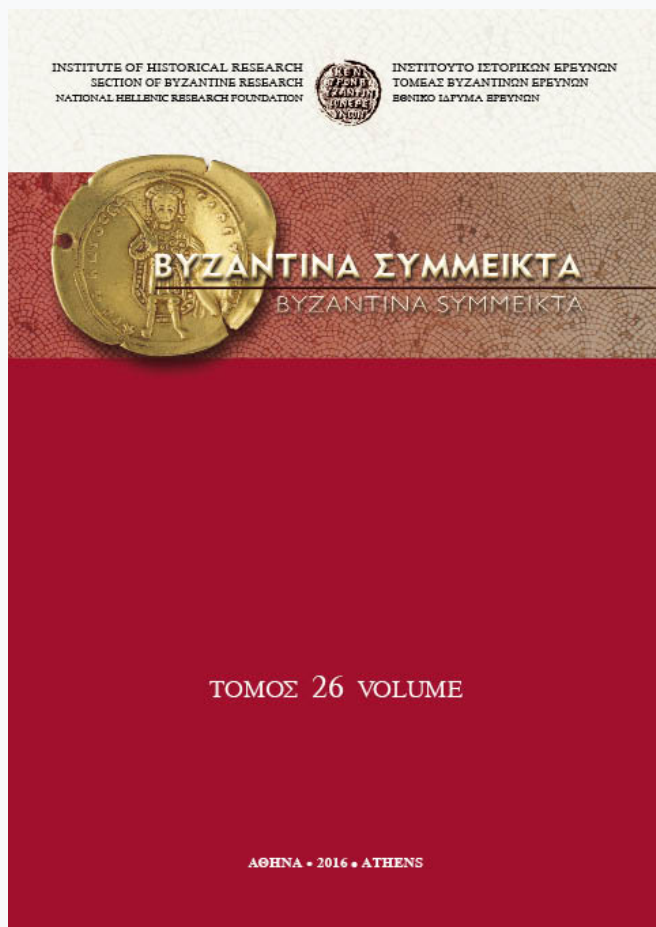


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**Book Review: A. RHOBY (ed.), *Inscriptions in Byzantium and Beyond. Methods – Projects – Case Studies*, (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch- Historische Klasse. Denkschriften, vol. 478, Veröffentlichungen zur Byzanzforschung, vol. 38)**

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A. RHOBY (ed.), *Inscriptions in Byzantium and Beyond. Methods – Projects – Case Studies* (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch–Historische Klasse. Denkschriften, 478. Band/Veröffentlichungen zur Byzanzforschung, 38), Vienna 2015, pp. 246. ISBN 978-3-7001-7674-9. ISBN Online 978-3-7001-7806-4 (<http://hw.oeaw.ac.at/7674-9>)

The nucleus of this collective volume consists of papers presented at two recent international events devoted to Byzantine epigraphy: the workshop “Byzantinische Epigraphik. Wege zu einem Corpus”, held in May 2010 at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, and the round table “Towards a Corpus of Byzantine Inscriptions” organized in August 2011 at the 22nd International Congress of Byzantine Studies in Sofia, with the addition of some further contributions by authors who did not participate in either of those meetings. The result is an updated collaborative work which claims to encapsulate the latest developments in the field of Byzantine Epigraphy, by offering an array of studies dealing with multiple aspects of the past, present, and future of the discipline.

The basic idea that underlies most of the book concerns the general directions current in the study of Byzantine inscriptions, especially with regard to the perennial problem – as it had appeared since the 19th century and has recently resurfaced thanks to the activity of the Austrian Academy of Sciences – of compiling a complete corpus of Byzantine inscriptions. That said, the contributing authors offer a wide range of methodological directions, concrete examples and case studies, personal experiences, descriptions of similar projects in other disciplines, but also provide practical information regarding the study of Byzantine inscriptions. Indeed, the volume epitomizes in many ways the current *status quo* in Byzantine epigraphy, by including a diverse selection of studies written by leading experts. Together with the

recent volume edited by Anthony Eastmond<sup>1</sup>, it is one of two major publications that appeared in 2015 dealing with Byzantine inscriptions, making that year a turning point in the history of Byzantine epigraphy.

