

## VOYAGING THROUGH STRANGE SEAS OF THOUGHT- THE STUDY OF ATHENIAN INSCRIPTIONS

ΟΜΙΛΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΑΝΤΕΠΙΣΤΕΛΛΟΝΤΟΣ ΜΕΛΟΥΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΚΑΔΗΜΙΑΣ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ M. J. OSBORNE

The title of my brief lecture is taken from a famous poem of William Wordsworth (*The Prelude*). The poet was, of course, adverting to Isaac Newton, but it seemed to me that his words encapsulated rather well two features of epigraph and the epigraphist. On the one hand it reminded me of the massive diversity of epigraphical evidence which draws practitioners willynilly into many strange fields, ranging from the obscurities of religious procedures to the mysteries of ancient chronological systems - in the latter case provoking a massive efflorescence of books and articles, whose unifying theme may reasonably be described as a lack of consensus. On the other hand, and more significantly, the words seemed to me to capture rather well the seemingly mysterious role that is frequently imputed to epigraphists by historians and others. Indeed, upon reflection, I should have replicated the quotation more fully to read «voyaging through strange seas of thought ALONE». For the domain of epigraphy has tended only too often to be thought of as distinct, remote and, in the eyes of not a few, peripheral; its evidence to be treated with suspicion and to be utilized only as a last resort; and its practitioners to be viewed as lonely purveyors of idiosyncratic sidelights on history.

The obvious directness of the link of inscriptions with the past ought to render such an attitude not just paradoxical but frankly incredible. The rationale, however, is surely in substantial measure related to the need for *autopsy* of the stone, clay or metal materials, which are indeed difficult to decipher and to interpret; for this has restricted severely the numbers of scholars who have the time and patience to be involved in the painstaking fieldwork that is demanded, and in effect brought into being the «epigraphist» and the «epigraphical community». (For convenience I shall in what follows concentrate on stone inscriptions)\*. The relative smallness of the epigraphical community

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\*Abbreviations

<i>Agora</i> XVI	=	A.G. Woodhead, <i>The Athenian Agora</i> , Vol. XVI <i>The Decrees</i> (Princeton 1997)
<i>Ergon</i>	=	Τὸ Ἔργον τῆς Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἐταιρείας (Athens)
<i>GRBS</i>	=	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>

and the propensity of its members to disagree, usually violently, even over fundamental aspects of their work, such as the readings of letters, have undoubtedly been responsible for the ready disposition of essentially armchair historians to distrust, or even ignore, such evidence, not to speak of its quarrelsome exponents. The intrinsic difficulties of interpreting such strands of evidence—a point to which I will return later—have no doubt provided additional stimulus for such neglect.

Critics of this gloomy insinuation of historical myopia in respect of epigraphical evidence may be reminded (for example) that many modern historians of Greece pay little, if any, attention to the evidence of inscriptions when the literary sources are relatively extensive, and especially when the literary sources are deemed «respectable» (as, say, in the case of Thucydides). Many indeed tacitly declare an end to Athenian history altogether once respectable authors are lacking and the evidence of inscriptions becomes paramount. In the case of Athens the point is starkly evidenced by contrasting the plethora of histories that end (with the best literary evidence) by or in the fourth century BC with the virtual absence of histories of the Hellenistic Period, where the events have to be reconstructed substantially from inscriptions. What a paradox that Athens in a period that saw her become the focus of the artistic and intellectual world should be so neglected!

