MONUMENTAL WRITING AND THE EXPANSION OF ROMAN SOCIETY IN THE EARLY EMPIRE*

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I. THE EPIGRAPHIC HABIT REVISITED

The vast majority of surviving Roman inscriptions originated in a cultural phenomenon that is characteristic of, and in some senses defines, the early Roman Empire. At the end of the last century B.C. — roughly co-incident, then, with the transition to autocracy, the Roman cultural revolution, and the formative period of provincial cultures throughout the Empire — an epigraphic boom occurred, in Italy and in every province of the Empire. That explosion of new inscriptions, and the subsequent rise and fall of an epigraphic culture, was experienced by eastern and western provinces alike, in Greek as well as in Latin epigraphy.[1] Many regional epigraphies remain to be characterized in terms of their chronology, but such local studies as have been done strongly suggest that, although there was certainly some inter-regional variation in the scale, rate, and timing of this phenomenon, in its broad outlines this pattern was very widespread. Across the entire Empire, the number of inscriptions set up each year began to rise from the Augustan period and increased more and more steeply through the second century. In every region that has been examined in detail, the majority of extant inscriptions were produced in the late second and early third centuries. The peak or turning-point seems to have been reached at slightly different times in each area. But everywhere the subsequent decline was much faster than the original rise, reaching a new low between the middle and the end of the third century A.D. Epigraphy does survive into the fourth century — in most areas of the Empire, if not in most cities — but late imperial inscriptions are very much rarer and differ markedly from early imperial examples in genre, form, and style.

How can this cultural phenomenon be understood? The origins of Latin epigraphy are to be sought in the early Republic, and probably in the uses to which archaic Etruscans and their neighbours put writing soon after adopting it from visitors from the eastern Mediterranean.[2] Its subsequent development, in the Republican period, needs to be set in the context of a range of parallel Italian epigraphies and of the impact on them of Greek styles of inscription and monumentality. One approach to the epigraphic culture of the early Empire would be a genealogical investigation into successive revaluations of epigraphy, but the approach employed here is contextualist, examining the uses to which monumental inscriptions were put in the early imperial period, and the significances accorded them. The greater part — perhaps seventy per cent, but it is

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[1] On Latin inscriptions, S. Mrozek, 'À propos de la répartition chronologique des inscriptions latines dans le Haut-Empire', *Epigraphica* 35 (1973), 113–18, cf. idem, 'A propos de la répartition chronologique des inscriptions latines dans le Haut-Empire', *Epigraphica* 50 (1988), 61–4, supported by numerous local studies, e.g. E. M. Wightman, *Gallia Belgica* (1985), 163 and R. P. Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire: Quantitative Studies* (2nd edn, 1982), 350–7, and discussed in an important paper by R. MacMullen, 'The epigraphic habit in the Roman Empire', *AJP* 103 (1982), 233–46. The evidence from the East is less well tabulated but cf. G. Alföldy, 'Augustus und die Inschriften: Tradition und Innovation', *Gymnasium* 98 (1991), 289–324, for the initial boom; also R. MacMullen, 'The frequency of inscriptions in Roman Lydia', *ZPE* 65 (1986), 237–8, and C. Roueché, *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity* (1989), xix–xxi, on Asian cities. E. A. Meyer, 'Explaining the epigraphic habit in the Roman Empire: the evidence of epitaphs', *JRS* 80 (1990), 74–96, in the most imaginative and rigorous study of the phenomenon to date, has produced sample curves for a series of western and eastern cities. I am greatly indebted to her work in all that follows.

[2] On early Roman literacy, cf. most recently S. Stoddart and J. Whitley, 'The social context of literacy in Archaic Greece and Etruria', *Antiquity* 62 (1988), 761–72; T. Cornell, 'The tyranny of the evidence: a discussion of the possible uses of literacy in Etruria and Latium in the archaic age', in J. H. Humphrey (ed.), *Literacy in the Roman World* (1991), 7–33.

difficult to be sure — were epitaphs,[3] but others recorded the dedication of buildings, honours paid to individuals, the fulfilment of vows to the gods, imperial and local laws, registers of magistrates and councillors, lists of permitted taxes and so on. The public spaces of Roman cities and the cemeteries that surrounded them were adorned with monumental writing,[4] as were rural sanctuaries and villages in many regions. Every province of the Empire, however briefly held or sparsely settled, had its own epigraphy.

Ramsay MacMullen, in a now classic article, introduced the concept of the 'epigraphic habit' to describe the cultural disposition to inscribe which resulted in this phenomenon.[5] MacMullen delineated the salient points of the distribution of Latin inscriptions in time, in space, and between social groups, and drew attention to the implications for studies based on epigraphy, but he declined to offer any general explanation of the phenomenon, other than to direct attention to the 'sense of audience' that elicited inscriptions. Other studies have noted connections between epigraphy and urbanism and between epigraphy and the army, while epigraphic density has long been used as an index of 'Romanization' and more recently of literacy.[6] Elizabeth Meyer, writing in this journal, has developed MacMullen's ideas in the context of funerary inscriptions, arguing that the spread of the epigraphic habit was closely related to Romanization in general, and in particular to the spread of citizenship with its accompanying ideals about the obligation of heirs to commemorate testators.[7] That argument is an important one, although it needs some modification to take into account epitaphs not set up by the heirs of the deceased — those, for example, set up by parents to their children, or by a commemoree in his or her own lifetime[8] — and also non-funerary epigraphy, and those inscriptions apparently set up by non-citizens to judge from the absence of the *tria nomina*.

Yet although all the correlations observed between epigraphy and other phenomena provide useful contexts for understanding some categories of inscription and some aspects of Roman epigraphy, none of them provide a general account of the epigraphic culture of the Roman Empire. Treating epigraphy as simply a component of 'urban culture' may help us understand the inscriptions of central Italy or western Asia Minor, but takes no account of the high epigraphic density of parts of the Empire such as Numidia or the Rhineland which were relatively under-urbanized, but highly militarized. Equally the spread of citizenship and Roman testamentary conventions cannot account for the inscriptions of Italy, the entire population of which was enfranchized some three centuries before Caracalla's grant. Approaches to epigraphy based on mortuary and funerary practices[9] are difficult to apply to the epigraphic culture of areas

[3] R. P. Saller and B. D. Shaw, 'Tombstones and Roman family relations in the Principate: civilians, soldiers, and slaves', *JRS* 74 (1984), 124–56, at 124, estimate that between 170,000 and 190,000 of around 250,000 extant inscriptions are epitaphs. Such global figures conceal considerable regional contrasts. W. Eck, 'Römische Grabinschriften. Aussagabsicht und Aussagefähigkeit im funerären Kontext', in H. von Hesberg and P. Zanker (eds), *Römische Gräberstraßen. Selbstdarstellung — Status — Standard* (1987), 25–41, at 25, estimates more than 35,000 of the 39,000 inscriptions in *CIL* VI (from the city of Rome) were funerary, while M. Biró, 'The inscriptions of Roman Britain', *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 27 (1975), 13–58, at 42, estimates that votive altars outnumber tombstones in *RIB* (from Roman Britain) by around 3 to 1. The contrast probably reflects differences between military and civilian rather than between peripheral and central epigraphies.

[4] cf. M. Corbier, 'L'écriture dans l'éspace public romain', in *L'Urbs. Espace urbain et histoire Ier siècle av. J.C. — III siècle ap. J.C. Actes du colloque international organisé par le CNRS et l'École française à Rome 8–12 mai 1985*, Collection de l'École française à Rome 98 (1987), 27–60.

[5] MacMullen, op. cit. (n. 1, 1982).

[6] For posited connections with urbanism and demography, W. Jongman, *The Economy and Society of Pompeii* (1988), at 68–9; with the military, Biró, op. cit. (n. 3); with Romanization, A. Mócsy, *Gesellschaft und Romanisation in der römischen Provinz Moesia Superior* (1970), 199–212, J. Nicols, 'Indigenous culture and the process of Romanisation in Iberian Galicia', *AJP* 108 (1987), 129–51, Wightman, op. cit. (n. 1), 168–90, although for some doubts about this approach see J. C. Mann, 'Epigraphic consciousness', *JRS* 75 (1985), 204–6, and A. Cepas, *The North of Britannia and the North-West of Hispania. An Epigraphic Comparison*, BAR Int. Ser. 470 (1989), 54–8. For cautious links between epigraphy and literacy cf. W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (1989), 265–9, criticized by R. Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (1992), 162–5.

[7] Meyer, op. cit. (n. 1). For a related argument about Attic epigraphy, cf. E. Meyer, 'Epitaphs and citizenship in classical Athens', *JHS* 113 (1993), 99–121.

[8] I am very grateful to Richard Saller for these points.

[9] e.g. I. Morris, *Death-Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity* (1992), 167–73, drawing on A. Cannon, 'The historical dimension in mortuary expressions of status and sentiment', *Current Anthropology* 30.4 (1989), 437–58.

like Britain where the majority of extant inscriptions are votive altars. The aim of this article is to build on these approaches to formulate some more general propositions about the place of epigraphic culture in the social history of the early Empire.

