

THE SCRIBES OF ROME

In a society in which only a fraction of the population was literate and numerate, being one of the few specialists in reading, writing and reckoning was to possess an invaluable asset. The fact that the Roman state heavily relied on these professional scribes in financial and legal administration led to their holding a unique position and status. By gathering and analysing the available source material on the Roman *scribae*, Benjamin Hartmann traces the history of Rome's public scribes from the early Republic to the Later Roman Empire. He tells the story of men of low social origin who, by means of their specialised knowledge, found themselves at the heart of the Roman polity, in close proximity to the powerful and responsible for the written arcana of the state – a story of knowledge and power, corruption and contested social mobility.

BENJAMIN HARTMANN is a former Research and Teaching Assistant in Ancient History at the University of Zurich. His research focuses on the role of literacy in the ancient world, ancient cultural and social history, and Latin epigraphy. He has published mainly on writing on everyday objects and small finds from the Roman world.

THE SCRIBES OF ROME

A Cultural and Social History of the Scribae

BENJAMIN HARTMANN

University of Zurich



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to my parents Annemarie and Josef
to Esther

sine quibus non

*Er hat einen Sturm in einem Wasserglase beobachtet und dabei noch
Verschiedenes mehr entdeckt als nur Eigenschaften eines Sturmes.*

*He observed a storm in a teacup and thereby discovered much more
than just the characteristics of a storm.*

Ludwig Hohl, *Die Notizen*

Epigraph excerpt from: Ludwig Hohl, *Die Notizen oder Von der unvoreiligen Versöhnung*.
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Abbreviations

The abbreviations of the names of ancient writers and their works adopted here are the ones used in the index of the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*¹ and Liddell-Scott-Jones' *Greek-English Lexicon*.² Short forms of epigraphic corpora follow the usage of Clauss-Slaby's *Epigraphik-Datenbank*.³ Journals are abbreviated according to the usage of *L'Année Philologique*. For the sake of convenience, the abbreviations of epigraphic corpora and reference works used in the text are reproduced below.

<i>Acquasparta</i>	P. Bruschetti and R. Pastura (2005). 'Acquasparta. Iscrizioni in Palazzo Cesi'. In: <i>Epigraphica</i> 67, pp. 473–485.
<i>AE</i>	<i>L'Année épigraphique</i> (1889–). Paris.
<i>Aesernia</i>	Marco Buonocore (2003). <i>Molise. Repertorio delle iscrizioni latine. Le iscrizioni. 5, 2: Le iscrizioni di Aesernia</i> . Ed. by Gianfranco De Benedittis. Campobasso: Palladino.
<i>Allifae</i>	Nicola Mancini (2005). <i>Allifae</i> . Piedimonte Matese: Tip. Bandista.
<i>CAG</i>	Michel Provost, Jean-Marie Pailler, et al. (2017). <i>Carte archéologique de la Gaule. Toulouse. 31/3</i> . Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres.
<i>CartNova</i>	Juan Manuel Abascal Palazón and Sebastián F. Ramallo Asensio, eds. (1997). <i>La ciudad de Carthago Nova. 3: La documentación epigráfica</i> . Murcia: EDITUM.

¹ *Thesaurus linguae Latinae*, ed. (1990). *Index librorum scriptorum inscriptionum ex quibus exempla afferuntur*. Editio altera. Leipzig: Teubner.

² H. G. Liddell and R. Scott (1996). *Greek-English Lexicon*. Revised and augmented by H. S. Jones with the assistance of R. McKenzie and with the cooperation of many scholars. With a revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

³ www.manfredclauss.de.

