

EPIGRAPHIC HABIT AND HISTORY
OF THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN*

by

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ABSTRACT: This paper investigates the epigraphic habit in the Eastern Mediterranean from the inception of alphabetic writing into the seventh c. CE. It considers all categories of inscriptions, not just epitaphs, as in most earlier studies. It examines the epigraphic habit through quantitative analysis of 32,157 inscriptions sampled from ten areas in the Eastern Mediterranean from the Black Sea coast to central Greece, western and central Asia Minor, Phoenicia, and Egypt. The shapes of the epigraphic curves are due to different factors, including the pre-Greek epigraphic habit, Hellenisation, the Roman presence, wars, and Christianity. Two epigraphic maxima are identified in the Eastern Mediterranean: in the third c. BCE and in the second c. CE.

The unprecedented profusion of inscriptions in stone permeating public spaces from agoras, streets, temple grounds and cemeteries was aptly recapped by Louis ROBERT, who called classical antiquity – as compared with the pre-modern Europe – “civilisation de l’*épigraphie*”¹. If not exactly universal, the habit of inscribing in stone was no longer the almost exquisite domain of royalty and the divine as had been the case in the great civilisations of Mesopotamia and Egypt². Although inscriptions were used as a source or at least quoted as such already in antiquity by Herodotus, Pseudo-Demosthenes, Onesikritos, Arrian, and

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¹ ROBERT 1989, the quotation is on p. 66.

² BRESSON 2005.

Pausanias, among others³, the reflection of their uneven chronological distribution and their importance for a historian is quite recent. The idea of linking the chronological distribution of inscriptions with political events and constitutional transformation in antiquity was first raised by Reginald AUSTIN and Benjamin MERITT⁴, while the term “epigraphic habit” owes its enormous following in modern scholarly literature to a 1982 article by Ramsey MACMULLEN⁵. The groundbreaking paper of Charles W. HEDRICK published in 1999 in “Hesperia” is a source of inspiration to any student of Greek history in its convincing attempt to find not just a coincidence but also a causal link between the vagaries of the Athenian constitution and the shape of the epigraphic curve. Among other things, this paper tests HEDRICK’s method on broad material from outside of Athens, simultaneously trying to overcome his limitations derived from the exclusive reliance on the PHI Greek Inscriptions database⁶.

INSCRIPTIONS, THEIR GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION, AND EPIGRAPHIC CULTURE

Although epigraphy is tied to important issues of ancient cultures, such as the level of literacy and the role the written word played in Mediterranean societies, this paper will not attempt to contribute to any of them. It will focus instead on patterns of chronological distribution of ancient inscriptions in the hope of contributing to a better understanding of the historical processes of the rise and fall of the classical urban culture, of the shifting relationship between ancient cities and territorial powers, and of the proliferation and demise of ancient democracy. It will ask questions about the role religion played in shaping epigraphic habits.

³ Hdt. VII 228 (epitaphs on tombs of Greeks killed at Thermopylai); Hdt. V 77, 4 (epigram commemorating Athenian victory over Boiotians and Chalkidians, known also from a fragmentary *IG I³ 501*); Ps.-Dem. 59, 76 (a stele inscribed in now faint archaic Athenian characters is kept in the temple of Dionysos Limnaios); Onesikritos, *FGrH* 134 F 34 (alleged inscription on the tomb of Cyrus the Great, quoted also, in different form, by Aristoboulos, *FGrH* 139 F 51b; Plut. *Alex.* 69); Arr. *Anab.* II 5, 4 (alleged inscription on a tomb of Sardanapalos/Ashurbanipal). Although his rendition of the inscription cannot be verified, Arrian refers to a real artifact: HELLER 2015: 337. Among many inscriptions to which Pausanias refers one may list the one inscribed on the monument celebrating victory of Kyniska, a Spartan princess, in chariot races in Olympia (VI 1, 6) which survived to our days (*IvO* 160). We do not include the celebrated example of a surviving ancient inscription (*IG I³ 83*) and an ancient historian seemingly quoting it *in extenso* (Thuc. V 47), since Thucydides in all probability quoted the treaty between Athens, Argos, Mantinea and Elis after a copy kept in Athenian archives: D. COHEN 1956. See also SMARCZYK 2006.

⁴ AUSTIN 1938: 25 (on increasing numbers of inscribed decrees): “It was doubtless intimately connected with the rise of Athenian democracy, which probably insisted that the laws by which it was governed should be accessible to everyone”; MERITT 1940: 91: “the democratic habit of inscribing things on stone”.

⁵ MACMULLEN 1982.

⁶ On these limitations see HEDRICK 1999: 390–393.

Inevitably it will ask whether we can speak of one epigraphic “culture” in the Eastern Mediterranean or of a number of disjointed or interlocking cultures⁷. Knowing full well that the written culture of the Eastern Mediterranean was predominantly Greek, this paper will pay particular attention to non-Greek epigraphic habits and how the pre-Greek background shaped the seemingly Greek epigraphic culture in various areas studied here. Bearing in mind how widespread and how long-lasting the ancient habit of writing in stone was, this paper will attempt to ascertain whether one can approach the epigraphic culture as an issue of *longue durée*. This paper is concerned with the quantitative study of ancient inscriptions, out of necessity leaving out issues that are not susceptible to chronological sequencing of epigraphic data. One example is regarding women commissioning inscriptions and being commemorated epigraphically. We are unable to review this issue for quantitative studies since the evidence is very limited both chronologically and territorially. Among the areas which provide the most epigraphic evidence for women is Miletos, with some 120 inscriptions commemorating *hydrophoroi*, well-born girls serving in the cult of Artemis at Didyma⁸. Another example is Olbia, where *tituli honorarii* were often set up for women or by women⁹. But, bearing in mind how marginal *tituli honorarii* are within the epigraphic output of this city (ca. 2.7%), the numerical strength of inscriptions set up for women or by women is statistically insignificant.

This paper draws upon a number of case studies conducted by a larger team which also included the authors of this paper. The results of this study were published recently as a book from which this paper largely draws¹⁰. Ten discrete areas were selected for case studies regarding the chronological distribution of inscriptions: (1) the north coast of the Black Sea (Bosporan Kingdom and Chersonesos); (2) the west and north-west coast of the Black Sea (Mesambria, Kallatis, Istros, and Olbia); (3) Boiotia (Thebes, Tanagra, Thespiiai, and Oropos); (4) Delphi; (5) Olympia; (6) western Asia Minor (Miletos, Ephesos, and Pergamon); (7) central Asia Minor (mostly Greater Phrygia), with individual studies of Eumeneia, Laodikeia, Pessinous, Aizanoi, and Aphrodisias (Karia); (8) Phoenicia; (9) Alexandria; (10) the Fayum Oasis. As the map below shows, the selected areas cover most of the Eastern Mediterranean, including the Black Sea region. The case studies were selected this way to have territories with a wide range of characteristics covered: big and small cities, places hosting major temples, areas of old, Greek or pre-Greek writing culture, territories in which inscribing began only after they became Hellenised, areas ethnically (mostly) Greek and areas where Greek was the language selected for writing even if

⁷ As suggested by BODEL 2001: 6–15.

⁸ GÜNTHER 2014.

⁹ E.g. *SEG* XLVI 948; *IOSPE* 190, 192, 193, 200.

¹⁰ NAWOTKA 2020a.

the majority of the population spoke an indigenous tongue, cities central to the culture and economy of the Greek world and peripheries of the Greco-Roman world. These case studies tabulate inscriptions datable to at least a century principally for the period from the beginning of the alphabetic writing until the end of antiquity, symbolically placed in the mid-seventh c. CE, to coincide with the Arab and Slavic raids, which put an end to the post-classical urban life in most of the Eastern Mediterranean. This upper chronological limit is in line with the dominant modern perception of the end of antiquity¹¹. It is also of relevance from the strictly epigraphic point of view since, in numerical terms inscribing in stone came to a virtual standstill after the mid-seventh c., while most of the late-Antique categories of inscriptions ceased to exist in the Byzantine age¹².



Map 1: Case studies of epigraphic distribution in the Eastern Mediterranean

¹¹ NAWOTKA 2020b: 2, with reference.

¹² MANGO 2020.

Table 1 below contains data on the total number of inscriptions from all studied cities/territories, the proportion of inscriptions datable to at least a century or quarter-century, and non-Greek and bilingual inscriptions. This is a revised table 11.1 from our book¹³. It has been updated using new data available after the table 11.1 was closed (November 2019). The new figures do not change the overall picture of the epigraphic output in the case-study areas in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Table 1

City/territory	All inscriptions	% of inscriptions datable to a century	% of inscriptions datable to a quarter-century or half-century (when indicated)	Greek inscriptions	Latin/ bilingual (Greek-Latin) inscriptions	% of Latin/ bilingual (Greek-Latin) inscriptions	Inscriptions in other languages
Bosporan Kingdom	1,599	93.50	89.93 (half c.)	1,595	3	0.19	1
Chersonesos	704	93.18	82.39 (half c.)	625	79	11.22	0
West and North-West Black Sea	1,437	87.05	33.68	1,285	152	10.58	0
Boiotia	6,201	85.69	45.41	6,189	12	0.19	0
Delphi	3,728	87.00	73.00	3,711	17	0.46	0
Olympia	1,109	63.57	45.18	1,096	13	1.17	0
Miletos	2,476	59.49	36.79	2,455	20	0.80	1
Ephesos	5,777	34.33	23.69	5,456	321	5.56	0
Pergamon	1,305	69.20	45.40	1,277	26	2.00	1
Phrygia and Aphrodisias	3,344	71.20		3,284	30	0.90	30
Phoenicia	2,594	38.80	23.10	1,715	597	23.00	234
Alexandria	1,133	61.87	19.77	977	141	12.45	15
Fayum	750	40.00	21.00	345	3	0.40	402
Total	32,157	66.55		30,050	1,414	4.40	684

¹³ NAWOTKA 2020d: 217.

By their very nature, quantitative epigraphic studies tabulate only surviving inscriptions, not knowing, however, what proportion of the original epigraphic output survived to the modern age¹⁴. The end result of tabulating inscriptions is the so-called “epigraphic curve”, now a generally accepted term for a linear or other graphical representation of the chronological distribution of inscriptions¹⁵. Graph 1 shows the aggregate curve for the Eastern Mediterranean, combining the individual case studies.

INSCRIPTIONS, THEIR NUMBERS, AND CATEGORIES

Nobody has counted all surviving ancient inscriptions, and the estimates for Latin inscriptions run at some 4,500 Republican-age specimens, while the EDCS Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby lists 532,661 specimens (mostly Imperial), rightfully asserting that these are almost all surviving Latin inscriptions¹⁶. Epigraphers further estimate that some 70% of all surviving Latin inscriptions are epitaphs¹⁷. John DAVIES has estimated that there are upward of 200,000 Greek inscriptions¹⁸, which is a much higher assessment than the 100,000 proposed by Charles HEDRICK¹⁹. Our study suggests that HEDRICK’s figures are notoriously low: for Ephesos, it is “fewer than 4,000” compared to our 5,777. For Delphi, it is “only about 2,000” compared to our 3,728²⁰. Therefore it is more prudent to accept DAVIES’ estimates. Alongside dominating Greek inscriptions, a number of Latin, Egyptian, Semitic, and other indigenous inscriptions from the Eastern Mediterranean survive. Their number is unknown too, although Werner ECK estimates the number of Latin inscriptions from the East (Asia Minor, greater Syria, Egypt, Cyrenaica) is at least 4,000, and another 14,000 from the Balkans recorded in volume three of *CIL* needs to be added, as well as a few thousand more that were found later²¹. There are also thousands of Semitic, Egyptian, Phrygian and other inscriptions from the Eastern Mediterranean. Thus the estimated total number of ancient inscriptions from the Eastern Mediterranean lies between 200,000 and 300,000. Epigraphy of the Eastern Mediterranean is not nearly as dominated by epitaphs as that in the West: in our study, their share is closer to 25% than to 70% as in

¹⁴ See HEDRICK’s (1999: 393–395) pessimistic remarks on the practical impossibility of estimating the proportion, even in the case of Athenian decrees, the most studied category of ancient inscriptions.

¹⁵ See e.g. section “Epigraphic corpora and epigraphic curves” in TROUT 2009: 170–173.

¹⁶ <https://db.edcs.eu/epigr/hinweise/hinweis-en.html>, accessed on 17 December 2022.

¹⁷ SALLER, SHAW 1984: 124; MEYER 1990: 74; WOOLF 1996: 22–23.

¹⁸ DAVIES 2003: 326.

¹⁹ HEDRICK 1999: 390–391.

²⁰ See NAWOTKA 2020c: 126, and GRZESIK 2020: 52, for explanation on our count of inscriptions.

²¹ ECK 2009: 19–20.

the Latin West. They dominate in the Bosporan Kingdom, while in neighbouring Chersonesos, their proportion is much lower. They dominate in Boiotia and also in Phrygia, whose epigraphic culture developed fully under the Empire. In some places, however, very few epitaphs are recorded, the best examples being Delphi and Olympia, where no ancient cemetery has been identified so far. It is low not only in the cities where ancient cemeteries have not been archaeologically identified, like Delphi, but also in Olbia where archaeologists have studied ancient cemeteries²². This phenomenon can be explained by the local burial tradition, which did not include the use of epitaphs – instead, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic sculptures, terracotta figurines, or marble and limestone steles were placed on the grave. This markedly lower proportion of epitaphs highlights an enormous distinction between the epigraphic culture in the East and the epigraphic habit in the West. In our project, we count inscriptions under five broad categories, typical for epigraphy of the East: epitaphs, decrees, together with other legislative acts (*nomoi*, sacred laws), *tituli honorarii*, no matter whether they were inscribed on statue bases or on other surfaces, dedications, and other inscriptions, not included in the dominant categories. The exceptions were taken for Miletos, where inscriptions of the top officials of Apollo and Artemis of Didyma, *prophetai*, *hydrophoroi*, and *tamiai*, take the place of dedications as a significant category of inscriptions, Phoenicia, where *inscriptions forestières* are counted instead of decrees, and Delphi with manumissions instead of epitaphs²³.

