INTRODUCTION

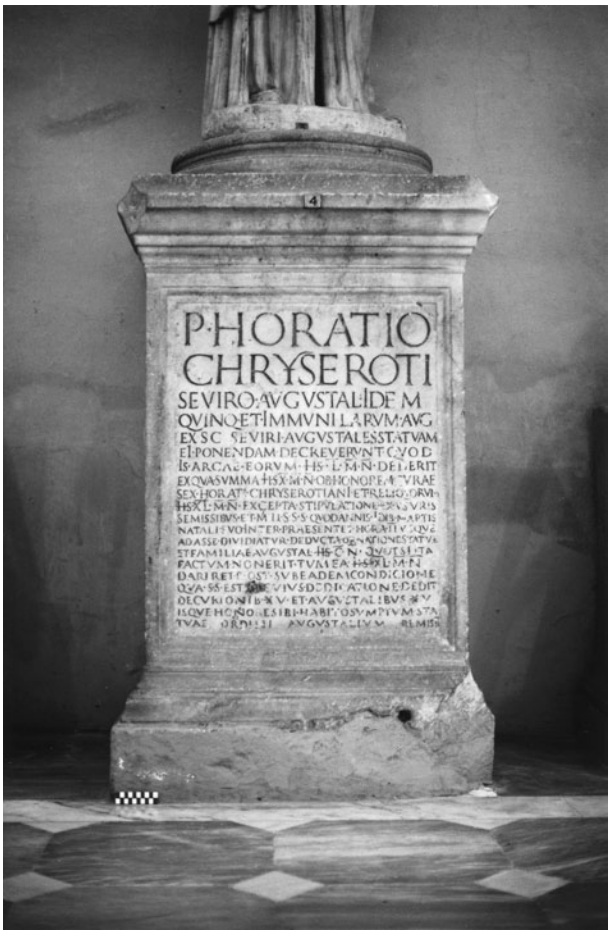
Inscribed Cities

A VISITOR TO THE FORUM OF OSTIA, ROME'S PORT, ON DECEMBER 17, 182 CE, would have witnessed a remarkable spectacle, as a crowd of the town's most important citizens gathered around the statue of a certain P. Horatius Chryseros (Fig. 1). The statue, probably a portrait of Chryseros dressed in a toga, stood atop a tall marble pedestal whose closely lettered inscription spelled out the circumstances behind the gathering: Chryseros had donated HS (*sesterces*) 50,000 – nearly five times the annual wages of a skilled laborer – to the municipal organization of the Seviri Augustales, of which he himself was a member (Fig. 2).[1] The inscribed text stipulated that most of these funds should be invested and a portion of the accrued interest should be used annually, on his birthday, to decorate the statue. Any remaining money then should be evenly distributed among the organization's members who had reconvened at the statue to celebrate the event. To thank Chryseros and memorialize his generosity, the Seviri Augustales had commissioned the statue and set it up in the most prestigious space at the city's center. Chryseros himself, to celebrate the new monument (and ensure a large turnout at its dedication), promised a one-time distribution of five *denarii* to each decurion and Sevir Augustalis present.

Monuments like that for Chryseros were ubiquitous throughout the ancient Roman world. They formed a dense crowd of bodies and bases that adhered to

[1] *CIL* 14.367 = *ILS* 6164; Vatican Museums, Museo Chiaramonti inv. no. 1247.

1. A gathering for a distribution in the forum at Ostia. From Pascolini 1979, 30, courtesy of Armando Editore.



2. Base for a statue of the Sevir Augustalis P. Horatius Chryseros, dedicated by the Seviri Augustales, Ostia, 182 (Vatican Museums, Museo Chiaramonti; *CIL* 14.367 = *ILS* 6164). Photo author, per gentile concessione dei Musei Vaticani.

standard architectural and decorative designs.[2] To a certain degree, the individuals they honored must have been distinguishable only by subtle differences of costume, posture, and the wording of their inscriptions.[3] The combination of monumental support, portrait image, and public lettering was perfected by the Romans to such a degree that even in antiquity statues on inscribed bases were considered emblematic of Roman public space. In fact, the elder Pliny compared erecting statues in houses to creating "fora in private homes."[4] To a modern audience, the physical form of this practice is recognizable; indeed, many of our own commemorative monuments directly embrace or reject the Roman tradition. However, despite this familiarity, we must seek to understand these artifacts on their own terms, as the products and producers of ancient civic communities.

