, 251)[14]

From this typical epitaph a number of discrete "facts" can be extracted and marshaled as evidence for the geographical distribution and interrelation of Latin *nomina gentilicia* (Herennius and Volusius) or of Latin (Marcella, Fidelis, Crescens, Africanus) and Greek (Epaphroditus, Clade, Tyche, Lamyrus, Synergus, Menias) *cognomina*; for the workings of Roman patronage (the freedman Epaphroditus provides space in his monument for his two patronesses and for his own freedmen and freedwomen and their descendants); for family structures (both a wife, *coniunx*, and a *nepos*—whether nephew or grandson is uncertain—are explicitly mentioned); and so on. Each of these items of information can usefully be compiled and compared with similarly acquired data to yield a broad picture of the particular socio-historical questions they concern (see further below, Chapters 3 and 4).

The same epitaph, considered as a whole, suggests a different set of questions. An initial examination of the stone prompts several observations. In contrast to the generous fullness of the text (except for the *praenomen*

Figure 1.6 Gravestone of L. Herennius Epaphroditus from Puteoli (Pozzuoli), Italy. Marble (63.5 × 53.5 × 0.6 cm), c. 75–125 CE? (*AE* 1974, 251 = D'Arms 1973: 156–7, pl. 29, Fig. 5). The text records an epitaph erected by a freedman for himself, his two patronesses, two other Herennii, his wife, and his own freedmen and their descendants. The last two lines, inscribed in a different hand, record the subsequent addition of four other persons to the monument. Line 7 shows an erasure and the word *meis*, evidently intended for the space occupied by the cancelled text, written above the line (Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Ann Arbor: MI.AA.UM.KM.L.1053).

of the dedicant, no words are abbreviated), the letters are unevenly aligned and irregularly cut, and the slab itself, oblong rather than rectangular, has been roughly chiseled away along the lower edge (possibly in modern times): this is not a first-rate piece of workmanship. In line 7, five or six letters have been erased after the word *libertis* and the word *meis* is carved above the line just before the cancelled text; closer inspection reveals traces of a vertical stroke at the start of the erased spaces. It is plausible to suppose that the carver began to inscribe the word *libertabus*, realized his omission of *meis*, chiseled out the mistaken letters,

and supplied the omitted word where it could be fit in. Finally, the last two lines were evidently added after the initial text was carved, by a different hand (note the more "rustic" shapes of the letters, particularly M and N, and the use of medial interpuncts between words).

Of what use are these observations? First, the initial omission of *meis*: why? Stone carvers made mistakes for a variety of reasons (Solin 1995), among the most common of which was force of habit. Comparison of thousands of Roman epitaphs in which the owners of tombs made provision for the inclusion within their monuments of freedmen and their descendants (that is, resort to the methods of studying inscriptions in bulk) reveals that the formulaic phrase *libertis libertabusque posterisque eorum* is extremely common and that the intrusion into this formula of a restrictive adjective is rare. The carver's slip in this instance calls our attention to the restriction of occupancy of Epaphroditus' tomb to his own freedmen and the exclusion of those of his wife. A freedman who both explicitly provides a place in his tomb for his own two patrons and excludes the freedmen of his wife is considerably more interesting for the history of Roman patron–freedman relations and the construction of the Roman *familia* than one who conforms to more conventional practices. Second, recognizing that the last two lines of Epaphroditus' epitaph were not part of its original composition—a fact obscured by a simple transcription of its text—casts their testimony about the configuration of the Roman family in a new light: the apparent inclusion of a *nepos* in Epaphroditus' tomb cannot, without qualification, here be taken as evidence in favor of the theory that familial relationships were organized along lines of agnatic descent rather than around the nuclear family, since we cannot assume that Epaphroditus himself intended to include the *nepos* in his monument (cf. below, pages 100–2). The addition of the last two lines may indeed reflect Epaphroditus' own subsequent revision of his plans for his monument, but the provision within the tomb of burial space for the four persons named may equally well have been made without Epaphroditus' consent, or even against his wishes, after his death. We do not know.

Consideration of the sequence of persons mentioned in the text raises further questions not likely to emerge from an examination of the names and social relationships individually. It is reasonable to surmise, from their "respectable" Latin *cognomina* and the recording of their names between those of Epaphroditus' two patrons and his wife, that Fidelis and Crescens were the freeborn sons of Epaphroditus and Tyche; but, if so, why was their freeborn status (normally an object of pride among the descendants of ex-slaves) not indicated by "filiation"

(see below) in the normal fashion (D'Arms 1973: 156–7)? Perhaps they were Junian Latins, a juridical status held by many informally manumitted slaves and their offspring during the early imperial period, of which we could scarcely guess the importance without epigraphy (Weaver 1990, 1991). And what, if anything, may we conclude about relative positions of honor or prestige—or rather, about the conventions of representing those positions in funerary commemoration—from the fact that Epaphroditus names himself first, then his patrons, then his sons (let us assume), and only then his wife? There are various possible answers to these questions, and a variety of extenuating circumstances might shape our interpretation of their significance. We need not here enter into details; it is enough to recognize that the questions would not arise if we did not consider the epitaph comprehensively as a coherent document with its own internal organization and structure.

The sorts of questions posed in the last paragraph raise an issue of fundamental importance for the interpretation of any epitaph—or indeed of any inscription—that of epigraphic bias. With this phrase I mean to describe the distortion introduced into any set of data derived from inscriptions by the fact that inscriptions are the source of the information in question. The selection of what to inscribe and in what form to write it was never determined solely by what one wished to communicate or to record but by what was considered appropriate to communicate or to record in inscribed writing on a particular object in a particular place at a particular time. When Trimalchio, the fictional freedman hero of Petronius' novel, rehearses the text of his epitaph to his dinner guests and asks the stonemason commissioned to inscribe the stone whether it seems suitable enough (71.12), the answer almost certainly is "no," but not because the claims it makes are wholly out of line with the social realities of Neronian Italy. Rather the humor derives from Trimalchio's subtle distortion of a narrowly circumscribed and readily recognizable set of epitaphic conventions (D'Arms 1981: 108–16; Beard 1998: 95–8). In the real world manifestations of this epigraphic bias can often be readily identified. When Roman grave markers from Spain proclaim with unusual frequency the piety of the persons they commemorate (Curchin 1982: 180–1), or when the epithet *προσφιλής* is found almost exclusively on gravestones from Thasos (Tod 1951: 184, 187), the inference to be drawn is not that Spaniards were exceptionally pious or that Thasians enjoyed a monopoly in kindliness but that the local customs of funerary commemoration favored recognition of those qualities in inscribed epitaphs. No one would conclude from the relative paucity of tombstones erected to parents at Rome that mothers

and fathers were unimportant in the Roman family (Nielsen 1997: 172–3), since too much literary, legal, and artistic evidence points to the opposite conclusion. But when inscriptions constitute a principal source of direct information on issues on which our other sources are silent, their testimony has not always been treated with the caution it deserves, and the consequences of this form of epigraphic bias have not always been adequately recognized.

