

BOOK REVIEW

The Cambridge Manual of Latin Epigraphy. By ALISON E. COOLEY. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. xxii + 531. Paper, \$42.00. ISBN 978-0-521-54954-7.

The categorization of the book as a “manual” indicates use as a tool and therefore it aims to apply to scholars and students, as well as anyone interested in Latin epigraphy, regardless of their previous knowledge of the methods, the material, or the research on epigraphy. The need for such a tool is easily deduced in view of the recently increased interest in Latin epigraphy, acknowledging especially the value of inscriptions for the approach of diachronic issues of individual and social life in addition to a general understanding of the Roman world. Therefore, a current handbook in Epigraphy has to accept a range of challenges and assist the readers in engaging themselves to the numerous possibilities offered in the field.

The first chapter of this book demonstrates in the most explicit way the use of inscriptions in the Roman world. Instead of a generic overview, Cooley wisely chooses to present the “epigraphic culture” in the Bay of Naples as a case study. Thus, the chapter offers an insight to the role the inscriptions played in everyday life and also illustrates how strongly the particular practice was incorporated in humans’ lives. The examples under discussion are organized in four sections, namely the use of inscriptions in civic life, by individuals and for commercial purposes, whereas a final section focuses on the use of inscriptions in art. This is an effective way to demonstrate the role of inscriptions in the “culture”, as it is declared by the title of the chapter. All in all, the first chapter instructs the reader well in both the practical and cultural aspects of the epigraphy.

The second and longest chapter focuses on what is defined as the epigraphic culture offering the theoretical framework within which epigraphy needs to be considered and thence the epigraphic material needs to be examined. The student of epigraphy, as well as the researcher, shall find the terminology as shaped by the current trends with a basic analysis of the development and the utility of each term. Consequently, the chapter facilitates a wide range of approaches and purposes. Definitions are usefully provided alongside a categorization of the ma-

terial. Thus, for the category of *instrumentum domesticum*, the author approaches the issue of its definition, admitting the difficulty and highlighting the caveats one should bear in mind, due to the vagueness of the material included in the category. What follows is a case-study that is the application of the presented terminology and methodology on Tripolitania, a section that can be a matter for study in its own right. The cases under discussion cover the range of paradigms one comes across in the field and they are clarified by the inclusion of indicative examples, followed by a step-by-step analysis.

Either as monuments or as documents, inscriptions are crucial for our understanding of the Roman world; and the emergence of the epigraphic habit is pivotal in our approach to the ancient world in general. The book so far has proved to be a useful tool for the researcher and the student, yet the third chapter makes it a useful tool for the beginner, anyone who had developed an interest in inscriptions and needs guidance in approaching it. The *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* is perhaps the commonest place for identifying an inscription; the reader will find all the information needed for the full exploitation of the *Corpus* in this chapter. Moreover, the detailed analysis of the mechanisms of recording and interpreting an inscription offers a deep understanding of the study of Epigraphy, and a step-by-step guidance to anyone interested in this process.

It is safe to say that Cooley's book addresses both the new challenges that confront a specialist on epigraphy and also those important for a beginning student. Roman epigraphy is strongly linked throughout the book with the Roman world, as we know it, thus it serves well for a study on history, Latin language, aspects of social life, etc., besides its main target. Besides the practical functionality of the book, it is noteworthy that the author approaches Roman epigraphy also as a theorist, and offers an updated view of the nature of the inscriptions and their position in the society, expanding this placement to the Christian era.

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