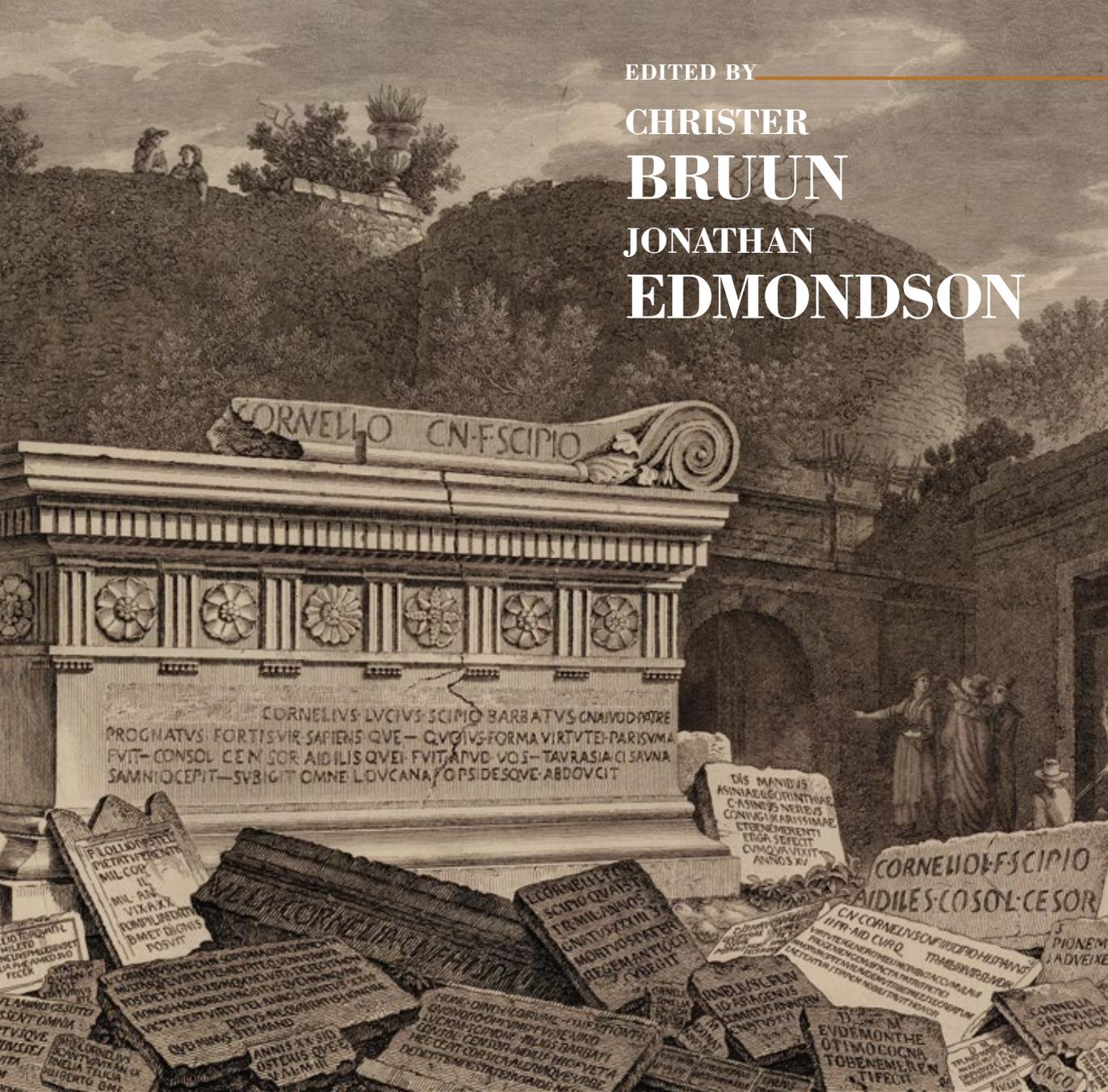


EDITED BY

CHRISTER  
BRUUN

JONATHAN

EDMONDSON



The Oxford Handbook of

# ROMAN EPIGRAPHY

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF  
**ROMAN**  
**EPIGRAPHY**



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EPIGRAPHY

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*Edited by*

CHRISTER BRUUN

*and*

JONATHAN EDMONDSON

OXFORD  
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## CHAPTER 30

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## COMMUNICATIONS AND MOBILITY IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

