

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy*. Edited by CHRISTER BRUUN and JONATHAN EDMONDSON. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xxxiv + 888. Hardcover, \$185.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-533646-7.<sup>1</sup>

The stated goals of *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy* are to show why inscriptions matter and to demonstrate to students and scholars how to utilize epigraphic sources in their research. To accomplish these objectives the editors have assembled an epigraphic Dream Team of authors who delivered 35 chapters and 7 appendices in just over 900 pages of epigraphic information. The 35 chapters are divided into three parts: Epigraphic Methods and History of the Discipline (5 chapters), Inscriptions in the Roman World (3 chapters), and The Value of Inscriptions for Reconstructing the Roman World (27 chapters).

The quality of the chapters overall is very high and with remarkable consistency. Each operates essentially as a brief survey of its topic supported by excellent line drawings, photos, maps, and tables and concluded with consistently superb and up to date chapter bibliographies. In fact, I would recommend any scholar of the Roman world writing on one of the covered topics begin with reading the chapter in the Handbook and thoroughly perusing the bibliography. While space does not allow even a brief mention of every chapter, a few stand out as models: Garrett G. Fagan, "Social Life in Town and Country" (494–514); Michael J. Carter and Jonathan Edmondson, "Spectacle in Rome, Italy, and the Provinces" (537–558); James Clackson, "Local Languages in Italy and the West" (699–720); Michael Alexander Speidel, "The Roman Army" (319–344). All provide thoughtful, informed analysis of their topics and go beyond just case studies, but model the sort of questions that can be asked and answered with epigraphic evidence.

Others are good, but not ideal. Maria Letizia Caldelli's chapter "Women in the Roman World" (582–604) was perhaps overwhelmed by the size of the topic and

<sup>1</sup> The reviewer apologizes for the delay in the appearance of this review. He alone is responsible.

strays from the epigraphical. For example, rather than citing Mary Beard on the sexual status of Vestals, Molly Lindner's work on the inscriptions and statues of the Vestals would be more to the point. David S. Potter's "Inscriptions and the Narrative of Roman History" is excellent, but ignores the *SC de Bacchanalibus* (CIL 12.581=ILS 18=ILLRP 511), which would have reinforced his discussion on foreign relations in the third to first centuries BC and provided a valuable example of inscription and the accompanying narrative in Livy. Mika Kajava's "Religion in Rome and Italy" (397–419) is perhaps the most idiosyncratic of all the chapters in terms of the texts chosen and the resulting discussion; I am still unclear on the structure or goals of this chapter. Speaking of idiosyncratic, in part I on Epigraphic Methods and History of the Discipline the longest chapter by far is "Forgeries and Fakes" (42–65), which seems disproportionately long compared to the significance of the other topics in the section. It did not seem to support either of the stated main objectives of the volume.

In a work of this scale with so many authors some inconsistencies are bound to occur. In the otherwise excellent chapter 6, "Latin Inscriptions: The Main Types of Inscriptions", the author includes writing tables under Private and Domestic Inscriptions while in chapter 16, *The Roman Army*, some of the same inscriptions cited in chapter 6, the Vindolanda tablets, are categorized more accurately as the only true extant military records. While such inconsistencies as well as overlaps of material across chapters are perhaps to be expected, it is disappointing that some chapters that cover the same material have no cross-referencing while others are plentifully supplied with references to other chapters. Potter and Kajava both refer to the Arval Hymn, the preserved archaic *Carmen* of the Arval priests at Rome, but neither chapter is cross-referenced. It is also understandable that some works will not make it into the bibliographies. Still, I was surprised that neither *The Ancient Graffiti Project* nor *The Herculaneum Graffiti Project* (both available at <http://ancientgraffiti.wlu.edu>) were referenced in the chapter on Local Elites in Italy, nor Epigraphy and Digital Resources, nor Main Types of Inscriptions.

The distribution of chapters and pages gives a good sense of the balance in the handbook and the relative priority given to its two stated goals. Of the two goals, the book does well demonstrating rather than explaining why inscriptions matter, which it does through chapters that model how to utilize inscriptions. In fact, much of the second goal is understated with the lessons on how to utilize inscriptions presented as subtext. Chapter after chapter on the social or economic categories of inscriptions provides models on using inscriptions without providing explicit lessons on how to go about doing so. Which raises the issue of what is this

handbook and what is it not. It may be a handbook, but it is not a textbook for learning epigraphy. It is not a replacement for Gordon's *Illustrated Introduction to Latin Epigraphy*. Alison Cooley's *The Cambridge Manual of Latin Epigraphy* (2012) serves that purpose. This handbook is more of an exploration of the extent to which epigraphy works in the service of many of the branches of the Classics. Students and scholars of the Roman world who study it should find it enormously helpful.

STEVEN L. TUCK

*Miami University*, tucksl@miamioh.edu