The book edited by Dr. Rhoby comprises a total of 20 studies/chapters, grouped in 4 parts, each dedicated to a specific general theme. It begins with an introductory chapter by the editor, Andreas Rhoby from the Austrian Academy of Sciences; at the end of the book there is also a concise general bibliography on the subject, which includes key publications of inscriptions and studies in Byzantine epigraphy.

The introduction written by Andreas Rhoby (“A short history of Byzantine Epigraphy”) is a concise history of the discipline, which is essential in understanding the place of Byzantine epigraphy within the context of Byzantine studies. By tracing the origins of the study of Byzantine inscriptions from the ambitious projects of the 19th century until the present day, he follows the course of events through specific milestones (often the discussions during Byzantine Studies Congresses) and specific efforts –all of them ultimately unsuccessful– to produce a Corpus of Byzantine inscriptions. This chronological survey ends with the announced inauguration of the new international project titled *Inscriptiones Graecae Aevi Byzantini*, coordinated by the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, whereby international partners will publish corpora of inscriptions in accordance with common guidelines. The clarity with which the author describes the various undertakings highlights important aspects of the development of Byzantine studies in general. Rhoby’s text is the ideal introduction to the book, not only because of the useful information contained in this historical flashback, but also because it addresses the main methodological questions that have tormented Byzantinists of the past and which occur in most of the studies included in the present volume, namely issues such as: when is an inscription classified as “Byzantine”, what is the relation between Byzantine and Classical epigraphy, how can Byzantine epigraphy develop alongside Western medieval epigraphy, which categories of inscriptions are suitable for a corpus, what are the main principles that should be observed when editing and collecting Byzantine inscriptions, and how can information technology help the realization of projects related to Byzantine epigraphic texts.

The first part of the book, titled “Inscriptions in Byzantium and Beyond” focuses mainly on some general directions and methodological considerations. Cyril

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1. A. EASTMOND (ed.), *Viewing Inscriptions in the Late Antique and Medieval World*, Cambridge 2015.

Mango's text "Some lessons in Byzantine Epigraphy" is an addition to the author's long list of contributions to Byzantine epigraphy; he returns to the existentialist problems of the field and offers some interesting ideas about the evolution of epigraphic habits after the end of Antiquity, based on the location, language, script, and content of inscriptions. Vincent Debiais ("La tentation de Byzance. Réflexions sur les inscriptions byzantines vues de la Latinité"), a specialist in Western Medieval Epigraphy, proposes some useful ideas about the interaction between Greek and Latin texts in the West. By bringing attention to bilingual inscriptions, he stresses the need for interdisciplinary collaborations in order to interpret complex epigraphic cultures. Vasil Gjuzev's paper ("Die byzantinische und die slawische Epigraphik in Bulgarien heute") is a summary of recent developments in Bulgaria, including the study of both Greek and Slavic inscriptions, an appropriate theme for a volume generated from the Sofia congress. Professor Gjuzev proposes that the so-called Proto-Bulgarian inscriptions should form a separate entity within the planned international corpus of Byzantine Inscriptions. Andrey Vinogradov ("Byzantinische Inschriften des nördlichen Schwarzmeerraums") is an informative introduction to the "Byzantine Inscriptions of the Northern Black Sea Shore" Project (also related to the Sofia congress and its focus on the Black Sea region), recently launched online. The text includes information on the geographic distribution of the material, its dating, script, and language. Thanks to this publication, rich material from a hitherto understudied area of Byzantine epigraphy is available to the scholarly community.