On the surface, the "meaning" of Chryseros's statue appears quite clear: it celebrated a civic figure and his generous actions in a tangible, permanent way. Probe more deeply and the monument acquires other, simultaneous roles.[5] While it rewarded past actions, it also stood as a paradigm, encouraging future benefactions with the promise of a public portrait and textually mapping the particular actions that qualified an individual for the honor. The monument culminated a process that placed the community of Seviri Augustales in direct contact with other municipal groups, especially the upper-class decurions (town councilmen), with whom the Seviri Augustales must have negotiated to gain permission to dedicate the statue in the forum. The connection between the two civic bodies would have been accentuated physically as the men stood together around the statue and received equal shares of the initial dedicatory gift. The text on the base, in recording and displaying this moment of parity, inscribed an ideal world in which the two groups were equals, even though in reality the Seviri Augustales ranked beneath the decurions. The monument became a landmark in Ostia's forum, a site of successive annual gatherings that were prescribed by its inscription.[6] In bringing the Seviri Augustales together to perform collective actions of rejuvenating the statue and receiving the accumulated interest, these meetings physically defined the present membership of the group and provided it with a history of past distributions and the promise of future congregations. Thus, the Ostian statue and its inscribed base marked space, time, and affiliations, acted as a site of memory, and constituted individual and collective identities.

[2] For Roman statue bases, see Alföldy 1984, 23–40; Bonneville 1984, 132–40. For the Roman east, see Tuchelt 1979; Smith 2006, 31–4.
[3] Lahusen 1982, 239–41; Stewart 2003, 118–83; Smith 2006, 19–39.
[4] Plin. *NH* 34.16–17, cited in Stewart 2003, 166.
[5] Laird 2006, 31–43.
[6] For the possible location of the base and statue of Chryseros in Ostia's forum, see Laird 2002, 148–9.

The present study explores the various and overlapping semantic meanings of inscribed monuments in towns in Roman Italy. I use the term "inscribed monument" deliberately to emphasize the dual nature of the objects under consideration. Roman monuments consisted of a built support or armature, such as a statue base or a structure, often accompanied by sculptures or relief decorations. Most armatures included space for inscriptions that addressed a broad audience. These public letters contributed meaning on a purely textual level and were also an integral and expressive visual element of the ensemble. Terming these ensembles inscribed monuments validates the role that their public lettering plays in the function of the physical object.

Such monuments had a physical presence in specific urban spaces. While the statue and base of Chryseros constitute a well-known type, my work also encompasses tombs with their dedicatory inscriptions and inscribed furniture (altars, stelai, cinerary urns, sarcophagi) as well as panels or architectural members whose inscriptions commemorated public works. I examine these inscribed monuments within specific archaeological contexts to understand how their constituent elements – public lettering, imagery, and architectural supports – combined in particular spaces to create meaningful urban assemblages.

Monuments and the practice of making them were hallmarks of Roman urbanism. Both were components of what Greg Woolf describes as a "range of objects, beliefs and practices that were characteristic of people who considered themselves to be, and were widely acknowledged as, Roman."[7] This "cultural package," which might include specific architectural forms, concepts such as manliness (*virtus*) or citizenship (*civitas*), or practices such as funerary rituals or civic beneficence (euergetism), closely parallels the shared "symbols" that sociologist Anthony Cohen asserts bind and define communities.[8] Although individuals may agree to hold a series of symbols in common, because such symbols are broad and complex they will not have single, monolithic meanings. Rather, each member of a community will assign a different meaning to these symbols that depends on her or his unique orientation to them. For example, two men living in Pompeii – a decurion and a freedman Augustalis – might have agreed on the concept of "citizenship." However, citizenship would probably have meant something different to the nobleman born with all the privileges that *civitas* entailed than it did to the ex-slave for whom its benefits were limited and predicated on manumission.[9] Likewise, the symbolic language of monument-making was broad enough to allow a Pompeiian and, say, a man from Lugdunum (Lyon) to participate in the practice, but flexible enough to be "tailor[ed] ... subjectively (and interpretively)" to each man's