It might, however, be objected that the question is ill posed. The epigraphic habit, one might argue, if a useful reminder of the limitations of our evidence, is essentially a modern construct that does not correspond to any Roman cultural category and as an object of analysis is formulated at an inappropriate level. On the one hand, the notion might be thought too narrow, in excluding from consideration public writing on media other than bronze and stone. Perishable notices painted on walls in Pompeii, notices set up in temples on painted boards, imperial letters posted for public display and the inscriptions on everyday objects such as coins and *instrumentum domesticum* should perhaps all be grouped together with inscriptions if we are to understand the *public* nature of Roman epigraphy.[10] Perhaps it would even be better to explore early imperial Roman notions and uses of writing in general.[11] That objection does have some force, and other, less permanent, forms of public writing do need to be borne in mind. Equally, it is important not to privilege the written component of inscriptions — if they were monumental writing they were also inscribed monuments and need to be set in the context of other monuments. This is an important point to which I shall return below.[12] This observation leads onto an alternative criticism of the notion of an 'epigraphic habit', that it includes too much rather than too little, and that it would be preferable to study epitaphs in the context of other mortuary practices: honorific inscriptions alongside the statues they so often accompanied, and votive altars with other offerings that did not employ the written word, like the models of parts of the body sometimes dedicated at healing shrines. As an object of analysis, the epigraphic habit might be thought to be situated uneasily between investigations at the level of the place of writing in Roman society, and more limited studies of particular cultural practices in which writing might play a more or less significant part.

Yet there remains something to be gained from attempting to approach the phenomenon at the level of analysis envisaged by the notion of an epigraphic culture. Firstly, some Romans at least did have something approximating to our category of epigraphy. Hermeros' claim in the *Satyricon* to be able to read 'litteras lapidarias' might suggest a consciousness of some of the unifying features of Latin epigraphy.[13] More certainly, the same specialist craftsmen who produced ancient epitaphs on a regular basis must have been called upon to inscribe the rarer honorific decrees of the town council, at least when they were inscribed on stone rather than on bronze.[14] Secondly, MacMullen's great contribution in evoking a sense of audience is to direct attention to the distinguishing quality of inscriptions as public writing and hence as monuments. Not all monuments included writing, and not all writing was monumental, but the intersection of these two categories is very close to our category of epigraphy. It follows that understanding epigraphy — monumental writing — as a cultural phenomenon depends on taking both the monumental and the written aspects of inscriptions seriously.

[10] Recent treatments showing the potential of all these media include J. L. Franklin, 'Literacy and the parietal inscriptions of Pompeii', in Humphrey, op. cit. (n. 1), 77–98; P. Veyne, ' "Titulus Praelatus": offrande, solemnisation et publicité dans les ex-voto greco-romains', *RA* (1983), 281–300; Corbier, op. cit. (n. 4); W. V. Harris (ed.), *The Inscribed Economy: Production and Distribution in the Roman Empire in the Light of instrumentum domesticum*, JRA supp. ser. 6 (1993).

[11] F. Desbordes, *Idées romaines sur l'écriture* (1990). For one aspect of this larger question A. K. Bowman and G. D. Woolf (eds), *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World* (1994).

[12] Eck, op. cit. (n. 3), Morris, op. cit. (n. 9), 164–8, for this point in relation to tombstones.

[13] Petronius, *Satyricon* 58. On writing in Petronius, cf. N. Horsfall, ' "The uses of literacy" and the Cena Trimalchionis', *Greece and Rome* 36 (1989), 74–89, 194–209. Cf. also Pliny, *Epistles* VIII.6.14 discussed below.

[14] G. C. Susini, *The Roman Stonecutter* (1973), 16–20.

II. THE EPIGRAPHIC IMPULSE

Why monumentalize? A well-known ode of Horace suggests some motivations. The epitaph to his third book of *Odes* begins:

> I have built a monument more lasting than bronze,
> Taller than the pyramid that marks the grave of a king.
> Neither driving rain nor blasts of wind
> Can efface it;
> nor the numberless years, nor the passing of time.
>
> I shall not perish utterly, and a great part of myself
> Will escape the grave; and I shall grow
> Revived by the praises of posterity,
> For as long as the priest and silent virgin climb the Capitol.[15]

Here then is one component part of MacMullen's 'sense of audience'. Strictly not an audience, since Roman monuments operated through symbols — images and inscriptions — which were directed to the eye, rather than the ear, of the observer. But monuments do imply a sense of posterity, of viewers and readers to come, whose progress through the public spaces or along the public roads where monuments were often set up, might be arrested, and who might then pause to read, and to remember.[16] Monuments, the *Ode* implies, if they lasted long enough and were prominent enough, would preserve the fame of the commemorated, acting like mnemonics to trigger memories and perhaps speech. Once evoked, the deeds and qualities of the monumentalized would be rehearsed, whether orally or in silence, and admired, and he or she would not 'perish utterly'.

The younger Pliny provides two further examples of contemporary responses to monumental writing.[17] Pliny's *Letters*, didactic as well as literary creations, model appropriate responses to monuments, offering an insight into the ideals with which an educated Roman might have approached the reading and commissioning of monumental inscriptions.[18] The first example is Pliny's description of his reaction on discovering that the tomb of Verginius Rufus remained neglected and unfinished.

> I was filled with resentment and sorrow that in the tenth year after his death his remains and ashes were neglected and lay without any inscription or name, although his memory and glory have spread throughout the entire world. Yet he himself had left instructions and taken care to ensure that his divine and undying deed should be inscribed in these verses: HERE LIES RUFUS WHO ONCE DEFEATED VINDEX AND SAVED THE EMPIRE, NOT FOR HIS OWN, BUT FOR HIS COUNTRY'S SAKE. Faithfulness in friendship is so rare, and the dead are so easily forgotten, that we should build our own monuments for ourselves and assume ourselves the duties of our heirs.[19]

Pliny presents a tableau of *exempla,* the general who puts his patriotism before his own interests and chooses a modest tomb and epitaph on his rural estate; the faithless heir whose laziness has resulted in the unfinished tomb; and Pliny himself, displaying his

[15] 'Exegi monumentum aere perennius | regalique situ pyramidum altius, | quod non imber edax, non Aquilo impotens | possit diruere aut innumerabilis | annorum series et fuga temporum. | non omnis moriar, multaque pars mei | vitabit Libitinam: usque ego postera | crescam laude recens, dum Capitolium | scandet cum tacita virgine pontifex'. *Odes* III.30.1–9 adapting Pindar, *Pythian* VI.6ff. to a Roman context.

[16] cf. L. Foxhall, 'Monumental ambitions: the significance of posterity in Greece', in N. Spencer (ed.), *Time, Tradition and Society in Greek Archaeology. Bridging the 'Great Divide'* (1995), 132–49. I am very grateful to Dr Foxhall for showing me this paper in advance of publication.

[17] On these letters cf. also Eck, op. cit. (n. 3), at 76–7.

[18] For this sort of reading of Pliny's letters cf. W. M. Beard, '*Ancient Literacy* and the function of the written word in Roman religion', in Humphrey, op. cit. (n. 2), 35–58, at 39–42.

[19] 'Subit indignatio cum miseratione, post decimum mortis annum reliquias neglectumque cinerem sine titulo sine nomine iacere, cuius memoria orbem terrarum gloria pervagetur. At ille mandaverat caveratque, ut divinum et immortale factum versibus inscriberetur: Hic situs est Rufus, pulso qui Vindice quondam imperium adseruit non sibi sed patriae. Tam rara in amicitiis fides, tam parata oblivio mortuorum, ut ipsi nobis debeamus etiam conditoria exstruere omniaque heredum officia praesumere'. Pliny, *Epistles* VI.10.3–5.

moral and emotional sensitivity to the reader. The letter also suggests and affirms certain moral priorities, the duties of friendship, the obligation of heirs to commemorate the dead, the virtues of modesty and of patriotism, as well as providing a monument to Rufus and incidentally celebrating an opponent of tyranny and connection of Pliny.

The second example explores rather different reactions. Pliny describes a monument set up to the imperial ex-slave Pallas on the road to Tibur, inscribed:

> For the sake of his faithfulness and loyalty towards his former masters, the senate decreed that this man be offered the insignia of a praetor and fifteen million sesterces, but he accepted the honour only.[20]

Pliny's commentary condemns both the offer of the honours and Pallas' refusal, which he presents as a travesty of offering posterity an example of modesty. Pliny offers his correspondent a choice of responses — outrage and ridicule — and the tone of the letter vacillates between these two positions, as if a monument to Pallas were literally incomprehensible. In another letter Pliny relates how he looked up the original decree of the senate in Pallas' honour. In the course of his lengthy description of the respective roles played by the senate, the emperor and by his former slave, he describes how the emperor's statement and the senate's decree were to be inscribed on a bronze tablet to be fixed to the statue of the Deified Julius.

> The busiest place in the city was chosen, for them to be read by contemporaries and by posterity. It was decided that all the honours of this most disgusting slave should be inscribed in bronze, both those he had refused and those he had accepted (as far as those who had granted them had the power to do so). The praetorian insignia of Pallas were carved and inscribed onto public and eternal monuments, just as if they were ancient treaties, just as if they were sacred laws.[21]

Pliny represents this public debasement as putting Pallas' own advertisement of the incident into the shade. But again his attack is based on paradoxes, on the bizarre positions into which senate and emperor are led in honouring a freedman. The honours offered Pallas belonged to an elaborate symbolic system,[22] but the system has been so abused that the symbols are rendered meaningless. Pallas, whether he accepts the offered reward or turns it down, whether he records the honours in full or laconically, cannot avoid presenting a travesty of these symbols and values, because of who and what he is.

