

Dressel 20 Inscriptions from Britain.  
and the Consumption of  
Spanish Olive Oil

With a catalogue of stamps

Pedro Paulo A. Funari



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TEMPVS REPARATVM

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This interesting *titulus beta* was published by the author (Funari 1991: 70) but is absent in RIB. The letters are exactly one Roman inch height. Montanus was a *mercator* known at Rome before AD 50 (cf. CIL XV 3670-1) and the shape of the letters indicates that they refer to the same entrepreneur. It is difficult to reconcile the palaeographical identification with the fact that Vindolanda was founded by Agricola in the late 70s, as well as with the probable contextual date of AD 110-120. It could be old stock in the first years of the governorship of Agricola, when Montanus could have continued as a tradesman. The inscriptions published by Dressel (1978:table XV, n.15) are remarkably like this one from Vindolanda we should pay attention to future findings which could confirm a very early occupation of the area.

#### 4. *alpha*: CIII

*beta*: AEMILIORVM ET/ CASSIORVM

*delta*: leontini aaaa ccxx seren

*anomalus supra beta*: VLXXVI

(RIB 2492.5)

(Figures 8,9)

The *titulus beta pittaccium* is 4 x 2 Roman inches and the fetters are 0.9 Roman inches high. The sherd was found in a deposit of Period II (before AD 97). The number in *alpha*, partially preserved, is composed of a C followed by two Is and a final I with a long *caudatura*. The letters in *beta* are very clear and the shape of R and S are somewhat archaic, whilst A and C are like our Antonine examples (cf. CIL XV 3649 and 3922). The *titulus delta* shows clear letters, suggesting it was written in the *Conuentus astigitanus* (cf. CIL XV 3735 and 3810). The anomalous inscription, probably written in the Guadalquivir Valley as its V letter is the same as in *titulus beta*, is composed of four clear letters (VL VI) and two possibly XX written with a ligature (cf. CIL II 2714; VIII 1610; XV 4071).

As we do not have other Dressel 20 painted inscriptions of the AD 90s, this is *hapax* on several grounds. Metrologically, it is the earliest with CIII-CXX weights, implying an early heavy container. We find another inscription of 220 Roman pounds only as late as AD 153 (CIL XV 3949), more than sixty years later. -The association of Aemilii and Cassii tradesmen represents the earliest evidence of a *societas* (cf. CIL XV 3730) of two different families of entrepreneurs. The known *societates* of the mid-first century were composed of members of only one family (cf. Caecilii, CIL XV 3646 and CIL IV 9480; Comelii, CIL XV 3844; Iunii, CIL XV 3659; Seii, CIL XV 3666-67; Octauii, CIL IV 5807 and 9382) and perhaps it is not a coincidence that when we find

two family *societates* a hundred years later, we again find the Cassii (CIL XV 3979: L Ocrati Saturnini et Cassiorum Apolausti et Art...). Our new evidence indicates that these two family enterprises had existed for at least sixty years in the Antonine period.

The *titulus delta* shows some distinctive features. The acronym *aaaa*, referring as it does to the *arca*, means that this institution was active in the late first century AD. The ensuing proposed adjective *seren(ense)*, even though we do not know its exact meaning, refers probably to a property (that is, *serenense figlina* or *fundo*). RIB 2492.5 prefers the reading *siren* but the photograph of the inscription shows that the second stroke of the letter R is used also as a second stroke in the preceding letter (E, with only two strokes, the second one being also the second R stroke). *Leontini* as a probable person's name in the genitive followed by *arca* follows a scheme known already in the AD 40s (cf. CIL XV 3648: *flauii galli a*). The reading proposed by RIB, *leonini*, is also a possibility, as some letters are not clear.

An unpublished Dressel 20 painted inscription from  
Vindolanda

The Director of the Vindolanda Archaeological Trust, Robin Birley, has submitted to the author two photos of a Dressel 20 Spanish olive-oil amphora found in his 1973 excavations, from the level dated from the beginning of the second century AD (100-120) (1). As the whereabouts of the actual pottery sherd at the moment is unknown, it was only through these photos that it was possible to study these *tituli picti*. The photographs bear no scale, but perhaps it is suggesting that the *pittacium* (meaning here a small piece of linen or leather spread with salve, cf. Cels.3,10) in both *tituli beta* and *gamma* are just 1.6 X 5.0 Roman inches, suggesting thus is a probably at a 1:1 scale (or otherwise 1:2 or 1:1.5). In spite of the faint ink impression, it is possible to propose a roughly sure reading of the dipinto, providing very interesting information on both paleographic and historical grounds.