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ANNE KOLB

DUE to the size of the Roman Empire, communication routes—whether by land or water—were crucial to its functioning. They not only enabled the Romans to build up their power around the Mediterranean, but also made it possible for them to consolidate their conquests and create a functional system of administration. These routes formed the basis for an efficient means of communication between the various levels of government, while also facilitating the transport of goods. Economic and cultural life in the Roman world benefited from the existence of such a transportation system. Roads represented the most important part of this communication network. Approximately 300,000 km (210,000 miles) of major and minor roads criss-crossed the provinces and provided a connection to the capital, Rome, and/or to wherever the emperor happened to be located. The road system was a characteristic feature of Roman imperial rule and symbolized Roman power in a ubiquitous and visible way. Europe's road network, which reached a similar extent only in the eighteenth century, was largely built on Roman foundations. The most distinctive feature of Roman road construction was a desire to create straight lines of communication, even in difficult terrain; obstacles were overcome through the construction of causeways, rock-cuttings, tunnels, and bridges.<sup>1</sup>

Besides a few literary passages and the archaeological remains, inscriptions provide the main evidence for studying Roman road-building and the administration of the road system. Furthermore, inscriptions are crucial for understanding certain aspects of transport and communication. They inform us about travel and travellers, about geographical mobility in general, and about transport, in particular the official service known as the *cursus publicus*.

<sup>1</sup> In general, Forbes 1965 (esp. 151 for the figure of 300,000 km); Pekáry 1968; Chevallier 1976; Laurence 1999; Rathmann 2003; Van Tilburg 2007: 2–11; Quilici 2008; Kolb 2011–12; several contributions in Kolb 2014.

## ROADS AND ROAD-BUILDING

Roman road-building began in the fourth century BCE for the purpose of connecting newly conquered territories in Italy to the city of Rome and maintaining military control over them. The focus of road-construction shifted as new territory was annexed in Greece, Asia Minor, and then other provinces around the Mediterranean. While some roads were laid out *ex novo*, others followed existing routes, as in the case of the famous Via Egnatia, which connected Italy to the East through Macedonia and Thrace. The pre-existence of an older road is demonstrated by the discovery in situ near ancient Edessa (Tserovo/Klidhi in modern Greece) of a Macedonian inscription, probably dated to the third century BCE, giving the distance “one hundred stades from Bokeria.”<sup>2</sup> This corroborates information in Livy (37.7.8–15) and Appian (*Syr.* 9.5.23).

The major roads managed by the Roman state (*viae publicae*), amounting to some 100,000 km (67,000 miles) of the road-network, were often named after their builder. The Via Appia, leading from Rome to Brundisium (Brindisi), took its name from Appius Claudius Caecus, censor in 312 BCE and the initiator of the project (the road’s name appears in *CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 21; cf. Liv. 9.29.5–7; Diod. Sic. 20.36.2).<sup>3</sup> The Via Domitia, leading from the river Rhône to the Pyrenees, was built on the orders of C. Domitius Ahenobarbus, consul in 121 BCE (*CIL* XVII.2, 294; cf. Cic. *Font.* 18). In the imperial period certain building inscriptions record the layout of the road system of a province and hence document its planning and organization, such as the so-called Tabulae Dolabellae from Dalmatia of the early Julio-Claudian period (*CIL* III 3198a–b = 3200–1 = XVII.4, p. 130–133)<sup>4</sup> or the so-called Stadiasmus Patarensis from Patara in Lycia, a large monument set up to honour Claudius, which commemorated his pacification of Lycia and its annexation as a province by listing distances between the various cities of the new province (*SEG* 44, 1205 = 51, 1832).<sup>5</sup> The Tabulae Dolabellae, a modern term derived from the name of the governor of Illyricum (later Dalmatia) at the time P. Dolabella, record a series of roads near the colony of Salona built by soldiers from at least two Roman legions during the reign of Tiberius. For example, one plaque provides the following details (*CIL* III 3198a + XVII.4, p. 130; cf. *ILS* 2478; Fig. 30.1):

[Ti(berius) C]aesar divi Augusti f(iilius) / [Aug]ustus Imp(erator) pont(ifex) max(imus)  
/ [trib(unicia)] potest(ate) XIIX co(n)s(ul) II / [viam] a colonia Salonitan(a) / [ad f]i[n]es  
προϋνῆσαι Illyrici / - - - - - / cuius viai millia passus sunt / CLXVII munit per vexillarios  
/ leg(ionum) VII et XI / item viam Gabinianam / ab Salonis Andetrium aperuit / et munit  
pe[r] leg(ionem) VII / - - - - - (?)

<sup>2</sup> Mordtmann 1893: 419; cf. *SEG* 32, 1688.

<sup>3</sup> Humm 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Schmidt 2006 on this text; cf. Kolb 2013b: 216–218.

<sup>5</sup> Sahin and Adak 2007; Kolb 2013b: 206–214.



FIG. 30.1 One of the so-called *Tabulae Dolabellae* from Salona (modern Croatia), commemorating the building of roads under the emperor Tiberius.

Tiberius Caesar, son of the Deified Augustus, Imperator, pontifex maximus, holding the tribunician power for the eighteenth time, consul for the second time, [-----] a road from the colony of Salona to the boundary of the province of Illyricum, a road which is 167 miles long, and he built it up with the labour of soldiers detached from the Legio VII and Legio XI, and he also opened up the Via Gabiniana from Salona to Andetrium and built it up through the agency of the Legio VII [-----].