This dismissive attitude towards inscriptions is also to be detected amongst rescue archaeologists. For, even allowing for the enormous pressure under which they operate, it is scarcely accidental that they so often restrict their reports of epigraphical discoveries to the most cursory of mentions. In the case of tomb monuments, the most frequent epigraphical discoveries in rescue

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- Habicht, *Untersuchungen* = Christian Habicht, *Untersuchungen zur politischen Geschichte Athens im 3. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* = *Vestigia* 30 (München 1979)
- IG i<sup>3</sup> = *Inscriptiones Graecae - Inscriptiones Atticae Euclidis anno anteriores*, third edition (Berlin 1981)
- IG ii<sup>2</sup> = *Inscriptiones Graecae - Inscriptiones Atticae Euclidis anno posteriores* (Berlin 1913-1940)
- Naturalization = M.J. Osborne, *Naturalization in Athens*, *Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België* (Brussels): I 98 (1981); II 101 (1982); III/IV 109 (1983)
- ZPE = *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* (Bonn)

operations, archaeologists frequently provide uninformative and hence desperately tantalizing reports announcing the discovery of monuments but without so much as a mention of the texts—a matter of deep concern since such inscriptions tend to lay hidden in storerooms for long periods thereafter, their unreported contents hanging over scholars like a forest of Damoklean swords. In the case of inscriptions containing public decrees the threat is particularly acute, and—to give but one example— all who deal with Athens in the third century BC still labour under the shadow of a *stèle* fragment found in 1978, containing portions of two decrees with vital dates, but still unpublished<sup>1</sup>.

To be fair, there are weighty precedents for such insouciant disdain. For it must be confessed that ancient authors show little or no interest in epigraphical evidence even in its pristine integrity and it may reasonably be assumed that historians such as Thucydides or Xenophon did not expend effort clambering over the Akropolis (or any other sanctuaries) inspecting inscribed texts. In their defence, of course, there are the considerations that they were close in time to the events and could visit the *Metreon*, so that the stimulus to examine the stone archive was understandably slight. Furthermore, whereas for modern historians the inscriptions of public decisions on stone slabs (*stelai*) represent a uniquely direct link with antiquity, it seems clear that for the ancients themselves the stone versions constituted memorials, not archives available for scholarly consultation. Hence no doubt the cramming of *stelai* into sanctuaries and the employment of a mode of inscription hostile to consultation, where the texts are inscribed continuously without word division like some precursor of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Quite apart from these considerations the prevalent illiteracy of the multitude disfavours widespread inspection. In the famed democracy of Athens the regular protestation in public decrees that the texts are to be inscribed «for all to see» is only too true—for only a relatively small group could read, and it is unlikely that many of them engaged often in epigraphical autopsy. The pedantic respect for accuracy of text which might perhaps seem surprising in such circumstances presumably relates to the long-established practice of setting the *stelai* in sanctuaries under the protection of a god or goddess. The gesture was in reality surely

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1. The discovery of the fragment was announced in 'Αρχαιολογικὸν Δελτίον 33 (1978) B (1) 13, which appeared in 1985. The fragment will be published in the near future by Ch. Kritzas.

as empty as that of holding «prayers» before meetings of various modern political bodies, whose deliberations show scant respect for religiosity. In any event, there can be little doubt that recourse to epigraphical evidence by major historians is a great rarity. The author Krateros, who compiled a booklet of inscriptions, is exceptional and his work, not surprisingly, is only known from a few relatively insignificant fragments.

This lack of interest on the part of the ancients is intelligible but for modern historians, starved of facts, there can be little excuse for neglect. The inscriptions clearly do have the capacity to enrich our knowledge immeasurably and they must thus be, or become, not an «optional extra» but a central feature of historical studies. The key deterrent, leaving aside the repellent aspects of epigraphical debate, must lie in autopsy and the intrinsic difficulties of evaluating this kind of evidence—to which problems I now turn in slightly more detail.