CCCA	Maarten Jozef Vermaseren (1977–1989). <i>Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attidisque</i> (CCCA). Leiden: Brill.
CCID	Monika Hörig and Elmar Schwertheim (1987). <i>Corpus Cultus Iovis Dolicheni</i> (CCID). Leiden: Brill.
CEACelio	Gian Luca Gregori, ed. (2001). <i>La collezione epigrafica dell'Antiquarium Comunale del Celio. Inventario generale, inediti, revisioni, contributi al riordino</i> . Rome: Quasar.
CECapitol	Silvio Panciera (1987). <i>La collezione epigrafica dei musei Capitolini</i> . Rome: Ed. di storia e letteratura.
CECasapulla	Laura Chioffi (2007). <i>La collezione epigrafica di Camillo Pellegrino a Casapulla</i> . Rome: Quasar.
CEL	Paolo Cugusi, ed. (1992, 2002). <i>Corpus Epistularum Latinarum Papyris Tabulis Ostracis servatarum. Vol. I Textus, Vol. II Commentarius, Vol. III Addenda, Corrigenda, Indices rerum, Index verborum omnium</i> . Florence: Gonnelli.
ChLA	Albert Bruckner and Robert Marichal, eds. (1954–1998). <i>Chartae Latinae Antiquiores. 1–49</i> . Dietikon, Zurich: Urs Graf Verlag.
CIG	August Boeck et al., eds. (1828–1877). <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum</i> . Berlin: Akademie.
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> (1862–). Berlin: de Gruyter.
CIMRM	Maarten Jozef Vermaseren (1956–1960). <i>Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae, 2 Vols</i> . The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
CLE	Franz Bücheler and Ernst Lommatzsch, eds. (1895–1926). <i>Carmina Latina Epigraphica</i> . Leipzig: Teubner.
CSIR	<i>Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani</i> (1964–).
Devijver	Hubert Devijver (1976–2001). <i>Prosopographia militiarum equestrum quae fuerunt ab Augusto ad Gallienum</i> . Ed. by Ségolène Demougin and Marie-Thérèse Raepsaet-Charlier. Leuven: Universitaire Pers.
EAOR	Patrizia Sabbatini Tumolesi, ed. (1988–). <i>Epigrafia anfiteatrale dell'Occidente Romano</i> . Rome: Quasar.
EE	<i>Ephemeris Epigraphica. Corporis Inscriptionum Latinarum Supplementum edita iussu Instituti archeologici Romani</i> (1872–1913). Berlin.
ERAlavesa	Juan Carlos Elorza (1967). <i>Ensayo topografico de epigrafia romana Alavesa</i> . Vitoria: Dip. Foral da Alava.

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<i>EURom</i>	Heikki Solin (1975). <i>Epigraphische Untersuchungen in Rom und Umgebung</i> . Helsinki: Soumalainen Tiedeakatemia.
<i>FCap</i>	Attilio Degrassi, ed. (1954). <i>Fasti Capitolini</i> . Turin: Paravia.
<i>FIRA</i>	Salvator Riccobono et al., eds. (1968). <i>Fontes iuris Romani anteiustiniani</i> . 2nd edn. Florence.
<i>Franchetti</i>	Maryline G. Parca (1995). <i>The Franchetti Collection in Rome. Inscriptions and Sculptural Fragments</i> . Rome: Quasar.
<i>GLIA</i>	Stephen Mitchell and David French (2012). <i>The Greek and Latin Inscriptions of Ankara (Ancyra)</i> . Munich: C. H. Beck.
<i>GLISwedish</i>	Bengt E. Thomasson (1997). <i>A Survey of Greek and Latin Inscriptions on Stone in Swedish Collections</i> . Stockholm: Åström.
<i>IAnkara</i>	David French (2003). <i>Roman, Late Roman and Byzantine Inscriptions of Ankara. A Selection</i> . Ankara: Museum of Anatolian Civilizations.
<i>IATrebula</i>	Heikki Solin, ed. (1993). <i>Le iscrizioni antiche die Trebula, Caiatia e Cubulteria</i> . Caserta: Associazione Storica del Caiatino.
<i>ICUR</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Christianae urbis Romae. Nova series</i> (1922–). Rome.
<i>IDR</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Daciae Romanae</i> (1975–). Bucharest.
<i>IDRE</i>	Constantin C. Petolescu (1996–). <i>Inscriptiones Daciae Romanae. Inscriptiones extra fines Daciae repertae</i> . Bucharest: Editura enciclopedică.
<i>I.Ephesos</i>	Hermann Wankel et al., eds. (1979–1984). <i>Die Inschriften von Ephesos</i> . Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien 11–17.4. Bonn: Habelt.
<i>IG</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i> (1902–). Berlin.
<i>IGI-Napoli</i>	Elena Miranda (1990–1995). <i>Iscrizioni greche d'Italia. Napoli</i> . Rome: Quasar.
<i>IGLFriuli</i>	Fulvia Mainardis (2004). <i>Aliena saxa. Le iscrizioni greche e latine conservate nel Friuli-Venezia Giulia ma non pertinenti ai centri antichi della regione</i> . Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei.
<i>IGLMessina</i>	Irma Bitto (2001). <i>Le iscrizioni greche e latine di Messina</i> . Messina: DiScAM.