Epitaphs in bulk

Perhaps the most notorious case of a quantity of epigraphic evidence seducing the unwary into believing that its testimony, because explicit and abundant, is also accurate and representative centers on the question of life expectancy. Roman tombstones from throughout the western Mediterranean and ranging over half a dozen centuries of imperial rule provide tens of thousands of detailed records of ages at death. The data have been compiled, tabulated, categorized, and averaged to produce impressive looking statistics (Szilagyi 1961–7) which have in turn formed the basis for broad generalizations about Roman mortality. Their value as evidence for this purpose, however, is severely compromised by a number of inherent biases, most of which cannot be corrected (Hopkins 1966, 1987). Compared with the majority of Romans, those commemorated with inscribed epitaphs were not a representative cross-section of the population but were, for example, more wealthy (tombstones were not expensive, but not everyone could afford one) and more likely to have lived, or at least to have been buried, near cities and towns than in the countryside. Furthermore, those whose epitaphs recorded an age at death tended to have survived infancy and early childhood, whereas a great many Romans—perhaps as many as a third—died before reaching their fifth birthday. On the other hand, a disproportionate number of those whose ages are specified seem to have died either young or (especially in Africa) improbably old (cf. Shaw 1984: 473–81; 1991: 75–6). A suspiciously high percentage of those who lived neither very long nor only into adolescence is reported to have died at ages precisely divisible by five, which suggests that age-rounding (a common phenomenon in societies where accurate birth-records are not kept systematically), as well as age-exaggeration and a widespread propensity to remark the ages of those who died before their time, probably further distorts the picture and raises the possibility that even those recorded ages that are not multiples of five may not be based on accurate information (Duncan-Jones 1990: 79–92, 101–3). Geographical and chronological variation

and an imbalance in the sex-ratio represented (roughly three males are commemorated for every two females) further vitiate the sample, so that it is almost impossible to extrapolate any meaningful conclusions about mortality rates from the surviving epitaphs (Parkin 1992: 5–19).

What the data reflect are not demographic realities but commemorative practices, and these, unlike biological necessities, might vary considerably for cultural reasons independent of the more easily identifiable variables of time and place and economic status. A single example may suffice to illustrate the point. From the city of Rome, during the early imperial period, a sizable sample of some 9,980 recorded ages at death yields an average life-expectancy at birth of under 23 years—a plausible number. If, however, one considers from this sample only the epitaphs written in Greek (822 in number), the figure for average life-expectancy rises to 51, a number not matched in modern western European society until well into the nineteenth century (Éry 1969: 60). That Greek-speakers residing alongside other Romans in a mixed population lived more than twice as long as their Latin-speaking neighbors is inherently unlikely; more plausibly the discrepancy is to be accounted for by a difference in behavior—in this case, in the recording of ages at death on tombstones—between the two groups.

Recognizing that epitaphs attest commemorative habits rather than demographic realities does not diminish their value as evidence but merely reorients our attention to a different set of questions, of which the most basic are: who commemorated whom, and why? In a groundbreaking article in which a large sample of some 12,000–13,000 tombstones from the western provinces was surveyed, R. Saller and B. Shaw found that close-family relationships (father–mother–child) were commemorated much more frequently than any other type and argued from this evidence that Roman kinship relations were mainly organized around the nuclear rather than the extended family (Saller–Shaw 1984; cf. Shaw 1984). Their methodology has been criticized on the grounds that counting individual relationships rather than groups of relationships as attested in individual inscriptions—a potential hazard of the standard technique of studying epitaphs in bulk rather than independently as self-contained documents—prejudices the results in favor of the nuclear family and underrepresents the evidence for other arrangements. Examination of some 1,160 epitaphs from seven cities and regions of Roman Asia Minor (those collected in *TAM*) suggests the prominence there of a Roman household characterized by extended kinship relationships (D. B. Martin 1996). But familial organization and household configuration are not the same thing (the arguments of

Saller and Shaw leave open the question of how Roman households were constituted), and the survey of epitaphs from Asia Minor arbitrarily centers on one of several different types (the inclusive style of Olympus in Lycia) to the exclusion of others (Rawson 1997). What emerges most suggestively from the critique of Saller's and Shaw's arguments are the multiplicity of familial relationships manifested in the epitaphs of Asia Minor and the possibility of a broad difference in commemorative practices between the inhabitants of the eastern and western parts of the Roman empire. A more fundamental question concerns the relationship between commemorative behavior and social organization, to what extent, that is, the conventions of inscribed epitaphs meaningfully reflect either familial structures or household configuration.

Consideration of the patterns of personal relationships attested in Roman epitaphs has led others to different conclusions. In attempting to explain MacMullen's profile of the rise and fall of an epigraphic habit, E. Meyer (1990) concluded not only that Roman epitaphs represent social assertions of the privileged status of citizen (see above, page 6) but that in most cases (those in which both the deceased and the commemorator are named, around 80 per cent in the western provinces) heirship rather than kinship was the principal reason for setting up a grave monument. The link between inheritance and commissioning an epitaph to the deceased, however, is tenuous and indirect, and several prominent categories of commemorative relationship (e.g. of father to child or of husband to wife) argue against the idea that heirship was the principal motivation for Roman funerary commemoration (Saller 1994: 98–9; Cherry 1995: 150–6; see below, page 102).

The second part of Meyer's thesis associating the erection of an epitaph with a claim to membership in a privileged body of citizens she further developed in a subsequent article and extended to classical Athens, where she detected a similarly striking peak in the numbers of inscribed funerary monuments erected in Attica during the fourth century BCE, precisely the period when citizenship in the Athenian *polis* was most highly valued (Meyer 1993). This apparent burst of commemorative activity following a significant change in the political and social value of citizenship (triggered, perhaps, by the overthrow of the oligarchs in 403 BCE: Meyer 1993: 117–19), conformed nicely with the picture of the Roman evidence elaborated earlier, where the so-called *constitutio Antoniniana* of the emperor Caracalla extending Roman citizenship to all free inhabitants of the empire in 212 CE had seemed to explain the sudden drop in Roman commemorations during the third century (Meyer 1990: 89–90). As with the Roman epitaphs, however (see

above), establishing the chronological parameters of the phenomenon is problematic. The lumping together of dated and undated material into temporal blocks defined by 25-year intervals, the arbitrary assignation of much of the undated material (e.g. epitaphs labeled "first–second century CE" are divided, equally it seems, between the periods 75–100 CE and 100–125 CE), and the uncertain foundations—and, in many cases, spurious precision—of much of the dated evidence render the conclusions suspect. What are in effect being charted by chronological analyses of this sort are not—or, at any rate, not necessarily—historical changes but modern dating methods, in this case those of J. Kirchner in *IG* II and III² (cf. Cherry 1995: 147). To the argument that Kirchner's dates are stable, in the sense that they have not, by and large, been overturned by subsequent scholarship (Meyer 1993: 121), it may be observed that neither have they been confirmed or rendered more precise. However attractive in appearance the results, attributing broad shifts in funerary commemorative practice to specific political events, no matter how consequential, requires sharply focused investigation of the historical circumstances surrounding the presumed watershed, and for this purpose the very general and often tentative datings assigned by modern scholars to inscribed epitaphs provide an exceedingly blunt instrument.