In the first place the epigraphical archive is a random selection of fragments which is constantly being augmented by new discoveries. In the case of Hellenistic Athens, where the evidence of inscriptions is paramount and the chronology of the period has had to be reconstructed, almost every new fragment containing any indication of date tends to demand changes to the currently accepted chronological scheme. This and the customary lack of unanimity over the exact repercussions create an impression of uncertainty which critics take to betoken a lack of value in the inscriptions as evidence rather than as a caution on the part of epigraphists. But in practice a clear pattern of years for the third century BC is now emerging, although the elucidation of the period 261/0-239/8 is still disputed. The key problem in the third century BC and later in Athens is that the literary sources are very thin and that from 293 BC onwards we are ignorant of the order of the eponymous *archons*, who denote the years. As a result it is necessary to reconstruct the *archon* list from the contents of the increasingly numerous public inscriptions and from a few fixed points which derive from literary sources such as the information (from Apollodoros, preserved by Diogenes Laertius) that the *archon* Pytharatos was in office when Epikouros died in 271/0<sup>2</sup>. Paradoxically, this important piece of information was effectively useless until 1954 when at long last a stone fragment of a decree recording him as eponymous *archon* and containing details of the secretary of his year emerged in the excavations of the Agora.

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2. Diogenes Laertius X 15, giving the date as Olympiad 127.2=271/0.

At the turn of the present century Ferguson set chronological studies on a new footing with his discovery of the so-called *secretary cycles*, that is the discovery or, more accurately, the deduction from a limited array of evidence that the annual secretaries of the Council, whose names figure regularly after those of the eponymous *archons* in public decrees, served in tribal order<sup>3</sup>. The significance of the discovery of this system—which incidentally is never mentioned in any ancient sources—was (and is) that it held out the prospect of determining a tribal pattern of secretarial cycles throughout the third century BC and beyond. As a result eponymous *archons* could be assigned to particular years, provided that the tribal affiliation of the secretary was known. It must be acknowledged that this was an important discovery and the existence of such cycles, unless there is absolutely incontrovertible evidence to the contrary, has become a first principle or basic premise on the part of most epigraphists/chronologists ever since<sup>4</sup>. This is unfortunate because almost certainly the quest to establish patterns of secretary cycles and thereby to impose a chronology is now frustrating progress. Thus in the third century BC, for example, a generally acceptable chronology has been established (apart from disputes over a couple of years) for the period 301/0-261/0, but the following twenty years or so have proved intractable even though the names of all the eponymous *archons* are known. It is arguable (and I would argue) that the assumptions that secretary cycles *must* be evidenced throughout those years and that their supposed «evidence» must be «paramount» (to quote B.D. Meritt) are to blame. For the secretary cycles are obviously a feature of democratic government, and thus not self-evidently to be assumed for the period 261/0-240/39 which witnessed political turbulence and phases of non-democratic government. As I have argued at length elsewhere<sup>5</sup>, in such periods the secretary cycles may have continued but they *cannot be assumed*, unless there is *independent* supporting evidence.

3. W.S. Ferguson, *The Secretary Cycles*, Cornell Studies in Classical Philology VII (Ithaca 1898).

4. The most ardent disciple has perhaps been B.D. Meritt, who produced a steady stream of chronological schemata to suit the constantly emerging evidence. Cf. (*inter alia*) *The Athenian Year* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1961); *Athenian Archons 347/6-48/7*, *Historia* 26 (1977) 168ff; *Mid-Third Century Athenian Archons*, *Hesperia* 50 (1981) 78ff.

5. Ch. M.J. Osborne, *The Archonship of Nikias Hysteros and the Secretary Cycles in the Third Century BC* in *ZPE* 58 (1985) 275ff.; *The Chronology of Athens in the Mid Third Century BC* in *ZPE* 78 (1989) 209ff.