[7] Woolf 1998, 11; 241.
[8] Ibid., 11; Cohen 1985, especially 11–21.
[9] See also Kaster (2007) on the use of the Latin term *virtus*.

needs.[10] This flexibility gave the donor, designer, or stonecutter the opportunity to shape a commission (whether intentionally or unintentionally). The final product was an individuated reflection of a maker's particular understanding of a set of symbols at the same time that it was an expression of his or her participation in a particular community.[11] An examination of the ways in which commissioners inflected the common visual language of inscribed monuments, patterns of commemoration, or epigraphic conventions, then, brings us closer to understanding the variety of meanings that groups and individuals could ascribe to the shared symbols of Roman culture.

I have been speaking of the shared symbols of the Roman Empire, a macrocommunity composed of individual towns and settlements. However, towns were composed of smaller groups, communities in their own right. Some were bound by ties of a social or political nature, such as the decurions, professional guilds (*collegia*), or the *Augustales*.[12] Other communities might be constituted by the bonds of kinship, household, or patronage. Still others, such as neighborhood communities, might be defined by geographical boundaries. These civic communities gained a sense of cohesion and shared premises (symbols) from repeated interactions within certain spaces.[13] Monuments, insofar as they were made, installed in a particular location, and used over time by various groups, fostered the formation of civic communities. The statue of Chryseros at Ostia, for instance, not only resulted from a highly codified sequence of actions; it also prescribed a series of rituals for which it served as a locus. These exchanges took place in specific places at certain times and distinguished Ostia's Seviri Augustales as a discrete civic community. Consequently, a careful examination of the spaces in which monuments stood and their use over time can help us understand how civic communities coalesced and projected identities unique to themselves and to their town.

Inscribed monuments publicly conveyed (and often prioritized) how and where a particular individual or group "fit" within the civic structure, or defined where the edges of these communities of actual people touched or

[10] Cohen 1985, 17. For the adaptation of the texts of inscribed monuments to meet the needs of citizens of Lugdunum (Lyon), see Woolf 1998, 78–97; and Hope 2001, especially 30–5.

[11] Cohen (1985, 20) writes: "The triumph of community is to so contain this variety that its inherent discordance does not subvert the apparent coherence which is expressed by its boundaries."

[12] Throughout the text, the title *Augustales* (italicized) will collectively represent the many institutions known under a variety of names (Augustales, Seviri Augustales, Magistri Augustales, and other variants, and the Seviri; but not the Flamines Augustales and the Sodales Augustales, whose members were recruited from a different social stratum). Unitalicized titles will label the specific groups found in individual towns. In this, I diverge from the pattern established by Duthoy (1978, 1254), who proposed the title **Augustales* (with an asterisk) to generalize the phenomenon of the *Augustality*.

[13] Yaeger and Canuto 2000, 5–6.

intersected, a reflection of the social hierarchy of a Roman town. However, insofar as monuments' texts insisted on chronicling positive relations between donors, honorees, and other groups, they also constituted ideal communities, virtual, "inscribed" cities that codified socially esteemed relations between groups and individuals. To tease out both the real and the imagined communities that coalesced around inscribed monuments, I have focused on commissions made by and for a particular municipal group, the *Augustales*.

AUGUSTALES AS SELF-DEFINING CIVIC COMMUNITIES

Augustales were municipal groups found predominantly in the towns of the western Roman Empire.[14] The precise titles used from town to town varied and include the well-attested Augustales, Seviri Augustales, and Seviri, along with more than forty local and regional variants.[15] Regardless of the title used, all of these organizations attracted wealthy men who, despite their financial qualifications, were legally barred from participating in municipal government.[16] Often, a man's status as a freed slave explained this prohibition. However, the *Augustales* were not specifically organizations for freedmen. Freeborn members are attested, particularly in northern Italy. The ratio between freeborn and freedmen members varied from region to region and reflected the numbers of each group who qualified for membership in particular areas.[17] While the *Augustality* is frequently considered a "freedmen magistracy," the present study considers the "freedman" aspect of the institution only insofar as this status often precluded members of these groups from attaining a true municipal magistracy.

