

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING THE FIELD – THE EPIGRAPHIC CULTURES OF LATE ANTIQUITY

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The aim of this book – and of the conference on which it was based – is to document and discuss the diversity and wealth of the epigraphic cultures of Late Antiquity. It is an attempt at understanding the various political, cultural and religious structures that characterized this period, and the special place occupied by inscriptions in the societies that produced and lived with them. Our goal is, therefore, to put these inscribed artefacts in their wider socio-political and physical contexts, illustrating the ways in which monuments and texts were related to the world around them. The chapters that follow propose to explore the geographic and typological diversity of late antique epigraphy as well as the many textual forms and material supports through which these epigraphic practices have come down to us. One of the central arguments pursued here is that, although marked by essential continuities, late antique epigraphy differed from that of previous periods in many important ways and can thus be defined as a subject of its own.

Recent decades have been marked by the consolidation of Late Antiquity as a legitimate field of enquiry within Ancient (and also Mediaeval) Studies. Although scholars rarely agree on definite chronological boundaries,¹ few would disagree today with the idea that this was indeed a historical epoch in itself.² The “*esplosione di tardoantico*”, to borrow an expression coined by Andrea GIARDINA,³ might in a certain sense be regarded as the abandonment of earlier historical models and ‘grand narratives’. But it might also be seen as the right moment for the introduction of new interpretative frameworks as an opportunity for refining our established assumptions and approaches. Perhaps more importantly, scholars are currently en-

- 1 As is shown by the discussion about the model of a ‘long Late Antiquity’ which is supposed to have lasted well into the 8th or even 9th century; cf. MARCONE 2008 and ANDO 2008. In this volume, we mainly retain a rather conventional chronological definition of ‘Late Antiquity’ as the period from the end of the 3rd to the end of the 6th century. In certain regional contexts, however, it has made better sense to enlarge the timeframe when looking at the late antique epigraphic record; this is the case in *Hispania*, for which J. VÉGH has included the inscriptions from the Visigothic period, and also in *Palaestina* and *Arabia*, where the ‘antique’ epigraphic habit (using Greek as dominant language) only ended in the course of the 8th century, as L. DI SEGNI demonstrates. The contribution by M.A. HANDLEY deliberately crosses established boundaries of historical periodization to show that graffiti were used as an important medium of inscribing one’s presence at certain spots both in Late Antiquity and in the Early Middle Ages.
- 2 For recent discussions of the field in its different aspects, cf. the contributions to ROUSSEAU 2009 and JOHNSON 2012; as well as CAMERON 2012.
- 3 GIARDINA 1999.

gaged in a vigorous debate concerning the specificity of Late Antiquity as a historical period, and in this sense it seems more appropriate to talk of ‘effervescence’ when looking at this period, rather than just ‘fragmentation’ or even (general) ‘decline’.⁴ Scholars are now more open to the re-reading of classic texts or the re-interpretation of material culture, thus raising new questions and adopting new theoretical models, whereas recent archaeological fieldwork has paid special attention to the time between the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 7th century, unearthing a huge mass of data and sites that are relevant for our interpretation of the period in question.⁵

This is particularly true in the case of epigraphy, a discipline explicitly concerned with the editing, correct reading, and also the interpretation of inscribed texts, and therefore always open to new discoveries and the reinterpretation of long-known evidence. Epigraphists of different national and intellectual traditions have traditionally offered important contributions for our understanding of past societies in general, and ancient societies in particular. The examples of Theodor MOMMSEN, Giovanni Battista DE ROSSI, and Louis ROBERT naturally spring to mind. Over the course of the past decades, however, scholars have become increasingly aware of the need to approach the inscriptions with which they work not only as mere ‘texts’ and historical ‘sources’, but to study them in their proper context.⁶ Special attention is thus paid to the material and topographical aspects of epigraphic monuments, as the materiality of their support and the place where they were presented to an audience of different size can be regarded – besides the textual message contained in them – as the defining characteristics of ‘inscriptions’ in the Greco-Roman world.⁷ It certainly makes a difference whether an inscription was engraved in stone or bronze, i. e. in durable materials in order to be preserved for eternity; or whether it was rather informally (and often temporarily) scratched in or painted on a wall (like the graffiti and *dipinti* along the streets of Pompeii);⁸ or stamped or otherwise

4 The concept of ‘decline’ has been vigorously defended with regard to Late Antiquity by LIEBESCHUETZ 2001a–c and 2006. It is critically discussed in various short responses in LAVAN 2001, 238–245; as well as, e. g., by CAMERON 2003; WHITTOW 2003; and ANDO 2008.