In the latter regard the evidence of another cycle, the Cycle of Meton, cannot be ignored as it so often has been. This system, which was introduced in Athens in 432/1, established a nineteen year long cycle of (seven) Ordinary and (twelve) Intercalary years according to a fixed pattern<sup>6</sup>. The objective was the highly practical one of seasonal regulation in an essentially agricultural society (and there are analogies in countries even today); and plausible reasons for tampering with this system, which was designed to correct anomalies inherent in using the lunar calendar, are lacking. The festival year, of course, was quite different and there are plenty of attested cases of intercalated days, compensated for later in the year, to postpone major festivals<sup>7</sup>. It is thus to be expected that the Metonic Cycle will normally be exhibited. As I shall argue in detail elsewhere, an insistence on observing the pattern of the Metonic Cycle in the period 261/0 to 239/8 actually produces a plausible arrangement of *archons* (and events, as attested in the public documents of their years of office) and, paradoxically, produces a series of miniature secretary cycles, each ending at a moment of significant governmental change, and one as yet unexplained period of turbulence (from 248/7-240/39). The authentication of this scheme, which is set out in the Appendix below, will, of course, depend on the discovery, and publication, of epigraphical evidence. But the portents are good, since the proposed scheme accommodates two recently reported discoveries—one a *stèle* fragment from Athens, telling us that the *archon* Athenodoros was the immediate predecessor of Lysias<sup>8</sup>; the other a text from Rhamnous in north-east Attica revealing that the *archon* Diomedon must be dated to 248/7 (rather than later, as has regularly been assumed)<sup>9</sup>.

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6. For an account of the Metonic Cycles see W.B. Dinsmoor, *The Archons of Athens in the Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge Mass. 1934) 309ff. The importance of these Cycles has been emphasized recently by J.D. Morgan, *American Journal of Archaeology* 100 (1996) 395. See also Chr. Habicht, *Athens from Alexander to Antony* (Cambridge Mass. 1997). p.v.

7. For the festival calendar see J.D. Mikalson, *The Sacred and Civil Calendar of the Athenian Year* (Princeton 1975).

8. See n. 1 above for details.

9. For the inscription cf B. Petrakos, *Ergon* (1993) 7ff. It is reportedly an honorific decree for the general Archandros from the year of the archon Diomedon. Petrakos actually dates it to 247/6, which is his year for Diomedon, but the contents reveal that Diomedon must belong in 248/7.

Unfortunately, the need to respect the pattern of years of the Metonic Cycle has failed to impress those in the terminal stages of obsession with secretary cycles as the master-key for unlocking the chronology of Hellenistic Athens. Indeed the obsessive grip of the secretary cycles is splendidly illustrated in the very recent words of Woodhead in relation to this period<sup>10</sup>... «the former general regularity of correspondence between Meton's arrangement and the Athenian festival calendar, already neglected during the tenth Cycle [of Meton, i.e. 261/0-243/2], had ceased to be a matter of regard [thereafter]». The assertion illustrates a breathtaking capacity to set predilection above evidence. For in reality it is to assert that his (or, more accurately, Meritt's) suppositions about the pattern of the secretary cycle cannot be made to fit the system of Meton, so that Meton can simply be disregarded, with extraordinary implications for the agricultural calendar of Athens. Such desperate expedients are unjustified and they have not only bedevilled the chronological debate but sown the seeds of doubt in the minds of observers. It is surely time to acknowledge that the elucidation of the chronology of Hellenistic Athens will be advanced, not by doing violence to the evidence, but by respecting it in its totality.

It is true that the Hellenistic Period represents something of a special case, because of the heavy dependence on epigraphical materials. The random nature of the archive, however, has a potentially disturbing effect in other periods because it imports an unusually high degree of detail which is not always easy to accommodate to the broad picture painted by the literary sources. Thus, for example, the so-called Tribute Lists and the decrees attesting Athenian interest in Sicily and Italy in the 440s and 430s BC have not been easy to relate to the account of Thucydides, the former because of the almost total neglect of financial matters on the part of Thucydides (in company, of course, with most other ancient writers), the latter because Thucydides is silent on western activity prior to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War. Again, the so-called Phyle Decree, honouring foreigners who helped to restore the democracy in Athens in 403 BC, reveals a dimension of foreign assistance that would never be guessed from the account of Xenophon<sup>11</sup>. In later times the decree honouring Kallias of Sphettos in the 280s, despite being virtually