This project, as earlier ones within the field of the chronological distribution of ancient evidence, limits its scope to the published source material as this is the only viable road one can take. Our understanding of inscriptions is narrow and, again, in agreement with the prevailing epigraphic convention. An *inscription* is understood as being a piece of text carved by the human hand onto a durable material, like stone, metal, or plaster, which is addressed to a wide audience and often presented to the public. Most of them meet the criteria of Eck's *Memorialinschriften*, the most typical category of ancient inscriptions cut in stone, "this durable material [...] selected almost exclusively for an enduring public memorial of events, deeds and people"²⁴. We agree with earlier scholars that in the majority of cases, the decision what to inscribe was made locally, even in respect to letters and edicts of kings and Roman emperors²⁵. Thus this project studies local epigraphic habits, aiming ultimately at finding principles uniting all or many of them. In keeping with the epigraphic convention, we include *instrumenta domestica* and graffiti painted on or cut into walls, stone, or rock, but not *diplomata militaria*, cuneiform, and early alphabetic Semitic inscriptions,

²² See e.g. PAROVIČ-PEŠIKAN 1974; SKUDNOVA 1988; PAPANOVA 2006.

²³ On categories of inscriptions tabulated in our project see NAWOTKA 2020b: 18–22.

²⁴ ECK 2009: 17.

²⁵ COOLEY 2012, with reference.

e.g., on clay tablets from Ugarit. The tablets from Ugarit were never meant for public display, as was the case with most inscriptions in stone, and *diplomata militaria* represent the epigraphic culture of Rome, not of places where they were found. The largest category of inscriptions excluded from this project are pottery inscriptions. The place where pottery (or fragments of pottery) is eventually found often differs from its place of origin, thus, inscribed pottery says nothing about the epigraphic habit of the place where it was unearthed. Then, inscriptions on tiles and amphorae were never meant for public display. Furthermore, the sheer quantity of pottery inscriptions (some 200,000 from Rhodes alone) and stamps on tiles would, in some places, distort the overall picture of the local epigraphic habit²⁶. For instance, 157 datable stone inscriptions were tabulated for Berytos and Heliopolis, while 110 Rhodian amphora stamps have been identified in Berytos alone²⁷; the quantity of stamped amphora uncovered in Pergamon overshadows the epigraphic production in this city²⁸.

Decrees, widely believed to have been the most typical way of expression for a democratic *polis*²⁹, are attested very unevenly, both in a temporal and geographical sense. In most cities where they are recorded, decrees are a feature most typical of the Hellenistic age. There are important exceptions to this rule. In Olympia, the category titled “decrees” already contained large numbers in the late-archaic age; however, these were often sacred laws, not proper decrees passed by the *boule* and *demos*. In most cities, the number of inscribed decrees diminishes in the first c. BCE, to die out in later centuries. Incidentally, this rule does not apply to Chersonesos and Olbia, two Greek cities that stayed outside the Roman *provincia* in the Imperial age. Both the diminished numbers of inscribed decrees in most places under Roman rule and the flourishing of the habit of inscribing decrees in Olbia and Chersonesos seem to speak of a powerful, if difficult to define, connection between Roman rule and the death of the democratic habit of inscribing decrees by the *boule* and *demos*. Some places are completely (Phoenicia) or almost completely devoid of decrees (Bosporan Kingdom, Phrygia, Alexandria). There seems to be a clear link between the status of a city and the habit of inscribing decrees: in cities of the Bosporan Kingdom, as well as in Alexandria, places that were never free and always directly controlled by a territorial power (a Bosporan or Ptolemaic king or a Roman emperor through his prefect), almost no decrees were inscribed, which suggests none were passed. Hellenistic Ephesos inscribed numerous decrees while independent and almost none when controlled by kings.

²⁶ PANAGOU 2016: 208–209.

²⁷ AUBERT 2004: 33.

²⁸ BÖRKER, BURROW 1998.

²⁹ BERTRAND 1985.

In our book, inscriptions are, in general, tabulated in 25- and 100-year brackets. Presenting material in 25-year brackets is akin to MACMULLEN's 20-year brackets; the 25-year brackets appear in some other earlier studies³⁰. This division of material stems from the desire to interpret minima and maxima of the epigraphic curve with reference to historical events evolving within a generation or within the reign of a king or emperor who might have affected epigraphic production in a particular city. In most cases, we accept the dates established by the editors or epigraphers who re-studied the published inscriptions.

PREVIOUS STUDIES OF THE EPIGRAPHIC CULTURE

So far, the bulk of research on the chronological distribution of ancient inscriptions has been concerned with Latin epigraphy of the age of the Empire. After the pioneering studies of Jean-Marie LASSÈRE on epitaphs in Roman Africa and Stanisław MROZEK on the frequency of inscriptions throughout the early Empire³¹, the real interest of scholarship in understanding the temporal distribution of ancient inscriptions has been generated by the classical paper of Ramsey MACMULLEN, which circulated the term "epigraphic habit"³², now gradually superseded by the term "epigraphic culture" as more reflective of the social context in which inscriptions were commissioned³³. His paper is still the principal point of reference for any study of the chronological distribution of ancient inscriptions, with a lasting contribution of drawing attention to the very uneven chronological distribution of inscriptions as well as promoting the idea of inscriptions as cultural phenomena and not exclusively as sources of text³⁴. MACMULLEN's epigraphic curve is almost flat for the period 1–100, rising at the beginning of the second c., to reach a high maximum in 180–220³⁵. The basic premises of MACMULLEN's paper in his study of the epigraphic habit in the Roman Empire are: exclusive concentration on epitaphs from just seven cities in Roman Africa, model-based dating used to tabulate inscription onto 20-year brackets, belief in the existence of a single principle explaining the shape of the epigraphic curve, and his willingness to extrapolate the result of his study into all of the Roman Empire. MACMULLEN and the epigraphers following in his footsteps argue that their epigraphic curves coincide with and reflect changes within Roman society, in particular reflecting the coveted Roman inheritance law that was spreading throughout the provinces, resulting in a growing number

³⁰ E.g. LE BOHEC 1989.

³¹ LASSÈRE 1973; MROZEK 1973.

³² MACMULLEN 1982.

³³ On epigraphic culture see WOOLF 1996: 30; BELTRÁN LLORIS 2015.

³⁴ BELTRÁN LLORIS 2015: 129.

³⁵ MACMULLEN 1982: 242, fig. IV.

of Roman citizens³⁶. Since allegedly only Roman citizens could make a valid will, the introduction of the universal franchise under Caracalla meant that the importance placed on being a Roman citizen was diminished, which in turn led to the sharp drop in the total epigraphic production rate of the third c. CE³⁷.

There seems to be a broad agreement that there was a pattern in the chronological distribution of (Latin) inscriptions from the early Empire. But is this true? The pattern of the chronological distribution of epitaphs, established principally by LASSÈRE's study of seven cities in Roman Africa and to a degree confirmed by MEYER's epigraphic curve for Thessaloniki, was not identical, not even within other Latin-writing provinces. The graph representing epitaphs from Lugdunum shows a peak between 75–100 CE, much earlier than in Africa, with a steep decline almost a century after the decline was identified in Africa, and in the number of papyri and ostraca from Egypt³⁸. Curves based on dated inscriptions are very different from that drawn by MACMULLEN on the basis of his statistical model, not on counting datable inscriptions. This applies to MACMULLEN's curve for Lydia³⁹, MEYER's curve of Athenian epitaphs⁴⁰, and the curves for Sicily, drawn by PRAG⁴¹. The analysis of the curves resulting from the past epigraphic studies does not allow for identifying one pattern of chronological distribution of inscription in the Early Empire, let alone in antiquity *sensu largo*. Another theory explaining the epigraphic maximum in the second half of the second c. CE comes from Greg WOOLF to whom inscriptions were cut in order to "fix an individual's place within history, society and the cosmos"⁴², which was criticised for misapplying psychology to epigraphy and for failing to explain the dropping epigraphic curve in the age of anxiety in the first half of the third c.⁴³

MACMULLEN and his school rely heavily on a statistical model in dating inscriptions in order to move around the low number of securely dated inscriptions. He expounds his model in reference to LASSÈRE's dating of African inscriptions:

4,160 texts, only two datable to a single year, the rest in 25 categories that touch on the empire, for example, "Augustus," 25 texts, where I have divided that number by the years of the reign, 25 – (27 B.C. to A.D. 14 = 41) = .61 texts per year over A.D. 1–14. There is also "end of Republic/Trajan," 602 texts running from 40 B.C., the date somewhat arbitrarily chosen, down to

³⁶ MEYER 1990.

³⁷ MEYER 1990: 89, 92.

³⁸ See MEYER 1990: 90, fig. 4 for the curve of epitaphs from Lugdunum, and NAWOTKA 2020b: 4, graph 0.2 for the curve of papyri from Egypt.

³⁹ MACMULLEN 1986.

⁴⁰ MEYER 1990: 92, fig. 6..

⁴¹ PRAG 2002: 22, fig. 2.1 and 23, fig. 2.2.

⁴² WOOLF 1996: 29, 32.

⁴³ PLEKET 1999: 83–84.

A.D. 117, i.e., 157 years = 3.83 per year. For a specific single year, e.g. A.D. 2, I would add 3.83 to .61 to produce the total for that year, and add still more from other overlapping categories. To the categories “early”, “mid”, and “late” I assign the values 0–9, 40–60, and 90–99⁴⁴.

This model is valid on the condition of a more or less equal distribution of inscriptions per year in each of MACMULLEN’s categories (e.g. “Augustus” or “early Empire”). It is impossible to say whether this assumption is correct since the sample of precisely datable epitaphs in Roman Africa is much too small to produce any sound statistical analysis⁴⁵.

The surviving epigraphic output from the East paints a strikingly different picture than that resulting from MACMULLEN’s model. The number of inscriptions that are datable to at least a quarter-century, e.g. 1,369 from Ephesos, 911 from Miletos, 2,816 from Boiotia, 2,735 from Delphi, leave no doubt that divergent epigraphic habits existed in the Eastern Mediterranean, and in Africa. In this respect, Sicily, with its 828 inscriptions datable to at least a century seems closer to the East than to Africa⁴⁶. In our case studies, we do not consider inscriptions dated by the editors as “Hellenistic” or “Imperial”. Those better-dated point to a tremendous difference between *per annum* frequency figures when one considers inscriptions tabulated in 25-year brackets, both in the Roman and Hellenistic age, e.g.: in Miletos, there are 10.5 inscriptions from 50–75 CE (0.42 per year) vs. 71.5 from 125–150 CE (2.86 per year), or 13 from 15–135 BCE (0.52 per year) vs. 72.5 from 225–200 BCE (2.9 per year)⁴⁷; in Ephesos there are 33.5 inscriptions from 50–75 CE (1.34 per year) vs. 188.5 from 100–125 CE (7.54 per year)⁴⁸; from Delphi there 36 inscriptions from 75–50 BCE (1.44 per year) vs. 330 from 175–150 BCE (13.2 per year)⁴⁹; from Boiotia, there are 34.5 inscriptions from 150–125 BCE (1.38 per year) vs. 775.5 from 225–200 BCE (31.02 per year)⁵⁰. The distribution of inscriptions per year is anything but equal if measured using a large number of specimens datable with some precision. Thus the dating model of MACMULLEN does not seem valid when applied to Greek epigraphy or perhaps to epigraphic output in classical antiquity in general. Therefore, using a data-based model, one that calculates the yearly epigraphic production by

⁴⁴ MACMULLEN 1982: 241, n. 14.

⁴⁵ As shown convincingly in CHERRY 1995: 145–149.

⁴⁶ PRAG 2002: 22, fig. 2.1.

⁴⁷ Figures after NAWOTKA 2020c: 122, graph 6.2. Figures like 10.5 stem from the method applied by us in assigning inscriptions to centuries, quarter-centuries or half-centuries. If editors date an inscription e.g. to the second–first c. BCE, we assign one half of it to each century and a similar principle is applied to assigning inscriptions to quarter-centuries or half-centuries.

⁴⁸ Figures after NAWOTKA 2020c: 128, graph 6.6.

⁴⁹ Figures after GRZESIK 2020: 55, graph 2.2.

⁵⁰ Figures after SZELĄG 2020: 36, graph 1.4.

dividing the total number of inscriptions from a given period by the number of years in that period, as MACMULLEN does, may very easily produce invalid data and is, to quote David CHERRY, “little more than informed guess-work”⁵¹. Creating further models using the inadequate model of chronological distribution of ancient epigraphic production may dangerously veer from history into fantasy. This study arises from the perceived need to confront the alleged universal nature of the epigraphic habit in the Roman empire with evidence derived from a representative sample of Greek inscriptions. As it does not study epitaphs from Roman Africa, its aim is not polemical with MACMULLEN and his school. It applies different methodological principles tabulating datable inscriptions from a much broader area, in a much wider chronological framework, and taking into account all categories of inscriptions, not only Imperial-age epitaphs.

LITERACY, ECONOMY, POPULATION DENSITY, AND QUANTITY OF SURVIVING INSCRIPTIONS

The total number of inscriptions in the areas studied in our project is 32,157, or between 10.72% and 16.07% of the total estimated surviving epigraphic output of the Eastern Mediterranean. This number is by far the highest of all epigraphic projects, and even the lower estimate of 10.72% of the total epigraphic output of the area makes this sample statistically significant. However, one caveat has to be made: table 1 displays enormous differences within the proportion of datable inscriptions in various cities/regions, from the lows of 34.33% for Ephesos and 38.8% for Phoenicia to the highs of 93.5% for the Bosporan Kingdom and 93.18% for Chersonesos. Since this project has not performed any autopsy of stones or squeezes, for the most part, we rely on dates established by editors (or other epigraphers who have re-studied the inscriptions). Therefore, this discrepancy in the proportion of dated inscriptions depends overwhelmingly on the editorial principles of various earlier scholars and in most cases, on their willingness to risk dating inscriptions on letter shapes. A good illustration of this is Phoenicia, where up to 70% of Phoenician-language inscriptions are dated, while in the standard corpora of Greek and Latin inscriptions published by Jean-Paul REY-COQUAIS, only 10% of inscriptions from Tyre and 40% from Arados are datable. In a sense, the ratio of datable Phoenician-language inscriptions from Phoenicia is somewhat inflated, and the pre-Hellenistic local maxima of the epigraphic curve of Phoenicia are probably overstated⁵².

Notwithstanding these issues, this project has documented, first, a great discrepancy in the number of the surviving inscriptions from the cities under consideration: the discrepancy is far bigger than the difference in their relative size

⁵¹ CHERRY 1995: 150.