5 The bibliography on this subject is vast, and continues to grow. The reader can have a sense of these new approaches in series like *Late Antique Archaeology* (cf., for example, LAVAN/BOWDEN 2003), but also in specialized journals such as *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, *Antiquité Tardive* or *Journal of Late Antiquity*.

6 The study of the materiality and contextualization of written texts in the pre-modern era (i. e. in the epoch before the ‘typographic turn’) is the main focus of the ‘Collaborative Research Centre (SFB) 933’ on “Material Text Cultures. Materiality and Presence of Writing in Non-Typographic Societies” based at the University of Heidelberg and funded by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*; see <http://www.materiale-textkulturen.org/>; as well as the contributions to MEIER/OTT/SAUER 2015. Such an approach was also chosen as subject for the last International Congress of Greek and Latin Epigraphy, which took place in Berlin in 2012; cf. ECK/FUNKE 2014.

7 For a recent attempt to define our notion of ‘inscription’ in Antiquity, see PANCIERA 2012.

8 The mass of graffiti and painted inscriptions known from the ancient world, especially from Pompeii, has come into the focus of scholarly attention only in recent years; cf. BENEFIEL/KEEGAN 2016; OPDENHOFF (forthcoming); and LOHMANN (forthcoming). There is also a very rich and illuminating amount of graffiti dating to the late antique period, as the ground-breaking

written on a movable object of what we classify as *instrumentum domesticum*.⁹ It has been clearly demonstrated in recent years that the materiality of epigraphic texts is a fundamental dimension of enquiry, the study of which has tremendously benefitted from the diffusion of photography (especially through the internet), a process that has allowed scholars not only to examine more accurately the epigraphic texts (including their layout and palaeography) with which they are working, but also to consider them in their proper physical setting.¹⁰ A second, equally important aspect comes into play here, namely the specific location at which an inscribed text was presented to the observer(s) – quite a lot of them were situated in public spaces and thus visible (if not always readable) for a large audience,¹¹ but others were located at a more ‘private’ spot that was accessible only for a restricted number of people, and some were even invisible to humans, for example the inscriptions on sarcophagi that were buried beneath the floor of churches and other funerary buildings.¹² To contextualize an ancient inscription thus also means taking into account the place in which the text was exposed, the values and priorities of its commissioner as well as of its reader(s) and/or viewers,¹³ and finally the specific historical context in which it was produced. Ancient inscriptions were rarely seen in isolation, but rather as part of monuments like statues and buildings; and in general as a component of a larger ‘epigraphic landscape’. All of these factors helped the ancient beholder to understand and interpret the message recorded – even if he was not able to read it properly.¹⁴ The choice of a specific physical support, of the style of the letters and of the rhetoric of the text were furthermore intimately related and deeply influenced by the social and material worlds in which the men and women that produced them lived. At the same time, inscriptions conveyed meanings, transmitted instructions and values, communicated decisions and displayed identities, and thus contributed to shape that same world in which they were commissioned and read.

Ever since the publication of Ramsay MACMULLEN’s influential article on “The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire”, in 1982,¹⁵ scholars have been acutely aware of just how characteristic of the ancient world was the carving of inscriptions, at least in certain phases like the Hellenistic Greek and the Roman imperial periods. Although the identification of this practice as a distinctive feature of classi-

work of Charlotte ROUECHÉ has shown; see, for example, ROUECHÉ 1993 and 1999. Cf. also the paper by M.A. HANDLEY, in this volume pp. 555–593.