Under normal circumstances, a Roman road rested on a layered foundation (often a mix of crushed and compressed stone), covered by stone slabs or gravel. Frequently the Romans were satisfied with a dirt road, merely taking care to level the surface. Paving, when it occurred, was often added only for part of its length, usually in the vicinity of towns.<sup>6</sup> Even the Via Appia seems to have been only partially paved on the first stretch of 220 km from Rome to Capua, since an inscription mentions that it was upgraded under Nerva (*CIL* X 6824 = *ILS* 280). Paving became more common only

<sup>6</sup> Road-paving costs in Italy: Duncan-Jones 1982: 124, 157–160.

in the imperial period, as occurred with the road between Carthage and Theveste in North Africa, which was paved by Hadrian in 123 (*CIL* VIII 22173 = *ILS* 5835 = *ILAlg* I 3951):

..... *viam*  
*a Carthagine The-*  
 10 *vestem mil(ia) p(assuum) CXCI (centum nonaginta unum milia)*  
*DCCXXXX (septingentos quadraginta) stravit*  
*P(ublio) Metilio*  
*Secundo leg(ato)*  
*Aug(usti) pro pr(aetore)*  
 15 *co(n)s(ule) desig(nato)*  
*per [[leg(ionem) III]] Aug(ustam)*

(The emperor Hadrian; full name and title in line 1–8) paved the road from Carthage to Theveste for a distance of 191 miles, 740 *passus* (“paces”) (i.e., about 280 km) when P. Metilius Secundus, consul designate, was governor through the agency of the Legio III Augusta.

On swampy ground roads were built as elevated causeways, and paling and wooden supports were used to stabilize them. Still other forms can be found in rocky terrain. When a road needed to be cut into the bedrock, tracks were sometimes carved into the surface to prevent wagons slipping off the road. Steps were occasionally cut when the gradient became steep. Mention of such extremely difficult stretches of roads can be found, for example, in Cilicia, where Caracalla “repaired the road through the Taurus Mountains with new bridges, after the road had collapsed through old age, by levelling mountains, cutting through rocks, and widening the track” (*AE* 1969/70, 607 = *I. Tyana* 132: ... *viam Tauri vetustate / [con]lapsam complanatis monti/[bus e]t c[a]esis rupibus ac dilata/[tis i]tineribus cum pontibus / institutis restituit . . .*). Just to the south of Terracina in Italy, Roman numerals cut into the rock-face show how much of the mountain alongside the sea had been removed to allow the Via Appia to pass through (*CIL* X 6849).<sup>7</sup>

Roman roads can be divided into two main types depending on their function and legal character: *viae publicae* and *viae privatae*. The jurist Ulpian defines private roads as running on private land and being the property of their owner (*Dig.* 43.8.2.21). Public roads were laid out on state-owned land, were financed from public funds, and were open to use by everyone.<sup>8</sup> Inscriptions show how these legal differences played out in actual practice: for example, at Doña Mencía in S. Spain travelers were instructed to “take the public road to the right” (*CIL* II<sup>2</sup>/5, 343: *viator viam / publicam dex/tra pete*). Sometimes inscriptions outlined the width of public roads (*AE* 2002, 559, Altinum, N. Italy: *pub(lica) / via l(ata) / p(edes) XII*; “public road, twelve feet [c. 4 m] wide”). Markers defining the limits of public and private roads were often affixed to funerary monuments, for by law these had to be built outside communities

<sup>7</sup> Quilici 2008: 557–558.

<sup>8</sup> Rathmann 2003: 3–23.

and often stood by the side of roads (cf. Ch. 29), as can be seen in an inscription from Rome (*CIL* VI 8862):

*iter privatum a via publica*  
*per hortum pertinens ad monumentum(!)*  
*sive sepulchrum quod*  
*Agathopus Aug(usti) lib(ertus) invitator*  
 5 *vivus et Iunia Epictesis fecerunt*  
*ab iis omnibus dolus malus abesto et ius civile*

This is a private road which leads from a public one through a garden/orchard and belongs to the funerary monument or tomb which during his lifetime Agathopus, imperial freedman and usher in charge of admittance, and Iunia Epictesis set this up. Let evil deceit and civil law be absent from all of them.

In the Roman provinces the legal category of *viae publicae* is less clear outside Roman cities with the status of *colonia*, for land ownership was not divided according to a strict dichotomy between *solum publicum* (state-owned land) and *solum privatum* (land to which a private Roman citizen or entity had title). The general function of a *via publica*, to facilitate both commerce and communication, must be the main criterion when identifying such roads, as in the case of the road leading from Adana to Mopsuete in Cilicia (*AE* 1922, 129). Scholars sometimes refer to “imperial roads” in the provinces in order to avoid the problem of legal definition, and this term is often used for the main communication routes in the Roman Empire.