10. A.G. Woodhead, *Agora* Vol. XVI (1997) p. 313.

11. For this important document cf. M.J. Osborne, *Naturalization*, I (1981) 37ff. D.6; II (1982) 26ff.

intact, has elicited very different interpretations<sup>12</sup>. Such problems, however, do not provide a sound basis for neglecting the evidence of the stones and I would argue that the unevenness of the epigraphical archive is in practice well matched by that of the literary sources. For the fragments of Greek histories, as opposed to the few fully, or at least substantially, preserved accounts, are very much a random array, as is only to be expected when so many have been rescued from the lucubrations of (say) Athenaios or the lexicographers.

A second major problem inherent in the epigraphical archive is that most of the materials are fragmentary [Plate I] and many are also badly worn as the result of re-use, inadvertent or otherwise [Plate II]. The Phyle Decree, already mentioned, presents a good example. For, whereas the opisthographic fragment from the Akropolis is reasonably legible [Plate III and IV], the two fragments discovered in Aigina are worn virtually smooth [Plate V] and the decipherment of the text took the present author many weeks of painstaking work—followed by an equal amount of time devoted to unlocking the mystery of what had been deciphered. The famous Segesta Decree, of course, is damaged at the very point where the name of the *archon* is recorded, and, whereas it is evident that only the last two letters (-]ON) are indisputably legible, a protracted debate is still in progress over the supposed traces of earlier letters, with various authors favouring various *archons*, whose names end appropriately [ranging from Habron (458/7) down to Antiphon (418/7)—a rather wide margin of possibility for so precise a document]<sup>13</sup>. Many other examples could be given, especially when the recording of the text is crucial for a date. On occasion, however, the problem is not so much that the reading is difficult as that scholars have failed to undertake the indispensable task of autopsy. A classic case of such neglect is evidenced by a decree of the 290s (= IG ii<sup>2</sup>. 644) where in the 1890s Ferguson had read the fragments of the demotic of the annual secretary as [’Αζην]τ[εύς] and drawn sundry conclusions therefrom. Some ninety years later a debate was still in progress about the implications,

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12. The decree was first published by T.L. Shear, *Kallias of Sphettos and the Revolt of Athens in 286 B.C.*, *Hesperia Suppl.* XVII (Princeton 1978). It is dated to 287 B.C. by M.J. Osborne, *ZPE* 35 (1979) 181ff; *Naturalization* II p. 155; so too Habicht, *Untersuchungen* 45ff.

13. For the text of the Segesta Decree and proposed restorations cf. IG i<sup>3</sup> 11.

until the present author undertook an autopsy of the stone fragment (readily accessible in the Epigraphical Museum of Athens), discovered that Ferguson had incorrectly recorded the traces, which could be clearly seen as -]ιδης, and thereby set the chronology of the 290s BC on to a different and more secure footing<sup>14</sup>. Such unexpected discoveries make clear the shortcomings of the armchair epigraphist and demand that any publication of inscriptions is based on autopsy. As noted already, the unwillingness or incapacity of many historians to undertake such tedious work has led to dependence on «epigraphists», and the frequent disagreements of the latter have tended to inspire scepticism, which in turn breeds neglect.

The fact that so many inscriptions are fragmentary probably presents greater difficulty than their state of preservation. For it has led to the expectation of restoration, that is the reconstruction of the whole text. The formulaic nature of public decrees favours such restoration, as do the modes of inscription, which facilitate the calculation of the number of letters in a line, but obviously the restoration of purely formulaic text is not especially illuminating. Naturally, the date of a text is of prime significance and, not surprisingly, many restorations of prescripts have been made. Such restorations must always be conjectural, and herein lies a dilemma. For the epigraphists understand that only the preserved letters are certain and that restorations are in effect guesswork, but they are equally aware that without restoration historians are only too likely to ignore the texts altogether. The upshot is that epigraphists restore and usually warn of the inherent problems, whilst historians often fail to draw any distinction between the preserved and the restored portions.