<i>IGRRP</i>	René Cagnat (1901–1927). <i>Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes</i> . Paris: Laroux.
<i>IGUR</i>	Luigi Moretti (1968–1990). <i>Inscriptiones Graecae Urbis Romae</i> . Rome: Istituto Italiano per la Storia Antica.
<i>IK</i>	Kommission für die Archäologische Erforschung Kleinasien, ed. (1972–). <i>Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien</i> . Bonn: Habelt.
<i>IKöln</i>	Brigitte Galsterer and Hartmut Galsterer (2010). <i>Die römischen Steininschriften aus Köln. IKöln</i> . 2nd ed. Mainz: Philipp von Zabern.
<i>IL Afr</i>	René Cagnat (1923). <i>Inscriptions latines d'Afrique (Tripolitaine, Tunisie, Maroc)</i> . Paris.
<i>IL Alg</i>	<i>Inscriptions latines d'Algérie</i> (1922–2003). Paris: H. Champion.
<i>IL Bulg</i>	Boris Gerov (1989). <i>Inscriptiones Latinae in Bulgaria reperiatae</i> . Sofia: Kliment Ohridski.
<i>IL CV</i>	Ernst Diehl, ed. (1925–1967). <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres</i> . Berlin: Weidmann.
<i>ILD</i>	Constantin C. Petolescu (2005). <i>Inscriptiile latine din Dacia (ILD). Inscriptiones latinae Daciae</i> . Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române.
<i>IL Jug</i>	Anna Šašel and Jaro Šašel (1963–1986). <i>Inscriptiones Latinae quae in Iugoslavia inter annos MCMXL et MCMLX repertae et editae sunt</i> . Ljubljana: Narodni muzej.
<i>ILLRP</i>	Attilio Degraasi (1937–1963). <i>Inscriptiones Latinae liberae rei publicae</i> . Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
<i>ILLRP-S</i>	Silvio Panciera et al. (1991). 'Inscriptiones Latinae liberae rei publicae'. In: <i>Epigrafia. Actes du colloque international d'épigraphie latine en mémoire de Attilio Degraasi pour le centenaire de sa naissance. Actes du colloque de Rome (27–28 mai 1988)</i> . Rome: École Française de Rome, pp. 241–491.
<i>ILLRP.Imagines</i>	Attilio Degraasi (1965). <i>Inscriptiones Latinae liberae rei publicae. Imagines</i> . Berlin: de Gruyter.
<i>ILMN</i>	Giuseppe Camodeca (2000). <i>Catalogo delle iscrizioni latine del Museo nazionale di Napoli, ILMN</i> . Naples: Loffredo.
<i>ILN</i>	<i>Inscriptions Latines de Narbonnaise (I. L. N)</i> (1985–). Paris: CNRS.

Abbreviations

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- ILPBardo* Zeïneb Benzina Ben Abdallah (1986). *Catalogue des Inscriptions latines païennes du Musée du Bardo*. Rome: École Française de Rome.
- ILS* Hermann Dessau, ed. (1892–1916). *Inscriptiones Latinae selectae*. Berlin.
- ILSanMichele* Hilding Thylander (1962). ‘Inscriptions latines de San Michele d’Axel Munthe’. In: *Opuscula Romana* 4, pp. 129–157.
- ILTun* Alfred Merlin (1944). *Inscriptions latines de la Tunisie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- IMCCatania* Kalle Korhonen (2004). *Le iscrizioni del museo civico di Catania*. Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica.
- InscrAqu* Johannes Baptista Brusin (1991–1993). *Inscriptiones Aquileiae*. Pubblicazioni della Deputazione di Storia Patria per il Friuli 20. Udine: Deputazione di Storia Patria per il Friuli.
- InscrIt* *Inscriptiones Italiae* (1931–). Rome.
- IPOstia* Hilding Thylander (1951–1952). *Inscriptions du port d’Ostie*. Lund: Gleerup.
- IRComo* Antonio Sartori (1994). *Le Iscrizioni Romane. Guida all’esposizione*. Como: Musei Civici.
- IRPalicante* Manuel Abilio Rabanal Alonso and Juan Manuel Abascal Palazón (1985). ‘Inscripciones Romanas de la provincia de Alicante’. In: *Lucentum* 4, pp. 191–244.
- IScM* *Inscriptiones Scythiae Minoris Graecae et Latinae* 2 (1980–). Bucharest.
- ISIS* Anne Helttula (2007). *Le iscrizioni sepolcrali latine nell’Isola sacra*. Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae.
- LapSav* Tóth Endre (2011). *Lapidarium Savariense*. Szombathely.
- LIKelsey* Steven L. Tuck (2005). *Latin Inscriptions in the Kelsey Museum. The Dennison and De Criscio Collections*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- LMentana* Guido Barbieri, ed. (1982). *Il lapidario Zeri di Mentana*. Rome: Istituto italiano per la storia antica.
- P. Mich.* Herbert Chayyim Youtie and John Garrett Winter, eds. (1951). *Papyri and Ostraca from Karanis. Second Series*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Pflaum* Hans-Georg Pflaum (1960–1982). *Les carrières procuratoriennes équestres sous le Haut-Empire romain*. Paris: Geuthner.