To this category also belong those roads known in inscriptions as *viae militares*, a term which was simply a variant of *viae publicae*.<sup>9</sup> These had a particular strategic importance, but the sources show that their main function was communication in general, as shown, for example, on two inscriptions from the province of Thracia (*CIL* III 6123 = *ILS* 231, Augusta, later called Diocletianopolis; *AE* 1999, 1397 = *IGBulg* V 5691, Serdica). This is also illustrated by a fragmentary milestone from near Corduba.<sup>10</sup> Here in 90 Domitian had the Via Augusta, the main route through Spain, restored. It was built by Augustus, but had suffered from wear over time. In this location it was designated as a *via militaris*: . . . *viam Augustam militarem vetustate corruptam restituit* (“He restored the *via militaris Augusta*, which had become dilapidated through old age.”). It is normally impossible to assign a particular military function to a *via militaris*, but the epithet underlines the strategic character of such roads and their use by army personnel and other state functionaries, who are called *militantes* in an important inscription from Sagalassos in Pisidia, dating to the reign of Tiberius (*AE* 1976, 653 = *SEG* 26, 1392; see further on p. 661).

This infrastructure was complemented by two other types of roads: *viae vicinales* (local roads at the village level), which in legal terms could be either *viae publicae* or *viae privatae*, and *viae urbanae*. The latter term was used to describe the roads and

<sup>9</sup> Rathmann 2003: 23–31; Speidel 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Sillières 1990: 102 no. 41.

streets of a town, while a *via vicinalis* passed through a village (*vicus*) or connected two small settlements or two *viae publicae*, thus serving local traffic. A contract from Londinium (London) shows how landed property was defined by reference to a local *via vicinalis* (AE 1994, 1093).

## MILESTONES

Milestones (*miliaria*) are the characteristic markers that were to be found only along *viae publicae* (Fig. 30.2). They indicated the distance from the *caput viae* (i.e., the road's starting-point), but at the same time they also served as symbols of Roman power, since their inscriptions normally mention Roman emperors and officials. These monuments (which now total between seven thousand and eight thousand) shed light not only on the administration and upkeep of the road network, but also on provincial administration and imperial policy.<sup>11</sup> The distance on milestones is measured in Roman *m(ilia) p(assuum)* ("one thousand paces" = 1,618½ yards = 1,480 m), except in the Germanic and Gallic provinces (though not Gallia Narbonensis, which had been under Roman rule the longest), where from Trajan's reign onwards distances were sometimes measured in Celtic *leugae* (1 *leuga* = 1.5 *milia passuum*) instead of in Roman miles (see *CIL* XVII.2, 312–317).<sup>12</sup>

Although the date of some of them from the mid-Republic is debated, the earliest milestones seem to belong to the mid-third century BCE (*CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 21 = *ILS* 5801 = *ILLRP* 448, S. Latium; AE 1957, 172 = *ILLRP* 1277, Agrigentum, Sicily).<sup>13</sup> In comparison to the numerous finds from the imperial period, very few milestones date to the Republic, and it is sometimes thought that in that earlier period they were erected only in certain places, presumably in the vicinity of important sites. Given, however, the general chronological distribution of surviving inscriptions (cf. Ch. 8), this assumption is not necessarily correct. Nevertheless, there are indications that a general demarcation of *viae publicae* with milestones only took place in the second century BCE, as stated in the famous inscription from Polla in S. Italy, in which the building of a road (*viam*), including bridges (*ponteis*), and the erection of milestones (*miliarios*) were celebrated (*CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 638 = *ILLRP* 454 = *ILS* 23; Fig. 30.3):<sup>14</sup>

[-----]  
*viam feci ab Regio ad Capuam et*  
*in ea via ponteis omneis miliarios*  
*tabelariosque posevei hince sunt*  
 5     *Nouceriam meilia LI Capuam XXCIII*

<sup>11</sup> Kolb 2001a; 2004.

<sup>12</sup> On the *leuga*, Rathmann 2003: 115–120.

<sup>13</sup> Agrigentum milestone: Prag 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Wiseman 1964, 1969; Salway 2001: 48–54.



FIG. 30.2 Milestone (replica) from near Brunico, N. Italy, set up during the reign of Macrinus and Diadumenianus, 217–218 CE (CIL III 5708 = XVII.4, 169 = ILS 464).

*Muranum LXXIII Cosentiam CXXIII Valentiam CLXXX ad fretum ad  
Statuam CCXXXI Regium CCXXXVII  
suma af Capua Regium meilia CCCXXI  
et eidem praetor in*

- 10 *Sicilia fugiteivos Italicorum  
conquaeisivei redideique  
homines DCCCXVII eidemque  
primus fecei ut de agro poplico  
aratoribus cederent paastores*
- 15 *forum aedisque poplicas heic fecei*

I [-----] built the road from Rhegium to Capua and on that road I put in place all the bridges, milestones, and *tabelarii*. From here to Nuceria it is 51 miles, to Capua 84, to Muranum 74, to Cosentia 123, to Valentia 280, to the statue at the Straits 231, to Rhegium



FIG. 30.3 The so-called headless *elogium* from Polla (Forum Popilii) in Lucania, late second century BCE.