Description and commentary (Figures 1 O-1 5)

*Titulus beta*: <L> AELIOPTAELI<AN>LVP

*Titulus gamma*: CCXXXII or CCXXXIII

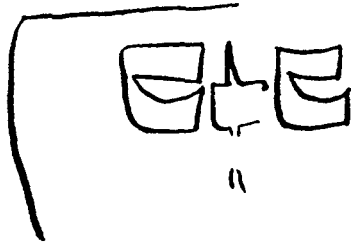
Cf. CIL XV, 3693-4

Find Place: Vindolanda

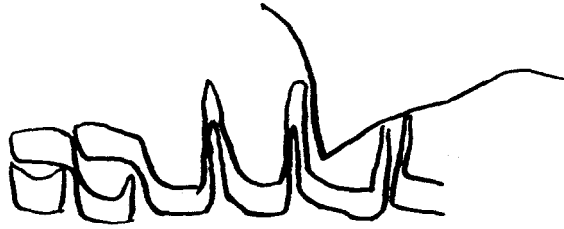
Storage Place: the Vindolanda Archaeological Trust (1973 excavations)

Contextual date: AD 1 00- 120

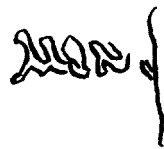
Other Contextual Dates: AD 154 (CIL XV, 3693)



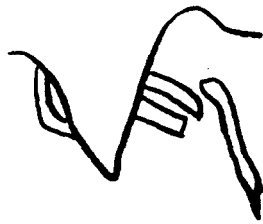
5



6



7



8

NEWTONIAN  
LABORUM

9

CECILIA'S ASSASSINATIVE

194. LQS  
Unpublished.  
Cf. Remesal 216, CIL 3109a, KL, (Call.922, Po.1,141,45; 187,125, Chic (1985: 93,109), Remesal (1994: n.345).  
FP: London.  
SP: MOL (R XI 646 2345).  
Fabric: grey-reddish.  
Handle: round.  
Size: 1.8 x 0.8.  
OCD: Testaccio K, L = AD 179- 180.  
Kilcher 93 = AD 150-250. Minimum: AD 150-170.  
A D 1 3 0 - 1 9 0 .  
Colchester = *in uentre* (=Call.1580) = III c.  
*Figlina*: Alcolea 4 & Tesoro 10  
Canama Arva?  
Hispalis  
Reading: L(Q)(S)
- a. L.Q.S  
Unpublished.  
FP: Colchester.  
SP: CAT (MID 1835).  
Fabric: grey.  
Handle: round-medium.  
Size: 2.3.
- b. L.Q.S  
Unpublished.  
FP: Colchester.  
SP: CAT (BKCC VI).  
Fabric: red.  
Handle: medium.  
Size: 0.10.  
CD: mid second to fourth century pottery.
- c. LQSF  
Published in May, fig.8,14 as PLQLSF.  
Unparalleled.  
FP: Colchester.  
SP: CC (2.3.2.132.10).  
Fabric: red.  
Handle: round.  
Size: 1.6 x 0.6.  
Reading: L(Q)(S)(F)
- d. LQ.S  
Unpublished.  
FP: Colchester.  
SP: CC (412.54).  
Fabric: grey.  
Size: 2.4 x 0.8.
- e. L.Q.  
Unpublished.  
FP: Caerleon (*uicus*).
- SP: RLM (Caerleon, civilian settlement to west of fortress 56 217 P.I).  
Fabric: red.  
Handle: round.  
Size: 2.4 x 0.6.
- f. L.Q.S  
Unpublished.  
FP: Bulmore civilian settlement.  
SP: RLM (75/001/027-7).  
Fabric: grey.  
Handle: medium.  
Size: 2.2 x 0.8.
- g. LQS  
Published by Ca11.922.  
F'P: Corbridge.  
SP: CSM (AS34).  
Fabric: red.  
Size: 1.7 x 0.8.
- h. L.Q.S  
Published by Ca11.922.  
FP: Corbridge.  
SP: CSM (AS21).  
Fabric: red.  
Handle: round.  
Size: 1.10 x 0.8.
- i. L.Q.S  
Published by Ca11.922.  
FP: Carlisle.  
SP: CLM (5.98 Carlisle, Collier Lane).  
Fabric: red.  
Handle: round.  
Size: 2.0 x 0.7.  
DOC: shape like Kilcher 40 = AD 190-250.
- j. LQS (*in ventre, retro*)  
Published by Call. 1580 as SCLT, fig. 16,46.  
FP: Colchester.  
SP: BM (Beverly Road, Pollensfen Collection, 1870, Colchester, 1870 4 2 660).  
Fabric: red.  
Handle: round.  
Size: 1.2 x 0.6.  
Vessel size: neck = 10 cm.  
rim = 16.5 cm.  
total vessel height: 65 cm.  
body: 45 cm.  
Remark in the same amphora there is also the next **stamp**.
1. .LQ.S  
Unpublished.  
FP: Colchester.