More reliably, epitaphs, in bulk, can be compared with other types of inscription, in bulk, to demonstrate broad chronological or demographic developments. For example, although Athenian gravestones do not in themselves provide an accurate indicator of the size of the citizen population, when considered beside lists of *prytaneis* and ephebes, they indicate that the demes of Attica fluctuated in size from the fourth century BCE through the Roman period, whereas the population as a whole declined in Hellenistic times and rose sharply again under Roman imperial rule (Hansen et al., 1990; cf. Hedrick 1999: 393–5). Comparison of the profiles of pagan and Christian epigraphy in late antiquity reveals that while the number of non-funerary inscriptions steadily declined after the middle of the third century CE, a resurgence of epitaphs beginning in the second half of the fourth century marked the spread of Christianity to the lower classes and the rise of a specifically Christian "epitaphic habit" (Galvao-Sobrinho 1995; cf. Shaw 1996: 105–7). By measuring the production of epitaphs against the production of other types of inscription within a well-defined, epigraphically self-contained, geographical area (Attica) or with the aim of identifying a phenomenon that, though varying from region to region, is fundamentally independent of regional variation (being a Christian, which is more absolute and easily defined than, for example, being a Roman), and by attempting to chart changes only broadly, over centuries rather than decades, studies such as these avoid some of the risks that any analysis of inscriptions in bulk is bound to entail.

Individual biographies

When studied singly, epitaphs usefully illuminate aspects of ancient life rarely seen in other sources (papyri are a notable exception) by opening windows onto individual lives. Biographical themes in Greek and Latin epitaphs cover a wide variety of human experience but tend to fall into several basic categories—causes of death, reversals of fortune, the accomplishments of the deceased—with Roman gravestones (both Greek and Latin) generally providing greater detail and wider variety of circumstance than their classical Greek counterparts (Lattimore 1942: 266–300). The most informative examples are funerary poems (*carmina funeraria*), which tend to combine greater freedom of expression with a propensity to articulate not only personal vicissitudes but individual attitudes and values, aspirations and regrets. Three examples may suffice to suggest the sort of detailed perspectives these miniature biographies can offer on three areas of Roman life commonly studied by analysis of inscriptions in bulk: the cultural "Romanization" (an inadequate but convenient term) of native populations in the provinces; marital arrangements and the configuration of Roman households; and civic identity and political life in Roman towns.

Sometime around the middle of the second century CE, T. Flavius Secundus, the patriarch of a leading family of the Roman colony of Cillium in the province of Africa Proconsularis (just south of modern Kasserine, Tunisia) erected for his father and namesake, and for himself, a three-storey tower-mausoleum on which he eventually had carved two inscriptions, a dedicatory register naming the family members buried inside (*CIL* VIII 211) and an extensive Latin verse epitaph (the longest known), in two parts: 90 hexameters, in which the elder Secundus converses with his heir, declaring his pride in the filial piety manifested by the construction of such a magnificent monument and epitaph, and a 20-line coda in elegiac couplets (not coincidentally bringing the total number of verses to 110, precisely the number of years the elder Secundus is said to have lived—another instance of symbolic epigraphy), in which the younger Secundus professes to have forgotten to mention in the earlier poem a weather-vane in the form of a cock in flight that crowns the structure (*CIL* VIII 212–13 = *CLE* 1552 = Courtney 1995: no. 199A–B). The elder Secundus, the first Roman citizen of the family, won

his citizenship after 33 years of service as an auxiliary soldier in the Roman army and achieved wealth and status in his community by becoming the first in the region to grow vines—specifically, that is, by applying native African techniques of irrigation to the cultivation of a characteristically Roman crop (A 51–3). Throughout the first poem, reflections on the elder Secundus' afterlife and the journey of his soul through the underworld are linked with the permanency of his monument as a guarantee of his immortality—a typically Greco-Roman sentiment expressed through the typically Greco-Roman medium of an inscribed funerary poem. The second poem, focusing on the weather-cock at the summit of the mausoleum (B 11–16), introduces a distinctive symbol of Libyo-Punic mortuary expression. Like the tower-mausoleum structure, an African architectural form, which is explicitly set into a Greco-Roman context by hyperbolic comparison with the lighthouse at Alexandria, the colossus of Nero, and the obelisk of the Circus Maximus at Rome (A 79–85), Secundus' inscribed verse epitaph represents a fusion of Greco-Roman and native Libyan concepts and modes of expression (*Les Flavii de Cillium* 1993; Hitchner 1995).

Allia Potestas of Perugia was an exemplary freedwoman, as the verse epitaph erected at Rome by her patron sometime in the late second or third century CE amply attests (*CIL* VI 37965 = *CLE* 1988 = Gordon 1983: no. 65). Funerary epigraphy provides our best and most abundant evidence for women—or the ideal of women—in the ancient Roman world (see below, pages 103–4, on "Turia" and Murdia), but even against this background Allia stands out (Horsfall 1985). Among other more traditional virtues, she was first to rise for work and last to retire at night (12–13); she was not unduly pleased with herself and never imagined herself a free(born) woman (16). That her hands were hard merely showed how hard she worked (24–5). In describing her beauty, Allius departs from convention to describe in rare (and idiosyncratic) erotic detail the shape of the breasts on her snow-white chest, the position of her legs, like those of Atalanta on the comic stage, and the generous way she shared her lovely body (20–3). Now that she is gone, Allius bears her name engraved in gold on his arm (40–1) and reveres a likeness of her with garlands (44–5). Most strikingly, Allia managed two young lovers, who lived together (with her?) under one roof, like Pylades and Orestes; since her death they have grown apart and grown old (28–31; Horsfall 1985: 265–7). It seems easiest to imagine that Allius himself is one of the two lovers, but even so, the sort of arrangement that made the freedwoman Allia the nucleus of a triangular relationship involving her patron and another male lover who lived together as friends casts unexpected light on the complexity of patron–freed relations and on the manifold variety of configurations possible in the Roman household.

Municipal benefaction was the engine that drove the Roman civic enterprise, and honorary inscriptions of the first two centuries CE generally give the impression of a smoothly running machine. The epitaph, now fragmentary, erected near Ausugum in the Italian Alps by a wife for her husband sometime in the second half of the first century CE presents a different picture (*CIL* V 5049 = *CLE* 417 = *Suppl. Ital.* n.s. 12: 162–5 = Courtney 1995: no. 108). The man had produced a wonderful gladiatorial spectacle and at personal expense had subsidized the purchase of grain on three occasions, in return for which some grateful men honored him as patron with a gilded statue (1–7). But this aroused the envy of the local citizenry who, swarming like locusts, tried to drive him out (8–15). Here the inscription breaks off, and we do not know the end of the story. But the tantalizing glimpse the narrative provides of popular politics in a Roman municipality, with its suggestion of rivalries among the local aristocracy, enriches our understanding of the vibrant civic life of early imperial Rome, which emerges as less placid and more dynamic than the stately parade of contemporary honorific inscriptions would otherwise make it seem (see Wistrand 1981, who, following Mommsen, believes the text to be a votive, rather than a sepulchral, inscription; F. Martin 1996).