Some general Plinian assumptions about monuments emerge from his argument of these two cases. To begin with, the discussion of the Pallas monuments reassures us that funerary and non-funerary epigraphy were not necessarily regarded as quite different phenomena. Pallas' personal monument, presumably a tomb from its location on one of the axial roads leading out of Rome, could be regarded as comparable to the honorific bronze tablet to be attached to the statue of the Deified Julius, to ancient treaties, and to sacred laws. Throughout, there is also the same emphasis as in the Horatian *Ode* on the role of monuments (of all categories) in publicizing and preserving the reputation and deeds of the commemorated after their deaths. Ideally, the monument should be congruent with the reputation and worthy of the commemorated. The monumentalization of Pallas is thus as great a disgrace to his commemorators, as is the failure to monumentalize Rufus. Thirdly, Pliny's modelling of these responses reveals an awareness that it is possible to read monuments in different ways. The inadequacy of Rufus' memorial requires Pliny to produce a corrective substitute in the form of the letter, while his letters about Pallas may be read as attempts to subvert the intended

[20] 'Huic senatus ob fidem pietatemque erga patronos ornamenta praetoria decrevit et sestertium centies quinquagies, cuius honore contentus fuit'. Pliny, *Epistles* VII.29.2.

[21] 'Delectus est celeberrimus locus, in quo legenda praesentibus, legenda futuris proderentur. Placuit aere signari omnes honores fastidiosissimi mancipi, quosque repudiasset quosque quantum ad decernentes pertinet gessit. Incisa et insculpta sunt publicis aeternisque monumentis praetoria ornamenta Pallantis, sic quasi foedera antiqua, sic quasi sacrae leges'. Pliny, *Epistles* VIII.6.14.

[22] On aspects of the origin of this system, cf. W. Eck, 'Senatorial self-representation: developments in the Augustan period', in F. G. B. Millar and E. Segal (eds), *Caesar Augustus: Seven Aspects* (1984), 129–67; A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Roman arches and Greek honours: the language of power at Rome', *PCPS* 216 (n.s. 36) (1990), 143–81.

reading of the monuments by proclaiming them symbolically illegible.[23] More generally, it is possible to assert that Romans intended monuments to be prominent and enduring symbols, important not in themselves but for what they were reminders of.[24] That precept applied to sacred laws and treaties as much as to funerary, honorific, and building inscriptions or to those votives which commemorated a vow made to a god, the god's response, and the fulfilment of the vow. The eternity of monuments guaranteed not lasting things, but rather momentary events of lasting significance — treaties, virtuous acts (*res gestae*), acts of public generosity, acts of religious devotion. Often these events were of lasting significance because they created new relationships, for example of patronage or peace, but always they were important because they had changed the world. As such, monumentalizing was a way of making claims about the world, claims which might be challenged, just as Pliny challenges the claims made about Pallas' worth, but public claims none the less. The reality, visibility, and prominence of a monument supported the claim it commemorated,[25] whether it was a claim about the state, or about the worth of an individual, or about the relationship between that individual and those who commemorated her or him.

Not all Roman monuments were inscribed, and even on those that were writing did not always play a prominent role. Perhaps most Roman inscriptions used images and words together to convey a meaning that was both fuller and less ambiguous.[26] The point may be illustrated by two of the commonest categories of inscriptions, votive altars and epitaphs. Votive inscriptions are commonly very short, consisting of little more than the name of the god, the name of the dedicator and a formula such as VSLM 'she/he fulfilled the vow willingly to the god who deserved it'. Occasionally some additional information is supplied, either an expansion of the name of the dedicators and or the god or else a phrase such as 'pro salute', 'in return for good health' that makes clearer the nature of the deal struck with the god. But the stone bearing the dedication is often shaped like an altar, and sometimes bears some pictorial representation of the god. Excavated sanctuaries suggest that these altars were set up in long lines as testimonies to the power of the god.[27] Not all votives were made in this form and many did not use writing at all but consisted of models either of the god or of footprints recording the presence of the worshipper. Occasionally, in some healing shrines, votives also took the form of healed parts of the body or inscribed accounts of the cure, and sometimes votive models were inscribed. The ubiquity of images warns us against privileging the use of writing in this process of monumentalization. Writing was one mode of representation that might be used in any of the component parts of the redemption of the vow (to identify the god, to identify the worshipper, or to memorialize the service in return for which the vow was fulfilled) but non-written images could be used in place of each of these elements. Tombstones too were not always inscribed with writing. In some parts of the Empire a relief image carved onto the stone was much more common, usually a picture of the deceased either in a conventional pose, for example seated or standing sometimes accompanied by family members, looking out of the stone, or else accompanied by workman's tools. These images might or might not be accompanied by texts. At the other extreme were brief epitaphs, naming the deceased and the dedicator, preceded and followed by conventional and standardized formulae. Again sometimes the epitaph may be expanded with more details about the individual named — local citizenship, military rank, tribe, or the age at death. The memorials chosen usually

[23] For a similar aristocratic assertion that some lives could not be monumentalized cf. Petronius, *Satyricon* 71 on Trimalchio's aspirations to preserve his name.

[24] *Digest* XI.7.2.6 (Ulpian), 'Monumentum est quod memoriae servandae gratia existat'. For an example from the Greek world, cf. G. M. Rogers, *The Sacred Identity of Ephesos. Foundation Myths of a Roman City* (1991), 19–22.

[25] J. Elsner, 'From the pyramids to Pausanias and Piglet: monuments, travel and writing', in S. Goldhill and R. Osborne (eds), *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture* (1994), 224–54, at 225 and 244–52.

[26] Eck, op. cit. (n. 22), at 132–3, for an insistence on this point. Cf. T. Hölscher, 'Die Geschichtsauffassung der römischer Repräsentationskunst', *JDAI* 95 (1980), 265–321, at 279–81.

[27] e.g. T. Derks, 'The perception of the Roman pantheon by a native élite: the example of votive inscriptions from Lower Germany', in N. Roymans and F. Theuws (eds), *Images of the Past. Studies on Ancient Societies in North-western Europe* (1991), 235–65, at 240–1, discussing a sanctuary at Osterburken (Baden-Württemberg).

conformed to a narrow range of tombstone types and would immediately have been recognizable as such, even by those who could not read them. Even when an inscription was not mounted on an altar or statue base, or accompanied by a relief or sculpture, it still remained a far from unadorned text.[28] Consider for a moment the size and forms of the letters inscribed, the layout of the inscription, and the devices used to highlight the text through its position; arranging it on lines, framing it in a panel, lining the individual letters with red paint. Formulaic elements were developed, like the ligatures that represented groups of letters with a single symbol, or abbreviations like DM, HSE, VSLM, or LDDD, which may in time have been read quasi-pictographically as symbols in themselves, just as we read R.I.P. or Q.E.D. Furthermore, a choice of media was available, from a range of different stones to bronze, each perhaps with its own significance.[29] At the very least these devices claimed authority by asserting the monumentality of the text, its place in a cultural (and religious, social, and sometimes political) tradition, and its intended permanence. For the illiterate, as for literate who did not bother to read them, they made clear the nature and status of the text. So too did the setting of inscriptions. Most were originally set up alongside others, in 'epigraphic environments' such as cemeteries, the public spaces of a town, occasionally in epigraphic archives on the walls of public buildings like the Capitol in Rome or the theatre in Aphrodisias.[30] Both the format and location of an inscription might be said to constitute a claim to authority by association, and an assertion of conformity with the accepted norms. But it is possible to go further. The implication of the existence of *uninscribed* votives and tombstones reminds us that the text is not the defining or essential element of these artefacts. The historian's tendency to treat inscriptions as a special kind of text needs to be modified, in other words, with a recognition that they are also a special kind of monument.

Why was writing used at all on Roman monuments? Part of the answer emerges if we consider another common epigraphic category, honorific inscriptions voted to individuals by public bodies, such as cities, *collegia*, and provinces. Writing nearly always played some part in these honours. Like Pallas' inscription it might be in the form of tablets set up in prominent places, and it might be incorporated in longer public inscriptions, but very often it took the form of inscriptions on the bases of statues. These images, displayed in public places designated by decree, were usually life-size images of individuals dressed in the public costume of councillors, magistrates, or priests, or else in military garb, often mounted on horseback. The inscription, on the base sometimes recorded specific services and sometimes simply recorded the name, rank, offices, and honours of the figure portrayed. On these monuments the two media, text and image, together with their context in particular epigraphic environments, may be thought of as working together both to expand and to circumscribe the representation in question: the statue confirms and illustrates the text and draws attention to it, while the text directs the reader to a particular appreciation or view of the statue. Writing contributed to the monument through its capacity to communicate things that could not be portrayed in a single pictorial image, a sequence of offices held, for example, a military as well as a civic career, priesthoods as well as magistracies and perhaps a notable benefaction. It also contributed a name.