237. The total from Capua to Rhegium is 321 miles. As praetor in Sicily, I also hunted down runaways of the Italians and I returned 917 individuals. I was also the first to make shepherds yield to ploughmen on public land. I constructed a forum and public buildings here.

In this text it remains unclear what *tabel(l)arii* were. Suggestions include, among others, inscribed stones containing an itinerary and, maybe more attractively, wooden route indicators.<sup>15</sup>

Besides the distances (sometimes indicated with numerals only, without place names), these inscribed milestones sometimes mention the person responsible for their erection and, more importantly, for the building or repair of the road. As a result, they can be said to belong to the category of “building inscriptions” in a broad sense, even though already in the Republic and certainly during the Principate verbs such as *fecit*, *refecit*, *restituit*, which are typical of this genre, are omitted. One inscription set up under Claudius in 46 outlines the construction history of the Via Claudia Augusta,

<sup>15</sup> See already Cary 1936; Salway 2001: 48–53; Kolb 2013a: 118.

the road that connected Italy and Raetia; it was probably set up at the border between these two regions (*CIL* XVII.4, 1):

*Ti(berius) Claudius Caesar*  
*Augustus German(icus)*  
*pont(ifex) max(imus) trib(unicia) pot(estate) VI*  
*co(n)s(ul) desig(natus) IIII imp(erator) XI p(ater) p(atriciae)*  
 5 *viam Claudiam Augustam*  
*quam Drusus pater Alpibus*  
*bello patefactis derexserat(!)*  
*munit a flumine Pado at(!)*  
*flumen Danuvium per*  
 10 *m(ilia) p(assuum) CC[CL]*

The emperor Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus... paved the Via Claudia Augusta, which his father Drusus had laid out straight after he had opened up the Alps in a military campaign, from the river Po to the river Danube for a distance of 350 miles.

There was no fixed system for establishing the starting-points for counting the miles along a Roman road. Normally larger centres, across whose territory the road passed, were used. Provincial capitals functioned as *capita viarum*, while in Italy the distances were sometimes counted from Rome. Sometimes a milestone recorded the distance in several directions, such as to the road's terminus, to the border of a province, or to an important site such as a legionary camp: for example, ... *ab Aug(usta) m(ilia) p(assuum) LXII, / a leg(ione) m(ilia) p(assuum) XXXIII* ("From Augusta (Vindelicorum) [Augsburg] 62 miles, from the legion [i.e., legionary camp] 34 miles"; *CIL* XVII.4, 70, from Raetia). Provincial milestones may even mark the distance from Rome, as, for example, on the Via Domitia in Gaul (*CIL* XVII.2, 291 = XII 5668 + p. 858), at Narbo (*CIL* XVII.2, 298 = XII 5671), or at Szombathely in Pannonia (*AE* 2000, 1195: [- -] / *a Roma S(avariam) m(ilia) p(assuum) / DCLXXV*). Rome was mentioned more for ideological than practical reasons.<sup>16</sup>

From the third century CE onward a key development occurred in the inscribing of the milestones. They shifted from resembling building inscriptions and became more akin to dedications or honorific monuments. Although the emperor continues to be mentioned in some examples in the nominative, as the ultimate source of the work that produced the road, his name appears ever more frequently in the dative. As a result, the text takes on the customary form of a pious dedication. By means of such "dedicatory monuments" in the form of milestones, which by definition were erected in much frequented places, communities all over the Empire seem increasingly to have honoured the emperor and manifested their loyalty towards the ruling dynasty. Regardless of whether any actual work had been undertaken on the road, new milestones were set up bearing dedicatory inscriptions on the occasion of an emperor's journey through the province or in connection with celebrations of an emperor's birthday or accession. For

<sup>16</sup> Kolb 2004: 151–152.

this reason milestones mentioning successive emperors were sometimes placed side by side, forming clusters, as occurred, for example, near Hagenbach in Rheinland-Pfalz in Germania Inferior (*CIL* XVII.2, 605–609).