In all its variety the *Augustality* provided an official mechanism to involve these legal outsiders financially in the public life of their towns. Elected by the decurions or by other members of the group itself, inductees paid an entry fee (*summa honoraria*) for membership. The fee's size and form varied from place to place: inscriptions mention dedications of imperial or divine statues, games giving, public construction projects, or cash donations. *Summae honorariae* were tailored to meet the needs of specific towns, which depended on

[14] The bibliography on the *Augustales* is vast. Essential studies include those of von Premerstein 1895; Duthoy 1970, idem 1974, idem 1976, and idem 1978; Abramenko 1993a; Mouritsen 2006; idem 2011, 248–61.

[15] The problem of this diverse nomenclature is deftly summarized by Mouritsen (2006, 237–40), who concludes that the spectrum of titles must reflect the highly localized nature of each organization and the lack of a single, juridically defined role for the *Augustales*.

[16] Abramenko 1993a, especially 11–56. Abramenko's characterization of the group as a "middle layer" (*Mittelschicht*) has been criticized, most recently by Mouritsen (2006; 2011 esp. 256–9). However, in many (non-official) ways, members occupied a particular social niche between the decurions and ordinary townspeople.

[17] Abramenko 1993a, 44–76.

contributions from magistrates and wealthy donors to cover the cost of civic infrastructure. Beyond this, scholars have debated the precise role played by groups of *Augustales*. They often have been characterized as involved on some level in the imperial cult, although they did not oversee or organize emperor worship as official municipal priests.[18] Recent work by historians has de-emphasized the institution's ties to emperor worship, although much of the archaeological evidence continues to be filtered through the lens of the imperial cult. This has led to narrow interpretations of, for instance, the function of buildings, or to *a priori* readings of particular dedications. However, patterns of euergetism do not sustain these conclusions. It is telling that dedications to emperors, whether of a cultic or honorific nature, do not coalesce around any single aspect of imperial power; nor do they constitute the majority of surviving public monuments made by the *Augustales*.[19] Individual *Augustales* and local groups were more likely to commission or renovate buildings, pay for public statuary, or underwrite games, public banquets, or financial distributions than they were to make imperial dedications. The position of *Augustalis* appears to have been largely honorific, a way to provide wealthy legal outsiders with public visibility while facilitating their financial participation in their towns.[20] Their public role, however, inevitably involved them in the performance of religious rituals, some of which honored emperors and the imperial family.[21] In this regard *Augustales* parallel many groups and individuals (including decurions, *duoviri* and *quattuorviri* [the top two or four magistrates in a colony or *municipium*, respectively], and members of professional guilds) that similarly overlaid emperor worship onto civic spectacle and euergetism.

In exchange for their financial contributions to their towns, *Augustales* received status and visibility. At least some *Augustales* were accompanied by lictors carrying fasces, the insignia of Roman magistrates, at certain points during their membership. Individuals who could contribute money above the *summa honoraria* were encouraged to do so and had the privilege of appearing as civic patrons at, for instance, games they had funded. Extraordinary gifts often received further rewards, such as an honorific double bench (*bisellium*) or

[18] Mouritsen 2006, 240–2. See also Gradel 1994, 259–60; Beard et al. 1998, 357–8, discussing the implications of Abramenko's work on the *Augustales* (1993a). The traditional arguments in favor of the *Augustales*' role as cult functionaries are those of Duthoy 1978, 1293–1306, and Fishwick 1991, 609–16. See Duthoy 1978, 1254–8, for the historiography of the issue.

[19] Of 639 "public" (i.e., created for municipal or religious spheres, rather than the funerary) inscriptions made by individual *Augustales* or collectively by local groups, only 186 of them (less than one-third) are associated with the imperial cult. See also Mouritsen 2006, 241–2; Laird 2002, 114–44 (particularly on Ostia).

[20] As suggested by Duthoy (1974) and Ostrow (1990). Both, nonetheless, stress the group's cultic function.