- 9 For inscriptions classified as *instrumentum domesticum* and other types of ‘*Kleininschriften*’, cf. HARRIS 1993; HAINZMANN 2012.
- 10 See, in this respect, the important observations of PANCIERA et al. 2006; as well as the many pertinent studies of Werner ECK, now collected in ECK 2010.
- 11 Cf. ROUECHÉ 2006; CORBIER 2006; and WITSCHÉL 2014.
- 12 See DRESKEN-WEILAND 2003. For the concept of the ‘restricted presence’ of inscribed monuments, cf. the papers in FRESE/KEIL/KRÜGER 2014.
- 13 See the methodological reflections presented by DICKMANN/KEIL/WITSCHÉL 2015.
- 14 The extent to which broad layers of society were able to read and understand the messages of inscriptions has been intensively debated in recent years, following the publication of the provocative study by HARRIS 1989; cf., e.g., CORBIER 1987; HUMPHREY 1991; BOWMAN/WOOLF 1994.
- 15 MACMULLEN 1982.

cal civilization was not entirely new, MACMULLEN's article played an important role in defining it as a phenomenon worthy of enquiry. Since then, scholars have chosen to emphasize the historical dimension of this practice, treating it as a conscious cultural choice rather than as a routine and everyday practice, as a product and as a part of a specific mentality that characterized ancient city life.¹⁶ The epigraphic habit was thus associated with local societies and immersed in wider processes of cultural change. It was certainly not static over time, as we realize when looking at the ups and downs of graphs that chart the number of (datable) inscriptions per year or by reign of Emperors.¹⁷ In the Roman world the production of inscription started on a low level during the Republic and only 'exploded' at the end of the 1st century BC in the reign of Augustus whose example in using inscriptions as a medium of self-representation and for conveying political messages seems to have played a decisive role in this process.¹⁸ After a peak in the later 2nd and early 3rd century the number of freshly fabricated inscriptions dropped quite dramatically after the middle of the 3rd century in many parts of the Empire. In some regions the production of inscriptions recovered, albeit on a lower level, at the end of the 3rd century, in others it did not – this is the rather divergent situation we encounter at the beginning of Late Antiquity.

Inscriptions lie at the junction of cultural imperatives and material constraints, as well as of social and political agendas. They are also part of a society's material culture. As such, they are – more than most other types of evidence – a product of their surrounding world, be it geographical, physical, or social. It is in this perspective that we decided to focus on the epigraphic culture(s) of Late Antiquity in a broad sense. In other words: although the discovery, editing and scientific publication of inscriptions will forever remain desirable in our disciplines, our main concern in this volume lies in the exploration of the ways in which these particular types of textual monuments might illuminate the society that produced them. This requires taking into account the major cultural and religious developments during Late Antiquity, as well as the many quantitative, qualitative and regional variations that are to be detected in the epigraphic record of this period. It also means that it is desirable, especially in regional studies, to collect the epigraphic evidence in a comprehensive way, including all different types of inscriptions and not preferring certain groups like the Christian *tituli*, as has so often been done in previous studies (see below). This approach enables the detailed comparison of the quantitative aspects and peculiar formations of epigraphic cultures in different regions of the Late Roman Empire, which, as been said before, is an important goal of this volume.

Scholars have referred to the specific situation in Late Antiquity by coining the term "the third age of epigraphy", as in the title of an influential conference

16 For subsequent discussions of the 'epigraphic habit' in the ancient world, see MEYER 1990; CHERRY 1995; WOOLF 1996; TROUT 2009; MEYER 2011, 205–218; COOLEY 2012.

17 See the much-cited (if not unproblematic) chart published by MROZEK 1973, which was also used by MACMULLEN 1982. For further quantitative studies of this kind, see the paper by I. TANTILLO, in this volume pp. 213–270.