⁵² GŁOGOWSKI 2020: 168.

and economic prosperity in antiquity. A case in point is Alexandria, the largest or second-largest city in the Mediterranean, with 1,133 inscriptions, whilst tiny Delphi has 3,728 inscriptions. Each large city analysed in our project produced many more inscriptions than Alexandria: Ephesos (5,777), Miletos (2,476), Aphrodisias (1,693), and Pergamon (1,305), in fact, even a couple of smaller cities produced more: Thespiai (1,361) and Tanagra (1,309). The size and the generally recognised economic prosperity of Alexandria were non-factors when it came to epigraphic production. Of course, excavating is difficult in densely-populated Alexandria, but the situation is the same, for instance, in Athens and Rome, where the surviving epigraphic output numbers tens of thousands of inscriptions. Most likely, therefore, the low number of surviving inscriptions from Alexandria testifies to a comparatively low rate of epigraphic production in the city. Another example is Phoenicia, which had quite a substantial population, a number of sizable cities, was prosperous throughout most of antiquity, and was endowed with a long indigenous tradition of writing. Yet the number of surviving inscriptions from Phoenicia is no match to similarly sized regions, be it Boiotia or Phrygia with Aphrodisias; in fact, the total number of the epigraphic output in Phoenicia is smaller than in some cities studied in this project, most notably Delphi and Ephesos.

The example of the Fayum Oasis sheds light on the issue of relations between inscribing on stone and the general level of literacy and proliferation of writing in everyday life, as well as in public administration. The Fayum has produced 31,928 papyri and ostraca, or ca. 30% of all documents of this type found in Egypt⁵³. The inhabitants of the Fayum surely lived in a world in which written documents (both public and private) were commonplace, which implies that at least some literacy existed outside the local elite. This contrasts with a very small number of inscriptions: 750 over a period of some 2800 years. We cannot extrapolate the evidence from the Fayum throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, yet the data from informal pottery inscriptions (graffiti and dipinti) found in the Black Sea area and not counted in this study⁵⁴, or from some 700 graffiti, mostly from sanctuaries in Thebes⁵⁵, or from ostraca or clay *bullae* from Phoenicia⁵⁶, likewise not counted here, seem to suggest that writing was a feature of everyday life in the Hellenistic and early Roman age and that it was not limited to the elite. The example of the Fayum is telling in more than one way. However deep pharaonic

⁵³ Number of papyri based on the Trismegistos database, accessed November, 2023: <https://www.trismegistos.org>.

⁵⁴ E.g. SAPRYKIN, MASLENNIKOV 2007 (1,266 graffiti from the Bosporan Kingdom); NAWOTKA 1999 (some 250 graffiti from Nymphaion); SOLOMONIK 1984; BÖTTGER, ŠELOV 1998 (2,233 dipinti from Tanais).

⁵⁵ SZELĄG 2020: 31.

⁵⁶ E.g. ARIEL, NAVEH 2003; PISANO, TRAVAGLINI 2003; KAOUKABANI 2005.

Egypt was immersed in writing culture, commissioning hieroglyphic inscriptions was limited to kings, important priests, and high-ranking officials, while the nature of most Egyptian inscriptions was religious. The fast expansion of inscribing in stone in the Hellenistic Fayum can be attributed both to the introduction of the Greek habit of inscribing, which was much less elitist than the pre-Greek Egyptian epigraphic culture, and to the internal evolution of Egyptian religion of the Late Age. In the Hellenistic age, inscriptions of a religious nature still dominated the epigraphic landscape of the Fayum, but now active participation in cult and inscribing became culturally more accessible to people not belonging to the highest elite of Egypt⁵⁷. The same evolution is not visible in Alexandria, which lacked pre-Greek epigraphic culture and which, alongside other Greek cities in Egypt, drew more upon the imported Greek epigraphic culture⁵⁸.

These examples prove that there is no easy and obvious link between writing and inscribing. Certainly, few people who were familiar with informal inscriptions on pottery or with documents on perishable material (like papyrus) ever commissioned an inscription on stone. One obvious reason is the expense of acquiring and preparing an appropriate stone and inscribing the text (and often painting it), not counting the possible cost of acquiring the right to display one's inscription in a public or private place. These issues have been investigated most thoroughly regarding Athens⁵⁹, Delos, and Roman North Africa⁶⁰. The price range for a stele with a decree is recorded as being between 20 and 60 drachms, and for a simple tombstone, even less, while the price of elaborate tombs might exceed one talent⁶¹. Even if the recorded price range of an inscribed tombstone put it out of the range of most people, the price of a stele was certainly affordable in every town. This is even more true in the case of Alexandria, one of the richest cities of the ancient Mediterranean, which makes the low number of inscriptions from Alexandria even more puzzling as it is not explainable on economic grounds alone.

One can argue that in some cases, at least, there is a link between the period of urbanisation of an area and the number of produced inscriptions. The rural Fayum, although populous, prosperous and largely literate, produced very few inscriptions. Pre-Greek Phrygia (eighth–sixth c. BCE), although endowed with the indigenous writing culture, has yielded a small amount of evidence: 15 inscriptions from Midas City and 13 from the rest of western Phrygia⁶². The

⁵⁷ See WILIMOWSKA 2020: 202, graph 10.2.

⁵⁸ BOWMAN 2020.

⁵⁹ RAEPSAET 1984; LOOMIS 1998: 121–165; OLIVER 2000.

⁶⁰ DUNCAN-JONES 1974, catalogue: “Prices in the African provinces”, nos. 77–212 and pp. 78–79; HØJTE 2005: 52–54.

⁶¹ In greater detail: NAWOTKA 2021.

⁶² CARLESS UNWIN 2020: 147.

examples of the Fayum and Phrygia reveal the connection between Greek-type urbanisation and the desire to display lapidary inscriptions in public. Urbanisation seems, therefore, to be a very important factor with regards to public inscription production, however, the examples of Alexandria and Phoenicia, to a degree, indicate that it was not always a mitigating factor.

LANGUAGE OF INSCRIPTIONS, ETHNICITY AND THE ROMAN EPIGRAPHIC HABIT IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

As table 1 shows, the great majority of inscriptions are in Greek, with Latin and Greek-Latin bilinguals coming in a distant second (4.4% of the total), and inscriptions in all other languages accounting for little more than 2%. Unsurprisingly the beginning of Latin/bilingual epigraphy in the East coincides with the beginning of the Roman rule. The numbers and percentages of Latin/bilingual inscriptions as part of the total epigraphic output vary significantly from a measly 0.19% in the Bosporan Kingdom to a whopping 23% in Phoenicia. There are divergent reasons for that. In Phoenicia, it is explained by a combination of the presence of the most successful Roman veteran colonies in the East (Berytos and Heliopolis), the continued use of Latin throughout the centuries by their inhabitants, the strong influence of the Roman honorific habit with 60% of *tituli honorarii* in Latin, and one local phenomenon: a large number of so-called *inscriptions forestières* of Hadrian, that marked the borders of the imperial domain in Mount Lebanon⁶³. The percentage of Latin inscriptions is much higher in cities that hosted Roman garrisons for a prolonged period, no matter whether they belonged to a province, like Alexandria, or stayed outside the borders of the Empire, like Olbia and Chersonesos. The high proportion of epitaphs among the inscriptions from these *poleis* is related to the adoption of the Roman preoccupation with erecting tombstones⁶⁴. The correlation between the high or, better still, increased number of Latin epitaphs and the Roman military presence is best known in Alexandria, where the enhanced Roman military assets in periods of revolts of *boukoloï* or the war with Zenobia are followed by a rising number of Latin epitaphs⁶⁵. Among non-garrisoned cities, the highest proportion of Latin/bilingual inscriptions is in Ephesos, which produced more public bilingual inscriptions than all the other cities of the province of Asia combined⁶⁶.

Since there was no language law in the Roman Empire, the decision of what language to use in epigraphy was made intuitively. The nature of the document seems to have been less important than the personal preference and identity

⁶³ ECK 2009: 32–33, 37–38; GŁOGOWSKI 2020: 174, 176–177.

⁶⁴ WOJCIECHOWSKA 2020: 191–192; PORUCZNIK 2020: 86; HALAMUS 2020: 105–106.

⁶⁵ WOJCIECHOWSKA 2020: 191–192 and graph 9.6.

⁶⁶ BURRELL 2009: 70, after KEARSLEY, EVANS 2001.

of whoever commissioned the inscription and the linguistic preference of the audience⁶⁷. Thus in Ephesos only 11 out of over 70 Imperial documents are in Latin⁶⁸. A partial explanation for the comparatively large number of Latin inscriptions in Ephesos is the pronounced Roman presence in the city, where the proconsul of Asia and probably more than one procurator resided⁶⁹. The governor was very active in civic affairs in Ephesos, and this is reflected in the large number of inscriptions (mostly Greek) stemming from his decisions, larger than in any city in the province of Asia⁷⁰. Latin is prominent in inscriptions commissioned not so much by governors and procurators but by their staff, clearly willing to demonstrate their superior Roman identity in the overwhelmingly Greek society of Ephesos⁷¹. Ephesos, the vibrant commercial centre of the Aegean in the Imperial age⁷², certainly attracted more important business people from the West, Italy in particular, than other cities in the region, among them *equites*, *publicani*, and Imperial freedmen who, alongside Roman soldiers, used Latin in their inscription(s) as a conscious decision that reflected their Roman pride and social position⁷³. The *conventus civium Romanorum* is attested epigraphically in Ephesos in the first c. BCE and under Augustus the city became a centre of imperial worship⁷⁴. Some bilingual monumental inscriptions show the unequal status of both languages: in the inscription commemorating the renovation of the Artemision in 6/5 BCE, the Latin letters, placed in the upper register, are twice the size of their Greek counterparts⁷⁵, in the inscription which still graces the monumental gate of Mithridates and Mazaeus, freedmen of Agrippa and *clientes* of Augustus, leading to the Commercial Agora in Ephesos, the Latin parts gain prominence through the placement on the projecting panels of the gate embellished with statues of members of the imperial family⁷⁶.

In many places studied in our project a reciprocal influence of the Greek and Roman epigraphic habit is visible. Perhaps the most obvious example of the influence of the Roman epigraphic culture is the proliferation of elaborate epitaphs

⁶⁷ ECK 2009: 18.

⁶⁸ ROCHETTE 2011.

⁶⁹ ECK 2009: 22.

⁷⁰ ECK 2009: 23; HARTER-UIBOPUU 2012.

⁷¹ ECK 2009: 29, 39.

⁷² DAVIES 2011.

⁷³ WEBER 1999; ECK (2009: 27) points out that *publicani* and soldiers were dedicators of most of the 20 Latin *tituli honorarii*, whereas the total number of honorific inscriptions for senators is no less than 140. For foreigners in Ephesos in general see WHITE 1995: 57–63, 66–79 (a catalogue of 106 foreigners attested in Imperial Ephesos).

⁷⁴ *I.Eph.* 658. BURRELL 2009: 70; ECK 2009: 25.

⁷⁵ *I.Eph.* 1522. GRAHAM 2013: 383–385.

⁷⁶ *I.Eph.* 3006 of 4/3 BCE. BURRELL 2009: 72–78; GRAHAM 2013: 391–394.

in the East, with formulae stating exclusive burial rights to a family grave and threatening violators with hefty fines⁷⁷. The gravestone formulae stating that fines are to be paid to the *fiscus* obviously repeat the provisions of Roman law⁷⁸. Another feature is the adoption of the dative instead of the usual accusative in a number of *tituli honorarii* from the same period attested in many places⁷⁹, although not in equal proportion: with one example in Boiotia⁸⁰, a few in Istros⁸¹, a few in Phoenicia⁸², and more in Alexandria and in Ephesos, including the *titulus* for Ti. Iulius Celsus Polemaeanus, the founder of the famous library⁸³. In reciprocity, some Latin *tituli honorarii* adopted the accusative instead of the dative⁸⁴. In general, our study supports the earlier findings of Werner Eck that the testimony of inscriptions goes against the idea that the language of the ruling class in the Roman East, let alone that of the common man, was Romanised. Even those Eastern Greeks who were pursuing a career in the Roman army or administration, in most cases, selected Greek for their inscriptions. Hence, the proliferation of Latin inscriptions is directly linked to the presence of western Roman soldiers, magistrates, support staff, and business people in cities of the East or, on occasion, to the deliberate decisions of the Emperor⁸⁵.

Languages other than Greek and Latin are much less common in inscriptions from the Eastern Mediterranean. They are not attested in continental Greek cities studied in our project, while Pergamon and Miletos brought one bilingua each: a Greek-Lydiaan dedication to Athena in Pergamon⁸⁶ and a Greek-Aramaic dedication to Zeus-Dusares in Miletos, commissioned by Šullai-Syllaios, a minister of the Nabatean king Obodas III⁸⁷. For all attention it attracted in modern academic

⁷⁷ E.g. *Milet* 564 of 175–192 CE: τὸ ἡρώων Φλαβίας Ὑγίας ζῆ καὶ κληρονόμων/ αὐτῆς, ... ἐτέ/ρω δὲ οὐδενὶ ἐξέεται ταφῆναι, ἐπὶ ὃ θάψας ἀποδώσει/τῶ κυριακῶ φίσκω * ,βφ' καὶ τῆ ἱερωτάτῃ Μιλησίων βου/λῆ ,βφ' καὶ ἔσται τῶ τῆς τυμβωρυχίας ἐνκλήματι ὕ/πεύθυνος. περὶ τούτων ἔγγραφοι ἀπόκειται εἰς/τὸ ἀρχεῖον ἐπὶ στεφανηφόρου Ἰουλίας τῆς Φιλέρω/τος <μ>ηνὸς Ληναίωνος κε', ἐπὶ ἀνθυπάτου/Φλ(αβίου) · Σουλπικιανοῦ μη(νὸς) Ληναίωνος ι'.

⁷⁸ Protection of tombs in Roman law: DE VISSCHER 1963.

⁷⁹ This shifting grammar in accordance with the Latin usage is akin to the word-for-word translation of official Roman documents quite common in the East: COOLEY 2012: 172–173.

⁸⁰ A *titulus honorarius* for Hadrian: *I.Thesp* 435.

⁸¹ *IScM* 175, 177A, possibly damaged *IScM* 176. Bilingual *IScM* 175 clearly shows a Latin calque.