In the Hellenistic period the importance of the epigraphical contribution has engendered a more than usually adventurous, in some cases reckless, approach. But that is no excuse for historians and essentially armchair epigraphists to exchange common sense and judgement for nonsense in the case of epigraphical assertion. A classic case is the continuing effort to date to the year 265/4 the *archon* Peithidemos, in whose year of office the Chremonidean War broke out. Such a date has long been advocated by Meritt, and is still apparently favoured by his disciple, Woodhead (in *Agora XVI*), and its rationale is to suit the supposed need of a secretary cycle. In reality, leaving aside the fact

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14. M.J. Osborne, *ZPE* 58 (1989) 281 ff.

that the secretarial details for the year of Peithidemos are unknown—they were not recorded on any of the preserved decrees for his year, although a blank space was left, presumably for later insertion—such a location flies in the very teeth of the evidence. For decrees of the year 267/6 (archon Menekles) and 266/5 (archon Nikias of Otryne) both contain references to the War as being in progress, rendering it obvious to all but a devotee of secretary cycles that the outbreak of the War and that the archonship of Peithidemos belong in 268/7, an otherwise vacant year. To argue for 265/4 is to argue that the War «broke out» two years after it is attested as in progress and on the foundation of this improbability to assign the secretary of Peithidemos' year, whose name, demotic and tribe are hypothetical, to a year when the secretary should come from a particular tribe. This is to reject commonsense in favour of fantasy<sup>15</sup>.

Not that attempts to reconstruct the dates of decrees are always without an element of irony. In 1938, Meritt published an inscription from the Athenian Agora<sup>16</sup> dating from the archonship of Lysias, who should have served in *ca* 239/8 because the Demetrian War broke out in his archonship. The *archon* name is clearly preserved, as indeed is part of the demotic of the Secretary ([-]ναιος denoting that the secretary came from Tribe X or XI). The text includes a reference to the *archon* of the previous year and it is possible to calculate that his name had ten letters. Meritt restored this name as Athenodoros, whom he already had set in 240/39, and the fact that Athenodoros' secretary came from Tribe X seemed to assure the sequence and a secretary cycle, i.e. Athenodoros (secretary Tribe X) 240/39 followed by Lysias (secretary Tribe XI) 239/8. For more than forty years this sequence was generally accepted, until in 1981, partly in deference to claims by Habicht that Athenodoros should belong earlier<sup>17</sup> and partly to serve the needs of his latest reconstruction of a secretary cycle, Meritt abandoned 240/39 for Athenodoros and set him in 256/5. This was a fatal change. For already discovered (in 1978) but not published, indeed still not published (in 1999), was a fragment, appropriately enough from Aristophanes Street, revealing (as Professor Kritzas, who will publish it, kindly advises<sup>18</sup>) that Athenodoros was indeed the imme-

15. For a fuller account of this case cf. M.J. Osborne, *ZPE* 78 (1989) 229 n. 93.

16. *Hesperia* VII (1938) p. 126 no. 25.

17. Cf. Habicht, *Untersuchungen* 137ff.

18. See n. 1 above.

diate predecessor of Lysias and thus belongs at the beginning of the 230s BC where Meritt had originally located him. If due respect is given to the need for Lysias to sit in an Intercalary year, Athenodoros should belong in 239/8 with Lysias in 238/7. It deserves note that the impetus to date Athenodoros earlier stemmed in substantial measure from the identification of the text of the decree from his archonship as the handiwork of an identifiable mason<sup>19</sup>. Since this mason's earliest endeavours went back as early as 287/6, the stimulus to bring back Athenodoros from a date as late as 240/39 seemed strong. However, it is now becoming clear that at least some masons did have lengthy careers so that 239/8 is unexpectedly, but not impossibly late for Athenodoros<sup>20</sup>.