18 As has been demonstrated by Géza ALFÖLDY in many studies; see esp. ALFÖLDY 1991.

(later published in a ground-breaking book) gathered in Bologna in 1986.¹⁹ As the contributors to that meeting emphasized, there were important differences in epigraphic practices between Late Antiquity and the preceding periods. Most importantly, we can observe a marked quantitative reduction with regard to the production of new inscriptions in many regions especially of the West, but also in Asia Minor, whereas there was a remarkable increase in (dated) inscriptions in certain parts of the Near East during the 5th and 6th centuries.²⁰ A parallel phenomenon was the increasing re-use of earlier inscribed monuments, especially statue bases, which were often used a second or third time by turning them around or erasing a previous text in order to inscribe a new one. This phenomenon was part of a broader tendency towards spoliation in Late Antiquity, taking quite different forms.²¹ It may have been a pragmatic way of handling the rich array of inscribed monuments that had been inherited from earlier times, but some other motives for such a practice are also conceivable. In general, we can detect quite divergent attitudes (and resulting actions) at play during Late Antiquity with regard to the epigraphic patrimony which was present in high numbers in the cities of the Roman Empire: alongside the re-use of earlier epigraphic monuments for engraving new inscriptions we are also quite often confronted with the complete removal of inscribed stones that were then used as building material (and thus became invisible), for example in the foundations of city walls or private houses.²² Other inscriptions of earlier times were just left in place, or were even consciously preserved. Another interesting phenomenon occurring during this period was the relocation of existing epigraphic and statue monuments and their new staging at another place, sometimes even wilfully combining old and new inscriptions on one and the same stone.²³ In some cities like in Aquileia we have clear evidence that a late antique visitor of the town's *forum* could still see inscriptions there which had stood in this location for 400 or 500 years.²⁴ It is in any case important to keep in mind that the 'epigraphic landscapes' of Late Antiquity did not only consist of freshly made inscriptions of that period, but were at least in certain places dominated by the mass of *tituli* and other monuments surviving from earlier times;²⁵ and this factor alone already guaranteed for a certain

19 Published as DONATI 1988.

20 See TATE 1996, esp. 73 fig. 1; DI SEGNI 1999 and 2009; as well as the charts presented by L. DI SEGNI in her paper, in this volume colour plates figs. 1–10.

21 On the '*spolia habit*' in Late Antiquity and its various motivations, cf. KINNEY 1997; WARD-PERKINS 1999; LIVERANI 2004; ALTEKAMP/MARCKS-JACOBS/SEILER 2013.

22 On the reuse of statues and inscription as building material, cf. COATES-STEPHENS 2002 and 2007.

23 The relocation of statues and statue bases in Late Antiquity has been repeatedly treated in recent times; see, for the West, LEPELLEY 1994; MACHADO 2006, 179–185; WITSCHERL 2007, 122–124; and for the East, ROUECHÉ 2002. An interesting example for this practice are three statue bases which were brought to the *forum* of Aquileia around AD 360 by the (Christian) governor Septimius Theodulus, where they were re-inscribed, partially preserving the earlier inscriptions; cf. ZACCARIA 2000 and 2001; and also C. MACHADO in this volume pp. 337 f.

24 On the *forum* of Aquileia in Late Antiquity, see SOTINEL 2005, 37–41; WITSCHERL 2012/13, 31–35.

25 As argued by SMITH 2007 on the basis of a detailed study of the statues and inscriptions found in the Hadrianic Baths at Aphrodisias.

degree of continuity – yet at the same time the massive removal of earlier inscribed stones caused a serious rupture in the late antique townscapes.²⁶

Nevertheless, distinct processes of transformation can also be made out when looking at the inscribed material from Late Antiquity. This is especially true for qualitative changes in the epigraphic practice. We can see such alterations, for example, in the growing importance of metric texts, first of all epigrams, both for honorific inscriptions presented in public and for grave inscriptions in funerary contexts.²⁷ We also encounter new epigraphic formulae, new onomastic systems and new styles of lettering – the previously quite standardized ways of cutting regular capital letters were supplanted by much freer and more heterogeneous forms of designing an inscribed text.²⁸ Again we should be cautious in interpreting this undeniable change, which altered the outward appearance of epigraphic monuments to a considerable degree, by referring to models of economic, moral or technical decline. If there was a demand for it, late antique craftsmen could still produce inscriptions of high quality. There were also some remarkable innovations with regard to the material supports used for creating inscriptions in Late Antiquity. This is especially true for the growing importance of mosaic inscriptions in certain contexts like in churches where the floors (and sometimes also the walls) were covered with mosaics containing texts that commemorated the erection of the building and the financial contributions of individual members of the congregation for the adornment of its interior; but also in domestic and funerary contexts.²⁹

All these phenomena can in our opinion be treated as signs of a profound transformation in epigraphic practice, rather than as evidence of ‘cultural decline’. They were closely related to the major historical processes that shaped that period, especially the development of new political and administrative structures within the Empire and its cities, and of course the spread of Christianity.³⁰ These two wider processes, political and religious, can thus be regarded as unifying factors amidst the development of strong regional, social, and cultural particularisms that also characterized the epoch. On the other hand, it would be far too narrow to describe the epigraphy of this period as an exclusively Christian one. The whole assumption of a clearly defined and separate ‘Christian epigraphy’ (which led to the establish-

26 This important point is made by I. TANTILLO, in this volume p. 236 f.

27 The role of verse inscriptions in honouring governors of late antique provinces has been demonstrated in a classic study by Louis ROBERT for the eastern part of the Empire: ROBERT 1948.