⁸² *IGLS* VII 4016a–b (Arados); *IGR* III 1098 (Sidon); *I.Tyr* II 24 = *I.Tyr* II 36 (Tyre); *IGR* III 1103 (Tyre?).

⁸³ *I.Eph.* 5113. Another *titulus honorarius* for Celsus is in Latin (*I.Eph.* 5103). BURRELL 2009: 78–83.

⁸⁴ *I.Eph.* 811. Eck 2009: 28.

⁸⁵ Eck 2009: 38–40.

⁸⁶ *I.Perg.* 1 of the early third c. BCE. See SCHÜRR 1999 for translation and interpretation.

⁸⁷ *Milet* 165 of 9/8 BCE. The modern edition is: HACKL *et al.* 2003: 127–128.

literature⁸⁸, the inscription of Syllaios is little more than a curiosity item in the epigraphic culture of Miletos. Inscriptions in languages other than Greek and Latin survive, in a sizeable quantity, in areas with pre-Greek epigraphic culture: Phrygia, Phoenicia, and Egypt. In Phrygia, all Phrygian inscriptions belong to the eighth–sixth c. BCE, while the abundant epigraphic production of the Hellenistic and Roman age was almost exclusively Greek with a sprinkling of Latin and bilingual (0.9%)⁸⁹. The reason for the total disappearance of inscribing in Phrygian is unknown, and one can only speculate whether it had to do with the greater prestige of Greek in the era after the demise of the native Phrygian statehood.

The two case studies in Egypt produced very different, if not unexpected, results. In Alexandria, the proportion of Egyptian and Egyptian-Greek bilingual inscriptions is small⁹⁰. In the Fayum, the Egyptian-language epigraphic output matches Greek if all inscriptions are considered (398 Egyptian vs. 342 Greek), but in this case study, the Egyptian inscriptions are counted from the inception of inscribing in the Fayum ca. 2000 BCE. In the period after inscribing in Greek was introduced in the Fayum, Greek inscriptions are far more numerous than Egyptian⁹¹.

The language composition of the epigraphic output in Phoenicia is the most complex of all areas in our project. Since the inception of alphabetic writing in the tenth c. BCE well into the third c. BCE Phoenician was the dominant language, although Greek started to make inroads already in the fourth, if not the fifth c. BCE. This process precedes Alexander's conquest, with the earliest Greek inscriptions in Phoenicia being dedications to Phoenician gods commissioned by Cypriots⁹². The fast-growing number of Greek texts in Hellenistic Phoenicia was initially connected with the dominance of Hellenistic powers in the Levant, which brought inscriptions erected in honour of Hellenistic kings⁹³, royal correspondence⁹⁴, and epitaphs of foreign mercenaries⁹⁵. But already in the third c. BCE, there are sure signs of the attraction of Greek language and culture among the Phoenician elite – a noteworthy example being an elaborated Greek epigram commemorating Diotimos the δικαστής (*šūfeṭ* in Phoenician) of Sidon, who had

⁸⁸ E.g. ROCHE 1996: 80–83; HEALEY 2001: 101, 179; HACKL *et al.* 2003: 127–128, 132, 606; AL-SALAMEEN 2008: 22–25; TERPSTRA 2015: 80, 93.

⁸⁹ CARLESS UNWIN 2020: 147 and table 1 in this paper.

⁹⁰ WOJCIECHOWSKA 2020: 184–186: only 15 out of 1,133 inscriptions from Alexandria are hieroglyphic, Demotic, hieroglyphic-Greek, Demotic-Greek, hieroglyphic-Demotic-Greek.

⁹¹ WILIMOWSKA 2020: 200–204.

⁹² *ICS* 343; *SEG* XXX 1678; see DALY 1980; MASSON 1982; *SEG* XXXV 1490; BAALIM II 1985, 182; LEMAIRE 1991: 113; GŁOGOWSKI 2020: 170.

⁹³ *I.Tyr* II 1; 18–19; 386–387; *SEG* VII 326; LV 1658; SALAMÉ-SARKIS 1986.

⁹⁴ *I.MNB* 1.

⁹⁵ MACRIDY 1904; JALABERT 1904. Although this group of texts is usually dated to the Ptolemaic rule (third c. BCE), several features of these inscriptions seem to indicate rather the second c. BCE, cf. SEKUNDA 2006: 135–149.

won the Nemean games⁹⁶. The next step was the decline of Phoenician and the dominance of Greek from the second c. BCE on. Between the first c. BCE until the fourth c. CE Greek was, however, rivalled in the epigraphy of Phoenicia by Latin as the language of the dominant power in the Levant⁹⁷. Inscribing in Semitic languages never disappeared completely in Phoenicia. Aramaic, thought to have displaced Phoenician as the spoken language of the native population in the Roman period⁹⁸, appears in a small number of inscriptions⁹⁹. Inscriptions in Hebrew are rare too¹⁰⁰, while the local Jewish community preferred Greek in their epigraphic expression¹⁰¹.

Our study confirms once again that there was no unequivocal link between the language selected for inscribing and the ethnic identity of the person who commissioned the inscription, a good example being Greek inscriptions commissioned by Roman *negotiatores* (Ῥωμαῖοι οἱ πραγματούμενοι) in Thespiā¹⁰². Onomastics sometimes provide a clue, with some names denoting Jewish identity¹⁰³, some clearly Egyptian¹⁰⁴, all in Greek inscriptions. Another example is *šūfet* Diotimos, who, through the careful choice of the Greek world for his official title (δικαστής rather than more usual ἄρχων), selected to allude to his Phoenician identity, while his Greek name could be adopted by a native Phoenician for contacts with Greeks¹⁰⁵. Greek inscriptions are sometimes accompanied by decorations and other non-verbal elements of the inscribed monument. The Egyptian style of an inscribed monument, solar discs, and Egyptian religious motives, quite often accompany Greek texts both in the Fayum, Alexandria, and in Egypt in general¹⁰⁶. Some of them were commissioned by Hellenised Egyptians, e.g. a dedication set up by Petenephis,

⁹⁶ *LAG* 41 of ca. 200 BCE. BIKERMAN 1939; STAVRIANOPOULOU 2013, 177–179.

⁹⁷ GŁOGOWSKI 2020: 171–174 and graph 8.4.

⁹⁸ BRIQUEL-CHATONNET 1991: 19–20.

⁹⁹ Several cases can be pointed out: BRIQUEL-CHATONNET, BORDREUIL 2001; BRIQUEL-CHATONNET 2005 (Aramaic dedication, at Mount Lebanon near Byblos, 110/109 BCE); *CIS II* 160 (bilingual Nabatean-Greek dedication, Sidon, 2 BCE); *BÉS* 1979.178; AGGOULA 1997 (dedication, Palmyrene, Arqa near Tripolis, uncertain context, 182 CE); JACQUES 1987 (Syriac, mosaic, near Ptolemais-Akko, the fifth c. CE); DESREUMAUX, GATIER 1993 (bilingual Syriac-Greek, mosaic, doubtful provenance, fourth–fifth c. CE).

¹⁰⁰ E.g. *IJO* 3, *Syr* 30.

¹⁰¹ *CIJ II* 870–874; 876–883; *IJO* 3, *Syr* 1–3; 10–14; 16; 23–24; 28.

¹⁰² *I.Thesp* 352 and 373. SZELĄG 2020: 34.

¹⁰³ E.g. Μούσσιος (for Moses) in *I.Eph.* 1677. See WILLIAMS 2002.

¹⁰⁴ *I.Fayoum* I 76: dedication to Egyptian gods commissioned by an Egyptian named Pmois. *I.Fayoum* I 2 contains a dedication to the Egyptian goddess Taweret by two sisters with double names (Greek and Egyptian): Eirene-Nephersouchos and Theoxena-Taues, daughters of a Greek-Egyptian couple Demetrios and Tasis.

¹⁰⁵ STAVRIANOPOULOU 2013: 177–179.

¹⁰⁶ E.g. *I.Fayoum* I 6, 12, 34, 125; *I.Alex. Ptol.* 30, 34, 54. CLARYSSE 2020.

son of a priest of the crocodile-god Sobek¹⁰⁷. But some were set up by people whose names are not Egyptian. If purely Greek names and patronymics of dedicants are indicative of their ethnic identity¹⁰⁸, the Egyptian character of some of these monuments may relate not to the ethnicity of people who commissioned them but rather reflect their personal religious choices. Jewish ethnic/religious identity is most commonly shown through engraved menorah, the most prominent one carved into a step of the Celsus Library in Ephesos. Other examples are also known from Ephesos¹⁰⁹, Phoenicia¹¹⁰, and the Bosporan Kingdom¹¹¹. In two tombstones from Ephesos, Jews are named as those responsible for their upkeep¹¹², in another one, the deceased are described as Ἰουδα and Ἰουδέος¹¹³. Another example of manifesting separate identity are double names used by Jews in Greek inscriptions, e.g. Αἰλιανὸς ὁ καὶ Σαμουήλ in Aphrodisias¹¹⁴.

In the areas studied in our project, the largest collection of engraved non-verbal items are tamgas in the Bosporan Kingdom. Tamga is a sign widely used by the Eurasian steppe people, brought to the north shore of the Black Sea in the first c. BCE¹¹⁵. Some of them resemble symbols known in the Persian heartland¹¹⁶, hence the Bosporan tamgas are generally associated with the Iranian Sarmatians, well attested in the Bosporan Kingdom of the Roman age, and also among its elite¹¹⁷. Most Bosporan tamgas, including those carved into stelae and statues, have no connection with the original monuments¹¹⁸. The so-called royal tamgas were, however, integral parts of otherwise Greek inscriptions from the age of king Rhoimetalkos II (131–153)¹¹⁹. We do not count tamgas because of their non-verbal character, yet a parallel between tamga-engraving and the epigraphic culture of the Bosporus, especially of its eastern part, should be noticed. The epigraphic maximum in the eastern (Asiatic) Bosporus falls in the second half of the second

¹⁰⁷ *I.Fayoum* I 34.

¹⁰⁸ *I.Fayoum* I 6 and 12.

¹⁰⁹ *I.Eph.* 413: a fragmentary inscription of which only τὸ θυσιαστήριον accompanied by engraved menorah survived, possibly from a synagogue. See HORSLEY *et al.* 1987: 231–232.

¹¹⁰ E.g. *IJO Syr.* 7; *Syr.* 10. GŁOGOWSKI 2020: 173.

¹¹¹ *CIRB* 736 (a Greek-Hebrew epitaph); 746; 1225.

¹¹² *I.Eph.* 1676 and 1677.

¹¹³ *SEG* LIV 1192. On *Ioudeos* as the ethnic/religious marker in Asia Minor see STEBNICKA 2011: 106–115.

¹¹⁴ *SEG* XXXVI 970. STEBNICKA 2011: 214.

¹¹⁵ See SOLOMONIK 1959; DRAČUK 1975; JACENKO 2001.

¹¹⁶ BOARDMAN 1998: 1–13.

¹¹⁷ HALAMUS 2017.

¹¹⁸ DRAČUK 1975: 97–99.

¹¹⁹ JACENKO 2001: 45–46, 50–51; DRAČUK 1975: 98.

c. CE¹²⁰. The epigraphic production of this age was composed mainly of building and honorific inscriptions from Tanais, Hermonassa, and Phanagoria, some of them bearing royal tamgas¹²¹. Although we do not know the primary motivation for incorporating tamgas into Greek inscriptions in the Bosporus, royal tamgas in particular, their presence made the inscriptions at least partly accessible also to illiterate subjects of the Tiberii Iulii of the Bosporus. The unmistakably Iranian character of tamgas was, at the same time, a clear reference to the prominent position of the Sarmatian component within the elite of the multiethnic Bosporan Kingdom.

THE BEGINNING OF THE EPIGRAPHIC CULTURE IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Inscribing on stone and metal started at widely different points in the territories under consideration in our project. It first began in areas with a strong pre-Greek writing tradition: ca. 2000 BCE in the Fayum and the tenth c. BCE in Phoenicia¹²². Additionally, it began between the ninth c. BCE in Olympia¹²³ and the third/second c. BCE in the case of Greek inscriptions in Phrygia (the earliest inscriptions in Phrygian date to the eighth c. BCE)¹²⁴. Apart from areas with a pre-Greek tradition, the earliest examples of inscribing are associated with established temples. Specifically, the earliest votive offerings from Olympia date to the ninth c. BCE¹²⁵, the earliest Boiotian inscriptions date to the eighth c. BCE (from Oropos) and the seventh c. BCE (dedications from sanctuaries: Kabeireion in Thebes and Ptoion in Akraiphia)¹²⁶, while the earliest inscriptions from Delphi are dedications on bronze cauldrons dated to ca. 600 BCE¹²⁷. Inscribing in Miletos began in the eighth c. BCE and the majority of archaic inscriptions come from Didyma, most of them dedications, whilst inscribing in Ephesos started in the seventh c. BCE¹²⁸. As a rule, the earliest inscriptions are private, often votive, and consist of dedications. An interesting early phenomenon is an epigraphic peak in the eighth–seventh c. BCE Tyre, the earliest in our project, created by ca. 80 stelae with epitaphs, most of them uncovered at Al-Bass cemetery¹²⁹.

¹²⁰ See HALAMUS 2020: 109, graph 5.4.

¹²¹ HALAMUS 2020: 110; JACENKO 2001: 50–51; TREISTER 2011: 319–320.

¹²² WILIMOWSKA 2020: 205–206; GŁOGOWSKI 2020: 169.

¹²³ KOMAR 2020: 68–69.

¹²⁴ CARLESS UNWIN 2020: 146–147.

¹²⁵ KOMAR 2020: 68–69.

¹²⁶ SZELAĞ 2020: 33–34.