The second part ("Methods of editing Byzantine Inscriptions") comprises the main methodological section of the book, since it addresses key questions about editing, by attempting to approach various issues from multiple angles, i.e. application of the classical rules of the Leiden convention, palaeographical considerations, problems of digitization, as well as aspects in common with Western medieval epigraphy. A short introduction by Peter Schreiner ("Drei Grundfragen zu einem Corpus byzantinischer Inschriften") repeats some of the questions already posed by Andreas Rhoby in the introduction and expresses the author's certainty that the time is ripe for a fruitful international collaborative Project, appropriately coordinated by the Academy of Sciences in Vienna. Walter Koch, like Vincent Debiais an expert in Western medieval epigraphy ("Die großen westlichen Corpuswerke zu den mittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Inschriften"), offers his experience in dealing with corpora in the West, by describing similar projects in France, Germany, Poland, Spain, and Italy, hoping that the lessons of already

advanced projects might help the Byzantine Project(s) under development. The contribution by Guglielmo Cavallo (“Corpus delle iscrizioni bizantine e pratiche della cultura scritta. Note su questioni aperte e per prospettive future”) adds extra weight to the section, since any discussion on the disciplines dealing with script has to take palaeography into consideration. Professor Cavallo offers invaluable remarks (expanding similar contributions to epigraphy he has made in the past<sup>2</sup>) on the use and reception of the inscribed Word, in the light of modern theories about reading, reciting, and reception of texts. Erkki Sironen’s text (“Zu den Richtlinien für die Edition byzantinischer Inschriften”) offers possible guidelines for editing Byzantine inscriptions with the use of specific examples, which demonstrate the peculiarities of the Byzantine material (compared to that of Classical epigraphy). The final two texts of the second part push forward toward the world of digitization: Charlotte Roueché, a pioneer in Byzantine epigraphy and champion of Open Access publishing (“Byzantine Epigraphy for the 21st Century”), traces the background and development of “digital epigraphy” with respect to Byzantine inscriptions and then proceeds to analyze the advantages of projects employing the EpiDoc language for electronic editions, especially its usefulness for developing searchable, interconnected databases. Joel Kalvesmaki (“Introducing Athena Ruby, Dumbarton Oaks’ New Font for Byzantine Inscriptions”) presents in detail the various problems and possible solutions related to the use of Greek fonts in digitization projects and offers a concise demonstration of the very attractive and efficient font Athena Ruby, designed by himself, which is already being used for editing inscriptions on Byzantine seals at Dumbarton Oaks.

Part 3 of the book (“Current and Future Projects”) deals with specific projects of collecting and documenting Byzantine inscriptions. This part offers a glimpse into the work carried out in the University of Athens, which is often overlooked by international scholarship. The text by Katerina Nikolaou and Irene Chrestou (“Indices of Published Christian and Byzantine Inscriptions. An *Old* Project carried through with *New* Technologies”) reiterates the theme of designing databases and emphasizes the need for historical analysis of inscriptions (often neglected by art historians and archaeologists). Sophia Kalopissi-Verti’s contribution (“Byzantine Dedicatory Inscriptions and Donor Portraits (7th-15th c.). A Project in Progress

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2. For example, G. CAVALLO - F. MAGISTRALE, *Mezzogiorno normanno e scritture esposte*, in *Epigrafia medievale greca e latina. Ideologia e funzione*, ed. G. CAVALLO - C. MANGO, Spoleto 1995, 293-329.

at the University of Athens”) describes a meticulously designed project involving interconnected databases which generate impressive results concerning the study of patronage, thanks to the combined emphasis on prosopography and art historical aspects. In fact, in order to demonstrate the efficacy of the Project, the author offers a series of original observations on patronage and society in the Mani and Cappadocia during the Middle Byzantine period, resulting from cross-referencing data from multiple fields within the databases. Thus, she is able to trace the emergence of specific patterns of patronage and the evolution from the patronage of imperial officials to local magnates. The section also includes two texts on corpora of graffiti by two pioneers of the field, Maria Xenaki (“Corpus des Graffites en Cappadoce: Introduction”) and Alexandra Evdokimova (“Greek Graffiti from Saint Sophia’s in Constantinople in the Archives of Robert Van Nice”), both of whom contribute to a re-evaluation of the importance of this understudied category of texts. The former offers particularly insightful observations on the interaction between scribes and readers by revisiting the theme of literacy in Byzantium.