The standard corpora of Greek and Latin inscriptions contain thousands of stories such as these. Individually engaging, occasionally curious, collectively they add detail and color to the social history of the ancient world.

Inscriptions and literature

The relationships between epigraphy and literature are numerous and various. Since 1959 the *Bulletin épigraphique* each year has registered under the heading "Rapports avec la littérature" various contributions pertaining to the Greek world, and there is a helpful (if now somewhat out-of-date) synthetic overview of the subject for Roman authors and Latin texts (Chevallier 1972). Ancient authors, especially historians, cite and quote inscriptions, and beginning in the fourth century BCE some Greek antiquarians, notably Craterus of Macedon (*FGrH* 342), systematically sought out and published collections of epigraphic documents (Stein 1931; Higbie 1999). Certain Greek inscriptions record historiographical narratives of a sort more normally associated with literary works (Chaniotis 1988), and some extensive epigraphic texts, such as the Epicurean treatise

of Diogenes of Oenoanda (see above, page 14) or the funerary praises of the Roman matron known as "Turia" (see below, pages 103–4), present carefully written compositions of a non-historiographical nature that deserve to be analyzed as works of literature in their own right (cf. Millar 1983: 98–110). Even shorter, more formulaic, inscriptions exhibit their own stylistic conventions and artistic modeling, so that one can properly speak of a distinctly epigraphical form of rhetoric (Judge 1997). Inscribed poetry, in particular, has profitably been subjected to stylistic and thematic analysis of the sort regularly applied to literary texts (e.g. Galletier 1922; Robert 1940–65: vol. 4; Cugusi 1985), and the influence of individual authors on *carmina epigraphica* and of epigraphic poems on literary compositions has been productively explored. Here it will be enough to mention a pair of exemplary studies, on Vergil (Hoogma 1969) and on the Neronian epigrammatist Lucillius (Robert 1968), and to note that new texts of literary interest come to light all the time: recently a 60-line poem of elegiac couplets in praise of Halicarnassus, datable to the second century BCE, was discovered *in situ* on the remains of an ancient wall at the promontory of Salmakis in Caria (Isager 1998). Even graffiti have yielded insights into the world of letters in antiquity, for example by evoking the literary culture of Pompeii (Gigante 1979).

The particular relevance of this theme to the ancient historian, however, concerns those cases in which inscriptions and literary sources document the same historical events or institutions and usefully illuminate one another, not only by exposing, through mutual comparison, the omissions and biases in each, but also by establishing the broader historiographical or epigraphic context into which each must be set. To cite a simple example, Thucydides reports that Pisistratus, the son of Hippias and grandson of the famous Pisistratus, during his archonship at Athens dedicated an altar in the precinct of Pythian Apollo with an inscription "in faint letters" (*ἀμυδροῖς γράμμασι*) that could still be read in Thucydides' day and which he quotes (6.54.6–7). In 1877 five fragments of a sculpted marble cornice bearing most of the inscription reported by Thucydides were discovered near the Ilissos (*IG* I² 761 = *GHI* 11; cf. Guarducci 1967–78: 1.139–40). From Thucydides' narrative we learn the ancient site of the dedication and (indirectly) the date of the younger Pisistratus' archonship (probably in 522/1 BCE, certainly not later than 512/11 BCE), which allows us to place and date the inscription. From the inscribed text we observe the *ἀκρίβεια* of the historian and deduce that the adjective *ἀμυδρός* must in this context mean "faint" rather than "obscure," possibly because the painted reddening

had faded, since the carved letters are clear and distinctly legible to this day. More importantly, since the letter-forms are of a style and elegance generally associated with a slightly later period, in the early fifth century BCE, the early dating of this inscription establishes an important benchmark for measuring the development of classical Attic lettering (cf. *GHI* 11; Higbie 1999: 60–1). In this instance, the inscribing of the dedication constitutes part of the historical episode Thucydides records, and he adduces the inscription in his narrative as evidence of the event. In other cases, an historical narrative is independent of an inscription documenting the same event and allows a more penetrating comparison of the two.

The suppression by the Roman senate of the cult of Bacchus in 186 BCE is reported at length by Livy (39.8–19) and is recorded in a decree of the senate inscribed (it seems) *in agro Teurano* on a bronze tablet discovered in southern Italy in 1646 and preserved, since 1727, in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (*CIL* I² 581 = X 104 = *ILS* 18 = *ILLRP* 511; cf. Gordon 1983: 83–5 no. 8). Livy's dramatic narrative, centering on a tale of familial blackmail and intrigue, fabricates a sudden discovery by the consul of a secret plot by a cadre of worshippers of Bacchus previously unrecognized in the heart of Rome. The senatorial decree, which refers to both Roman and Latin worshippers and is addressed to the allied communities (lines 2–3, 8–9), confirms what other archaeological and literary evidence suggests, that the cult of Bacchus was widespread and had long been tolerated in Italy before the senate decided to suppress it in 186 BCE. Why the senate moved to exert its religious authority in this area at this time cannot be surely known, but the inscription provides a more precise indication of the target of senatorial concern than does Livy's account in making it clear, as Livy's narrative does not, that it was not the worship of Bacchus *per se* that was to be curbed (though it was to be reduced to a smaller scale) but the highly structured internal organization of the individual Bacchic cells (lines 10–14). The control exercised by Bacchic leaders over their followers must have posed a threat to the traditional Roman organization of familial authority vested in the *pater familias*, an aspect of contemporary anxieties well brought out by Livy's narrative of familial tensions but scarcely hinted at in the senatorial decree (North 1979; cf. Pailler 1988; Gruen 1990: 34–78).

Occasionally both an inscription and an historical narrative purport to represent a text they independently document. Perhaps the most famous example concerns the speech that the emperor Claudius delivered in the Roman senate in 48 CE advocating the admission of leading citizens of

Gaul into that body. The circumstances of the speech are reported and an abridged and adapted version of it is recorded by Tacitus in his *Annals* (11.23–4), and the oration itself is beautifully engraved and largely preserved on a large bronze tablet (more than 200 kilograms in weight) found at Lyons (ancient Lugdunum), where it was originally displayed (*CIL* XIII 1668 = *ILS* 212; cf. Gordon 1983: 117–18 no. 42). The two versions of the speech have been repeatedly discussed and analyzed, usually for the light they shed on Tacitus' historiographical methods, but comparison of the two also reveals fundamental differences in historical perspective between the emperor and the historian (Griffin 1982). Other well-worked examples might be invoked, but it may help to illustrate the vitality of this type of study to mention briefly two recently discovered inscriptions that bear on our understanding of Greco-Roman literature which, though hardly obscure, have not yet been fully explicated.