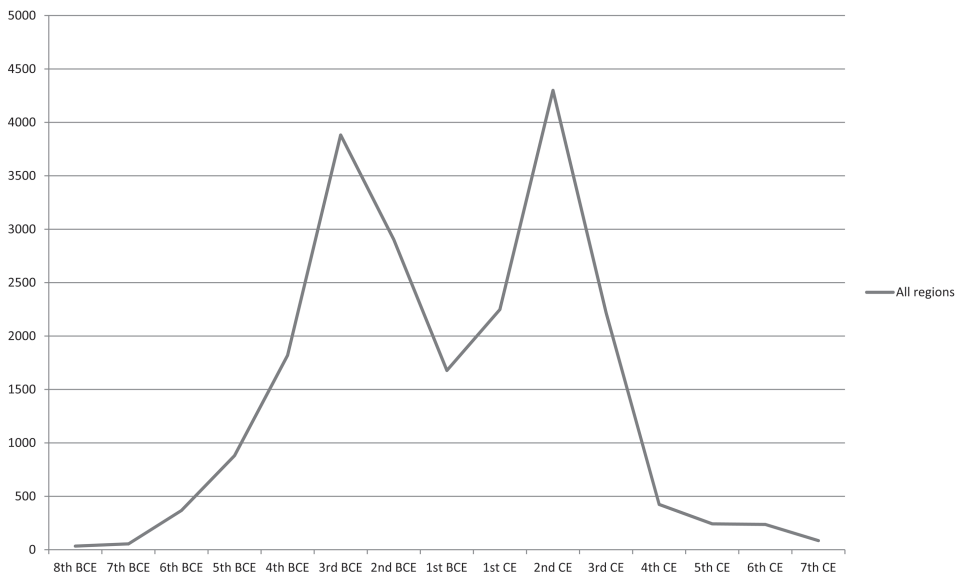
¹²⁷ GRZESIK 2020: 53–54.

¹²⁸ NAWOTKA 2020c: 121, 127.

¹²⁹ Stelae published in SADER 2005 and ABOUSAMRA, LEMAIRE 2014. See GŁOGOWSKI 2020: 169–170 and graph 8.1.

Contemporary epigraphic output from other Phoenician cities consisted mostly of royal inscriptions (dedications, epitaphs). Judging by the cheap local stone and inferior craftsmanship, these stelae from Al-Bass were commissioned by people clearly below the top tier of Tyrian society¹³⁰. They were not commoners either¹³¹. Nevertheless, the impressive collection of early Tyrian epitaphs seems to testify to a rather broad epigraphic culture in Tyre. In the eight c. BCE, people there were already allowed and willing to commemorate themselves or their deceased relatives with inscribed stelae in the fashion usually associated with classical or Hellenistic *polis* rather than the Levant of the archaic age.

CHRONOLOGICAL DISTRIBUTION OF INSCRIPTIONS



Graph 1: Aggregate epigraphic curve for the Eastern Mediterranean

Graph 1 shows the consolidated epigraphic curve of the Eastern Mediterranean with two maxima, primary in the second c. CE and secondary in the third c. BCE, divided by a minimum in the first c. BCE¹³². The first issue in the study of epigraphic culture is epigraphic maxima. The maximum in the third c. BCE falls in Mesambria, the entire region of Boiotia (including all major Boiotian cities), and Alexandria. In Alexandria, the epigraphic maximum coincides with the

¹³⁰ ABOUSAMRA, LEMAIRE 2014: 211–213.

¹³¹ Among them was a priest of Astarte-Isis: ABOUSAMRA, LEMAIRE 2014: 102–107, no. 40, of ca. 700 BCE.

¹³² This is the updated version of graph 11.2 in NAWOTKA *et al.* 2020: 226. See p. 222, graph 11.1 for epigraphic curves in all cities/regions.

age of maximum power and prosperity of the Ptolemaic Kingdom. However, this connection is largely indirect. The most numerous category of third-c. BCE inscriptions from Alexandria are epitaphs, presumably more affordable to common people during economic booms than when the economy is stagnant¹³³. The maximum in the second c. BCE falls in Delphi and Pergamon. The link between the power and prosperity of the state and the number of inscriptions is more evident in Pergamon than in Alexandria, primarily due to royal patronage¹³⁴. The maximum in the Fayum falls in the first c. BCE¹³⁵. The maximum for the Bosporean Kingdom occurs in the first c. CE, the second half of which is the period with the highest recorded number of inscriptions in this region¹³⁶. The maximum of the second c. CE falls in: Chersonesos, Olbia, Istros, Kallatis, Ephesos, Miletos, Aphrodisias, and the majority of the cities in Phrygia and the whole region of Phoenicia¹³⁷. In Miletos, the second c. CE marks the overall maximum, and the quarter-century with the second-highest recorded epigraphic output also falls in this century (125–150 CE). This local quarter-century maximum is largely due to several public and private inscriptions that celebrated Hadrian as emperor and, on scores of private altars, as a god¹³⁸. The popularity of Hadrian also contributed to the absolute quarter-century epigraphic maximum in Ephesos. Other contributing factors were inscriptions (decrees and *tituli honorarii*) associated with the activity of a great local benefactor Vibius Salutaris¹³⁹.

In a few cases, a particular reason can be identified as the cause for the maximum in a particular century. In Delphi, the cause was the high concentration of manumission records in the second c. BCE, with a stunning 765 (out of a total number of 1,132 second-c. BCE inscriptions) being recorded. Also, thanks to manumissions, the two quarter-centuries with the highest numbers of inscriptions fall between 175–125 BCE. Without manumissions, the clear epigraphic maximum in Delphi would have occurred in the third c. BCE and the quarter-centuries with the highest and second highest numbers of inscriptions would have been 275–250 and 350–325 BCE¹⁴⁰. The phenomenon of manumission inscriptions seems to be limited largely to central and northern Greece between the second c. BCE and the third c. CE

¹³³ WOJCIECHOWSKA 2020: 187–190 and graph 9.1.

¹³⁴ An important category of Pergamene inscriptions are those from the Great Altar cut in the second quarter of the second c. BCE. NAWOTKA 2020c: 132 and n. 85 (with reference).

¹³⁵ WILIMOWSKA 2020: 202, graphs 10.1 and 10.2.

¹³⁶ HALAMUS 2020: 107–110 and graph 5.3.

¹³⁷ HALAMUS 2020: 104–106 and graph 5.1; PORUCZNIK 2020: 82, 85–89, 91–93 and graphs 4.1, 4.3, 4.5; NAWOTKA 2020c: 121, 125, 127, 130–131 and graphs 6.1, 6.5; CARLESS UNWIN 2020: 154 and graph 7.6; GŁOGOWSKI 2020: 173–175 and graph 8.5.

¹³⁸ NAWOTKA 2020c: 122, 125 and graph 6.2.

¹³⁹ NAWOTKA 2020c: 130–131 and graph 6.6.

¹⁴⁰ GRZESIK 2020: 57–58 and graph 2.2.

and has never been plausibly explained¹⁴¹. The unexpectedly late quarter-century maximum in Alexandria (600–625) is caused by a group of 33 inscriptions from circus factions of the Kom el-Dikka theater, all beginning with the expression νικᾶ ἡ τύχη¹⁴². These are the last dated inscriptions from Alexandria. Without this deposit, the quarter-century maxima would belong at the turn of the second c. CE¹⁴³.

The epigraphic maximum in Olympia occurs in the fifth c. BCE, following on from very high numbers in the sixth c. BCE; the number of inscriptions recorded per quarter-century between 525 and 450 BCE was not exceeded until 125–150 CE. As attested by archaeological evidence, the epigraphic maximum in the fifth c. BCE coincides with a period of great prosperity for Olympia, which in the late-archaic age progressed from an essential shrine to a major pan-Hellenic cult centre and the seat of the most important Greek athletic events. Olympia received many dedications and inscriptions commemorating victories, and these inscriptions resulted in the epigraphic maximum of the late sixth–early fifth c. BCE. Meanwhile, the later decline was caused, among other things, by the fading habit of commemorating military victories, noticeable from the second half of the fifth c. BCE¹⁴⁴. A contributing factor was the rise of Delphi as the pan-Hellenic stage for honouring deserving individuals in the fifth c. BCE, thus superseding Olympia in this role¹⁴⁵.

Epigraphic culture in the Eastern Mediterranean often reveals itself through a combination of primary and secondary peaks. The secondary peak of Sidon is caused by inscriptions associated with the building activity of king Bodashtart at the sanctuary of Eshmun at Bostan esh-Sheikh¹⁴⁶. The early peaks in the two largest Phoenician cities (the primary peak in Tyre in the seventh c. BCE and the secondary peak in Sidon in the sixth c. BCE) make this section of the epigraphic curve for these two cities and, to a degree, for Phoenicia in general, similar to the curve drawn by PRAG for Sicily, where the first peak falls in the sixth c. BCE and is primarily caused by Punic dedications¹⁴⁷. The examples of (Punic) Sicily, Tyre and Sidon demonstrate the importance of a pre-Hellenistic indigenous epigraphic tradition in shaping the epigraphic curve. Together with examples from Olympia and Miletos in the pre-Hellenistic portion of their epigraphic curves, they testify to the role of dedications and votive inscriptions, often associated with major sanctuaries, in shaping the epigraphic curve in its early stages. The secondary

¹⁴¹ ZELNICK-ABRAMOVITZ 2005.

¹⁴² *SEG* XXXI 1485–1510 (33 inscriptions).

¹⁴³ WOJCIECHOWSKA 2020: 191–192 and graph 9.4.

¹⁴⁴ KOMAR 2020: 69–71 and graphs 3.1 and 3.2.

¹⁴⁵ GRZESIK 2019; KOMAR 2020: 69.

¹⁴⁶ GŁOGOWSKI 2020: 169.

¹⁴⁷ PRAG 2002: 22–23 and fig. 2.2.

peaks of Boiotia and Olbia fall in the fourth c. BCE with a vast (for the region) number of proxeny decrees, public dedications, and other inscriptions. This reflects the growth of Olbia, which was becoming an inter-regional centre at that time, and the constitutional shift to democracy sometime in the fourth c. BCE¹⁴⁸. The fourth c. BCE is marked by the strong and, at times, dominant position of the Boiotian League in Greece and military defeats and destruction suffered by some of the largest Boiotian cities (Thebes, Plataiai, Thespias and Orchomenos). The first factor explains the high epigraphic production rate, while the second demonstrates that the maximum of the fourth c. BCE is distinctly less than the absolute maximum of the third c. BCE. The destruction of Thebes by Alexander in 335 BCE and its slow and incomplete rebuilding inaugurated by Kassander may have contributed to the local minimum in the fourth c. BCE, situated between the peaks of the fifth c. BCE and the third c. BCE. There is also a visible minimum in 350–300 BCE, while at the same time, in the rest of Boiotia, we can observe a rising epigraphic curve¹⁴⁹. The secondary peak of the third c. BCE falls in Chersonesos, Delphi and Miletos. The secondary peak of Chersonesos reflects the advantageous economic situation of this *polis* from the late fourth to the early third c. BCE, a time when Chersonesos controlled a large *chora*. A contributing factor was the chance discovery of a large number of painted epitaphs re-used in the construction of the Tower of Zeno within the citadel of Chersonesos¹⁵⁰.

In Delphi, the third c. BCE was the golden age of honorific culture, with a stunning 45% of *all* decrees dated to this century. Many of these decrees were commissioned by external powers, testifying to the position of Delphi as a pan-Hellenic centre used by various states to advertise their Greekness, the best example being the honorific decrees set up by the Aitolians who controlled Delphi for most of the third c. BCE¹⁵¹. Secondary peaks in the second c. CE fall in the Bosphoran Kingdom, Pergamon, Eumeneia, Tyre, and Alexandria. In the Bosphoran Kingdom, the secondary peaks reflect the continued stable situation in the age of the unquestioned Roman protectorate and the increased presence of Sarmatian elites in the public life of the Kingdom¹⁵². The secondary peak of Pergamon is, to a degree, a reflection of the general economic prosperity of western Asia Minor in the age of the Antonines. The particular concentration of the epigraphic output in the first half of the second c. CE has much to do with local recognition, *tituli honorarii* and altars of Hadrian, a noted benefactor of the Asklepieion¹⁵³. The secondary peaks of Tyre and Alexandria both echo the general prosperity

¹⁴⁸ NAWOTKA 2014: 175–176; PORUCZNIK 2020: 84.

¹⁴⁹ SZELĄG 2020: 36–38.

¹⁵⁰ HALAMUS 2020: 103–104.

¹⁵¹ GRZESIK 2020: 57.

¹⁵² HALAMUS 2020: 110–111.

¹⁵³ LE GLAY 1976; NAWOTKA 2020c: 133.

of the age of the Antonines. In addition, the period of 175–225 CE is the most intense time for epigraphic production in Alexandria, caused mainly by the interest in Egypt shown by Septimius Severus and his dynasty; it also reflects the increased Roman military presence in the country that was shaken by the revolts of the *boukoloï*. The increased Roman military involvement in Egypt conditioned Alexandria's absolute peak of Latin and Greek/Latin bilingual inscriptions in 175–225 CE¹⁵⁴. Finally, the secondary peak of the third c. CE falls in Istros, Kallatis, Ephesos, and all of Phoenicia. In western Pontus, the secondary peak is mostly a continuation of the very high epigraphic production rate from the second half of the second c. and the first half of the third c. CE. The same is true of Phoenicia. The secondary peaks in Ephesos, per century and per quarter-century, in the third c. CE and in 200–225 echo the high level of building activity in the city and coincide with the pinnacle of prestige the city reached upon acquiring its third and fourth *neokoria*¹⁵⁵.

Since in most areas, pre-fourth c. BCE and late-Antique epigraphic output was low, epigraphic minima are truly diagnostic in the age of generally high epigraphic production, from the late-classical age until the mid-third c. CE. For the outlying/border periods, three prevailing trends are noticeable. In the late-urbanised areas of Phrygia and Aphrodisias, the low point occurs in the third c. BCE, as inscribing was developing slowly at this time. Epigraphic production in Pergamon, Phoenicia, and the Fayum was also low during this century mainly due to their small Greek and Hellenised populations. The third trend is the decline of epigraphic output in the third c. CE, apparent everywhere except Eumeneia. However, the dating of inscriptions from Eumeneia is problematic and uncertain¹⁵⁶.

EPIGRAPHIC CURVES AND HISTORY: GLOBAL TRENDS, LOCAL FACTORS

For all divergence among epigraphic curves in our case studies, most epigraphic maxima, measured by the number of inscriptions per century, fall between 300 BCE and 300 CE. Examples of earlier (Tyre, Sidon, Olympia) or later (Alexandria) maxima all have a specific local explanation. These are either tied to the developed pre-Greek epigraphic culture (Phoenicia), specific forms of commemoration combined with the transformation of the sanctuary from local to pan-Hellenic (Olympia), or a chance discovery of a comparatively large cache of inscriptions from circus factions, an age-specific category of documents (Alexandria). In all other cities/regions under consideration, the primary and, in most cases, secondary epigraphic maxima fall either in the early to

¹⁵⁴ WOJCIECHOWSKA 2020: 191–192.