194g

LQ'S

194h

LQ'S

194i

LQ'S

194j

LQ'S

194l

LQ'S

194m

LQ'S

194n

LQ'S

195

QUINTA

196

GRADOS

196a

GRADOS

196b

GRADOS

197

EXOFOR

198

ROMI

198a

ROMA

198b

ROM

198c

ROM

198d

ROMANES

198e

ROMANES

## CONCLUSIONS: ROMANIZATION, EPIGRAPHY AND ECONOMY

The study of Dressel 20 inscriptions (*tituli picti*, graffiti and stamps) from Britain and the consumption of Spanish olive-oil is directly linked to three interwoven subjects: Romanization, literacy and epigraphy, and the economic history of the Roman world. The consumption of olive-oil has traditionally been considered a good evidence of the adoption of “Roman ways” and there would be no amphora borne inscriptions in Latin, painted, scratched or stamped if there were no “Romanization”. We must thus begin discussing the meaning and the epistemological consequences of using the concept of *Romanization* as an analytical tool.

Romanization: acculturation and the “adoption of Roman customs”

The use of the concept of Romanization in the Classics was embedded in a framework of nineteenth century national identity politics. Originally, classical philologists used to distinguish the processes of adoption of the Greek and Latin languages by different peoples and it is no coincidence that modern nation states were defined by the adoption of a national language. Modern nations were defined by their newly created standard languages and the fight against regional tongues and dialects continued up to very recent times throughout Europe. The Welsh language, for instance, declined in use constantly up to the 1980s. Dialects in Italy and Germany are still opposed to high culture. It is thus only too natural that philologists considered that the spread of the Latin language followed similar lines and that the term “Romanization” could better describe the adoption of Rome’s tongue and habits by other peoples.

Romanization was quickly adopted by classicists every where and archaeologists were soon to apply the term to refer to the use of Roman style artefacts. “There are few detailed theoretical statements about what Romanization might have entailed...but it is taken to describe...the progressive adoption of Roman culture by indigenous populations, including Roman speech and manners, political franchise, town life, market economy, material culture, architecture and so on” (Jones 1994: 1.5). Late nineteenth century and early twentieth century scholars used Romanization to refer to an acculturation process very like the modern colonial one, with explicit references to India by the British, to North Africa by the French, or to Ethiopia by the Italians. These studies did tend to

consist of the description of cultural traits, with little theoretical discussion, or analysis of the dynamics of cultural change. By definition, it was considered as a one-way process of *adoption* of pure Roman ways.

Recently though Martin Millet was keen to emphasize that “we must thus see Romanization as a process of dialectic change, rather than the influence of one ‘pure’ culture upon others” (Millet 1992: 1). In this respect, perhaps the best ancient text refers precisely to Britain. Tacitus (*Agricola 21*) describes what modern authors would call “acculturation” and “Romanization” with the following words:

*Namque ut homines dispersi ac rudes eoque in bella faciles quieti et otio per uoluptates aduescerent, hortari priuatim, adiuuare publice, ut templa fora domos extruerent, laudando promptos, castigando segnes: ita honoris aemulatio pro necessitate erat. Iam uero principium filios liberalibus artibus erudire, et ingenia Britannorum studiis Gallorum anteferre, ut qui modo linguam Romanam abuevant, eloquentiam concupiescerent. Inde etiam habitus nostri honor et frequens toga; paulatimque discenssum ad delenimenta uitiorum, porticus et balineas et conuiuiorum elegantiam. Idque apud imperitos humanitas vocabatur, cum pars seruitutis esset* (Winterbottom & Ogilvie 1987: 16).