28 For the wide range of different letter styles that were in use during Late Antiquity, cf. BOLLE (forthcoming).

29 For mosaic inscriptions on the floors and walls of late antique churches, see CAILLET 1993; BAUMANN 1999; BOLLE/WESTPHALEN/WITSCHERL 2015; as well as the contribution by R. HAENSCH, in this volume pp. 535–554. For mosaic inscriptions in funerary contexts, see e. g. RAYNAL 2005.

30 A close connection between the spread of Christianity and the development of a new funerary epigraphic habit in Late Antiquity has been proposed by GALVÃO-SOBRINHO 1995; cf. also HANDLEY 2003. Whereas grave inscriptions with clearly marked Christian formulae and symbols mostly do not appear before the end of the 3rd century in the West, we already encounter them in parts of Asia Minor by the later 2nd century; see DESTEPHEN 2010; MITCHELL 2014; and also the paper by S. MITCHELL, in this volume pp. 271–286.

ment of its own corpora, journals, conferences etc.) has come into discussion in recent years³¹ – rightly so, as in our opinion it is much more fruitful to work with a comprehensive concept of ‘late antique epigraphy’ that encompasses all different kinds of inscribed texts that were created during this period, regardless of their religious affiliation which in many cases is anyway not discernible with certainty.

The study of late antique epigraphy has undergone important developments since the publication of “La terza età dell’epigrafia”. Scholars have become more sensitive to the rhetorical component of late antique inscribed texts, and especially to their (changing) use as a means of expressing certain forms of self-representation and social/religious identity.³² In addition, new phenomena of civil and religious authority, especially in the person of the bishop, have become the subject of intense scrutiny, investigating the close links between secular and sacred structures of power and their implications for the history of the period.³³ Of equal importance, scholars have emphasized the role of epigraphic monuments in our understanding of the changes that redefined city landscapes and urban spaces in Late Antiquity.³⁴ Traditional locations for the presentation of epigraphic monuments like *fora* and baths still existed in the cities of Late Antiquity (at least in most regions),³⁵ but had lost some of their former importance as places for the public presentation of inscriptions.³⁶ In the 4th century we can detect a decisive spatial shift in some regions of the West (especially in Northern Italy) where inscriptions honouring the Emperor were no longer (or only rarely) attached to statue bases that were put up in the *fora*, but were instead cut into milestones that were erected in large numbers along the roads leading through the territories of the cities.³⁷ In the 5th and 6th centuries intra- and extramural churches became ever more important as stages for the presentation of inscriptions in front of a more restricted, but still rather large audience, especially in the form of texts that were fashioned as mosaics on floors and walls.³⁸ Many other developments could be pointed out, but it is obvious that our picture of the

31 See the observations by C. ROUECHÉ and C. SOTINEL, in this volume pp. 503–514.

32 See, for example, BORG/WITSCHERL 2001. For memory and identity in Late Antiquity, cf. DIEFENBACH 2007; and for diverging responses to inscriptions, MORALEE 2006.

33 As explored by RAPP 2005. The role played by inscriptions in the consolidation of episcopal authority is studied, for example, by SÁGHY 2012.

34 On the development of towns and urban landscapes in Late Antiquity, cf. LIEBESCHUETZ 2001a; LAVAN 2001; BRANDS/SEVERIN 2003; GHILARDI/GODDARD/PORENA 2006; KRAUSE/WITSCHERL 2006; SARADI 2006; LEONE 2007; WITSCHERL 2008; DALLY/RATTÉ 2011.