¹⁵⁵ NAWOTKA *et al.* 2020: 223–224.

¹⁵⁶ CARLESS UNWIN 2020: 150–151.

mid-Hellenistic age or in the second c. CE. Sometimes, the primary and secondary maxima fall in the same broad period. The early to mid-Hellenistic maxima are typical of central Greece (Boiotia, Delphi), Mesambria on the Black Sea coast, some cities of western Asia Minor (Pergamon and largely Miletos) and, to a degree, Alexandria. Maxima in the second c. CE are attested throughout a much wider area: most of the Black Sea region, parts of western Asia Minor (Ephesos and, to a degree, Miletos), Aphrodisias, most of Phrygia, most of Phoenicia and, to a degree, Alexandria. It is important to note that areas that do not fit into this pattern, besides Olympia, the Bosporan Kingdom, Chersonesos, Olbia, Eumeneia, Tyre, and the Fayum present a mixed picture where some maxima fit the pattern while others fall outside it. As a rule of thumb, marginal areas and those urbanised and Hellenised at a late stage are more likely to present a curve with late maxima. This is best illustrated by the example of Eumeneia, where epigraphic activity was still very high in the third c. CE. Maxima of the old cities of continental Greece and some of Asia Minor tend to fall in the Hellenistic age. All this information shows that there was not one globally dominant shape of the epigraphic curve in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, in ca. 43% of all identifiable cases, a maximum (per century, per half-century, per quarter-century) falls in the second c. CE. The peak of the Antonine age in epigraphy, postulated by MACMULLEN, has to be applied with utmost caution to the Eastern Mediterranean¹⁵⁷. Our studies suggest that the peak of the Antonine age is the case of a higher probability of discovering extensive epigraphic output in many areas, especially outside continental Greece, in the second c. CE, rather than an absolute historical principle. Nevertheless, since the epigraphic maxima identified in our project, both the Antonine and the early-Hellenistic peaks, are matched by similar peaks in Egyptian papyri, also when tabulated by a quarter century¹⁵⁸, they are very likely representative of high writing production on stone and perishable materials in periods of economic prosperity, comparative political stability and optimism. The economic factor should not be eliminated from this equation since a substantial proportion of papyri resulted from or related to business activity.

The age of the Antonines and early Severans was undoubtedly a period of considerable epigraphic production as not a single example of the absolute epigraphic minimum, either per century, half-century, or quarter-century occurs in the second c. CE. Seven primary and six secondary per century minima fall either in the first c. BCE (Chersonesos, Olbia, Istros, Kallatis, Tyre, Sidon, Alexandria) or in the first c. CE (Chersonesos, Istros, Kallatis, Mesambria, Miletos). They are often accompanied by distinct per quarter-century or per half-century local minima: 100–50 BCE in Chersonesos, 75–50 BCE in Alexandria, 50–25 BCE in Phoenicia, 25–1 BCE in Boiotia, and 50–75 CE in Miletos, Ephesos, and

¹⁵⁷ MACMULLEN 1982: especially 234–237.

¹⁵⁸ NAWOTKA 2020b: 3–4 and graph 0.2 (graph drawn by J.K. WILIMOWSKA).

Pergamon. The coincidence of minima per century and local minima per quarter-century and half-century leads to the conclusion that between the first c. BCE and the first c. CE, there was indeed a noticeable downturn in epigraphic output in the Black Sea region, western Asia Minor, the Levant, and parts of Egypt, while in central Asia Minor, epigraphy had not yet begun in earnest. Similarly, as in the case of the peak of the Antonine age, the exceptions to the rule for an epigraphic downturn in the first c. BCE or the first c. CE are too numerous to suggest a global trend of diminished epigraphic production in this period. However, it is still noticeable in many places. Although no obvious evidence can be presented and many local factors have to be taken into consideration, it would be hard not to notice the coincidence between the downturn in epigraphic production and the beginning of Roman rule in the East, or, more precisely, the establishment of a Roman provincial and sub-provincial administration.

INSCRIPTIONS, DEMOCRACY, FREEDOM

The issue of the causal link, not only a temporal coincidence, between periods of democracy and ample inscribing, was raised in the early days of quantitative epigraphic study. Charles HEDRICK shows a strong coincidence between periods of a democratic constitution and epigraphic maxima and makes a strong point for the causal link between these two phenomena¹⁵⁹. There is no doubt about the coincidence, but the causal link between democracy and attested inscribing of decrees in Athens has been disputed by some scholars¹⁶⁰. Krzysztof NAWOTKA gathered evidence for the near-universal transformation from oligarchy to democracy in Ionia, Aiolis, and the old Greek cities of Karia, brought about by Alexander the Great in 334 BCE and reflected in the sudden proliferation of inscribed decrees in the last third of the fourth c. BCE¹⁶¹. The argument for studying causal links between ancient democracy and inscribing is based on the premise that inscribing decrees was the habit of a democratic *polis* as opposed to the secrecy typical of oligarchy and tyranny. Caution needs to be applied here since the rising epigraphic curve and the suddenly increasing numbers of inscribed decrees in western Asia Minor in the last third of the fourth c. BCE need to be read against the background of what Richard BILLOWS calls the “rebirth of Ionia”, i.e., the rejuvenation of cities of Ionia and adjacent areas at the beginning of the Hellenistic age following the stagnation in the classical age. BILLOWS notices numerous

¹⁵⁹ Most notably HEDRICK 1999. Even his critics agree with the coincidence between inscribing of decrees and periods of Democracy in Athens: PÉBARTHE 2005.

¹⁶⁰ To MEYER (2013) this has more to do with the Athenian habit of honouring people than with democracy. To TRACY (2000: 338) the declining inscribing of Athenian decrees in the age of Demetrios of Phaleron was connected with his laws on restricting extravagance in memorials.

¹⁶¹ NAWOTKA 2003; see also graph 0.11 in NAWOTKA 2020b: 13. See also CARLSSON 2010 for the connection of ample legislating and democracy in the Hellenistic age.

growth factors: refounding of cities, new settlers in existing cities, extensive monumental buildings (temples, walls), and royal patronage¹⁶². In principle, the epigraphic curves are congruous with BILLOWS' observation with a local peak in Ephesos followed by an extremely low epigraphic curve prior to the mid-fourth c. BCE and a steady curve rise in Miletos in the last quarter-centuries of the fourth c. BCE and the first quarter of the third c. BCE¹⁶³. However, the composition of the total epigraphic output in Ephesos in 350–275 BCE is telling, too: out of 85.5 inscriptions datable to this period, 61 or 71.34% are decrees or abbreviated decrees¹⁶⁴. This stunning proportion of decrees, typical epigraphic products of democratic Hellenistic *polis*, occurred in the years of democratic revolutions attested in Ephesos in the 330s BCE and its direct aftermath¹⁶⁵.

The difference between the epigraphic curves of the three large cities of western Asia Minor, Miletos, Ephesos and Pergamon, in the Hellenistic age is stunning. After the first quarter of the third c. BCE, the Milesian and Ephesian curves diverge most radically of all the periods under consideration. This may not result from the economy alone as both cities prospered in the Hellenistic age, although in the first c. BCE, especially towards the end of this century, Ephesos seems to have been outstripping Miletos as the leading trade centre of western Asia Minor¹⁶⁶. The principal reason for this divergence may lie in the deeper cultural and political attitudes of the two biggest cities of Hellenistic Asia Minor. The Hellenistic age saw a huge epigraphic output in Miletos, with the recorded numbers of inscriptions being consistently high, with the absolute per quarter-century maximum in 225–200 BCE, to drop slightly in the second and first c. BCE. The very high numbers of inscriptions recorded between 225–175 BCE are associated with the intense production of decrees, 50 out of 100 inscriptions datable to this period¹⁶⁷. This is a sign of vigorous democracy with its principle of openness¹⁶⁸ and a reflection of Milesian foreign policy, which necessitated the hiring of large mercenary armies and led to the mass franchising of Cretan mercenaries, as recorded in scores of abbreviated decrees¹⁶⁹. These factors seem to have been more important in shaping the epigraphic curve of Miletos in the mid-Hellenistic period than economy. Namely, 225–175 BCE was the most prolific period for inscriptions in the history of Miletos, with high numbers

¹⁶² BILLOWS 2007.

¹⁶³ NAWOTKA 2020c: graphs 6.6 and 6.3, respectively.

¹⁶⁴ NAWOTKA 2020c: graph 6.6.

¹⁶⁵ NAWOTKA 2003: 23–24.

¹⁶⁶ DAVIES 2011: 194–197.

¹⁶⁷ NAWOTKA 2020c: graph 6.3.

¹⁶⁸ NAWOTKA 2014: 178–179.

¹⁶⁹ NAWOTKA 2020c: 123.

also for 250–225 BCE. At the same time, the stephanephoric list of 232/231 to 184/183 BCE includes Ἀπόλλων Διός 11 times, and the divine *stephanephoria* is commonly explained as a sign of economic trouble when no mortal wanted to pay the costs of the office from his pocket¹⁷⁰.

Much like in earlier periods, Miletos chose to assert its independence by fielding large mercenary armies and warring with neighbouring Greek *poleis*, barbarian tribes, and territorial powers. In its foreign policy, Miletos was typically an ally, not a subject, even to the mightiest of kings. Ephesos asserted its drive to freedom most forcefully in the 330s BCE, during the age of Macedonian conquests in Asia Minor. Its democracy was most vigorous between 334 and the beginning of the third c. BCE. Indeed, the local maximum of 325–300 BCE, built predominantly upon inscribed decrees, remained the highest until 1–25 CE; epigraphic production between 275 and 1 BCE stayed depressed. This was the period in which the Ephesian attitude was to avoid wars, which came at a price, i.e., the submission and payment of tribute to Lysimachos, the Seleukids, the Ptolemies and the Attalids, and hosting Hellenistic kings and their families who selected Ephesos for their residence more than once¹⁷¹. This attitude of the Ephesians is aptly called *Lauheit* or lukewarmness by modern scholars¹⁷². The ensuing low epigraphic production contrasts that in Miletos, whose active and self-conscious democracy commissioned numerous decrees and *tituli honorarii*, primarily related to the vigorous foreign policy of the *polis*. The difference in the epigraphic curves of Miletos and Ephesos and its likely explanation are valid for the Hellenistic age, the golden age of Greek democracy, but not for the age of the Roman Empire when both Ephesos and Miletos evolved towards what VEYNE and GAUTHIER would call a *régime des notables* or an oligarchy¹⁷³. In Pergamon, the inscribing of decrees increases tremendously in the final years of Attalos III and continues after his death and the granting of freedom to the city. Obviously, inscribing decrees was barely compatible with the royal rule, as kings preferred different ways of expression: dedications showing their piety, building inscriptions, edicts, and letters. All of this suggests that inscribing decrees, let alone adopting them by a show of hands, was predominantly the epigraphic habit of a free and democratic *polis*, which limits the chronological timeframe regarding the inscribing of decrees primarily to the Hellenistic age. The epigraphic curves of Miletos and Ephesos largely converge in the first c. CE except that the Augustan peak was reached in Miletos in the last quarter of the first c. BCE and in Ephesos in the first quarter of the first c. CE. Subsequently, both curves drop to reach local minima in the third quarter of the first c. CE, after which they

¹⁷⁰ *Milet* 124.

¹⁷¹ KNIBBE 1998: 91–97.

¹⁷² BÜRCHNER 1905: 2789; DAVIES 2011: 192–194.

¹⁷³ VEYNE 1976: 122–131; also QUASS 1993: 11–13.

rebound vigorously. One wonders whether this development can be attributed to the applied conservative fiscal measures, among them the curtailing of municipal privileges in the East under Augustus, Claudius, and Vespasian¹⁷⁴.

In Delphi, the overall number of published inscriptions is attributable to several specific local factors, from extensive archaeological excavations and the meticulous efforts of French epigraphers to the ancient habit of inscribing on building stones of temples and terraces which made local inscriptions less prone to destruction than those inscribed elsewhere on stelae¹⁷⁵. Contributing factor to the very high number of inscribed decrees (936.5 between the fourth and the first c. BCE) was the international position of Delphi, a principal Greek shrine and oracle in the late-classical and Hellenistic age, in which more outsiders than citizens commissioned and were honoured through inscriptions. The connection between democracy and the inscribing of decrees is similarly as visible as in western Asia Minor: Delphi, already democratic in the mid-fourth c. BCE, suddenly starts to inscribe more and reaches a peak in the third c. BCE – a secondary peak if all inscriptions are considered and an absolute peak if manumission records are not included. The majority of decrees are dated between the mid-fourth and the second c. BCE, i.e. to the period of the blossoming of Delphic democracy¹⁷⁶.

Broadly speaking, the cities and regions in this project, whose datable epigraphic production is numerous enough to allow for sound conclusions to be made, connect (chronologically at the very least) the number of inscribed decrees with the rise of democracy in the late-classical and Hellenistic age; this connection was also observed by HEDRICK regarding Athens¹⁷⁷. However, some cities/areas in our project produced little or almost no decrees. One example is Alexandria, from which just three decrees survive: one issued by an association¹⁷⁸, one by a body whose identification is not possible due to damage to the stone¹⁷⁹, and one possibly by the *boule* and *demos* if we accept BRECCIA's restoration¹⁸⁰. If it is correct, this decisively proves that early Hellenistic Alexandria did have a *boule* and that the council and people legislated at least for some time¹⁸¹. The minute number of decrees is most probably a consequence of the fact that Alexandria was usually administered by officials appointed by the king or prefect, which left little space for the *boule* and *demos* to act in the periods

¹⁷⁴ JONES 1940: 130–131.

¹⁷⁵ GRZESIK 2020: 52.

¹⁷⁶ GRZESIK 2020: 55–57 and graph 2.1.

¹⁷⁷ HEDRICK 1999: 394, fig. 4.

¹⁷⁸ *I.Musée d'Alexandrie* 47.

¹⁷⁹ *I.Musée d'Alexandrie* 162.

¹⁸⁰ *I.Musée d'Alexandrie* 164: [ἔδοξε τῆι βουλῆι/ καὶ τῶι] δήμωι πρυταν[έων γνώμη].