The final section, titled “Case Studies”, also includes original contributions with new material. The late Sencer Şahin publishes some stone and mosaic inscriptions from Perge (“Spätromisch-frühbyzantinische Inschriften aus Perge in Pamphylien”), which will appear in volume 3 of the *Inschriften aus Perge* series, whereas Mustafa Sayar offers a number of additions to the corpus of brickstamps from Constantinople and its hinterland, namely a group of stamped bricks from excavations at Küçükçekmece, to the west of the city<sup>3</sup>. Hopefully, the results of these excavations conducted by the University of Izmit will yield important information about the region. Kazimir Popkonstantinov, one more author representing Bulgaria, has contributed an interesting account and interpretation of Greek epigraphy in Bulgaria, thus showing that the field is active in Bulgaria. Linda Safran’s article “Greek in the Salento: Byzantine and post-Byzantine public texts” summarizes some of the conclusions of her recent book<sup>4</sup> and raises important questions about the readership of inscriptions, as well as the significance of studying post-Byzantine material, thus ending the volume with additional methodological considerations, in accordance with the general orientation of the book.

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3. J. BARDILL, *Brickstamps of Constantinople*, Oxford 2004.

4. L. SAFRAN, *The Medieval Salento: Art and Identity in Southern Italy*, Philadelphia 2014.

Ida Toth's essay "Epigraphic Traditions in Eleventh-Century Byzantium. General Considerations" (also a part of the "Case Studies" section, placed before L. Safran's article) is undoubtedly one of the highlights of the volume. Intended as a continuation of Cyril Mango's seminal works on Byzantine Epigraphy from the 4th to the 10th centuries<sup>5</sup>, the text contains some preliminary results from the author's ongoing work on 11th-century epigraphy. Toth addresses several crucial issues by approaching the subject from various points of view, including the methodological considerations concerning the scope and purpose of her research. Thus, she offers a comprehensive overview of the available material, including textually attested inscriptions and a broad range of categories, such as graffiti, artists' signatures, and inscriptions on painted scrolls, and offers original observations on a variety of topics, such as the script and visual qualities of 11th-century inscriptions, as well as the ways in which the epigraphic material reflects changes in patterns of patronage.

To sum up, the book covers an impressive array of subjects, ranging from methodological observations on collecting and editing inscriptions to current directions in keeping up with the digital age and from analyzing patronage and interpreting inscriptions to recording epigraphic practices in Byzantium. The geographic extent of the essays represents large parts of the Byzantine world, with special articles dedicated to Cappadocia, the Russian lands, Bulgaria, Southern Italy, the Peloponnese, Constantinople, and Asia Minor. The chronological span is also addressed to a wide range of readers interested in multiple topics, such as early Christian inscriptions, Middle Byzantine graffiti, 11th-century epigraphy, Palaiologan material, and post-Byzantine survivals. Thus, the diverse nature of the studies and the treatment of several crucial topics by excellent studies concerning Byzantine inscriptions are major advantages of the volume.

It is clear from the above that the volume represents an updated overview of recent and current (and occasionally future) developments in the field of Byzantine epigraphy. Thus, it appears that the editor's aim is to make this (and his overall contribution to the field) a turning point in the history of Byzantine epigraphy, one that resets the objectives on an international collaborative basis in accordance with current developments in the digital humanities, as well as in classical epigraphy. The authors of the various essays repeatedly refer to the methodological problems,

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5. C. MANGO, *Byzantine Epigraphy (4th to 10th century)*, in D. HARLFINGER – G. PRATO (ed.), *Paleografia e codicologia greca*, v. 1, Alessandria 1991, 235–249.

especially those concerning the definition of Byzantine epigraphy and the process of collecting, editing, and publishing corpora. The recurring laments on the absence of a well-defined discipline dedicated to the study of Byzantine inscriptions, which combines pessimism and repetition, is perhaps tiresome (and probably the only flaw of this otherwise excellent volume). At the same time there is an evident determination that some common grounds have been laid for pursuing well-defined international projects toward a corpus of Byzantine inscriptions (as opposed to older unrealistic attempts at maximalist works) in a manner that will contribute to the efficient inclusion of Byzantine inscriptions in the general corpora of Greek texts and thus facilitate their use as textual and archaeological sources. This determination and the work of indefatigable scholars such as Andreas Rhoby and Ida Toth should serve as a source of optimism and even certainty that there is now an established (or reborn?) discipline of Byzantine epigraphy.

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