The first shows that it is not only historians whose writings epigraphy can illuminate. In 1981 a lead tablet preserving a *lex sacra* inscribed in the local alphabet of Selinous in Sicily was presented to the J. Paul Getty Museum. Returned to Italy in 1992, the inscription (our longest Greek inscription on lead) received its *editio princeps* a year later (Jameson–Jordan–Kotansky 1993) and has been the subject of intense discussion ever since (e.g. *SEG* 43.630). Many aspects of this remarkable document remain obscure, but its date, around the middle of the fifth century BCE, and its references to Zeus Eumenes, the Eumenides, and vengeful spirits similar to Erinyes (here called ἐλάστεροι: cf. Eurip. *IT* 970–1), make it obviously relevant to the central themes of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (Clinton 1996: 165–70). Two independent columns of text written upside down with respect to one another concern pollution, hostile demons, and rites designed, it seems, to mark a transition of the latter from dangerous polluting entities to spirits worthy of worship. The first column, a list of rituals to named deities, is addressed to some group or community; the second is addressed to individuals harassed by wrathful ἐλάστεροι. It is probable, though not absolutely certain (North 1996: 295–9), that the pollution arises from murder and bloodshed, in which case the network of associations involving individual and community, impure and pure (and the rituals which effect a transformation from the former to the latter), murder and atonement, and ancestral spirits (*Tritopatores*) of two sorts—chthonic/heroic and pure/godlike (cf. Jameson–Jordan–Kotansky 1993: 107–14)—renders the text, if as yet imperfectly understood, of central interest not only to the history of Greek religion but to much of Greek tragedy of the fifth century.

The second text is widely known and well understood, but the questions it raises have only begun to be explored. In the late 1980s several bronze tablets (six or seven, one almost complete), recording a decree of the Roman senate passed on 10 December 20 CE posthumously condemning Cn. Calpurnius Piso for the murder of Tiberius' adopted son Germanicus and other political crimes, came to light in Andalusia (the Roman province of Baetica) in southern Spain. Together with the *tabula Siarensis*—two large fragments of a bronze tablet unearthed in the same region in 1982 and preserving senatorial decrees of December 19 CE conferring honors on Germanicus following his death in October of that year (*RS* no. 37; *AE* 1991, 20–2)—the *s(enatus) c(onsultum) de Cn. Pisone patre*, as the heading in the most complete surviving copy describes it (*SCPP*), provides an unprecedentedly detailed view of the workings of the Roman senate during one of the most significant crises in the history of the early Empire (Caballos–Eck–Fernández 1996, on the archaeological context and physical characteristics of the inscriptions; Eck–Caballos–Fernández 1996, for the historical significance of the document). It further invites comparison with the detailed account of the episode in Tacitus' *Annals* (2.41–3.19). Far more than in the case of Claudius' oration and the Lyons tablet (see above), the possibility here exists not only of analyzing the historian's reworking of his source material but of assessing the accuracy of his historical vision. What emerges clearly is the tendentiousness of both narratives, with the obsequious senate heaping blame on its isolated victim and praising the beneficent equanimity of the Princeps, and with the historian sowing seeds of doubt about Tiberius' motives and Germanicus' virtue. Significant discrepancies between the two versions center on questions of chronology, not only of Tacitus' narrative, in which an ovation celebrated by Drusus on 28 May 20 CE immediately follows the account of the trial (*Ann.* 3.19), but of the publication of the text preserved in Baetica, which refers, first, to *haec senatus consulta* (plural), to be inscribed on bronze and published wherever the emperor sees fit (*SCPP* 169), and then to *hoc senatus consultum* (the one passed on 10 December), to be published in similar fashion in the provinces and at the winter quarters of the legions (*SCPP* 170–2). Resolution of these issues, which have excited considerable debate (see, e.g. the views surveyed in Damon–Takács 1999, *passim*), will necessarily involve consideration not only of questions of historiography but of epigraphical publication, a subject on which the new document provides important textual and material evidence (Eck–Caballos–Fernández 1996: 279–87; cf. Crawford 1996: 25–34).

Pitfalls

Epigraphic bias

The most pervasive difficulty encountered by those who look to inscriptions for historical evidence is the problem of epigraphic bias discussed above in the section on epitaphs. Inscriptions seldom respond directly to the questions we want to ask of them, and the information they provide is invariably filtered through the medium by which it is transmitted. With epitaphs, the problem is essentially one of distinguishing commemorative practices from demographic and social realities; even if the bias cannot be corrected, it can be recognized and can itself become a useful object of study. The same holds with other types of inscription, although in many cases the orientation of the bias is not easy to discern. Sometimes the information inscriptions provide not only is distorted but fundamentally misrepresents the historical reality it purports to describe. Roman building inscriptions provide a case in point.

Perhaps the most widely read inscription of antiquity is the simple statement spelled out in massive bronze letters across the frieze of the façade of the Pantheon in Rome declaring that Agrippa built the structure in 27 BCE: *M. Agrippa L.f. cos tertium fecit.* In modern times it was not until the late nineteenth century that scholars recognized traces of a secondary inscription carved on the architrave giving the imperial titles of the emperors Septimius Severus and Caracalla in 202 CE and declaring that "they restored the Pantheon, deteriorated by age, with all its decoration" (*CIL* VI 896 = 31196 = *ILS* 129). In fact, stamped bricks subsequently found throughout the structure show that the monument we see was largely constructed during the early years of Hadrian's reign and that the Severan restoration was restricted to three minor areas (Bloch 1947: 102–17). Neither of the principal building inscriptions adorning the façade accurately represents the surviving structure. Claims of restoration and rebuilding such as that asserted by Septimius Severus and Caracalla are especially problematic and often bear little correspondence to the architectural realities. It is not simply a matter of exaggerating the work done, as with the alleged Severan rebuilding of the Pantheon "with all its decoration": temporal concepts such as "old age" (*vetustas*), the most frequently invoked reason for rebuilding, were variable; perceptions of decay were relative. Sometimes entirely new buildings were represented as mere restorations in order to justify their construction (Thomas–Witschel 1992). As with epitaphs, what Roman rebuilding inscriptions attest are not historical realities but Roman attitudes toward those realities, in this case public buildings and architecture.

Sometimes, inscriptions were reused in ways that concealed their original purpose; occasionally we can recover the original texts sufficiently well to reconstruct the history of their use and reuse. One famous example is the duplex inscription carved into opposite sides of the shaft of the red-granite obelisk brought by the emperor Caligula to Rome and set up in the Vatican circus (Pliny, *NH* 16.201; *CIL* VI 882). Now partially erased on both sides, the inscription records a joint dedication to the deified Augustus and to the emperor Tiberius, that is, uniquely, as Mommsen recognized, to both a deified and a living emperor. Despite appearances, it cannot have been inscribed when the obelisk was brought to Rome by Caligula but must belong to an earlier phase of its life in Egypt, when Tiberius ruled; indeed, it was no doubt Caligula who was responsible for the partial erasure of the text carved under Tiberius (Iverson 1965). What is more, in 1962 F. Magi discovered under the surviving inscribed text traces of an earlier duplex inscription formed by individually attached bronze letters, of which only the bottoms of the holes used to hold the letters survive. According to the original text, which Magi was able to reconstruct by connecting the holes, the obelisk was originally set up at the bidding of Octavian by C. Cornelius Gallus, as *praefectus fabrum*, to celebrate the building of a Forum Iulium, evidently at Alexandria. The original letters were presumably removed following Gallus' condemnation and suicide in 26 BCE (Magi 1963; *AE* 1964, 255; cf. Alföldy 1990 and, briefly, Gordon 1983: no. 35).