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<i>PIR</i> ¹	Elimar Krebs et al., eds. (1897–1898). <i>Prosopographia Imperii Romani I. II. III</i> . Berlin: G. Reimer.
<i>PIR</i> ²	Klaus Wachtel et al., eds. (1933–). <i>Prosopographia Imperii Romani saec. I. II. III</i> . Editio altera. Berlin: de Gruyter.
<i>RDGE</i>	Robert K. Sherck, ed. (1969). <i>Roman Documents from the Greek East. Senatus consulta and epistulae to the Age of Augustus</i> . Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press.
<i>RECapua</i>	Laura Chioffi (2005). <i>Museo provinciale Campano di Capua. La raccolta epigrafica</i> . Capua: Museo provinciale campano.
<i>RIB II</i>	R. G. Collingwood et al., eds. (1990–1995). <i>The Roman Inscriptions of Britain. Volume II. Instrumentum Domesticum</i> . Oxford: Alan Sutton.
<i>RICIS</i>	Laurent Bricault (2005). <i>Receuil des inscriptions concernant les cultes isiaques (RICIS)</i> . Paris: De Boccard.
<i>RIU</i>	<i>Die römischen Inschriften Ungarns</i> (1972–). Budapest: Enciklopédia Kiadó.
<i>Roman Statutes</i>	Michael H. Crawford, ed. (1996). <i>Roman Statutes. 2 Volumes</i> . Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies. Supplement 64. London: University of London.
<i>Schiavi</i>	Marco Buonocore (1984b). <i>Schiavi e liberti dei Volusi Saturnini. Le iscrizioni del colombario sulla via Appia antica</i> . Rome: Bretschneider.
<i>SCPP</i>	Werner Eck, Antonio Caballos, and Fernández Fernando (1996). <i>Das senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre</i> . Vestigia 48. Munich: C. H. Beck.
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum</i> (1923–). Leiden: Brill.
<i>Sinn</i>	Friederike Sinn (1987). <i>Stadtrömische Marmorurnen</i> . Mainz: von Zabern.
<i>SIRIS</i>	Ladislav Widman (1969). <i>Sylloge inscriptionum religionis Isiacae et Sarapiacae</i> . Berlin: de Gruyter.
<i>SupIt</i>	<i>Supplementa Italica</i> (1981–). Rome: Quasar.
<i>tab. Vindon.</i>	Michael A. Speidel (1996). <i>Die römischen Schreibtafeln von Vindonissa. Lateinische Texte des militärischen Alltags und ihre geschichtliche Bedeutung</i> . Veröffentlichungen der Gesellschaft Pro Vindonissa 12. Brugg: Gesellschaft Pro Vindonissa.
Thomasson	Bengt E. Thomasson (1972–2009). <i>Laterculi Praesidum</i> . Goteborg: Bokförlaget Radius.

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<i>TitAq</i>	Péter Kovács and Ádám Szabó, eds. (2009–2011). <i>Tituli Aquincenses I–III</i> . Budapest: Pytheas.
<i>WT</i>	Roger S. O. Tomlin (2016). <i>Roman London’s First Voices: Writing Tablets from the Bloomberg Excavations, 2010–14</i> . MOLA Monograph 72. London: Museum of London Archaeology MOLA.

Again his eyes were drawn to the comitium lying beneath him on the forum. Again he felt the anxiety that had haunted him since before dawn. He wasn't even sure if he had slept at all, kept awake by wheels clattering on the cobblestones, the muted sounds of the sleepless city. Any other night he would have been able to ignore the noise, but this night was different. It didn't help that he was now engaged in preparing the very event that was the source of his disquiet. Again he stole a glance at the circular enclosure where the tribes used to elect the magistrates. For a moment he saw himself standing in the midst of the crowd, his white toga resplendent in the blinding summer sun, donned with the broad purple band of the aedile-elect. Among the people stood his father, Annius, in sheer disbelief that his own son, the son of a freedman, could make it as far as the Roman senate. His father had already been more than content when he had aspired to become an apparitor of the Roman magistrates. 'Cnaeus Flavius, scriba of the Roman people'. It had a certain ring to it. Things started to happen very fast when he was allotted to serve Appius Claudius. Looking back, the random lot that was picked that early December morning didn't seem entirely coincidental now. He didn't even consider himself a revolutionary. Sure, he knew the hardships of the common people from personal experience. But he had considered the order to be God-given. Appius had opened his eyes, an experience he shared with so many others. Change was possible. He himself was living proof of it. He had learnt the legal calendar by heart, betrayed the priests, smuggled their jealously guarded treasure out of their precinct. Sure, he had become a scriba on Appius' behalf, the publication of the priestly arcana had been his idea. He couldn't have done it without the protection of his patron, who had assumed responsibility. The duped aristocrats would have eaten him alive. But now, some years later, he couldn't help but accept it as his own achievement. Not for no reason had he become a favourite of the plebs. And they had vowed to help him on even further. — Clamour from the entrance area of the aerarium suddenly pulled him back from his reverie. Startled, his otherwise steady hand slipped and left a deep impression in the wax surface of the writing tablet that lay before him. It was the tablet that was supposed to receive the results of the election later that day. He smiled.