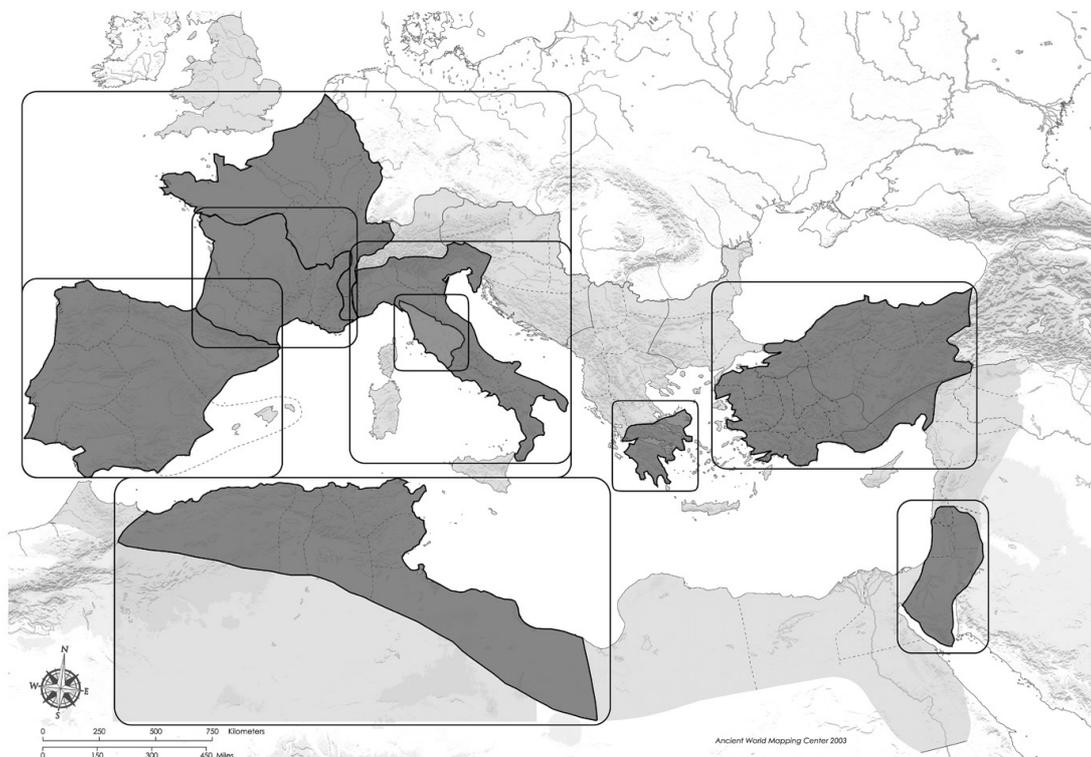
35 With the exception of Gaul, where the outward appearance and urbanistic structures of the towns had already changed to a considerable degree by the late 3rd or early 4th centuries; cf. WITSCHERL 2013.

36 For the use of *fora* in the late antique West, see WITSCHERL 2007. For the situation in the East, where public spaces were preserved for a much longer time than in West, cf. SMITH 1999; LAVAN 2005; SMITH 2007. Here we also still find the public display of important messages from Emperors and governors in the form of epigraphic monuments well into the 6th century, as Denis FEISSEL has shown in numerous studies; cf. FEISSEL 2009, and now the collected papers in FEISSEL 2010.

37 On the role of milestones as honorific monuments for Emperors in Late Antiquity, cf. WITSCHERL 2002; KOLB 2004.

38 See YASIN 2009, esp. 110–150.

late antique world – and of the role played by inscriptions within it – is now much more subtle than three decades ago.



*Map: The different regions of the Imperium Romanum treated in detail in this volume.
Design: T. WITTENBERG (after © Ancient World Mapping center 2003).*

Our volume “The Epigraphic Cultures of Late Antiquity” seeks to explore the possibilities opened up by this recent scientific progress, bringing together scholars of different origins and scholarly traditions, as a way of presenting a picture of where the field of late antique epigraphy currently stands, and what kind of contribution it can make to our general understanding of Late Antiquity as a historical epoch. As the studies collected in this book show, this period was marked by profound regional differences, and it is only by taking them into account that we can form a clearer picture of the variety and wealth of the epigraphic cultures of Late Antiquity. The first part of the book is therefore devoted to detailed regional studies which pay special attention to quantitative aspects in the development of the late antique epigraphic habit, thus allowing for comparisons between the different regions, including the rise and fall of certain types of inscriptions (see the map). The latter phenomenon is especially relevant with regard to the so-called ‘civic inscriptions’, i. e. the honorific and building inscriptions which filled the public spaces of ancient cities and that where such a characteristic element of urban life in the Hellenistic and imperial Roman periods. The decline in numbers of such ‘civic inscriptions’ is a striking phenomenon of the period after the middle of the 3rd century; and it has been interpreted as a symptom of the general decline of the classical city in Late An-