More recently G. Alföldy has employed the same technique of decipherment to uncover a hidden history of the Flavian amphitheater at Rome. Beneath an inscription on the architrave of the Colosseum recording a restoration sometime in the second quarter of the fifth century CE (*CIL* VI 32089 = *ILS* 5633) Alföldy found holes for the bronze letters of the original dedication which, when connected, revealed that the structure was built by *I[mp.] T. Caes(ar) Vespas[ianus Aug(ustus)] . . . ex manubis* (*CIL* VI 40454a; Alföldy 1995a). To judge from the spacing of the letters, the *praenomen* "T." was squeezed in between *I[mp.]* and *Caes(ar)*, which suggests that Titus usurped his father Vespasian's prerogative by dedicating the building under his own name. More striking is the reference to "spoils" (*manubiae*), which can only be those of the Jewish War, celebrated in the triumph of 71 CE. The great stone amphitheater, like the Arch of Titus erected across the valley on the lower slopes of the Palatine, *in summa sacra via*, was a triumphal monument.

Sometimes epigraphic pitfalls emerge as windfalls. More often, they deceive the unwary into believing things that are not so.

Fakes

Already in antiquity the implicit authority attributed to inscribed texts led to the practice of falsifying inscriptions in order to lend credence to otherwise dubious assertions of antiquity or distinction. Herodotus, who knew that inscriptions could be forged (1.51.3–4), claimed to have transcribed in the sanctuary of Ismenian Apollo at Thebes texts carved in ancient "Cadmean" letters on three votive tripods declaring them to be gifts of the mythical persons Skaios, Laodamas, and Amphitryon (5.59–61: West 1985: 289–95). More than 400 years later Livy complained of the *falsi imaginum tituli* with which ambitious Romans attempted to glorify their ancestors (4.16.4, 8.40.4, 22.31.11; cf. Plut. *Numa* 1.1). Of greater concern to modern historians than these ancient deceptions are the numerous spurious inscriptions, mainly in Latin, fabricated from various motives ever since the Renaissance. A count made at the beginning of the twentieth century of those identified in *CIL* put their number at over 10,500, or roughly one for every fourteen authentic inscriptions then included in the corpus (Abbot 1908: 22; cf. Billanovich 1967).

Certain infamous antiquarians from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries raised the practice of forgery to an art. First among them, in audacity and productivity, was the Neapolitan Pirro Ligorio (1510–83), who succeeded Michelangelo in overseeing the construction of St Peter's basilica and who is (dis)credited with nearly 3,000 (more than three-quarters) of the spurious inscriptions registered in part five of volume six of *CIL*, devoted entirely to the *falsae* of Rome (Mandowsky–Mitchell 1963). Less notorious but more typical was Girolamo Asquini (1762–1837), count of Udine, who faithfully, if stolidly, recorded many genuine inscriptions in the tenth Augustan region of Italy (Venetia and Histria) before succumbing late in life to the allure of fame, which led him to fabricate a number of texts (Panciera 1970). Mommsen's judgment on Asquini was typically harsh, and the procedure he followed in *CIL* in dealing with Asquini's work was characteristically rigid: all texts known only from Asquini were relegated to the *falsae*, regardless of their inherent plausibility (*CIL* V, p. 81 ch. xxiv; cf. *CIL* IX or X, p. xi). Inevitably some genuine inscriptions were unjustly impugned (see Panciera 1970: 35–84 *passim*). The challenge of dealing with *falsae*, it emerges, is not only to avoid the spurious but not to discard the

authentic, many of which are now branded as suspect in the standard corpora.

When the expertise of the forger is high, detection can prove difficult. For a hundred years following its supposed discovery in 1871 in a grave near Palestrina, the so-called *fibula Praenestina* was widely believed to preserve the oldest known Latin inscription—*Manios med fhefhaked Numasioi*, "Manios made me for Numasios"—and as such occupied a position of prominence in virtually every handbook and anthology of Latin inscriptions (*CIL* I² 3 = XIV 4123; *ILS* 8561; *ILLRP* 1). Branded a fake in 1981 in a lengthy exposé (Guarducci 1981; Gordon 1983: 75–6 no. 1; cf. Guarducci 1984–86), the *fibula* was equally vigorously defended in 1989 (Lehmann 1989) and now stands as a salutary reminder that no accumulated weight of scholarly opinion about any ancient inscription, no matter how authoritative, can ever be considered unshakably secure.

Nor is the modern forgery of ancient inscriptions limited to Latin texts. Spurious Greek inscriptions, more numerous than Latin *falsae* in antiquity (Guarducci 1967–78: 1.488–501), are still being produced today. Beginning in 1980 the texts of (so far) nine bronze tablets recording a series of decrees of the Sicilian city of Entella during the time of the First Punic War (254–241 BCE) have begun to be published and, despite (or perhaps because of) the mystery surrounding their origin and current whereabouts, have attracted considerable scholarly attention (see *SEG* 30.1117–23, 32.914, 34.934, 43.619, and most volumes in between). The authenticity of several of the tablets seems beyond dispute, but one (VII), manifestly modeled on another (VIII), is clearly a fake and now raises questions about the authenticity of the others, which have not yet been subjected to expert inspection and scientific analysis (Loomis 1994). The verdict for historians eager to exploit the fascinating glimpse these documents provide of the perspective of a minor player in one of the Hellenistic era's great military events must, for now, remain a frustrating *non liquet*.

Dating

Because inscriptions are frequently called upon to date the archaeological contexts in which they are found or the persons named in their texts, the methods by which they themselves are dated are important. Sometimes an inscription can be dated by reference in its text to some securely datable event, for example, the accession of a Roman emperor or the term of office of an Athenian archon; at others the circumstances

of an inscription's discovery—in a region known to have been first occupied or settled by Greeks or Romans at a particular date, for example, or marking an undisturbed grave with a datable coin or other object among the grave goods—provide a *terminus post quem* for its display in a particular location; at others the material in which a text is inscribed or the style of the monument that carries it allows it to be assigned to a more or less well defined period (cf. Woodhead 1981: 52–62; Gordon 1983: 40–2). But when such indications are lacking and an undated inscription is used to date other objects or events, caution is necessary, for two related reasons: (1) many dates assigned to individual inscriptions, especially those for which the grounds are not specified, are more approximate and uncertain than they are sometimes made to seem (cf. Badian 1968: 243–4); (2) the frequently invoked and apparently fixed chronological *termini* on which many such tentative dates are (often tacitly) based are themselves less secure than their apparent precision suggests.