¹⁸¹ For a summary of discussion on the existence of *boule* in Alexandria see G.M. COHEN 2006: 368–372.

when these democratic bodies existed¹⁸². The example of Phoenicia is even more striking, with no decrees and very few other inscriptions referring to the legislative activity of the *boule* and *demos* among some 2,600 surviving specimens¹⁸³. Before a more detailed study is conducted, two explanations can be offered: either Phoenician cities were not democratic for any prolonged period, thus they were not prone to publish decrees in stone, or, for some cultural reason, it was not deemed appropriate to inscribe legislative acts at all.

UNIVERSAL HISTORY AND THE EPIGRAPHIC CURVE

Whether there was a temporal coincidence only or a causal link between critical political events and the epigraphic curve is of fundamental importance in this paper. This putative link is better studied in places where it is possible to tabulate inscriptions in 25-year brackets. Some of the examples are obvious. For instance, the production of Greek inscriptions began in the Fayum only after Ptolemy II started to settle veterans in the region¹⁸⁴. The prolonged siege of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar and the city's subsequent decline probably caused its epigraphic curve to sink in the sixth c. BCE. This coincides with a pronounced local maximum at Sidon, the dominant Phoenician city during the Early Persian period. Conversely, the falling out of grace with later Achaemenids and the calamitous destruction of Sidon by Artaxerxes III are reflected in a local minimum during the fourth c. BCE¹⁸⁵. In Miletos of the sixth c. BCE, a comparatively high number of datable inscriptions (with a local maximum in 550–525 BCE) reflect the prosperity of archaic Miletos and the elevated regional position of Apollo's temple and oracle at Didyma. The sudden decline of the curve after ca. 500 BCE is due to the city's destruction at the end of the Ionian revolt in 494 BCE. There is little doubt that the low of 475–450 BCE, the absolute minimum of the Milesian epigraphic curve between 600 BCE and 375 CE, resulted from the Persian destruction of the city¹⁸⁶. The reign of Alexander is reflected in a different way in continental Greece and Asia Minor¹⁸⁷. The destruction of Thebes in 335 BC is marked by a distinct local minimum of the epigraphic curve in the fourth c. BCE¹⁸⁸. The sharp rising curve in Miletos and Ephesos after 350 BCE echoes Alexander's liberation of the Greek cities of Asia Minor. This event is

¹⁸² WOJCIECHOWSKA 2020: 192–193.

¹⁸³ GŁOGOWSKI 2020: 173–174.

¹⁸⁴ The earliest Greek inscription of Fayum is *ILouvre* 8 [1–3] = *SB* I 677 [a–c] dated to 274–270 BCE.

¹⁸⁵ GŁOGOWSKI 2020: 169 and graph 8.1.

¹⁸⁶ NAWOTKA 2020c: 122 and graph 6.2.

¹⁸⁷ See WALLACE (2010: 45–52) on dissimilar policy of Alexander regarding democracy and oligarchy, in continental Greece and western Asia Minor.

¹⁸⁸ SZELAŃG 2020: 42–43 and graph 1.8.

also clearly visible in other cities of this region¹⁸⁹. The time in which the Ptolemaic Empire was most prosperous and important – the third c. BCE – is also the period when Alexandria reached its per century epigraphic maximum¹⁹⁰. Meanwhile, the most crucial period for the Attalid Kingdom coincides with the absolute epigraphic maximum per quarter-century in Pergamon (175–150 BCE), followed by its secondary maximum in 150–125 BCE. This resulted from, to a degree, the frantic legislative production in the city that was freer to act during the final years of Attalos III, eventually being liberated in 133 BCE following his last will¹⁹¹.

The destructive raids of Burebista in western and northern areas of the Black Sea coast resulted in absolute epigraphic minima in Olbia (no inscriptions in 50–25 BCE), Istros (epigraphic minimum of the first c. BCE), and Kallatis¹⁹². In Alexandria, recorded epigraphic output increased in the age of Kleopatra VII¹⁹³. The coincidence between the reign of Augustus and the epigraphic curves from the Eastern Mediterranean is mixed, with distinctly rising curves in Kallatis (25 BCE–25 CE)¹⁹⁴, Olympia (a local quarter-century maxima, the highest between 350 BCE and 50 CE)¹⁹⁵, Miletos (a local maximum in 25–1 BCE), Ephesos (the local peak of 1–25 CE is a quarter-century absolute maximum for the period preceding 100 CE), Pergamon (a local quarter-century maximum in 1–25 BCE, the highest in the period 125 BCE–125 CE)¹⁹⁶, and Alexandria (1–25 CE marks the highest quarter-century reading between 200 BCE and 150 CE)¹⁹⁷. However, Augustus does not seem to have positively influenced the epigraphic curves of Boiotia, Delphi, Phoenicia, the Fayum, and large parts of the Black Sea area. These mixed results should somewhat mitigate ALFÖLDY's (and others') enthusiastic opinion about the role of Augustus in creating the Imperial epigraphic culture¹⁹⁸. Readings from the end of the Julio-Claudian and beginning of the Flavian dynasties are mixed, with clear minima in many places, like Istros, Boiotia, Delphi, Miletos, Ephesos, and Pergamon. This is not a universal trend: in Olympia and the Fayum, local maxima fall in 50–75 CE. The reign of Hadrian is the high point of inscribing in the Eastern Mediterranean, and maxima in many places are associated

¹⁸⁹ NAWOTKA 2003.

¹⁹⁰ WOJCIECHOWSKA 2020: 188–190.

¹⁹¹ NAWOTKA 2020c: 132–133 and graph 6.8.

¹⁹² PORUCZNIK 2020: 85, 89, 91–92, graphs 4.2, 4.4, 4.6.

¹⁹³ WOJCIECHOWSKA 2020: 191 and graph 9.4.

¹⁹⁴ PORUCZNIK 2020: graph 4.6.

¹⁹⁵ KOMAR 2020: graph 3.1.

¹⁹⁶ NAWOTKA 2020c: graphs 6.2, 6.6 and 6.8.

¹⁹⁷ WOJCIECHOWSKA 2020: graph 9.4.

¹⁹⁸ ALFÖLDY 1991 (most examples listed by ALFÖLDY originate in the Latin West); GORDON *et al.* 1997: 210–212.

either with his activities (most notably: *inscriptions forestières* in Phoenicia)¹⁹⁹ or his popularity, marked by commemorative *tituli honorarii* and the erection of altars (public and private) where he could be worshipped. Hadrianic maxima are noticeable in Olbia, Boiotia, Olympia, Miletos, Ephesos, Pergamon, and Phoenicia²⁰⁰. In Delphi, the number of inscriptions dated to the reign of Hadrian far exceeds the number of inscriptions produced during the reign of any other emperor²⁰¹. This connection of absolute or local maxima with the reign of Hadrian is much in line with HEDRICK's graph for Attica, where the highest peak after 300 BCE occurs under Hadrian²⁰². The evidence gathered in this case study suggests that in the Eastern Mediterranean, the absolute epigraphic maximum coincides with Hadrian and not with Septimius Severus, as suggested by MROZEK and MACMULLEN²⁰³.

Epigraphic maxima and minima often, but not in a prevailing majority of cases, coincide with certain political phenomena and reigns of important kings and emperors. The Augustan, Antonine, and Severan peaks were not truly global trends, discernible in all areas in the Eastern Mediterranean. It can only be inferred that a new Roman dynasty, besides the Flavian, was likely to coincide with an uptick in the epigraphic curve, but its arrival was not necessarily the catalyst. With this reservation, the temporal coincidence between the upturn of epigraphy and the change of dynasty is another global trend observed in our project. One needs to bear in mind that local factors often mitigate it or make the link causal and not exclusively chronological.

THE END OF THE ANCIENT EPIGRAPHIC HABIT AND THE END OF CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

In most cases (except for Eumeneia), the third century CE sees an evident decline in epigraphic output. Before relating it to the so-called “Third Century Crisis”, one needs to realise that not every quarter-century drop in epigraphic production should be considered a clear indicator of a crisis. Crises can only be identified when the epigraphic curve drops significantly and remains depressed for a prolonged period or, better still, forever. In the Bosporan Kingdom, the absolute half-century maximum of 50–100 CE is followed by 350 years of decline, with a sudden drop after 250, and a virtual halt of epigraphic production after 400. These two sudden curve declines coincide with two foreign invasions

¹⁹⁹ GŁOGOWSKI 2020: 174, 177.

²⁰⁰ PORUCZNIK 2020: graph 4.2; SZELĄG 2020: graph 1.4; KOMAR 2020: graph 3.1; NAWOTKA 2020c: graphs 6.2, 6.6, 6.8; GŁOGOWSKI 2020: graph 8.7.

²⁰¹ GRZESIK 2020: graph 2.2: twice as many inscriptions as under Trajan, whose reign has the second highest number.

²⁰² HEDRICK 1999: 392.

²⁰³ MROZEK 1973; MACMULLEN 1982.

of the Bosporan Kingdom: by Goths ca. 250 and by Huns in the second half of the fourth c. In Chersonesos, inscribing declined after 250 CE, while a slight recovery was noted in the second half of the sixth c., stopping after 600. The epigraphic curves of western and north-western Pontus stay at a high level until the mid-third c. in Olbia and Istros, until 275 in Kallatis, and throughout the third c. CE in Mesambria. Certainly, Olbia and Istros, and possibly Kallatis, fell victim to the Goths in the mid-third c., which resulted in a much diminished epigraphic production rate during the second half of the third c. Mesambria, comparatively immune to barbarian raids due to its position on an offshore island, is the only place in western Pontus where the epigraphic output recovered in later antiquity. Epigraphic output in Boiotia, Delphi, and Olympia declined in the third c. CE and came to a virtual standstill after the fourth c., with one inscription in Boiotia in the sixth c. and 1.5 in Olympia²⁰⁴.

The case studies of Asia Minor are very dissimilar. In Pergamon, the epigraphic output collapsed after 225 to cease after 375. In Miletos, epigraphic production diminished in stages after 200 to recover, uniquely among the cities in this project, under Emperor Julian. The renewed elite activity associated with his rule is noticeable in some places in Asia Minor and Africa, where the sudden increase in monumental building activity is explained by Julian restoring part of municipal income to the cities of the Roman empire²⁰⁵. After that, the epigraphic curve remains depressed, with a small uptick under Justinian. Ephesos' epigraphic production diminished slightly after 225, followed by a decline related to the destruction inflicted by an earthquake and the raid of the Goths in 262²⁰⁶. Again, an uptick occurred under Justinian, followed by small-scale inscribing until the mid-seventh c. In most of Phrygia and Aphrodisias, epigraphic output stayed at quite a high level until 300, while in Pessinous until 400. Aphrodisias experienced a sudden decline in epigraphic production after 300, but later it rebounded to reach a local maximum in the fifth c. CE. Inscripting declined in Asia Minor in the fourth to seventh c. as compared to the first through third c., e.g. in Miletos to 46.5 from 532.5, in Ephesos to 149 from 1515, in Pergamon to 0 from 392.5. Apart from Ephesos, the decline is more pronounced than 90% estimated by Sylvain DESTEPHEN for major cities in Asia Minor²⁰⁷.

Inscripting in the Levant was quite strong in Late Antiquity. In Phoenicia, the third century CE brought the secondary epigraphic maximum, and inscribing

²⁰⁴ NAWOTKA *et al.* 2020: 233–234.

²⁰⁵ On the enthusiastic reception of the short reign of Julian in Asia Minor, demonstrated by the fact that a much larger number of statues were commissioned for him than for his predecessor Constantius II and his successor Valens, see WARD-PERKINS 2016: 303. On Africa: SAASTAMOINEN 2015: 465.

²⁰⁶ FOSSEY 1979: 3–4; SCHERRER 1995: 16–17.

²⁰⁷ DESTEPHEN 2020: 19.

diminished markedly only after 325. The epigraphic curve rebounded to its third highest level in the sixth c. This is much in line with the conclusions reached by DI SEGNI in her study of inscriptions from Palestine and Roman Arabia, where epigraphic activity peaked in the fifth and sixth c. CE and the epigraphic curves stayed relatively high until the Arab conquest²⁰⁸. Also, in Alexandria, the epigraphic curve remained very high in the third c. It then dropped in the fourth and especially in the fifth c., but rebounded vigorously in the sixth c., particularly in the seventh c., with the absolute quarter-century maximum occurring in 600–625. Also, in the Fayum, the epigraphic curve reached a local maximum in the seventh c.

The downward trend is not registered simultaneously throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, nor with the same intensity. There is a clear distinction between the area that includes the Black Sea, the Balkans, central Greece, and western Asia Minor, where the decline in epigraphic production is apparent, and central Asia Minor, the Levant, and Egypt, where there is no sign of a crisis in inscribing. The most obvious distinction between these two discrete territories is that barbarian raids severely affected the Balkans and the coastal areas of Asia Minor, bringing about the collapse of organised city life. The epigraphy of central Asia Minor and the Levant, sheltered from the calamities of wars that raged in the East of the Roman Empire from the mid-third c. until Late Antiquity, did not present signs of decline until the seventh c.

War was not the only factor of decline because, in Late Antiquity, the epigraphic output also dropped in areas not ravaged by enemies, as is the case with central Greece, while the epigraphic curve in western Asia Minor did not rebound significantly for generations after the Gothic raids of the mid-third c. This is no place to go into the discussion about the transformation of Late Antique cities²⁰⁹. Ine JACOBS indicates the mid-sixth c. as the turning point for most cities of the East when local civic communities could no longer maintain local architecture²¹⁰. This late-Antique urban transformation coincides with a shift in epigraphic curves. Even if, in Late Antique Asia Minor, urban prosperity was concentrated predominantly in a small group of cities, the strongest, best connected to central government and the Church, Ephesos and Aphrodisias among them²¹¹, the curves from western Asia Minor demonstrate that epigraphic production in these cities was not nearly as strong as in the inland areas of Phrygia and Karia. This speaks to the combination of factors influencing the shape of the epigraphic curve: wars of Late Antiquity combined with the transformation of the later Roman Empire and Late Antique City.

²⁰⁸ DI SEGNI 2017.

²⁰⁹ See NAWOTKA *et al.* 2020: 235–237 for a short summary of our take on this issue.

²¹⁰ JACOBS 2013: 678.

²¹¹ MITCHELL 2015: 364–365; DESTEPHEN 2020: 25–26.