During the Republic decisions regarding new projects or road repairs were made by the Senate, since this body controlled public finances, and by the censors, who had the right to lease state-contracts, and occasionally by the consuls. Normally such projects were financed by the state; private contributions were exceptional (cf. Plut. *Caes.* 5.7).<sup>17</sup> Building inscriptions and milestones name the person in charge of the work, normally magistrates with *imperium* (consuls, proconsuls, praetors). Although upkeep of public structures was part of their public duties, only on a few rare occasions do aediles (*CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 21, 22, 829, all from Italy) or quaestors (*AE* 1995, 1464, near Smyrna, Asia) appear in such inscriptions. Specially nominated *curatores viarum* can also be found (*CIL* VI 1299, 40904a, on which below). In 20 BCE Augustus took over the *cura viarum*, and from then onwards the emperor was in charge of the *viae publicae*. In Italy he handed over this responsibility, which involved control and repair of roads, as well as occasional minor new projects, to a college of *curatores viarum*.<sup>18</sup> The building of new roads in Italy and the provinces, where he enjoyed proconsular *imperium*, became the prerogative of the emperor, as confirmed by the inscriptions on milestones.

In the provinces, the governor was in practice in charge of road building both during the Republic and the Principate (for example, *CIL* VIII 22173, discussed on p. 652). He could delegate this task to subordinates (*AE* 1995, 1464; cf. Cic. *Font.* 18). The costs of the building and upkeep of the roads were primarily borne by those living along them (Cic. *Font.* 17–19) or in the neighbourhood, and sometimes even by people living a considerable distance from them (*CIL* III 3202, from Dalmatia, discussed on p. 659). They handled the necessary repairs as a *munus publicum* (*Dig.* 49.18.4, Ulpian; 50.4.18.15, Arcadius Charisius). An inscription of late republican (perhaps Sullan) date from Appennine Italy provides rare details about procedures and costs in such cases (*CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 808 = VI 40904a = *ILLRP* 465 = *ILS* 5799 = *FIRA* III 152, partially cited here):<sup>19</sup>

- [haec] opera loc(ata)  
 [in refic(ienda) v]ia Caecilia de HS  
 [n(ummum) - - - ad refic(iendum) (?) a]d mil(liarium) XXXV pontem in fluio (!)  
 [Farfaro pecuni]a adtributa est; populo const(at)  
 5 [HS n(ummum) - - - Q(uinto) (?) - - -]s(io) Q(uinti) <l(iberto)> Pamphilo mancupi(!) et  
 ope[r(is)]  
 [magistro (?); cur(atore)] viar(um) T(ito) Vibio Temuudino q(uaestore) urb(ano).  
 [item via gla]rea sternenda af mil(liario) [- - - ad]  
 [mil(iarium) - - - et per Ap]pennium muunien[da est af]  
 [mil(iario) - - - ad mil(iarium) - - -]XX; pecunia adtributa  
 10 [est; populo c]onst(at) HS n(ummum) CL L(ucio) Rufilio L(ucii et) L(ucii) l(iberto)

<sup>17</sup> Wiseman 1970.

<sup>18</sup> Eck 1979: 25–87; Eck 1992; Rathmann 2003.

<sup>19</sup> For a slightly different translation, Lewis and Reinhold 1990: 440 no. 160.

[-13/14?-]sti man[cu]pi; cur(atore) viar(um) T(ito) Vib[io]  
[Temuudino q(uaestore) urb(ano)]...

These works were contracted for repairs of the Via Caecilia out of a cash appropriation of [-] *sestertii*. Money appropriated for the repair of a bridge over the river Farfarus (?) at the 35th milestone; the people agree to pay [- *sestertii*] to Q. (?) [- -]sius Pamphilus, freedmen of Quintus, contractor and [director] of the works, while T. Vibius Temudinus, urban quaestor, was *curator viarum* (in charge of the roads). The road to be paved with gravel from the [-] milestone to the [-] milestone and built across the Appennines from the [-] milestone to the [-] milestone. The money was appropriated; the community agreed to pay 150,000 *sestertii* to L. Rufilius, freedman of Lucius and Lucius, contractor, while Q. Vibius Temudinus, urban quaestor, was *curator viarum*. (The fragmentary text continues.)

The building of bridges, which were integral parts of many roads, is often singled out in inscriptions, as on the “headless *elogium* of Polla” (discussed on p. 654–655), presumably because of the more complex challenges that such projects represented (for instance, as in *CIL* VIII 10296 + p. 2138 = *ILS* 5872, near Cirta, Numidia). In such cases the task was often allocated directly to a local community by the emperor, who nevertheless took credit for the project, as occurred in Dalmatia in 183/4 CE (*CIL* III 3202 + p. 1651 = XVII.4, 323a = *ILS* 393):

*Imp(erator) Caes(ar)*  
*M(arcus) Aurelius*  
*Commodus*  
*Antoninus*  
5 *Aug(ustus) Pius Sarm(aticus)*  
*Germ(anicus) maximus*  
*Britannicus*  
*pont(ifex) max(imus) trib(unicia)*  
*pot(estate) VIII imp(erator) VI*  
10 *co(n)s(ul) IIII p(ater) p(atriciae)*  
*pontem Hippi flumi-*  
*nis vetustate cor-*  
*ruptum restituit*  
*sumptum et operas*  
15 *subministrantibus*  
*Novensibus Delmi-*  
*nensibus Riditis cu-*  
*rante et dedicante*  
*L(ucio) Iunio Rufino Procu-*  
20 *liano leg(ato) pr(o) pr(aetore)*

The emperor Commodus...restored the bridge over the river Hippus damaged by the passing of time while the people of Novae, Delminium, and Rider covered the expenses and provided the workforce under the supervision of L. Iunius Rufinus Proculianus, dedicator and governor (of the province of Dalmatia).