Names are in fact extraordinarily prominent on all categories of Roman inscription. Some inscriptions consisted mostly of names: the municipal *album* from Canusium lists patrons of senatorial rank, patrons of equestrian rank, and then all the town councillors in order of the magistracies they had held, while the inscriptions recording the Trajanic alimentary schemes at Veleia and Ligures Baebiani consist of huge lists of landowners,

[28] cf. on the significance of the choice and ornamentation of scripts, R. McKitterick, 'Text and image in the Carolingian world', R. McKitterick (ed.), *The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe* (1990), 297–318, especially at 310–14.

[29] C. Williamson, 'Monuments of bronze; Roman legal documents on bronze tablets', *Classical Antiquity* 6 (1987), 160–83, cf. M. H. Crawford, 'The laws of the Romans: knowledge and diffusion', in *Estudios sobre la Tabula Siarensis*, Anejos del Archivo Español de Arqueologia 9 (1988), 127–40.

[30] For investigations into the structure of these environments, cf. G. Zimmer, *Locus datus decreto decurionum. Zur Statuenaufstellung zweier Forumslagen im römischen Africa* (1989) and Derks, op. cit. (n. 27).

surmounted, in much larger letters, by the name of the emperor. Lists of names included the *Fasti* in Rome, listing consuls and generals who had celebrated triumphs, and the *Res Gestae* of Augustus in which the long lists of names were those of the conquered.[31] The elaborate official names and titles of the emperors were everywhere. Official documents were dated with the names of consuls, of municipal magistrates, or the successive numbered grants of tribunician power which served as regnal years for the early emperors. Milestones were named for the magistrates and generals responsible for building roads. Inscribed copies of imperial letters often named the ambassadors who had spoken before the emperor. On the more common categories of inscription, names played an even more central role. Tombstones bore the names not only of the departed but (unlike most Greek gravestones) normally also the names of those who had dedicated the stone. The dedicators were often, although not always, the heirs of the deceased, but the relationships they chose to stress were often couched in other terms: parental, filial, conjugal, patronal, or a relationship of comradeship based on service together in the ranks.[32] Names were naturally prominent on honorific and building inscriptions: public inscriptions of this kind in the Latin West often employed the fullest version of the name, including the *praenomina* of the father and grandfather and the tribe. It has already been pointed out that the essential components of an inscribed votive were the name of the god and that of the worshipper. Mary Beard has recently suggested that this 'habit of naming played . . . a central role in defining the place of the individual within traditional paganism; in asserting his or her incorporation within the amalgam of rituals, practices and "truths" that made up ancient cult'.[33] It also served to assert the precise identity of the god in the bewildering polytheism of the early Empire. That sense of writing as an assertion of membership is a valuable one, but in many votives the inscription of a name might equally be seen as a more personal act, a public acknowledgement of a personal relationship made between a worshipper and a god, and the inscription of a person into the divine order.[34] The idea that inscribing a name served to locate a person in a nexus of relationships, human and divine, is more widely applicable.

Writing, I suggest then, was important in Roman monuments, because words were the only images precise enough to convey the complex names and relationships that defined the identities of individual Romans. With the expansion and complexification of Roman society, the need to define identities precisely became increasingly important. Other societies might manage with coats of arms or totemic animals, but the primary function of monuments in the early Empire was as devices with which to assert the place of individuals within society. Aspects of this concern have already emerged in the arguments that Roman monumental writing often seems to have been used by individuals to assert their incorporation into a larger whole; that the object of monuments was often to establish or preserve a particular relationship; and with the idea that monuments were believed to offer individuals a chance of evading complete oblivion after their deaths. These considerations are equally valid for monuments set up by communities or other collectivities, since for the most part they celebrated individual magistrates and benefactors. No simple formula exists for explaining why inscriptions were set up, but the desire to fix an individual's place within history, society, and the cosmos provides a plausible psychological background to 'the epigraphic impulse'.

[31] On the symbolic aspects of lists of names, C. Nicolet, *L'inventaire du monde: géographie et politique aux origines de l'Empire romain* (1988).

[32] Saller and Shaw, op. cit. (n. 3).

[33] Beard, op. cit. (n. 18), at 47 and cf. in general 44–8.

[34] Another way of viewing these inscriptions is as gifts designed to create relationships; cf. S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power. The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (1984), 65–77, on worship as a component of a system of gift exchange that constituted the symbolic unity of the Empire. Equally, funerary inscriptions set up by heirs might be seen as reciprocating testamentary bequests; cf. Meyer, op. cit. (n. 1) and N. Purcell, 'Tomb and suburb', in H. von Hesberg and P. Zanker (eds), *Römische Gräberstraßen. Selbstdarstellung — Status — Standard* (1987), 25–41. Some inscriptions were formally presented to those named in them, for example the certificates (*diplomata*) that marked the grant of citizenship to auxiliary veterans or *tabulae patronatus* like *CIL* VI.1492, a bronze copy of the municipal decree whereby Ferentinum co-opted Titus Pomponius Bassus as patron, which was intended for display in his house. On this genre of inscription, cf. J. Nicols, 'Tabulae Patronatus: a study of the agreement between patron and client community', *ANRW* II.13 (1980), 535–61.

III. EPIGRAPHIC CULTURE, MONUMENTALITY AND ROMAN SOCIETY

It has recently been suggested that historians might do better to focus on an 'epigraphic culture' rather than on the epigraphic habit.[35] Among the advantages of this formulation is that it directs attention away from the dedicator and her or his 'sense of audience', onto an investigation of the social contexts within which Roman monumental writing flourished.[36] A convenient starting point is a consideration of the wider relationships between monumentality and society.

Not all societies build monuments, yet monumentalization has been a widespread practice in all periods of human history since, or perhaps even before, the origins of settled societies and agriculture. Monuments are so central to the study of early societies that it is perhaps unsurprising that the best work done on them has been produced by prehistorians.[37] Recent work has concentrated on how monument building draws societies together, entrenches social power, expresses particular views of time, space and cosmology, and might civilize and appropriate landscapes. Central to all these uses of monuments are their two quintessential qualities, expense and durability. Monuments of all sorts, whether built of earthen ramparts, megaliths, baked clay or stone, require a significant investment of skills, time and energy, making monuments rare enough to be symbolically prominent. Equally, it is the capacity of monuments to resist time that makes them suitable as vehicles for representing the contingent as permanent and the contestable as fixed. Roman monuments constitute no exception to these general rules. Roman monumentality does differ in significant ways from Stonehenge and the Pyramids, most strikingly in the private and personal nature of many Roman monuments, perhaps a sign of the greater individualism of ancient societies as compared to most prehistoric ones.[38] Yet in other respects, Roman monumentality conforms to patterns well attested in a range of societies. Most important in this context is the timing or periodicity of monumental building. The construction and use of monuments rarely proceeds in a uniform or gradual fashion. On the contrary, cycles in monumentality have been identified, alternations between the types or scale of monument constructed, periods of new monumentalization, periods in which few monuments were built, and very often periods in which old or abandoned monuments were re-appropriated through their restoration, elaboration, conversion, and occasionally deliberate destruction.[39] These cycles seem neither to be random, nor to depend entirely on their own internal rhythms and dynamics, but rather to respond to social conditions. In particular, periods of monumentalization often seem to characterize the formative periods of cultures,

[35] R. Gordon, M. Beard, J. Reynolds, and C. Roueché, 'Roman Inscriptions 1986–90', *JRS* 83 (1993), 131–58, at 154–5, for this formulation.

[36] W. M. Beard, 'Writing and ritual. A study of diversity and expansion in the Arval Acta', *PBSR* 40 (1985), 114–62, at 146, states clearly an analytical difficulty in accounting for long-term trends in the Arval Acta, which may be applied to the explanation of epigraphic trends in general. 'Unless we suppose that the writing of our texts took place in complete cultural isolation, we cannot deny the influence on their character of external factors. We cannot expect that an explanation could be generated from the texts alone. Our difficulty lies in deciding *which* external factors should be seen as influential on the precise character of the texts'.

[37] R. J. Bradley, *Altering the Earth*, Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Monograph 8 (1993), is the most readable and learned introduction to this literature, building on R. J. Bradley, 'Studying Monuments', in R. J. Bradley and J. Gardiner (eds), *Neolithic Studies*, BAR Int. ser. 133 (1984), 61–6, and R. J. Bradley, 'The Archaeology of Monuments', in R. J. Bradley, *Consumption, Change and the Archaeological Record*, University of Edinburgh Department of Archaeology Occasional Paper 13 (1985), 1–20. For a recent selection of approaches cf. *World Archaeology* 22.2 (1990) on the theme 'Monuments and the Monumental'. For another attempt to apply some of these ideas to Roman epigraphy see J. C. Barrett, 'Chronologies of remembrance: the interpretation of Roman inscriptions', *World Archaeology* 25.2 (1993), 236–47.

[38] Several late prehistoric societies did construct personal funerary monuments of comparable scale to ancient ones, but perhaps only for the burial of chiefs, which might be considered a transitional category between collective and personal monumentalization. The prominence of sumptuary legislation concerned with funerals in Archaic Greece and Rome suggests that this 'privatization' of monumentality may have been among the more important ways through which aristocracies established themselves in the earliest ancient states, cf. I. Morris, *Burial and Society: The Rise of the Greek City-State* (1987) and op. cit. (n. 9), 149–55.