This last point stimulates me to remind that in practice one of the greatest advances of recent times in the epigraphical domain has been the identification of masonic hands. This is a highly technical task, requiring a meticulous eye for detail, and Stephen Tracy has made it peculiarly his own<sup>21</sup>. The results are impressive and many masonic careers have now been adumbrated using the *archon*-dated texts, but the capacity to recognize and identify hands is not accorded to all and the need for autopsy is obviously essential, so that in practice another gulf has appeared between epigraphists (or at least some of them) and the historians.

A further factor which conspires against the utilization of epigraphical evidence may be termed inaccessibility. In practice this takes two forms. On the one hand there is the universal problem that the stone fragments of Athenian texts are scattered throughout many museums and other repositories not all of them in Greece, never mind Athens. The British Museum, for example, has a significant collection of Attic materials; one of the six fragments of the early fourth century BC decree for Sthorys of Thasos is in Copenhagen,

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19. For the mason, known as «Cutter IV», cf. S.V. Tracy *GRBS* 14 (1973) 190ff. + *Hesperia* 57 (1988) 340ff.

20. The working career of «Cutter IV» was some 48 years on the latest estimate. At least two other masons are attested as having worked for more than forty years.

21. Cf. S.V. Tracy, *Identifying Epigraphical Hands* in *GRBS* 11 (1970) 321ff; 14 (1973) 189ff; *The Lettering of an Athenian Mason* in *Hesperia Suppl.* XV (1975); *Two Attic Letter Cutters of the Third Century 286/5-235/4 BC* in *Hesperia* 57 (1988) 303ff; *Attic Letter-Cutters of 229 BC* (California 1990); *Athenian Democracy in Transition: Attic Letter-Cutters of 340 BC* (California 1995).

whilst the remaining five are in the Epigraphical Museum in Athens; and so on. Quite large numbers repose in storerooms in Athens and in villages in Attica. In such circumstances autopsy can be an expensive and time-consuming activity. An additional complexity is the well-known fact that many inscriptions of Athens remain unpublished—estimates range from several hundreds to a more realistic figure of several thousands—and each year witnesses further discoveries. This mass of *inedita*, which have been imprisoned without even preliminary trial in various stores, haunts all scholars of ancient Athens, and it is clearly an urgent desideratum that they are published as quickly as possible. In practice it seems that, at long last, this may now happen, since a Commission has been established (in 1998) to publish the whole *corpus* of inscriptions of Athens, including all fragments hitherto unpublished. This is a timely, if massive, initiative that should set the study of Athenian history on a new footing. But this brings me naturally to the other aspect of accessibility, namely that there is not at present a comprehensive *corpus* or collection of the published inscriptions of Athens and that far too many of the collections that do exist languish in obscure tomes or journals, bereft of anything but the most opaque and succinct commentaries and almost lacking a translation for non-specialists. In the case of Athens, despite all of the studies, there is not in existence at present a reliable list of all of the known inscriptions, never mind a *corpus*. Such a *corpus* is now planned, but it will be essential, if it is to be utilized by historians and others, that it provides explanatory commentaries, preferably in a language other than Latin, and that it provides a translation of the texts.

To end this catalogue of deterrents to the full utilization of epigraphical sources on a somewhat lighter note, it should perhaps be acknowledged that the ferocious and acerbic nature of much epigraphical debate is hardly an incentive to widespread participation. Unfortunately, this is an aspect of epigraphical study which has a long pedigree, dating back to the early practitioners of the 1830s, when the excavations of the Akropolis and the systematic collection and record of Athenian inscriptions began in earnest. Its expeditious demise could only be helpful.