Outside of Italy the emperor was only rarely responsible for the costs, as at Simitthu in North Africa (*CIL* VIII 10117 + p. 2118 = *ILS* 293). Local communities were allowed

to levy a road toll (*vectigal rotaris*) in order to finance road construction projects (for example, *CIL* VIII 10327), while private contractors were mostly responsible for the work. Occasionally we hear of the involvement of prisoners (Suet. *Cal.* 27.3) or soldiers (*CIL* V 7989 = *ILS* 487; *CIL* VIII 22173, discussed on p. 652). Towns and communities were responsible for the local roads in their territory, and the costs fell heavily on those who owned property along the roads. This is clearly demonstrated in the late republican *Tabula Heracleensis* (*CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 593 = *RS* 24, lines 20–50). In the city of Rome the cleaning of the streets was handled by the *IIIIViri viis in urbe purgandis*, who from 13 BCE were called the *IIIIViri viarum curandarum*,<sup>20</sup> but in other Roman towns the local magistrates (*IIViri*, aediles) or special officials (*curatores*) were responsible for the roads and streets, including necessary repairs, and this is documented in numerous inscriptions.<sup>21</sup> The financial costs were partly covered by municipal funds (*CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 2537 + p. 1004 = *ILLRP* 466 + p. 322, *Cereatae Maritimae*), but private money was also used, for instance in the form of inheritances or donations to the community (*CIL* II 3167, near Ercavica, Hispania Citerior).

## THE DEVELOPMENT AND REGULATION OF THE *CURSUS PUBLICUS*

Augustus created an administrative unit responsible for transportation, usually known as the *cursus publicus*, primarily to facilitate communication between the emperor and senatorial officials or those serving him personally, and for travel and transport for government purposes. In fact the expression *cursus publicus* is encountered in texts only from the late third century CE onwards, but it is consistently used by modern scholars, even though *vehiculatio* was the term employed during the first two centuries CE on inscriptions (*CIL* III 6075 = *ILS* 1366 = *I.Ephesos* 820) and coins (*BMCRE* III 21–22 no. 19). This service depended on the population living along the main communication routes, who were required to provide official travellers with means of transportation without delay.<sup>22</sup> Augustus initially created a system of couriers who relieved each other during journeys over long distances (Suet. *Aug.* 49.3). He then expanded the system into a fully functional service by arranging for means of transport to be available at regular intervals along the major routes for those authorized to use it.

Clear confirmation of Augustus' reform is provided by an inscription from early in Tiberius' reign that contains an edict of the governor of Galatia Sex. Sotidius Strabo Libuscidianus (*AE* 1976, 653 = *SEG* 26, 1392, Sagalassos). The bilingual text, in Greek and Latin, is the only document from the imperial period that reveals the precise details

<sup>20</sup> Robinson 1992: 59–81.

<sup>21</sup> Goffin 2002: 64–71, with examples; Campedelli 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Kolb 2000: 49–226; 2001b.

of the workings of the *vehiculatio*.<sup>23</sup> The first six lines indicate why the edict was necessary:

*Sex(tus) Sotidius Strabo Libuscidianus, leg(atus) / Ti(beri) Caesaris Augusti pro pr(aetore), dic(it). / est quidem omnium iniquissimum me edicto meo adstringere id quod Augusti alter deorum alter principum / maximus diligentissime caverunt, ne quis gratuitis vehiculis utatur. sed quoniam licentia quorundam / praesentem vindictam desiderat, formulam eorum quae [pra]estari iudicio oportere in singulis civitatibus / et vicis proposui servaturus eam aut si neglecta erit vindicaturus non mea tantum potestate sed / principis optimi a quo id ip[su]m in mandatis accepti maiestate.*

Sextus Sotidius Strabo Libuscidianus, *legatus pro praetore* of Tiberius Caesar, states: It is the most unjust thing of all for me to tighten up by my own edict that which the Augusti, one the greatest of gods, the other the greatest of emperors, have taken the utmost care to prevent, namely that no-one should make use of carts without payment. However, since the indiscipline of certain people requires an immediate punishment, I have set up in the individual towns and villages a register of those services which I judge ought to be provided, with the intention of having it observed or, if it shall be neglected, of enforcing it not only with my own power but with the majesty of the best of princes from whom I received instructions concerning these matters.