[39] Bradley, op. cit. (n. 37, 1993) on these processes.

civilizations, or states, rather than their apogees.[40] More generally, monuments may be seen as responses to perceptions of insecurity:[41] their permanency operates to deny change, such as threats to the power of their builders or to the status quo in general. The uses of monuments might be compared to the uses of tradition, also most commonly elaborated, developed and reworked in times of perceived change and instability.[42] Variations in the tempo and nature of monument building correspond, then, not so much with variations in the capacity of peoples to monumentalize, as with variations in their desire or perceived need to do so.

This anthropologically informed view of monumentality complements Roman views of *monumenta*, by inviting us to look for perceptions of change and instability to which Roman monuments might respond. It is not enough simply to point to any change, of course, since history never stands still, and all ages have their own anxieties.[43] To begin with we have to do with *perceptions* of change. Furthermore, the anxieties in question must also be carefully linked to the precise nature of the monuments concerned. Recent work provides the basis for an investigation of the anxieties with which Romans viewed the future and tried to control it. The elaboration of astrology and of the interpretation of dreams shows how science was harnessed to these aims. Oracular consultations, sacrifices, magic, and perhaps gambling offered alternative or complementary responses.[44] Alongside these devices we may set philosophical remedies for the precariousness of fortune, and the legal devices designed to secure the future, testaments and also a kind of trust, *fideicommissa*.[45] Most of these responses were made use of by wide sectors of Roman society, and none were wholly confined to either 'élite' or 'popular' culture (if indeed such entities existed in a discrete sense in the ancient world). The locations of these activities were various: the cities of the Empire certainly, but also the army, and, in the case of oracles, many rural sites. In fact, wherever we are able to look in the Roman world, lawyers, astrologers, oracle-mongers, and gamblers are ubiquitous. Many of these sciences were, after all, very old indeed, and had been created in societies very different from those of the early Empire. Nevertheless, their popularity and prominence in the early Empire is striking, as is the extent to which they fascinated

[40] J. F. Cherry, 'Generalisation and the archaeology of the state', in D. Green, C. C. Haselgrove and M. Spriggs (eds), *Social Organisation and Settlement*, BAR Int. ser. 47 (1978), 411–37; B. G. Trigger, 'Monumental architecture: a thermodynamic explanation of symbolic behaviour', *World Archaeology* 22.2 (1990), 119–32. By 'formative' I mean those periods in which societies and cultures were malleable enough to be reconstructed and redirected in fundamental ways, which, once institutionalized and routinized, acted as durable and enduring social structures and practices, the formation, as it were, of habitus from practice. For example, the formative period of the Archaic Greek *polis* was characterized by various cultic activity around Bronze Age tombs and by the construction of monumental sanctuaries. On tomb cult, cf. A. M. Snodgrass, *Archaic Greece, the Age of Experiment* (1980), 38–40; I. Morris, 'Tomb cult and the "Greek Renaissance": the past in the present in the eighth century BC', *Antiquity* 62 (1988), 750–61; J. Whitley, 'Early states and hero cults: a reappraisal', *JHS* 108 (1988), 173–82; idem, 'The monuments that stood before Marathon: tomb cult and hero cult in archaic Attica', *AJA* 98 (1994), 213–30; C. Antonaccio, 'Contesting the past: hero cult, tomb cult and epic in early Greece', *AJA* 98 (1994), 389–410. For sanctuaries, F. de Polignac, *La naissance de la cité grecque* (1984); C. A. Morgan, *Athletes and Oracles: the Transformation of Olympia and Delphi in the Eighth Century B.C.* (1990); S. E. Alcock and R. G. Osborne (eds), *Placing the Gods* (1994).

[41] Bradley, op. cit. (n. 37), with I. R. Hodder, 'Social and economic stress and material culture patterning', *American Anthropology* 44 (1979), 446–54; J. Thomas, *Rethinking the Neolithic* (1991), 29–55.

[42] E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *Social Memory* (1992). Snodgrass, op. cit. (n. 40), stresses the importance of traditions of an heroic age in connection with tomb cult in Archaic Greece.

[43] The rather different anxieties of the third century, for example, on which cf. G. Alföldy, 'The crisis of the third century as seen by contemporaries', *GRBS* 15 (1974), 89–111, found expression in very different ways to the personal anxieties that prompted most early imperial epigraphy.

[44] Recently, S. R. F. Price, 'The future of dreams: from Freud to Artemidorus', *Past and Present* 113 (1986), 3–37; T. S. Barton, *Power and Knowledge: Astrology, Physiognomics and Medicine in the Roman Empire* (1994); N. Purcell, 'Literate games: Roman urban society and the game of Alea', *Past and Present* 147 (1995), 3–37.

[45] For philosophical concerns of this type, cf. the passages of Epictetus discussed in F. G. B. Millar, 'Epictetus and the imperial court', *JRS* 55 (1965), 141–8. For a different philosophical response to these same anxieties, cf. T. N. Habinek, 'An aristocracy of virtue: Seneca on the beginnings of wisdom', *YCS* 19 (1992), 187–203. On law, E. Champlin, *Final Judgements: Duty and Emotion in Roman Wills 200 B.C.–A.D. 250* (1991), on the development of testamentary law, D. Johnston, *Roman Law of Trusts* (1988), on *fideicommissa*.

the élite and incurred imperial hostility.[46] It is in the context of this widespread preoccupation with a personal future that I suggest the epigraphic culture be inserted.

Like all monuments, inscriptions were intended to defy change and to entrench a particular view, in this case of the self. The specific anxieties to which inscriptions seem to have been addressed revolved largely around identity. The identities that were preserved through monumentalization might be defined essentially, in terms of qualities or virtues, such as conjugal affection, loyalty, or patriotism, for example; or of personal achievements (*res gestae*) such as embassies performed, military successes, or the magistracies or priesthoods held. Identities might also be constructed relationally, that is in terms of membership of particular collectivities — *collegia, familiae*, tribes — or else as friends, fellow-soldiers, children, or parents. All these points apply to non-funerary as much as to funerary epigraphy. Both sorts of identification related to anxieties specific to early imperial society.

Most obvious was the fear of oblivion, of loss of the self. The point, made explicitly in the passages of Horace and Pliny already discussed, needs little elaboration except to note that the survival of one's *fama* was perhaps all the more important in a society with little agreed eschatology. Roman testaments were often pre-occupied with ensuring that they be remembered, whether by establishing foundations to preserve their tombs, by setting up foundations to fund public celebrations on their birthdays, or through legacies and manumissions.[47] The fear of oblivion is evident in its use as a sanction, for example in the device we term *damnatio memoriae*, which involved the destruction of all monuments to an individual, images as well as inscriptions, or in the ban in the *Senatus Consultum de Gn. Pisone* on the use of his *praenomen* by his descendants. Pliny's conceit that, despite his eminence, Pallas had been so forgotten that his monument could be re-discovered and his honours needed to be researched, relates to the same set of values.

But inscriptions did more than simply preserve memory, they also publicized it. Romans seem to have been intensely aware that they lived their lives in public, and *personae* were conceived of largely in terms of publicly validated concepts such as *dignitas* and *aestimatio*, *honores*, and *fama*. It is easier to document this concern through literature produced by the élite, but consideration of religious cult, of festivals and games and of attitudes to death suggest the idea had a wider currency.[48] This sense that one's worth was measured in public — rather than, for example, by one's own conscience, or in the eyes of God — constituted a part of MacMullen's 'sense of audience'. If this aspect of early imperial society encouraged individuals to construct identities under the gaze of the public, it also induced corresponding anxieties. The peculiarly Roman form of competition termed *aemulatio* contained within it a tension between superlative and normative behaviour. On the one hand, Romans struggled to surpass others and differentiate themselves from their peers and rivals, yet they were also acutely aware of the dangers that in so doing they might transgress the norms of what was appropriate to their social or cultural identity.[49] Epigraphy, with its highly formulaic presentation of social *personae* standardized yet at the same time individualized, offered a partial remedy to the problem of how to surpass and conform at the same time.

Finally, may be added anxieties about what might be termed social dislocation. In Section II it was argued that setting up inscriptions offered Romans a way to assert their place within history, within society, and within the cosmos. The common practice of recording the deceased's *origo* or local citizenship on tombstones of those who died away

[46] Barton, op. cit. (n. 44), for these developments. The number of treatises produced on all these subjects in the early Empire is very striking.

[47] K. Hopkins, *Death and Renewal. Sociological Studies in Roman History 2* (1983), at 247–55; D. Johnston, 'Munificence and *municipia*: bequests to towns in classical Roman law', *JRS* 75 (1985), 105–25; Champlin, op. cit. (n. 45), at 25–8.

[48] cf. C. A. Barton, *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans. The Gladiator and the Monster* (1993), for an impressionistic but insightful exploration of these themes.

[49] cf. C. Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (1993), at 150–60 and 200–4, for parallel examples of dilemmas generated by *aemulatio*.

from home is a case in point.[50] Equally, private votives offered a means of establishing a relationship between the dedicator and one of a wide range of possible deities. Such devices may be seen as responses to increased levels of geographical and social mobility, to the increased possibility that an individual might exchange his or her place in society for one better, worse, or simply different. The very fluidity and mobility of imperial society thus provides one of the most important contexts for personal monumentality and the creation of an epigraphic culture.