The composition of Late Antique urban elite and its changing taste and priorities contributed to the shape of the epigraphic curves too, since the majority of inscriptions preceding the fourth c. CE were commissioned either by their members or by boards that they populated. One must remember that epitaphs, the most typical non-elite inscriptions, were much less numerous in the East than in the West. There is a universal agreement on the decline of the broad ruling class, the *curiales* or *bouleutai*, in Late Antiquity²¹². *Bouleutai* did not disappear from cities of the Eastern Mediterranean after the mid-third c. However, there was no longer a reason for them to be mentioned in inscriptions: their magistracies became liturgical, and in the third c., more and more often, it was leadership offices that were on display²¹³. This suggests that the regular civic career had apparently lost its attraction, and therefore, there was little reason to refer to it in inscriptions – unlike state offices²¹⁴. The new ruling class of major landowners, state officials, and bishops, i.e., people whose careers were not dependent on local public opinion and who were not as civic-minded as the Hellenistic and early imperial notables, apparently did not think commissioning inscriptions was worth the effort. A contributing factor was the steady transfer of power away from town councils to the central government, governors, and officials appointed by Rome²¹⁵. Avshalom LANIADO points out that the late Roman city could operate without *boulai*, governed instead by the imperial administration and local notables²¹⁶.

The euergetic activity of the local elite did not disappear in Late Antiquity but underwent a profound transformation from founding games, processions, hekatombs, gymnasia, stadia, bathhouses, colonnades, schools, and public entertainment towards acts of Christian piety. The scale of old-fashioned benefactions diminished more or less in line with the shrinking number of local leaders able to afford the cost²¹⁷. The last significant civic *euergetes* of the traditional order in Ephesos, the capital of Asia, was active under Severus Alexander or Maximinus Thrax²¹⁸. With the demise of the Hellenistic and early Imperial euergetism disappeared the very rationale for putting up *tituli honorarii*, once a very prominent part of the epigraphic curve in the East. Christian pious foundations, like Christian tombs, were much less conducive to commemoration in stone²¹⁹. A partial explanation for the depressed epigraphic curve in Late Antiquity is

²¹² ALSTON 2002: 249–259; BOWMAN 1971: 123; SARRIS 2006: 178–179; HAARER 2015.

²¹³ NUYENS 1964.

²¹⁴ SMITH 1999; BORG, WISCHEL 2001: 69–70; SCHEIBELREITER-GAIL 2012: 136–137; PONT 2017: 46–53.

²¹⁵ NAWOTKA *et al.* 2020: 236–237.

²¹⁶ LANIADO 2014.

²¹⁷ PLEKET 1999: 84–85.

²¹⁸ *I.Eph.* 679A, 1080, 3063; *SEG* LXI 909; SCHERRER 1995: 15.

²¹⁹ DESTEPHEN 2020: 23–28.

also that the traditional way deserving individuals were honoured changed, with epigrams progressively becoming the preferred genre of praise from the third c. CE on²²⁰. Most were directed towards high state officials and the richest local notables. Epigrams in stone, catering to the taste of constantly more and more narrow circle of educated notables, were much less common and thus more elitist than *tituli honorarii*, prolific in the age of high Empire²²¹. The exclusive nature of new forms of praising state and civic leaders most likely contributed to the diminished popularity of the traditional form of honours, i.e., statues and honorific inscriptions²²². This transformation of elite aesthetics further subdued the epigraphic curve in Late Antiquity.

Another reason for the lower epigraphic output in Late Antiquity is the decline and eventual end of Greek athletics events after the mid-third c.²²³. Games are attested as late as Valerian and Gallienus, thereafter, they are rarely mentioned²²⁴. In the late-second c., there are clear signs that even in otherwise most prosperous cities, Ephesos among them, athletics was losing its former lustre, while stadia and gymnasia were no longer used for their original purpose²²⁵. The outcome of these developments was the disappearance of *tituli agonistici*, a once enormously popular sub-category of *tituli honorarii*, after the mid-third c. In the fourth c., chariot races, a spectator sport, became more popular in the East than traditional Greek athletics²²⁶. Chariot racing was limited to the biggest and most affluent cities which obviously limited their epigraphic attestation. Examples of epigraphy related to chariot racing include a cache of early-seventh c. inscriptions commissioned by circus factions in Alexandria²²⁷ and inscriptions from the hippodrome in Tyre²²⁸. Inscriptions of this kind, often bearing words like $\nu\iota\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \eta\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\eta\ \Pi\rho\alpha\sigma\acute{\iota}\nu\omega\nu/\text{Βενέτων}$ are also known from cities of Asia Minor. However, the numbers are very low, with just two deriving from Miletos²²⁹, two from Ephesos²³⁰, and 16 from Aphrodisias²³¹. The two *nika* inscriptions from Miletos

²²⁰ ROUECHÉ 1997.

²²¹ DESTEPHEN 2020: 26–27.

²²² PONT 2017.

²²³ REMIJSEN 2015.

²²⁴ REMIJSEN 2015: 73–74, 173. An exemption to this rule is a mosaic from Sparta (*SEG* L 412), ca. 300, naming seven *agones*, either still existing or just commemorated.

²²⁵ REMIJSEN 2015: 75, 76, 79–81, 86–87.

²²⁶ REMIJSEN 2015: 169–171.

²²⁷ *SEG* XXXI 1485–1510 (33 inscriptions).

²²⁸ *I.Tyr* II 127–146. Rey-Coquais 2002; KAHWAGI-JANHO 2012: 42–53.

²²⁹ *I.Didyma* 609, 610.

²³⁰ *I.Eph.* 1198.2, 1198.3.

²³¹ *ALA* 181ix, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186.1, 186.iii; *PPAphr.* 1.iii, 8e, 10, 46B1, 46E9i, 46E11, 46G12i, 46J13, 46X4.

are no match to ca. 50 *tituli agonistici* from the Didymeia games of the Early Empire, not to mention scores of other Hellenistic and Imperial inscriptions related to these games. The move away from participatory athletics to spectator sports depressed the Late Antique epigraphic curve enormously.

Another issue is the change in the religious climate in Late Antiquity. Troels KRISTENSEN, in his analysis of the fate of pagan sculpture in the Christian empire, finds many examples of the existence of an extremely hostile attitude towards three-dimensional representations of gods and priests²³². One example is an inscription from Ephesos (dated to the second half of the fifth c.) in which a certain Demeas boasts of having damaged an idol, presumably a statue, of Artemis ([Δαίμ]ονος Ἄρ/τέμιδος καθελῶν/ ἀπατήλιον εἶδος)²³³. For KRISTENSEN's caveats and the examples of preserving ancient sculptures in Christian Late Antiquity, it is evident that the prevailing mood of the day discouraged erecting as many statues as in the earlier centuries, not only those that were openly or remotely pagan. Even if statues commemorating emperors and high officials were produced or were re-used in Ephesos well into the sixth c., the epigraphic habit changed, as no dated inscribed Ephesian bases are known after 410–436²³⁴. This shift in the epigraphic habit also contributed to lowering the epigraphic curve in Ephesos and certainly also in other cities in Late Antiquity.

With the Empire fast becoming Christian in the fourth c., state support for temples, games, and oracles ceased. The only short-lived exception was Emperor Julian, praised by Miletos, who called itself “the nourisher (τροφός) of Apollo of Didyma”. Miletos was a rare exception of resistance to the Christian onslaught against traditional culture and religion commemorated in stone²³⁵. The sheer lack of reference to the ideological struggle of the fourth c. in the epigraphic evidence seems to testify to tacit reconciliation within the local elite to the religious transformation of the Empire. In all probability, this transformation fatally undermined the *raison d'être* of *poleis* dependent on great temples. This may explain the fading away of epigraphic production in Delphi in the fourth c., the cessation of pagan inscribing in Olympia at the beginning of the fourth c., and the end of the epigraphic habit in Pergamon.

In the centralised and bureaucratic Christian empire, supporting traditional cult places was no longer conducive to the careers of local notables. Perhaps the most striking is the changed position of *prophetai*, the administrators of the temple and oracle in Didyma. Some 206 are attested epigraphically between the third c. BCE and the third c. CE (ca. 35 per century), while we hear of only

²³² NAWOTKA 2023: 140–142. In general: KRISTENSEN 2013.

²³³ *I.Eph.* 1351. The person who damaged the statue was classically educated as his epigram contains a Homeric echo – AGOSTI 2007: 49.

²³⁴ AUINGER, SOKOLICEK 2016: 170–173.

²³⁵ *I.Didyma* 83 (with REHM's commentary) and *Milet* 1122. Cf. NAWOTKA 2023: 126.

two *prophetai* of the fourth c.: the only securely dated is Emperor Julian²³⁶, the other one is a philosopher and *prophetes* tortured and executed under Licinius or Constantine²³⁷. Assuming the costly office of *prophetes* obviously was no longer attractive to elite Milesians. Similarly, in Ephesos, after the third c. CE, we no longer hear of Kuretes, the officer of the cult of Artemis once coveted by the leading families of Ephesos.

ONE OR MANY EPIGRAPHIC CULTURES IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Based on a quantitative study of the entire epigraphic production of ten discrete areas in the Eastern Mediterranean from ca. the tenth/eighth c. BCE until the mid-seventh c. CE, this paper argues that no single global trend can be identified as affecting the development or shape of the epigraphic curve. It disagrees with earlier attempts to prove the opposite, often through the study of epitaphs of the Early Empire. Here, the broad area of study, the long chronology, the fact that all categories of stone and metal inscriptions are taken into consideration, and, last but not least, the methodology of basing the epigraphic curves on firmly dated inscriptions and not on theoretical models, are important factors which make such sweeping conclusions impossible. Rejecting the one-trend approach does not lead to a black hole of disparate and unexplainable developments. The opposite is the case: the shapes of the epigraphic curves are due to different factors occurring in different, yet broadly defined, geographical areas and in various epochs. These factors worked separately in the archaic, classical, Hellenistic, early Imperial, and late Imperial times. The shape of the epigraphic curve also differs in various geographical areas, depending on factors such as the pre-Greek epigraphic habit, the moment of urbanisation and Hellenisation, the presence of Roman garrisons, and the scope and shape of other Roman presence. The shape of the epigraphic curves was also heavily influenced by three other factors: war (including barbarian incursions), the relative status and constitution of a *polis*, and finally, the influence of Rome upon the traditional epigraphic habit. The overall picture of the epigraphic habit in the Eastern Mediterranean is certainly variegated but not chaotic. This conclusion, reached on the basis of ten case studies, is much in line with John BODEL's notion of "Greek epigraphic cultures", with emphasis on the plural²³⁸.

Inscribing in stone in the Eastern Mediterranean in antiquity lasted from the tenth c. BCE until the mid-seventh c. CE, or sixteen centuries and longer if we

²³⁶ Julian. *Ep.* 88.

²³⁷ E.g. Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* IV 2. The *prophetes* from Miletos was executed before the date of composition of the *Praeparatio Evangelica* (no later than 320); JOHNSON 2006: 160–162; STONEMAN 2011: 204–205.

²³⁸ BODEL 2001: 6–15.

consider Egyptian hieroglyphic inscriptions. The longevity of this phenomenon and its extensive geographical spread prompts a question of whether it could be classified within the framework of BRAUDEL's approach of dividing history into three levels of time: the "longue durée", "slow rhythm" history of communities, and "histoire événementielle". The study of the epigraphic culture, with its long series of inscriptions tabulated to form an epigraphic curve, clearly goes beyond what BRAUDEL called *histoire événementielle*, however much of the shape of the epigraphic curve is affected by political events and prominent people. However, was the ancient habit of inscribing akin to the Braudelian *longue durée*?

The essence of BRAUDEL's model is acknowledging the slow and imperceptible but overwhelming effects of geography, landform, and climate on the actions of human beings in the past. These factors indeed mattered in issues of inscribing, but their influence was short of overwhelming. Inscribing on stone was more prominent, and indeed easier, in the Mediterranean lands, endowed with seemingly inexhaustible sources of stone, frequently marble and limestone, easy to carve on account of its softness when freshly cut, than in Babylonia, where almost all durable writing was done on clay, the abundant local mineral²³⁹. However, the same abundance of stone did not influence human behaviour regarding inscribing, in the same way in all ages. The otherwise literate Greeks of the Late Helladic period preferred to commit their linear B writings to clay rather than to stone²⁴⁰. The people of Late Antiquity and Byzantium continued to use stone for building purposes and to produce tombstones and art objects while inscribing progressively came to nil²⁴¹.

Equally important is the size and permanence of attested inscribing. One, two, or even ten inscriptions per century in a major city or territory do not indicate the real epigraphic culture. Albeit inscribing in stone in the Eastern Mediterranean in antiquity lasted for some sixteen centuries, graph 1 shows that a great majority of surviving datable inscriptions were cut between the fifth c. BCE and the third c. CE – only for this period can one reasonably speak of the epigraphic culture. The long-lasting decline of writing in stone after the third c. CE, everywhere in the Eastern Mediterranean, although with different speeds in various places, and its virtual disappearance in the Middle Ages, Byzantine and Muslim alike, shows that the epigraphic culture cannot be understood as a permanent, almost unchanging phenomenon of the *longue durée*.

The age of inscribing, between the fifth c. BCE and the third c. CE, coincides with the age of the *polis*, a self-governing, urban-centred community. Inscribing

²³⁹ BRESSON 2005: 156.

²⁴⁰ See ZADKA 2015: 75 (table 5, based on BARTONĚK 2003: 30) – from 5095 Linear B texts 5561 are on clay tablets, 342 on other clay objects (vases and *cretulae*), only two on other materials (one on flint and one on ivory).

²⁴¹ MANGO 2020.

started earlier and continued unabated in the places where similar, non-Greek cities existed already in the first half of the first millennium BCE, most notably in Phoenicia, as well as in those Greek cities whose association with major temples raised their status, and thus the visibility of their inscription, to an above regional level, like Olympia or Didyma. In general, *polis* proved conducive to writing for public display, both of laws and other acts of the *polis* and private documents commissioned by citizens rivalling for prestige and recognition. The seemingly permanent nature of an inscription in stone made it a tool of choice in this rivalry in euergetism, competitive sport, and taking up unpaid civic leadership. Once it disappeared, social structures changed so much as to create a veritable chasm between the Late Antique state and Church elite and commoners. One powerful reason for inscribing disappeared too, and the epigraphic curve took a downward course. Our research has shown substantial changes in the frequency of inscriptions and the type of content they included. If BRAUDEL's model of history is to be applied, we can talk only of the history of the "slow rhythm", and the social history of groups and communities within the Eastern Mediterranean.

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