tiquity and especially from the early 5th century onwards.³⁹ But this proposed direct connection between the production of certain types of inscriptions and the much more general transformation of urban life during Late Antiquity is not unproblematic from a methodological perspective, and it also blurs the considerable regional differences which can be found when observing the evidence more closely.⁴⁰ Christian WITSCHÉL tries to highlight some of these general trends and variations in his introductory chapter that focuses on the Latin West. In *Hispania*, covered by Judit VÉGH, the quantity of late antique inscriptions is considerably lower than that of the high imperial period, and the not very numerous civic inscriptions of this period are concentrated in the administrative centers of the region. On the other hand, the late antique epigraphic culture in Spain was still characterized by a wide range of different types of inscriptions, including mosaic inscriptions which we encounter both in funerary and in domestic contexts. In some towns like Tarraco, Augusta Emerita and Myrtilis a flourishing production of late antique funerary inscriptions can be made out, exhibiting Christian as well as traditional ‘pagan’ and sometimes Jewish elements. We should also note the considerable differences between these local epigraphic cultures. In Southern Gaul, treated by Lennart HILDEBRAND, we are again confronted with remarkable regional variations, already visible in the much higher number of late antique inscriptions from *Narbonensis* in comparison with *Aquitania*. The situation in the latter region (comprising three late antique provinces) is especially striking, as the very low rate of late antique epigraphic monuments (even funerary ones) is accompanied by the nearly complete disappearance of civic inscriptions of any kind. In this case, social change or economic decline cannot have been the main reasons for this development, as *Aquitania* was a prosperous region well into the 5th century with a highly cultivated elite and a flourishing villa culture; but the local aristocracy could now obviously do without inscriptions.⁴¹ Katharina BOLLE examines the late antique inscriptions from *Tuscia et Umbria*, a province in the middle of Italy. She can again document significant change, but also elements of continuity: for example, the number of late antique civic inscriptions from this region is comparatively much higher than that known from Spain, Southern Gaul and also Northern Italy; in addition, honorific inscriptions were still erected for members of the municipal aristocracy until the beginning of the 5th century, and they evoke quite traditional themes connected to the field of euergetism. In general, the epigraphic practice in *Tuscia et Umbria* is characterized by a considerable degree of vitality. Even more traditional, at least during the 4th century, was the epigraphic culture in the central parts of Africa, studied in this volume by Ignazio TANTILLO. The number of late antique civic inscriptions (especially honorific inscriptions for Emperors and governors as well as building inscriptions) is higher in Africa than in any other region of the West, as can be demonstrated by looking at the well preserved example of Lepcis Magna,⁴² before it drops off more or less completely at the beginning of the 5th century. But change is also felt in Africa, as some charac-

39 As argued by LIEBESCHUETZ 2001a, 11–19.

40 See the discussion in WITSCHÉL 2006.

41 For the late antique aristocracy in *Aquitania* and its villas, see SIVAN 1993 and BALMELLE 2001.

42 Cf. TANTILLO 2010.

teristic trends of late antique epigraphic practice can be made out here in all clarity, especially the massive re-use of earlier statue bases and other stones for carving new inscriptions (but also for other purposes). Another interesting phenomenon in late antique Africa are the many differences (both quantitatively and qualitatively) between the local epigraphic habits in the numerous cities of the region – even neighboring towns sometimes differ completely with regard to the number, but also the layout, styling and wording of the late antique inscriptions (especially from funerary contexts) that were found there.⁴³ Substantial local variations can also be witnessed in the late antique epigraphic culture(s) of Asia Minor, as Stephen MITCHELL describes in his paper: the number of late antique inscriptions differs considerably between cities in the coastal regions and the interior, but also within smaller regions. MITCHELL tries to explain this striking phenomenon by the various rhythms and forms that the spread of Christianity took in Asia Minor. A remarkably different situation can be found in the Near East, i. e. in the provinces of *Palaestina* and *Arabia* (and also in parts of *Syria*), where the number of (dated) inscriptions reaches a peak in the 5th and 6th centuries, as is impressively demonstrated by Leah DI SEGNI. These inscriptions come from both public civic and (increasingly) from ecclesiastical contexts. DI SEGNI can also show that from the 6th century onwards more such inscriptions were set up in villages than in cities.