This final point is worth elaborating. Where social roles are relatively fixed or tightly controlled, uncertainty is focused on other areas of human existence. Many of the subjects of concern revealed by Roman horoscopes, oracles and the like are of this kind, perennial anxieties about the length of one's life, love, marriage, children, sickness and so on. Yet others are concerned instead with social advancement, with the chance of obtaining wealth, enfranchisement, or high office. The increased differentiation of social roles under the Empire is one precondition for this sort of anxiety. Differences in wealth were much greater than in the world of the city state, and there were many more occupations, statuses, and professions available, aspects of the increased complexity of social and economic life, and the size and diversity of the Empire. But equally importantly, the chances of exchanging one social role for another were also increased. The *possibility* of social mobility, then, was also an important feature of the Roman imagination.[51] One way in which it was explored was in one of the most characteristic forms of early imperial literature, the novel, where narrative is organized around successive shifts in fortune and status. Interestingly, these shifts are often connected in the novel with geographical mobility, an important aspect of the social mobility of the early Empire: actors, athletes, soldiers, slaves, merchants, sophists, missionaries, and aristocrats changed who they were partly through changing places. Equally, increased interchange between different parts of the Empire created cosmopolitan societies, especially in the larger cities, whose members were confronted with a bewildering diversity of cults, customs, and cultures. One consequence was a significant emancipation of many imperial subjects from two of the most fundamental structures of classical society and religion, the city and the family. Important though these institutions remained, membership of them became increasingly optional for significant numbers of people, allowing them the possibility of reconstituting their social identities.[52] The results are most evident in the religious history of the period,[53] but could equally be illustrated from many areas of cultural history, including diet, sexuality, entertainment, and architecture. The early imperial period, then, was characterized by a loosening of the bonds of society together with a concomitant rise in individualism.[54] Mobility brought fears as well as hopes, since not all change was chosen or desirable, and more prescriptive and tightly caged societies offer security as well as discipline.[55] Preoccupation with the future was wholly reasonable, then, since in some respects it really had

[50] cf. for example, the material gathered in J. Krier, *Die Treverer ausserhalb ihrer Civitas* (1981) and in L. Wierschowski, *Die regionale Mobilität in Gallien nach den Inschriften des 1. bis 3. Jahrhunderts n.Chr. Quantitative Studien zur Social- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte der westlichen Provinzen des römischen Reiches*, Historia Einzelschriften 91 (1995).

[51] For social mobility as an index of the likelihood that children will not succeed their parents in equivalent social roles, cf. W. G. Runciman, 'Accelerating social mobility: the case of Anglo-Saxon England', *Past and Present* 104 (1984), 3–30, reprinted in idem, *Confessions of a Reluctant Theorist. Selected Essays* (1989), 121–47.

[52] Although conversely the fact that the strength of familial and civic ties could no longer be taken for granted may have increased the valency of expressions of sentiment or loyalty in these directions.

[53] On the weakening of the civic model for religion, cf. R. Gordon, 'Religion in the Roman Empire: the civic compromise and its limits', in M. Beard and J. North (eds), *Pagan Priests* (1990), 235–55, further developed by J. B. Rives, *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage from Augustus to Constantine* (1995).

[54] For increasing individualism in one sector of imperial Roman society, cf. Hopkins, op. cit. (n. 47), 79–81. Full discussion of what 'individualism' might have comprised in this period or of ancient ideas of 'the self' cannot be attempted here. While there are evident connections with other moral developments of the early Empire, the stress envisaged here is on the collapse, multiplication, and complexification of norms rather than on the emergence of new coercive structures, and the field in which this process operated is conceived of as encompassing both 'public' and 'private' spheres, difficult in any case to distinguish or delineate in Roman society.

[55] Social mobility may, in fact, be thought of as one form of social risk: the higher the rates of social mobility, the greater the uncertainty about any individual's future identity, prosperity, and status. For social caging, cf. M. Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* I (1986), 38–40.

been rendered much less secure for a significant number of the inhabitants of the Empire: the desire to fix the past in stone for posterity was an understandable response to the uncertainty of the present.

IV. THE EXPANSION OF ROMAN SOCIETY

Let us return to the epigraphic habit. It is now possible to recast the problem as accounting for the spread of an epigraphic culture, a culture bound up with a specific set of social correlates, specifically with a set of hopes and anxieties about the future and posterity of individuals. Despite regional differences of style and expression, the inscriptions of Italy and the West — or better the Latin provinces of the Empire — are sufficiently similar, in their subject matter, their formal character and the chronology of their development, to regard this phenomenon as a single process, rather than as the appropriation of epigraphic technology by a series of neighbouring societies to create separate and distinctive epigraphic cultures. This judgement is a matter of degree, but comparison with the origins of dozens of parallel Mediterranean epigraphies in the archaic period makes the unitary nature of Latin epigraphy immediately evident. Deriving from this premise, my argument is a simple one. The spread of an epigraphic culture in the Latin Empire is to be seen as a symptom of a broader set of changes, which may conveniently be termed the expansion of Roman society.

The notion of the expansion of Roman society presupposes a view of what Roman society was. By the term I mean the society characterized by the fears and hopes described in Section III, together with the attitudes and practices that accompanied and gave rise to them. Highly differentiated as Roman society was, the identities owned by individual Romans were very diverse, as were their backgrounds and lifestyles. Yet these differences were structured in meaningful, rather than random, patterns, and in a sense constituted the social structure of the Empire.[56] Because attitudes and practices may be internalized and adopted piecemeal, society defined in these terms is not tightly bounded. It is not, then, the set of social practices of the citizen body or of citizens and Latins or any such group. In fact, the expansion of society in these terms may be thought of as the expansion of a set of patterns, as it were like a wave form moving through a medium. Alternatively it might be envisaged like a virus, reproducing by metabolizing the resources and structures of an area of living matter, or as a huge square dance into which more and more of those in a room are drawn, taking different parts but all participating in the movement of the whole. Socialization becomes the process through which individuals are drawn into the dance. Like a square dance, the social pattern may change, as participants take up new positions and make new movements. The disintegration of a society corresponds to the point when, gradually or at once, the dancers drop out of formation and divide into smaller groups whose movements are no longer co-ordinated as part of a coherent pattern.

Roman society had been expanding in this way for much of the late Republic. Successive enfranchisements, the Augustan social legislation, and the extension of the Latin right contributed to this expansion, but were also attempts to use law — state power — to order and control it. The fact that many of these expedients were re-active shows the expansion of Roman society had its own dynamic, although in some cases — the spread of Roman culture in the early imperial West, for example, or the run up to the Social War — expectations of a reaction characteristic of the Roman state may have accelerated the process. The expansion of societies is very common in history, but the expansion of Roman society may be contrasted with some others — feudalism, for example — in the fluid and unstable nature of the expanding society. Roman society did not just bring a new order, but a dynamic system in which the places of individuals were less fixed than before.

[56] For discussion of how routinized behaviour generates and sustains social structure, cf. A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (1984).

This dynamic system has been best studied for early imperial Italy. The recruitment of *domi nobiles* into the equestrian and then senatorial orders[57] was mirrored at lower levels of society in the careers of the *apparitores*, of the *Augustales*, and of their descendants.[58] Debate over actual rates of social mobility within the Italian municipalities continues,[59] but for present purposes the reality is immaterial, since it is perfectly clear, both from the archaeology of competitive emulation in the Vesuvian cities, and from élitist satire directed against *arrivistes* in the *Satyricon* and in other Silver Latin texts,[60] that anxieties about social mobility occupied a significant place in the collective imagination of early imperial Italy. Disappointed hopes and fears of downward mobility would have been as influential as instances of upward social mobility in forming and maintaining this set of attitudes, and for some it would have been a matter of pride or relief simply to have maintained a social position. The seried inscriptions of early imperial Italy may be seen as monuments that asserted individual successes against a background of the growing uncertainty engendered by a dynamic and fluid society. It is as if permanent memorials tacitly admitted that *elogia* and family memory and cult might no longer be enough to ensure that posterity remembered individuals. But it is important to be precise about the relationship suggested between the spread of epigraphic culture and the expansion of Roman society. Roman society galvanized and energized the Italian and provincial communities it expanded into. Roman styles of epigraphy provided one possible response to the new conditions of uncertainty. Rome both created the problem, then, and suggested one answer to it.[61] It is not surprising, then, that the area of Italy in which Roman epigraphic culture was most marked was central western Italy, where proximity to the city of Rome meant that both the galvanizing forces of Roman society were strongest and the Roman model was most evident. At Rome and in the Italian municipalities, Roman epigraphy was adopted most enthusiastically by élite members (in the broadest sense) and by ex-slaves. Roman epigraphy, at least as far as private monuments are concerned, originated as part of élite self-representation early in the Republican period, so it is unsurprising that the most elevated members of Italian communities rapidly adopted the practice as they became embroiled in the expansion of Roman society, especially where non-Latin epigraphies were already in existence. But ex-slaves too seem dramatically over-represented in the epigraphy of Rome and other Italian cities.[62] Several factors may be adduced to explain this. To begin with, this group would have had much greater contact with élite culture than would many of the freeborn inhabitants of Roman cities. Living in great houses, acquiring new identities and names through servitude, and continuing to live as part of those *familiae* even after manumission, former slaves imitated the culture of the great.