“Agricola had to deal with people living in isolation and ignorance, and therefore prone to fight. As his aim was to accustom them to a life of peace and quiet by the provision of amenities, he gave private encouragement and official assistance to the building of temples, public squares, and good houses. He praised the energetic and scolded the slack, and competition for honour proved as effective as compulsion. Furthermore, he educated the sons of the chiefs in the liberal arts, and expressed a preference for British ability as compared with the trained skills of the Gauls. The result was that instead of loathing the Latin language they became eager to speak it eloquently. In the same way, our national dress came into favour and the toga was everywhere to be seen. And so they were gradually led into demoralizing temptations of arcades, baths, and sumptuous banquets. The unsuspecting Britons spoke of these new habits as “civilization”, when in fact they were only a feature of enslavement” (translation by the author).

This is one of the most quoted passages which refer to Roman Britain and the only explicit reference to a

policy of urbanization. The key word in the text is *humanitas*, used for a long time by the Romans to refer to the culture of Romans, in opposition to Barbarians, and particularly to learned Roman culture: *fur Barbaren ist das Fehlen von humanitas selbstverstaendlich. Aber auch nicht alle Roemer haben Anteil and der humanitas: den nobils kommt sie zu, bie serui aund liberti wird sie nicht erwartet* (Rothe 1978: 58). *Humanitas* thus means liberal education, elegance of manners, upper class habits (e.g.. Cicero, *Off.* 140,145). “Humanization” should not be confused with “Romanization”, as the Romans were using *humunitas* to refer to upper class adoption of Roman ways (Bum 1953: 113), not to the modern concept of general adoption of Roman traits by different social strata. Millet (1990: 39 *et passim*) emphasized that it was the upper class tribal elites who transformed themselves into the *decuriones*.

Latin inscriptions, even if on humble amphorae, should be studied in the context of a stratified society. Are these inscriptions the result of “Romanization”? Were they written by upper class people who studied with professors of rhetoric, and who were “enslaved by *humanitas*”?

#### Epigraphy and literacy

Robert I. Curtius (1991: 160) in his monograph on *Garum and salsamenta, production and commerce in materia medica* expressed a standpoint usually shared by amphora inscriptions experts: “so widespread and common were these labels <SC. painted inscriptions> that they became, like inscriptions on stone, basically formulaic and so were frequently abbreviated”. “Widespread” and “common” are terms often used by palaeographers and epigraphists to refer to Latin inscriptions in general.

Mireille Corbier (1991: 113; 117) mentions “poor literacy, but widespread” (*alphabetisation pauvre largement répandue*). Alan K. Bowman (1991: 123) argues that “there is good reason to believe in a very wide spread of literate skills in the ancient world”. Bowman (1994: 141) stressed “the power of Latin literacy as an instrument of acculturation <and> as a tool of institutional control through the army”.

James L. Franklin, Jr (1991: 81) again points out that “the vivacity and sheer mass of the evidence suggests a widely literate population”. Keith Hopkins (1991: 155) studied humble village documents and concluded that “literacy in the Egyptian villages penetrated well below a social elite, and reached a variety of levels of competence”. The same lower strata literacy was noticed by Roger S.O. Tomlin

(1988: 101 *et passim*) in the curse tablets from Bath, written by humble people (Jordan 1990: 438). Mordechai Gichon (1983: 585) noted, in passing, “the rather high state of literacy among Roman-times Bedouins” in the eastern fringes of the Empire.

It is of course impossible to measure accurately ancient literacy levels and we should thus turn our attention to the importance of literacy to the functioning of social and economic activities in the Roman world. Hopkins (1991: 136) wrightly reminded that “a large-scale economy needed (or operated better with) more writing”. Dressel 20 painted inscriptions and stamps are a good example of this need. *Tituli beta* with names of entrepreneurs and firms like the *Societas Aemiliorum et Cassiorum* do imply important legal and trade obligations. State and private agents were in touch with legally constituted firms (*societutes*) and it was only thanks to written labels like these *tituli* that it was possible to control commercial transactions. The same importance applies also to the other information conveyed by *tituli alpha, gamma, and delta*. The weight of the vessel and of the olive-oil inside the container, the confirmation of the latter in *delta*, the reference to a controlling institution (*arca*), among other data, establish beyond dispute the power of the written word over the spoken, the “primacy of writing” in the words of Mary Beard (1991: 39).