My thesis in this very brief paper has been that the very real difficulties of dealing with epigraphical evidence, some of which have been touched upon here, should not be allowed to prevent inscriptions from becoming an integral part of, indeed central to, any study of Athenian history. In the exciting

Hellenistic period their evidence is paramount and it will in due course provide the framework for the history. Leaving aside the consideration that, where there is such a dearth of evidence generally, no type of information can be neglected, the inscriptions have a special claim to importance. For they represent a direct link with the past, lacking the deficiencies of scribal blunder, monkish correction or errors of transmission which afflict the literary evidence. In addition they have humanized the great historians of antiquity, revealing mercifully, but predictably, that they are as susceptible to faults as modern historians and rescuing them (and us) from the idealizing tendencies of Classical scholarship, so evident in Great Britain until quite recently.

In short, epigraphy is an integral part of the history of ancient Athens, and it is incumbent upon epigraphists to ensure that the fruits of their study are readily accessible and that they themselves are not viewed as remote and mysterious scholars «voyaging through strange seas of thought alone».

#### APPENDIX

The Eponymous Archons of Athens from 262/1 to 234/3

I present here a list of eponymous archons which takes into account the new evidence relating to Athenodoros and Diomedon (see notes 1 and 9 above) and observe the pattern of Ordinary (O) years and Intercalary (I) years required by the Metonic Cycle. The tribal affiliation of the Secretary is added, where known.

There would appear to be a cycle from 260/59 commencing appropriately with the tribe *Antigonis*. The sequence was broken in *ca* 255, presumably on the occasion of the restoration of some vestiges of freedom to Athens (as reported by Eusebios). A new cycle re-commenced and lasted until 249/8. There then followed a period of turbulence from 248/7 until 240/39 or 239/8, when a new cycle was commenced. The consideration that the previous cycle ended in 249/8 with a Secretary from Tribe VIII perhaps favours a re-commencement in 240/39 with a Secretary from Tribe IX. A tribal sequence is clearly attested for some years thereafter and it might be expected that it would be consistent with the cycle clearly attested in the 220s. Unfortunately, *prima facie* at any rate, this is not the case—and we are left with the dilemma of either assuming that one tribe missed its turn in the late 230s or that the archons of the 220s must be downdated by one year. But that is a puzzle beyond the scope of this paper.

Year	Meton (O) or (I)	Archon	Tribe of Secretary	
262/1	O	Antipatros	(4)	
Antigonos Gonatas installs a governor			⇒	Break
261/0	O	Arrheneides	(?)	
260/59	I	Philostratos	I	(?)
259/8	O	Philinos	II	
258/7	O	Antiphon	(3)	(?)
257/6	I	Thymochares	(4)	(?)
256/5	O	Antimachos	V	
255/4	O	Kleomachos	VI	
Restoration of freedom in ca 255			⇒	Break
254/3	I	Phanostratos	(?)	
253/2	O	Kallimedes	IV	
252/1	I	Pheidostratos	V	(?)
251/0	O	Thersilochos	VI	
250/49	O	Polyeuktos	VII	
249/8	I	Hieron	VIII	
				Break
248/7	O	Diomedon	XII	Confusion
		<i>Either</i>	<i>or</i>	<i>or</i>
Order unclear:		(A)	(B)	(C)
247/6	O	Theophemos	Lysiades	Philoneos VI ?
246/5	I	Philoneos VI	Philoneos VI	Lysiades ?
245/4	O	Kydenor VI	Theophemos	Theophemos ?
244/3	I	Eurykleides	Kydenor VI	Kydenor VI ?
243/2	O	Lysiades	Eurykleides	Eurykleides ?
242/1	O	)	)	) ?
241/0	I	) Lykeas, Polystratos and Diogeiton X:	)	) ?
240/39	O	) probably in these years - order unclear	)	(9) ?
Cycle re-commences: probably in 240/39				
239/8	O	Athenodoros	X	
238/7	I	Lysias	XI	
237/6	O	Aristion	(12)	
236/5	O	Kimon	(1)	
235/4	I	Ekphantos	II	
234/3	O	Lysanias	III	