[21] Mouritsen 2006, 241; Beard et al. 1998, 358.

the bestowal of the insignia of a decurion (*ornamenta decurionalia*). As a group, *Augustales* might occupy special seats at games and in the theater; they frequently received the second share (beneath the decurions) at civic distributions; and they might dine with the decurions at public banquets. However, they did not constitute an official "order," as scholars frequently assert. Decurional inscriptions never characterize them as such, nor did *Augustales* perform public functions alongside the town council.[22] Their freeborn sons, however, could and did rise to the decurionate.[23]

Augustales, then, should not be considered official magistrates or priests but rather men whose wealth and the visibility it obtained guaranteed them prominence in their towns.[24] Their position encouraged them to commission monuments both as a group and as individuals, which they did with enthusiasm. This extensive corpus permits comparisons across a typologically broad body of monuments whose inscriptions announce their donors' membership in the organization. This pattern renders the *Augustales* a recognizable community within their towns and makes a study of their material remains uniquely revelatory.[25] Moreover, nomenclature and other details recorded in their inscriptions explicate the ties of individual *Augustales* to those of both higher and lower social and political standing, opening windows onto social contexts. Their status, between the decurions and "ordinary Romans," and their local spheres of action offer a counterpoint to the Rome-centric imperial and senatorial projects that have dominated contextualist studies of Roman monuments.[26] The *Augustales* also chronologically limit this study to the first two centuries CE, the period in which they were most active.[27] Although *Augustales* were found throughout the western empire, patterns of preservation limit my focus to Roman Italy. While the present study emphasizes the history of monuments over the history of their makers, the work nonetheless furthers our understanding of the *Augustales* and its members, who emerge as complex actors within municipal society.

[22] Mouritsen 2006, 244–6.

[23] Gordon 1931, 65–77. For the sons of Seviri and Seviri Augustales at Ostia, see Laird 2002, 59–61. For a similar assessment of the Seviri Augustales at Brixia (Brescia), see Mollo 2000, 347–71.

[24] For the social status of *Augustales*, see Mouritsen 2006; idem 2011, emphasizing that the wealth of various groups of *Augustales* might vary from town to town. Also Duthoy 1970; D'Arms 1981.

[25] It was this habit of self-identification that prompted D'Arms (1981) to use the *Augustales* of Campania as the basis for his study of the social status of merchants in the imperial period.

[26] For example, Favro 1996; P. Davies 2000.

[27] The earliest dated inscription pertaining to the group was made in 13–12 BCE (*CIL* 11.3200 = *ILS* 89 [Nepet]). For the foundation of the group, see Kneissl 1980; Ostrow 1990 (specifically linking it to Augustus's social programs). The latest dated inscription was made in 270 CE (*CIL* 11.4589 = *ILS* 6636 [Carsulae]). For the decline of the group, see Abramenko 1993b (especially at Ostia). Vittinghoff (1985) correctly counters the proposal of Ausbüttel (1982) that the group survived into the fifth century.

PRIOR APPROACHES AND PROBLEMS

By characterizing *Augustales* as freedmen priests, scholars have prioritized one aspect of their public function, often at the expense of their role as benefactors within their towns. In a similar way, scholarship on inscribed monuments has separated parts from the whole. Disciplinary boundaries have determined which parts of inscribed monuments have received the most attention – their written or their iconographic content. The former is the domain of epigraphers and historians, the latter of art historians and archaeologists. While scholars recognize the utility of both categories of evidence, they privilege one at the expense of the other. This dichotomy and its limitations are illustrated by past approaches to the inscribed monuments of the *Augustales*.

Most work on the monuments made by and for the *Augustales* has focused on written content, primarily because this constitutes our best evidence for the history and function of the group. In ancient literature, the *Augustales* garner only one (albeit spectacular) mention: Petronius casts Trimalchio, the overbearing host of the dinner party in the mid-first-century novel, *Satyricon*, and two of his guests as Seviri Augustales.[28] In contrast, more than twenty-nine hundred surviving monuments commemorate real *Augustales* or mention the group and its members in their inscriptions.[29] Absent these epigraphic texts, we would know virtually nothing about the group. The inscriptional corpus has supported a vast body of scholarship, ranging from broad surveys to more specialized studies; many of these works are essential to the present project. However, focusing on an epigraphic text *qua* text invariably reduces a physical object and its public lettering to two-dimensional words on a page, privileging texts as the bearers of historical content.[30] Inscriptions are often employed to answer questions about the origins and development of the *Augustales*, the significance and chronology of the different titles, or the social status and ties of the group's members, all subjects having little to do with the physicality of the monumental support. Ironically, the images that adorn the monuments of some *Augustales* are frequently treated as representational appendages to the epigraphic record. In particular, relief carvings of magisterial insignia – fasces,