Turning now our attention to the stamps, they aimed most probably readers just around the producing areas in the potteries in Baetica. Traditionally, amphora stamps were interpreted as the producers of the containers, and when there are Roman *tria nomina* they could represent pottery owners: *les estampilles renvoient donc à des propriétaires de figlinae - qui peuvent être en même temps exploitants agricoles mais sont ici saisis dans leur fonction d’exploitants de carrieres d’argile et d’ateliers de potiers* (Tchemia 1993: 184). It would though be difficult to explain the presence of many different and contemporary stamps in the same pottery (Remesal 1986: 20) if they were considered as *figlina* proprietors. These *tria nomina* should rather be interpreted as the owners of the olive-oil inside the vessel, most often the landowner: *die “tria nomina” den Namen des Eigentuemers des verpackten Oels, unabhaengig davon, ob er gleichzeitig der Produzent des Oels ist oder ob er es gekauft hat* (Remesal 1991: 162). The use of these stamps were thus linked to the industrial organization in the producing area and this brings us to the complex issue about the character of the ancient economy.

Market economy and the economic history of the Roman world

John H. D'Arms (1981: 13), in his now classic study on Commerce and *Social Standing in Ancient Rome*, stated that "granted that the Roman Empire was a preindustrial society - it nonetheless exhibits signs of complexity, order, and system in its institutions, to an extent which makes labels like 'primitive' inappropriate unless they are carefully qualified". Roman society was not a "market society", a society in which producers were market-dependent, dependent on the market for access to the means of life, labor, and self-reproduction, and subject to market imperatives (cf. Wood 1994: 25). *Dans ce type de société, les hommes ne sont pas seulement des producteurs ou des consommateurs, des possesseurs du capital ou des salariés: ils sont aussi libres ou esclaves, romains ou 'alliés'* (Nicolet 1988 :4 1).

It is however Claude Nicolet (1988: 275 *et passim*) himself who emphasizes that there was indeed a Roman economy: through the Roman history cost and profit have been carefully taken into account (*à tout instant de l'histoire romaine*). Studying different subjects, several scholars were amazed by the importance of the market place in the Roman world. Emilio Gabba (1988: 144-9 *et passim*) studied the local markets (*nundinae*) and established their longstanding importance for the *exchange of surplus production*. Mireille Corbier (1991: 629) considers that the settlement pattern followed circulation and exchange constraints. Dominic Rathbone (1993: 387. *et passim*) observed that estates could calculate "profit" and "loss" and the accounting system was designed and used in the context of economically rational management (cf. Kehoe 1993: 483).

Recently, Lietta de Salvo (1992: 69), in her very comprehensive study of the *corpora nauiculariorum*, stated that *il mercato libero romano deve aver avuto una portata assai piri vasta di quanto non si sia finora sostenuto*. The free market implies the use of wage labour but we should not be surprised by the fact that the Roman wageworkers were not necessarily free people. Alfons Buerge (1990: 135 *et passim*) produced a fine study of *mercennarius* (wageworker) and concluded that the usual interpretation, identifying the *mercennarii* with free wageworkers is misleading, as the term referred mostly to slaves who received a wage: *nicht die Freiheit, sondern die Unfreiheit ist ihm gelauefig und selbstvertaendlich, sondern der lohnobhaengige Sklave*. This was a very special market economy with slave (but still) wageworkers!

and to the role of the State. Some authors stressed the consumption, proposing a consumer city economic model (e.g. Finley 1973; Andraeu 1987-g; *contra Hopkins 1980*). Political factors alone would thus" explain the transfer of goods from the exploited countryside to urban dwellers. This outlook however does not explain how "ideological and political" constraints could be unrelated to the economic function and performance of the proposed "consumer towns" (as proposes Whittaker 1990: 117).