Nowhere are these hazards more treacherous than with dates established by letter-forms. The use of the three-barred sigma in Attic inscriptions of the fifth century BCE provides a case in point. From the early 1960s a widespread orthodoxy held that the three-barred form went out of use abruptly around 446 BCE and that inscriptions exhibiting that type of sigma must therefore belong to an earlier period; recently, however, the date has been lowered by 20 or 25 years, and the whole question must now again be considered open.[15] Furthermore, just as epigraphic cultures developed independently, so professional stonecutters in individual communities employed distinctive styles of lettering. Even after the diffusion throughout the Greek world of a single Athenian-Milesian alphabet following its official adoption at Athens during the archonship of Eukleides in 403/2 BCE (Guarducci 1967–78: 1.85–8), stylistic developments emerged locally. Consequently, datings based on Attic letter-forms are applicable only to texts actually carved in Attica. More generally, any attempt to date an inscription by the style of its lettering except according to purely local criteria must be considered suspect (Tracy 1994: 151–2; cf. Woodhead 1981: 62–6).

The same caution holds for Latin lettering and the Roman world. In the 1950s and 1960s A. E. and J. S. Gordon examined thousands of inscriptions on stone from the vicinity of Rome with a view to analyzing the characteristic features of Roman letter-forms of the imperial period (Gordon–Gordon 1958, 1964, 1965).[16] In summarizing the results of their research, the Gordons conclude a succinct overview of particular features of lettering (shading, module, individual letter-forms, punctuation, etc.) with the warning that their painstakingly established guidelines should

be relied upon only to suggest approximate *termini* for tentative dates for inscriptions originating from the region of Rome (Gordon–Gordon 1957: 208–17; 1958: 3). Despite the caution enjoined by those who know the material best, others have not always resisted the temptation to place more weight on palaeographical features to date inscriptions than they can effectively bear.

As all epigraphists agree, reading inscribed texts and examining their letter-forms for clues to dating is always best done by autopsy. In practice, this is often not possible, in which case consulting visual aids—squeezes, photographs, facsimiles, drawings, tracings, and the like—is the best resort. But drawings, tracings, and facsimiles are only as reliable as the draftsmen and technicians who create them (see Figures 1.8, 1.9); paper squeezes are often imperfectly executed due to the difficulty of reaching inscriptions *in situ*; liquid latex squeezes can only be made when an inscription can be laid flat on its back; and photographs of squeezes and of actual inscriptions can mislead because of the vagaries of lighting. There is little the investigator can do to obviate these hazards except to be aware of them and to avoid expressing conviction where confidence is out of place.

More reliable for dating than letter-forms are linguistic formulae and onomastic conventions, of which various useful examples have been identified (for Greek texts, see Guarducci 1967–78: 2.380–410, Woodhead 1981: 60–2; for Latin, Thylander 1952: 50–3, Calabi Limentani 1974: 175–8, Duncan-Jones 1982: 362–3). In general, these indications are most helpful when they are based upon wide usage and a high number of attestations and when they can be applied in combination. A Latin epitaph preceded by the formula *D(is) M(anibus)* (first attested in the two-letter abbreviated form around the middle of the first century CE) and naming a man with the *praenomen* and *gentilicium* "M. Ulpius" is very likely to belong to the second century CE, after the accession of the emperor Trajan and before the recording of the *praenomen* in inscribed texts largely fell out of use in the third century. An Athenian decree that refers to *proedroi* in its preamble probably belongs to the fourth century BCE, possibly (but not certainly) to the middle half of it (c. 375–325 BCE), after the office of *epistates* was replaced by a board of *proedroi* following the democratic reforms of 403 BCE and before the mention of *symproedroi* became common around 330 BCE (Henry 1977: 39–41).

Good epigraphic practice in editing inscriptions nowadays calls for an explicit indication of the grounds upon which even a tentative dating is based, but this has not always been so, and most inscriptions published in the standard corpora (*IG*, *CIL*) are not provided with even

an approximate date. The better able the investigator is to identify and control the various specific "internal" criteria relevant to dating the type of inscription under consideration, the more confidence can be placed in its use as evidence.

History from square brackets

The phrase "history from square brackets" was coined by E. Badian to describe the most pernicious of epigraphic dangers for the historian, that of building argument from speculation disguised as fact (Badian 1989). The phrase refers to the standard epigraphic editing convention of including within square brackets conjectural restorations of text presumed originally to have been part of an inscription but now missing because of breakage or accidental damage to the writing surface (see "Editing conventions", page xxv). Because of the formulaic character of many Greek and Latin inscriptions, many of these supplements are uncontroversial and virtually inevitable (cf. Woodhead 1981: 72–4). With epitaphic formulae, they are also often historically inconsequential. With more complicated texts, however, conjecture sometimes embeds itself in the scholarly discussion so deeply that it assumes the appearance of fact and can only be dislodged by a thorough reassessment of the entire epigraphic and historical context. A recent, comprehensive reconsideration of the Athenian Standards Decree provides a case in point (Figueira 1998: 319–423).

Sometimes architectural features of the object on which the text is inscribed dictate the size of lacunae with a degree of certainty that narrows considerably the range of plausible supplements that can be considered (Meritt 1940); at others, conjectural restoration of a predictable text, such as the titles of a Roman emperor or the offices of a magistrate whose career is otherwise well attested, can help to establish the physical dimensions of the monument on which the inscription was displayed (e.g. Alföldy 1992: 113–23). In many instances, however, an editor wishing to make sense of an incomplete text is tempted to propose supplements (often avowedly *exempli gratia*) that are, at best, merely possible and, at worst, no more than wishful thinking. Regrettably, there exist no generally accepted criteria for distinguishing restorations that can be agreed to be reasonably certain from those that fall in the latter category, and in any case standards of reasonableness are bound to differ (cf. Badian 1993: 134–9). At the same time, it would certainly be counterproductive to demand that the editors of inscriptions—the very ones most likely to have devoted serious effort and thought to the restoration of the texts they are editing—refrain from suggesting all but the most secure supplements to their fragmentary texts. The most that can be expected is that the distinction between preserved text and conjectural supplement be clearly marked and that those who rely on epigraphic editions for historical evidence judge the reliability, as well as the intrinsic appeal, of any restoration individually on its own merits (see the sensible remarks of Woodhead 1981: 67–8, 74–5).

Figure 1.7 Contract for constructing a wall and doorway (*lex parieti faciendo*) from Puteoli (Pozzuoli), Italy. Marble (48 × 132 cm), 105 BCE? (*CIL* I² 698 and p. 936 = X 1781 = *ILS* 5317 = *ILLRP* 518 = Calabi Limentani 1974 no. 128). Carved in three columns on a single slab of (Luna?) marble, the text is dated to 105 BCE by the names of the local *duoviri* and of the Roman consuls and by the number of the year since the founding of the Roman colony (in 194 BCE), but the surviving inscription is thought to date from the early imperial period because of the letter-forms and the use of Luna marble (cf. *CIL* I² p. 936) (National Archaeological Museum, Naples). (For a larger reproduction, refer to page 176.)