[28] Petron. *Sat.* 28–79. Two scholiasts of Horace, Pseudo Acron and Porphyrion, *ad Hor. Serm.* 2.3.281, assert that *Augustales* were freedman priests in charge of crossroad shrines (*compita*). However, these late sources apparently confuse the *Augustales* with the neighborhood magistrates (*vicomagistri*) who were specifically responsible for *compita*.

[29] Duthoy (1976, 143–214) collects more than 2,500 inscriptions known up to 1975; updated by Abramenko (1993a). My database (current to 2011, the publication date of *Année Epigraphique* 2008) includes more than 2,900 inscriptions pertaining to the group and its members.

[30] Eck (1995a, 111) succinctly explains how the traditional epigraphic method, derived from philological approaches, largely reflects the priorities of Theodor Mommsen, the first editor of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. Mommsen insisted on autopsy, but only to confirm the correct reading of an inscription's letters.

honorific chairs (the *sella curulis* and the *bisellium*), and wreaths – are examined only to understand which groups were permitted to use particular visual perquisites. Such readings not only single out a part (the letters or sculpted relief) of the whole; they also treat an inscribed monument as an artifact of an abstract (juridical / political / religious / familial / etc.) system or process, rather than as a tangible memorial, landmark, or even, at times, obstacle that had a physical presence in a lived community.[31] This is true both of the most traditional prosopographic studies and of the most sophisticated considerations of the social practices that inscriptions can reveal.[32]

Art historians and archaeologists likewise prioritize one form of evidence over the other, but with image taking precedence over text. Scholars in these fields tend either to view accompanying texts as captions that identify subject matter or the donor's name or to single out the handful of inscribed monuments that bear relief decoration.[33] Although there are notable exceptions, few studies offer a sustained focus on the aesthetic impact of public lettering and fewer give serious attention to undecorated inscribed monuments.[34] In approaching monuments made by *Augustales*, in particular, art historians have focused on a circumscribed corpus of funerary reliefs that show an *Augustalis* acting in public, perhaps in his role as a member of the order (see, for instance, Fig. 3 on page 20). Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli connected these biographical reliefs with the funerary imagery commissioned by the fictional Sevir Augustalis, Trimalchio, who, like many real *Augustales*, was also an ex-slave.[35] As Roman art history has broadened to consider art made by "ordinary" Romans, scholars have collapsed the boundaries between Petronius's literary creation and real *Augustales*, seeing in the corpus of narrative reliefs one facet of "freedman art," a modern art–historical category that identifies art commissioned by ex-slaves based on the use of specific iconographies or visual style. Because scholars consider real *Augustales* to be freedmen par excellence, their monuments, especially those bearing biographical scenes, have become synonymous with freedman art.[36]

[31] Eck 1995a, 111.

[32] For example, Beard (1985); Van Nijf (1997); and Ma (2007), although now see Ma (2013) and the essays in Sears et al. (2013).

[33] For example, D'Ambra 1988; G. Davies 2007.

[34] For example, the work of Rose (1997) is important for considering statue bases and their inscriptions as evidence for imperial sculptural groups. See also Højte (2005), who uses bases to reveal patterns of dedication.

[35] Bianchi Bandinelli 1967, 7–19.

[36] For example, Bianchi Bandinelli 1967; Whitehead 1993; Clarke 2003, 145–52; and, to a lesser extent, Hope 2009, especially 153–9. D. Kleiner (1992, 148–9) discusses the tomb of the Sevir Lusius Storax from Chieti as the sole example of "The Art of Freedmen" in the Julio-Claudian period. Ryberg (1955, 98–102) has been particularly influential in crediting the members of the organization with commissioning biographical narrative scenes. *Contra*, see Laird 2002, 172–97. For the origins of "freedman art" as a scholarly category of inquiry, see Petersen 2006, especially 2–12.