The supply of different consumption products, like olive-oil, was not completely governed by market forces and the role of the Roman state has been studied by several scholars. Peter Hertz (1988: 85) stresses that *man kann die Administration des Imperium Romanum sicherlich nicht mit der eines modernen Staates vergleichen...doch die Verwaltungsbereiche, deren unbehindertes Funktionieren fuer die Erhaltung der Macht unumgaenglich was (Armee, Finanzverwaltung, Versorgung der politisch wichtigen Hauptstadt), haben nach allem, was wir selbst aus unseren duerftigen Quellen erkennen koennen, einen bemerkenswerten Grad der Effizienz und damit auch der administrativen Durchformung erreicht*.

The supply of essential products, like olive-oil, was inevitably controlled or at least not left completely out of the State's attention. A especially important State department on this respect was the *Annona*. The *ratio annonaria* from the beginning of the Principate probably controlled the supply of both military and civilian sites thanks to *procuratores Augusti* acting under the authority of the *praefectus annonae*, linking the administration of funds from the *fiscus, aerarium* and provincial offices (Remesal 1990: 58). Olive-oil could thus be acquired by the state administration through taxation, purchase, or *indictiones*, the latter not necessarily underpaid, but possibly the olive-oil was paid at market prices (Remesal n.d.: 3).

The study of olive-oil consumption in different areas of the Empire, through the analysis of Dressel 20 stamps, has produced some monographs on the subject. Although the number of stamps is restrict to some hundreds for each. area, being thus statistically unsure, the coincidence of consumption patterns in Northern France, Germany and Britain, studied in detail in the fourth chapter, *cannot be explained by chance*: to compare randomly some one thousand stamps from dozens of sites in three distant regions and find such striking similarities by chance is statistically almost impossible. This is the best argument in favour of the study of the economic history through the use of these stamps.

This brings us to the supply of consumption goods



## Conclusions

The specific relations between producing areas in Baetica and the three consuming areas in Britain brings us to the economy of Roman Britain. The first years of Roman rule and the boom of imports to the Southeast Britain was linked to the scale of expenditure on the army and the conquest (Fulford 1991: 39). Soon after that, “further evidence for the spread of a monetized market economy among the *ciuitates* can be seen in rural settlements which were gaining access to a wider range of manufactured goods...essentially Britain in the second century was enmeshed within a network embracing Northwestern provinces and Spain (Baetica)” (Fulford 1989: 185).

As we have mentioned in the fourth chapter, olive-oil consumption patterns varied in the three areas, the Southeast, Wales and Hadrian’s Wall area. There were thus different dealers and purchasing contracts in the three areas. Were these differences the result of military and civilian separate supplying networks? It seems unprobable, as Welsh sites follow neither Southeast nor Hadrian’s Wall patterns. There are three different consumption patterns, not not, military and civilian. It is more likely that there were three different trade routes to these areas. The most difficult issue, however, is to figure out how much of the olive-oil consumed in Britain was purchase at marked prices.

The stamps themselves and their distribution do not offer an answer to this question. We could be tempted to propose that at least the clearly military sites at the North of Britain could receive Spanish olive-oil through **some** kind of “redistributing” mechanism. We know that “Roman quartermasters played a crucial role, ensuring that the necessary supplies of everything a cohort required were both available and accounted for” (Birley 1990: 21). This says nothing about purchase or free supply. The writing tablets from Vindolanda refer to the purchase of cereal from local sources (Bowman, Thomans & Adams 1990: 41) but local producers could not supply olive-oil. Bowman (1994: 40-41;46) states that “records of cash, commodities and transactions were kept scrupulously...the camp operated an internal cash-commodity market in which purchase were carefully recorded”. Furthermore, “entrepreneurs and merchants must have thrived on the opportunities offered by the army”. Among these, we should include Spanish olive-oil suppliers, as ***the consumption pattern in the North is not the same as in other areas in Britain***. Even if we admit that these military sites purchased their own olive-oil in

regional central distributing markets, we do not know if they payed for it or if the suppliers received the payment directly from State sources.

Whatever the case, only the collection of these epigraphic evidences, painted inscriptions, graffiti and stamps and the publication of ***corpora*** from different regions of the Empire will enable us to advance in our understanding of the Roman World. Literacy and economic history, through the study of epigraphy, are thus important research avenues to a better understanding of Roman society functioning and changes. This monograph is just a small step in this long journey.