[57] e.g. by R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (1939); T. P. Wiseman, *New Men in the Roman Senate 139 B.C.–A.D. 14* (1971); M. Hammond, 'Composition of the Roman senate A.D. 68–235', *JRS* 47 (1957), 73–81; K. Hopkins, 'Elite mobility in the Roman Empire', *Past and Present* 32 (1965), 12–36, reprinted in M. I. Finley (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Society* (1974), 103–20; idem, op. cit. (n. 47), 31–200, but cf. now J. Hahn and P. M. M. Leunissen, 'Statistical method and inheritance of the consulate under the early Roman Empire', *Phoenix* 44 (1990), 60–81.

[58] N. Purcell, 'The Apparitores: a study of social mobility', *PBSR* 51 (1983), 125–73; R. Duthoy, 'La fonction sociale de l'augustalité', *Epigraphica* 36 (1974), 134–54; A. Abramenko, *Die municipale Mittelschicht im kaiserzeitlichen Italien. Zu einem neuen Verständnis von Sevirat und Augustalität* (1993); P. D. A. Garnsey, 'Descendants of freedmen in local politics: some criteria', in B. Levick (ed.), *The Ancient Historian and his Materials. Essays in Honour of C. E. Stevens on his Seventieth Birthday* (1975), 167–80.

[59] Most recently cf. Jongman, op. cit. (n. 6), 207–329; H. Mouritsen, 'A note on Pompeian epigraphy and social structure', *Classica et Mediaevalia* 41 (1990), 131–49.

[60] On luxury and status in the Vesuvian cities cf. A. F. Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (1994). For the *Satyricon* as a source for social history cf. P. Veyne, 'La vie de Trimalchion', *Annales ESC* 16.1 (1971), 213–47, with Garnsey, op. cit. (n. 58), taken into account in the revised edition published in P. Veyne, *La société romaine* (1990), 13–57.

[61] The process might be compared to a common method by which belief systems have expanded, by disturbing prior systems and then suggesting a more complete vision cf. E. Gellner, *The Psychoanalytic Movement. The Cunning of Unreason* (2nd edn, 1993), at 40–73.

[62] L. R. Taylor, 'Freedmen and freeborn in the epitaphs of imperial Rome', *AJPh* 82 (1962), 113–32; Eck, op. cit. (n. 3) and especially in 'Aussagefähigkeit epigraphischer Statistik und die Bestattung von Sklaven im kaiserzeitlichen Rom', in P. Kneißl und V. Losemann (eds), *Alte Geschichte und Wissenschaftsgeschichte, Festschrift für K. Christ zum 65. Geburtstag* (1988), 130–9. The issue is discussed at length in V. Hope, *Reflections of Status: A Contextual Study of the Roman Tombstones of Aquileia, Mainz and Nimes*, PhD thesis, University of Reading, 1994. I am grateful to Dr Hope for permission to cite this work.

More generally former slaves had, through their own manumission, experienced social mobility to an extent which must have heightened their sensitivity to the mutable nature of their social identities. The fact that such mobility was upward, predisposed them to personal monumentalization. Other factors may be invoked to account for the spread of epigraphic culture within Italy, but as these were not special to Italy it is worth considering first the spread of epigraphy throughout the western provinces.

A broad impression of this process is provided by the geographical distribution of Latin inscriptions. The crudest evaluation possible is to compare the density of extant inscriptions in different provinces and regions on the basis of the total number of inscriptions collected in *CIL*. The technique is not precise: many extant inscriptions are not included in these volumes and the areas they cover are very large, and rarely socially or geographically homogeneous. As a result, detail is lost and boundaries between neighbouring areas are exaggerated. On the other hand, this method does minimize the impact of chance finds and of locations where unusually large numbers of inscriptions have survived, whether because a city was abandoned and never reoccupied, or because the collection and recording of its inscriptions began very early. It is much more difficult to guard against systematic differences in the survival rate of inscriptions, due to variations in the availability of hard stone, in the intensity of later building, in the use of lime-kilns, or simply due to post-Roman settlement patterns and land use.[63] Nevertheless, epigraphic density does give a first approximation of the broad contours of Roman epigraphic culture. Figures, expressed in numbers of inscriptions recorded per 1000 km^2, are currently available for Italy and for the western provinces, ranging from over 400 in the Italian *regio* I (Campania), to 3.3 in Mauretania Tingitana.[64] That range of variation is very marked, as are the high figures for Italy in general when compared to the provinces. Only one of the eleven Italian *regiones* (Lucania), has less than 40 inscriptions/1000 km^2, a figure which only four provinces (Narbonensis, Africa Proconsularis, Numidia, and Dalmatia) surpass. Of the European provinces, only Noricum and Pannonia have figures higher than 20 and neither reaches 30. Yet even within Italy there are wide fluctuations, and the four central Italian *regiones* — I, IV, V and VI — stand out with figures above 150. If these distributions are examined in more detail, by plotting the location of concentrations of inscriptions or even of individual stones, more detail stands out. As yet, analyses at this scale have been conducted only in Britain and Gaul, where the paucity of surviving inscriptions makes such a study feasible. Roman Britain, with an epigraphic density of only 5.7, lends itself to this analysis.[65] Plotting every single inscription and subjecting the whole corpus to a series of analyses, Biró documented in great detail the extent to which Romano-British epigraphy was restricted to the north of Britain and in particular to the military camps on Hadrian's Wall, and it has been noted that 'of the 2,216 stones included in *RIB* I (excluding milestones), 1,914 came from the areas under military occupation',[66] the overwhelming majority of these being military in origin. The epigraphies of the Gallic and German provinces confirm and expand this picture. If clusters of inscriptions are plotted it is clear that the three areas where clusters are largest and most frequent are the Mediterranean province of Narbonensis, in particular the lower Rhône valley, the Rhineland, and a broad area of central-eastern France that connected the two zones.[67] The geographical distribution of

[63] Mann, op. cit. (n. 6), 204–6, on the impact of these factors on the surviving epigraphy of Roman Britain. Duncan-Jones, op. cit. (n. 1), appendix 13 discusses the problem generally.

[64] Duncan-Jones, op. cit. (n. 1), 339, and Harris, op. cit. (n. 6), 265–7, produce figures, with minor differences, for the Italian *regiones*. Jongman, op. cit. (n. 6), 68–9, maps Duncan-Jones' figures showing the close fit with levels of urbanization in peninsular Italy. Harris, on p. 268, extends the analysis to the western provinces.

[65] On Romano-British epigraphy, Biró, op. cit. (n. 3), and Mann, op. cit. (n. 6), on the basis of *RIB* I. For further analysis, cf. T. Blagg, 'Architectural munificence in Britain: the evidence of inscriptions', *Britannia* 21 (1990), 13–32, comparing Romano-British building inscriptions with those from non-Mediterranean Gaul and Germany analysed by E. Frézouls, 'Evergétisme et construction urbaine dans les Trois Gaules et les Germanies', *Revue du Nord* 66 (1984), 27–54.

[66] Mann, op. cit. (n. 6), 205.

[67] C. Goudineau in G. Duby (ed.), *Histoire de la France Urbaine I. La ville antique* (1980), 49, gives an idea of the general pattern. I hope to publish a more detailed analysis elsewhere. On the North, cf. Wightman, op. cit. (n. 1), 162–77.

Latin epigraphy can thus be simply characterized. In Italy, inscriptions were concentrated in the city of Rome and in the neighbouring regions. In the provinces, the densest concentrations were either in the more highly urbanized Mediterranean provinces — often but not exclusively those which had received Caesarian, Triumviral, or Augustan colonies — or else in highly militarized areas like Numidia, the Rhineland, and northern Britain.

Why urbanized and militarized areas? Although very different in many respects, these social environments shared a number of common features. To begin with they were both economically privileged locales, within which a significant number of individuals lived well above subsistence level. Secondly, both were characterized by a broad range of statuses, between which it was possible for individuals to move in the course of their lives. Towns were certainly more fluid in this respect, with populations that included significant numbers of 'intermediate status' between rich and poor,[68] among whom mobility operated largely outside the control of the state. But within the army too the gradated rank and promotion structure and the systematic enfranchisement of auxiliary veterans, and enrichment and social promotion of legionaries (before and after discharge), provided a more disciplined version of the same dynamic society.[69] Thirdly, both military and urban societies included high-ranking individuals, whose behaviour might serve as a model for those who aspired to social advancement. Fourthly, both cities and camps were integrated into wider networks of communication through which individuals and ideas passed more rapidly than normal within the Empire. Finally, many of the members of both sorts of societies originated outside them, whether as migrants from rural areas, as auxiliary or legionary recruits or as slaves. Urban and military communities were thus among the most socially fluid environments in Roman society, the locales where socialization and social mobility, with their attendant anxieties, were most common. The actual mechanisms by which social personae were transformed varied: personal patronage and education were important in both worlds, as was manumission for slaves, while the chances of economic activities or marriage were more significant in urban environments. But the social fluidity of both cities and camps is marked when set against the social environments we can envisage among more rural societies.[70]

At a more general level, the creation of these societies can be related to the extension of Roman power over the provinces, operating to differentiate (in the sense of creating a structured system of differences) between regions, communities, and individuals. Urbanization was one aspect of this process, the creation of 'pacified' and 'militarized' areas another, the imposition of a juridical system of statuses yet another. In part these developments were the result of imperial policy, in part the effect of concomitant but unplanned processes such as the growth of the imperial economy, the spread of Roman cultural priorities among Italian and provincial élites, and the increased possibility of travel afforded by the imperial peace. The expansion of Roman society is a convenient, if vague, label for these processes. Some or all of them are sometimes discussed under the heading of 'Romanization': that term has been avoided here because current usages are so varied and confused,[71] and because the aim has been to denote a series of social

[68] For the significance of these groups, cf. Purcell, op. cit. (n. 58), J. Crook in *JRS* 82 (1992), 233–4, Wallace-Hadrill, op. cit. (n. 60).