As noted above, reading inscriptions is always best done by autopsy; when that is not possible, resort to visual aids such as photographs and drawings provides only an imperfect guide to the letter-forms of the original. Sometimes it is not only the shapes of the letters but the letters themselves that a reproduction fails to replicate faithfully. The temptation to rely upon facsimiles of well-known inscriptions, clear and neat and often with inconvenient flaws in the original object discreetly removed, is understandable, but legibility is no substitute for accuracy, and for any serious study of inscriptions the temptation must be firmly resisted.

Figure 1.7 reproduces a photograph of a famous inscription from Puteoli (modern Pozzuoli), now on display in the epigraphic wing of

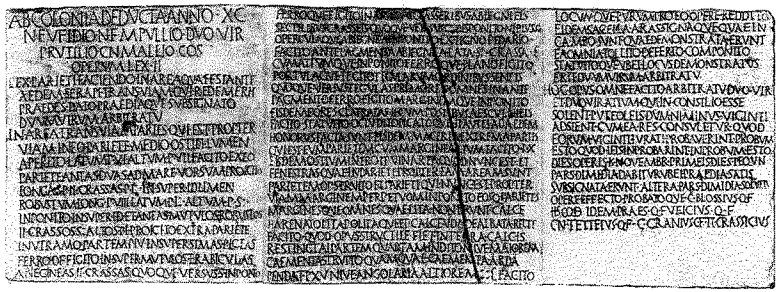

Figure 1.8 Lithograph facsimile reproduction of the *lex parieti faciendo* from Puteoli (Figure 1.7) as printed in F. Ritschl, *Priscae Latinitatis Monumenta Epigraphica* (1862), Tab. LXVI. Compared with the original marble slab (Figure 1.7) the drawing reproduced by Ritschl shows letter-forms similar but not identical to those on the stone. (For a larger reproduction, refer to page 177.)

the National Archaeological Museum in Naples (*CIL* I² 698 and p. 936 = X 1781 = *ILS* 5317 = *ILLRP* 518 = Calabi Limentani 1974 no. 128). The text—a building contract for constructing a wall and monumental doorway between two private houses across the street from a temple of Serapis—is without parallel in ancient epigraphy, and the date of the inscription depends largely upon its physical qualities: the arrangement of the text in three columns, the shapes of the letters, and the use of a single slab of Luna marble to display the document. The text is accurately transcribed in the standard editions (although none remarks all its notable palaeographic features), but when one looks for published images of the stone, one finds, in Ritschl's classic volume of lithograph plates, *Priscae Latinitatis Monumenta Epigraphica* (1862), a facsimile of a drawing of the text (Figure 1.8; the first column is reproduced by Calabi-Limentani 1974: 385) and, in the volume of plates published to accompany the latest fascicle of *CIL* I², a photograph—not of the inscription but of a plaster of Paris copy of it made for the Museum of Roman Civilization in Rome (Figure 1.9). Ritschl's facsimile shows the correct text and faithfully represents various imperfections in the stone (notably a break through the middle), but the letter-forms are subtly different from those on the stone. The photograph in *CIL* not only exhibits letter-forms unlike those of the original and of Ritschl's facsimile but shows no sign of the damage to the stone and introduces an orthographical error into the *nomen gentilicium* at the beginning of the second line in the spelling FVDIDIO for FVFIDIO. It is difficult to attribute the mistake

Figure 1.9 Reproduction of the *lex parieti faciendo* from Puteoli (Figure 1.7) in the Museo della Civiltà Romana, Rome. Plaster (48 × 132 cm?), c. 1937 CE (*CIL* I², pars II, fasciculus IV, addenda tertia, 2. *Tabulae*, Tab. 25, Fig. 1). Compared with the original marble slab (Figure 1.7) the reproduction appears similar in layout but exhibits markedly different letter-forms and outright error in the second line of the heading, where the plaster shows FVDIDIO instead of FVFIDIO (Museum of Roman Civilization, Rome). (For a larger reproduction, refer to page 178.)

to anything other than inadvertence, since the letters on the stone are clear. In this instance the historical consequences are slight (the *nomen* Fudidius is unattested but can be deduced from the *cognomen* Fudidianus: Schulze 1904: 238), but the reproduction of a faulty copy in the standard corpus is bound to mislead. Nor, regrettably, is this an isolated case. In Degrassi's excellent *auctarium* to the first volume of *CIL*, concerned with Latin inscriptions down to the end of the Republic (*Imagines*), plate no. 151 (= *CIL* I² 2662 = *ILLRP* 342) reproduces another plaster copy from the Museum of Roman Civilization, in this case of a poem set up at Corinth sometime in the first years of the first century BCE by M. Antonius the orator (grandfather of the triumvir), in which several readings not preserved on the stone but restored by modern editors are presented no differently from the surviving text (see Badian 1968: 242; cf. Gordon 1983: 90–1 no. 14). Relying on this "evidence," only the truly vigilant will avoid writing history from square brackets.

For all the potential pitfalls into which the unwary may stumble, the vast, rich territory constituted by the wealth of surviving Greek and Latin inscriptions contains many more deposits of valuable information than nuggets of fool's gold. The thrill of discovery, the sense of immediacy, the excitement of dealing directly with the ancient world—these

rewards of the study of inscriptions can scarcely be conveyed at second hand. Readers who venture beyond the following pages to experience them directly will better understand the joys of the epigraphist and will sooner come to recognize the special contributions, as well as the limitations, of epigraphic evidence.

Chapter 2

Local languages and native cultures

Maryline Parca

The cultural cohesion which Herodotus claimed for Greece in the second half of the fifth century (8.144.2) and the universal political sway attributed to Rome by Augustus in the preamble to his *Res Gestae* (*CIL* III, 2, 769–99; Wigtil 1982a and 1982b), telling abstractions through which Greek and Roman self-definitions were articulated, provide helpful guides to an investigation of the linguistic and cultural diversity of classical antiquity. However dissociated from practical considerations, the construct that omits a mosaic of political institutions to embrace a fiction of genetic homogeneity, and the one in which political unity overrides considerations of race, language, religion, and customs are both lucid expressions of the exigencies of ideology. These representations have each had a full measure of success and have been practically unchallenged until recently. The broadened conception of the classical world currently being sketched is one advocating that due attention be paid to the interaction of Greece and Rome with Egypt, the Near East, and North Africa. Albeit surrounded by academic polemic, this critical démarche lends particular authority to the studies which historians of literacy (Harris 1989: 175–90) and scholars of cultural identities (Millar 1968: 126–34; 1987: 143–62; 1993: 225–35) have devoted to the nature, extent, and significance of the written evidence left by the distinctive cultures which Hellenistic Greece and imperial Rome came to encompass.[1]

Because Greek and Roman mentalities stand in such stark contrast to one another—Greek distinction being defined through exclusion and Roman self-definition being premised on inclusion—and since the political landscape of classical Greece has so little in common with that made possible by Alexander and compares even less with that of Rome during the Principate, the overview which this chapter intends