The second part of the book deals with different genres of late antique epigraphy and practices connected with them. Inscribed statue bases are an excellent field of study for exploring these themes,⁴⁴ as is demonstrated by Carlos MACHADO with reference to the re-use of such monuments, and by Ulrich GEHN in terms of their relationship with the statues they once carried.⁴⁵ An interesting phenomenon of late antique epigraphic culture is the development of new forms of textual communication. Honorific inscriptions in the West were still normally composed in prose, but they no longer consisted of dry lists of the posts held by the person honoured during his *cursus honorum*, but lavishly praised him and his merits in a highly stylized, rhetoric language – an ‘oration in stone’, as Silvia ORLANDI has called it in her contribution, which treats this issue by studying a previously unpublished inscription from Rome. In funerary contexts, and also for honorific inscriptions in the East, inscription in verse, especially in the form of epigrams, became a dominant factor during Late Antiquity. Looking at the inscriptions connected to the (senatorial) elite in late antique Rome, Lucy GRIG asks for reasons why an increasing number of people chose this form of epigraphic commemoration for their graves. Erkki SIRONEN explores the various (literary) motives that were applied by the authors of late antique honorific epigrams in Greece. It is further to be noted that, as GRIG and SIRONEN indicate, the same choice of style for epigraphic monuments might have different meanings according to their respective contexts. Stylistic features and the

43 This diversity has been demonstrated at length by DUVAL 1988 with regard to the funerary inscriptions known from late antique Africa.

44 On statue bases and the development of the ‘statue habit’ in Late Antiquity, see MACHADO 2010; and now the papers in SMITH/WARD-PERKINS 2016.

45 Late antique honorific statues are treated by SMITH 1999; BAUER/WITSCHHEL 2007; GEHN 2012; KOVACS 2014.

choice of language in an inscription can thus serve as a way of understanding not only the text itself, but also the culture in which it was produced and read. Alongside these new forms of epigraphic communication, the continued use of traditional titles and formulae, especially in a civic context, was also an important characteristic of late antique epigraphic culture, as Denis FEISSEL demonstrates in his paper by concentrating on the three most important municipal magistrates of this period, the *curator*, the *defensor* and the *pater civitatis*, and by collecting the relevant epigraphic evidence from the East.

The third part of the volume explores the impact of Christianity on the epigraphic cultures of Late Antiquity. In a basic methodological paper Charlotte ROUECHÉ and Claire SOTINEL call into question the long-established division between a ‘pagan’ or ‘secular’ and a ‘Christian’ epigraphy. They argue that this a modern distinction which does not concur with late antique realities and therefore obscures more than it reveals. A characteristic feature of early Christianity were the many theological disputes that in turn led to the establishment of various groups that were termed as ‘heretics’. Georgios DELIGIANNAKIS asks whether the existence of such ‘heretical’ groups shows up in the epigraphic record of the period, taking the situation on some of the Aegean islands as a case study. When we take a look at epigraphic practices that were connected with church building, especially the numerous mosaic inscriptions commemorating donations of individuals towards the adornment of the churches,⁴⁶ regional differences come into play again, as Rudolf HAENSCH demonstrates by comparing such mosaic inscriptions and the formulae used in them in churches in the Near East and Italy. As we have already seen, the late antique period was a phase of experimentation in terms of the culture of writing, when new styles of lettering were adopted. In fact, contrary to the notion that the use and importance of writing decreased dramatically during this period,⁴⁷ the ubiquity and social diversity of graffiti, especially in ecclesiastical contexts, indicate that these were still an important element in social life, as Mark A. HANDLEY shows in the final paper of this volume.

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46 See above n. 29.

47 As has been claimed, for example, by HARRIS 1989, 285–322.

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