[69] cf. R. MacMullen, 'The legion as society', *Historia* 33 (1984), 440–56, reprinted in idem, *Changes in the Roman Empire. Essays in the Ordinary* (1990), 225–35, for this perspective on military society. On the extent to which socialization obliterated previous social identities, cf. B. D. Shaw, 'Soldiers and society: the army in Numidia', *Opus* 2 (1984), 133–59. The prominence of some legionary veterans in their home towns is well-known, and is demonstrated by their legal classification alongside *decuriones* and other *honestiores* from the second century on; cf. P. D. A. Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (1970), at 245–51.

[70] Naturally not all rural societies were alike and in some, perhaps the village societies of Egypt, Syria, and Anatolia, gradations of social and economic status, economic activity and hence some forms of social mobility may have been close to conditions in smaller towns. Nor can the existence of moderately well-off or even wealthy peasantries be excluded *a priori*. Cities and the military camps that resembled them were, however, clearly different in kind and scale.

[71] cf. P. W. M. Freeman, ' "Romanisation" and Roman material culture', *JRA* 6 (1993), 438–45 for an insightful critique. I hope to return to this issue elsewhere.

changes to which a particular cultural phenomenon, Latin epigraphy, responded, rather than that phenomenon itself. Through the notion of the expansion of Roman society, I have tried to describe a slow social revolution in Italy and in the western provinces. Epigraphy gives a doubly misleading impression of this revolution. To begin with, these personal monuments stress stability and success, operating ideologically to deny or disguise insecurities engendered by the pace and nature of social upheavals, and omitting to record disappointed hopes and realized fears. Secondly, they direct attention to the most mobile sectors of Roman imperial society. Throughout this paper the fluidity and instability of some Roman societies has been emphasized. By ancient or pre-industrial standards, Roman society was remarkable in that respect. But the blanks and thin distributions on the map of epigraphic density and the under-represented populations are a reminder that by modern standards much of Roman society remained static and caged. Seeing the expansion of Roman society as the extension of a new configuration of power — power, that is, in the Foucauldian sense of an active, creative force that constitutes society, culture and knowledge — helps in conceptualizing this phenomenon. While some populations — among whom we must count the vast majority of the inscribing classes — were galvanized and freed by the extension of Roman power, yet others were subjected to a new discipline of social immobility, excluded from the more dynamic currents of imperial society.

A number of issues remain unresolved by this analysis. First, there is the question of how far this picture can be extended to other regions of the Empire, notably the eastern provinces. The epigraphic habit and epigraphic densities have been less studied for those regions. Some aspects of eastern epigraphic culture do seem to conform to western patterns; the Augustan boom, for example, the late-second-/early-third-century peak and the connection with urbanism.[72] Equally eastern societies participated in many of the same developments as the West, including urban growth and the spread of cosmopolitan societies. But in other respects the picture would need to be nuanced, to take account, for example, of pre-Roman and non-Latin epigraphic cultures in the region, of the slighter importance of manumission, and of the presence in many cities of a Latin-inscribing army.

Second, there is the problem of the very rapid decline of epigraphic culture in the third century. At first sight the answer might seem to lie in a cessation or diminution in the force of the social factors that had made epigraphy such an attractive option in the first place, but on closer inspection this hypothesis faces serious objections. To begin with, although Roman society did undergo various changes in the course of the third century, these transformations were far too gradual to account for the rapidity of the collapse of Roman epigraphic culture in the first half of the third century. Social mobility was, in any case, a marked feature of fourth-century society, supported by an expanding imperial bureaucracy and education system and marked by a continuation of personal patronage. Astrology and magic at least, those alternative indicators of insecurity, remained popular in the later Empire. The crucial change, then, was not the removal of these anxieties, but the response made to them. It is difficult to see what might have so swiftly derailed such a widely and long-established cultural practice. The military and political crises of the Empire began too late to be relevant, and were not generalized until the 260s: it is difficult, in any case, to see what impact they might have had on private acts of devotion, commemoration, and self-advertisement. The personal nature of setting up inscriptions militates against explanations in terms of some central initiative (for which in any case no rationale is evident). Other factors that have been invoked as explanations do not convince. Caracalla's universal grant of citizenship did not result in an immediate devaluation of citizenship, as many provincials continued throughout the third and fourth centuries to proclaim their pride in the new status through the use of the name Aurelius.[73] Nor do changes of burial rite which may have taken place at approximately the same period explain the decline in the quantity of military epigraphy, which was not primarily funerary.[74] The problem is complicated by

[72] cf. n. 1 above.

[73] *pace* Meyer, op. cit. (n. 1).

[74] *pace* Morris, op. cit. (n. 9), 168–70.

the setting up of some inscriptions in the late Empire,[75] although in several cases — for example, the Christian inscriptions that begin to be more common in the West from the fourth and fifth centuries — it may be more useful to regard them as representing new and distinctive epigraphic cultures, drawing on early imperial examples, but modifying them to suit new cultural logics of their own.

Perhaps the most promising starting point for further investigations would be a consideration of changes in other forms of monumentalization in this period. Markedly fewer civic (as opposed to imperial) monuments were set up anywhere in the Empire after the early third century.[76] The desire to display wealth and status survived, but it seems to have been expressed largely through other media, among them grand urban and rural residences and elaborate art works of silver plate or ivory. Links between this 'privatization' of display and a change in the public roles of ancient cities seem likely.[77] The virtual disappearance of euergetism and, in the East, of civic coinages might seem a change in public, rather than private practice, but in fact the two were intimately connected. The inception of provincial epigraphy had coincided with the appearance of new styles of public representation in art and architecture, and the influence of imperial models on private monuments is well established.[78] This paper has focused on the motivations of individuals, because it was individuals whose actions were manifested in epigraphy. Yet civic epigraphy was an important medium for those individuals, who defined their identity at least in part in relation to a public, usually a civic, setting. The new ways in which identity was constructed, and the new frames of reference in relation to which identity had to be fixed, are beyond the scope of this paper. But it seems likely that changes in the setting up of monumental writing are to be seen as part of wider transformations which reflected a shift in the ways in which identities were constructed and presented in public.

The origins and spread of that culture, however, can be more clearly rooted in the (much better understood) social history of the Principate. This paper has argued that epigraphy provided a device by which individuals could write their public identities into history, by fixing in permanent form their achievements and their relations with gods, with men, with the Empire, and with the city. In so doing, they have drawn attention to an underestimated quality of early imperial society: a fluidity of social roles, a degree of looseness of social ascription, and a sense of confidence based on a sense of the durability of society as a whole rather than of the permanence and fixedness of the places of individuals within it. It is difficult to express this quality precisely. What is clearer is what early imperial society was not: not fixed, not static, not caged, and not bounded by prescriptive rules that ascribe an immutable social location to each of its members. As that society expanded — partly propelled by, partly drawing behind it the imperial state — so too the private monuments that responded to it with false claims of permanency were inscribed further and further afield, wherever Roman power had reproduced the dynamic social forms at its heart.

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[75] But on a much smaller scale and with significant formal differences. For an illustration, cf. Roueché, op. cit. (n. 1), on Aphrodisias. Some 1,500 inscriptions survive from the first two hundred and fifty years A.D., but only 230 between then and the mid-sixth century. Public inscriptions declined markedly but private epitaphs are also very rare. The late imperial epigraphy of Aphrodisias is nevertheless very prolific compared to that of most Asian cities. The style and orthography of late inscriptions is also very different to those of the early Empire.

[76] e.g. (and recently) on Italy, B. Ward-Perkins, *From Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages. Urban Public Building in Northern and Central Italy* (1984); on Anatolia, S. Mitchell, *Anatolia. Land, Men and Gods in Asia Minor* (1993), I, 211–17; on Britain, D. Perring, 'Spatial organisation and social change in Roman towns', in J. Rich and A. Wallace-Hadrill (eds), *City and Country in the Ancient World* (1991), 273–93; and more widely cf. the papers collected in J. W. Rich (ed.), *The City in Late Antiquity* (1992).

[77] On urban change, cf. most recently S. J. B. Barnish, 'The transformation of classical cities and the Pirenne debate', *JRA* 2 (1989), 385–400; W. Liebeschuetz, 'The end of the ancient city', in Rich, op. cit. (n. 76), 1–49.

[78] Alföldy, op. cit. (n. 1); T. Hölscher, *Staatsdenkmal und Publikum. Vom Untergang der Republik bis zur Festigung des Kaisertums in Rom* (1984); P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (1988).