The next section (lines 7–10) establishes that the inhabitants of Sagalassos have to keep ten wagons and the same number of mules ready for the needs of travellers, and for the use of each wagon they are to receive from the user ten asses per *schoenus* (a measure of distance which varied between 11 and 16 km) and for each mule four asses per *schoenus*. Only certain individuals travelling on government business were permitted to use the service (lines 13–21):

- “the procurator of the best of princes and his son”
- “persons on military service, both those who have a diploma and those who travel through from other provinces on military service”
- “a senator of the Roman people”
- “a Roman equestrian whose services are being employed by the best of princes”
- “a centurion”

In addition, authorized travellers had to be provided with free accommodation, which increased the financial burden on the local population (lines 23–25). For this purpose, existing inns were used, one must assume, with the local population bearing the costs, or new ones were built, as is revealed by an inscription from Dion in Macedonia, which describes the contents of such an establishment, here called a *praetorium*, in interesting detail (*AE* 2000, 1295):

<sup>23</sup> Mitchell 1976 (translation and commentary).

- ex mandatis*  
*P(ubli) Mestri C(ai) f(ili) Pal(atina) Pomponiani Capitonis II[viri]*  
*Mestriae C(ai) f(iliae) Aquilinae sacerdotis Minervae*  
*C(aius) Mestrius C(ai) f(ilius) Pal(atina) Priscus Maianus*  
*N(umerius)Mestrius C(ai) f(ilius)*  
 5 *Pal(atina) Priscus praetorium cum tabernis duabus*  
*et apparatus ea quae infra scripta est*  
*lectis cubicularibus V culcitis V pulvinis V*  
*subselis X cathedris II triclinio aerato cul-*  
*tis III emitulis III pulvinis longis III foco ferreo*  
 10 *mensis XX grabattis XX emitulis XX haec omnia*  
*colonis de sua pecunia faciendum curaverunt*  
*idemque dedic(averunt)*

On the orders of P. Mestrius Pomponianus Capito, son of Gaius, of the Palatine tribe, *duumvir* and of Mestria Aquilina, daughter of Gaius, priestess of Minerva, C. Mestrius Priscus Maianus, son of Gaius, of the Palatine tribe, and Numerius Mestrius, son of Gaius, of the Palatine tribe (set up) an inn with two *tabernae* (?public rooms) and the furniture which is listed below: five sleeping couches, five mattresses, five pillows, ten benches, two armchairs, a bronze dining couch, three mattresses, three *emitulae* (?banquet cushions), three long pillows, an iron hearth, twenty tables, twenty cots, twenty *emitulae* (?banquet cushions). All of these things they supervised at their own expense for the inhabitants of the colony and likewise they dedicated them.

In sparsely populated and under-urbanized regions the emperors themselves had to create the necessary infrastructure for the *cursus publicus*. Building inscriptions from Thrace show how in 61 Nero had his procurator T. Iulius Ustus build several accommodations (“inns and quarters”) along the *viae militares* there (*CIL* III 6123 = *ILS* 231; *AE* 1999, 1397 = *IGBulg* V 5691: . . . *tabernas et praetoria / per vias militares / fieri iussit per / T(itum) Iulium Ustum proc(uratorem) / provinciae Thrac(iae)*).

The system created by Augustus thus built on republican precedent in the requisition of the means of transport and accommodation. Since travellers often did not obey the rules and instead exacted more than their fair share from the population, as becomes apparent in the edict from Galatia discussed above, this resulted in provincial subjects sending letters of complaint to the emperor.<sup>24</sup> The emperor reacted by restating the same rules, as two new edicts of Hadrian indicate: one from Maroneia in Thracia (*SEG* 49, 886 = 55, 744 = *AE* 2005, 1348), another from the province of Asia (*AE* 2009, 1428).<sup>25</sup> From the collection of rules regarding the *cursus publicus* in the Theodosian Code (*CTh* 8.5), it is clear that emperors enacted further regulations, apparently at regular intervals. The setting up of permanent way-stations (*stationes*) along the roads made it easier to acquire fresh means of transportation and to some extent reduced the misuse of other resources by travellers. On the other hand, from the fourth century onward it was apparently no longer a normal practice to pay

<sup>24</sup> Herrmann 1990; Hauken 1998.

<sup>25</sup> Jones 2011; Hauken and Malay 2009.

compensation for requisitioning, and the *cursus publicus* became, therefore, an even heavier burden on the population.<sup>26</sup>

## COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

In the ancient world, only a few techniques for the communication of information were known, and these were mainly used in military contexts: for example, signalling, projectiles, the use of birds. The normal method of spreading news was to send couriers with oral or written messages. Roman magistrates used their own private staff (Cic. *Fam.* 2.7.3; *Att.* 5.16.1) as well as government personnel for this purpose. Numerous inscriptions from the imperial period name various kinds of messengers: *statores*, *viatores*, *geruli*, *cursores*, and, above all, *tabellarii*. All such functionaries were employed by specific sectors of the Roman government or the army, as illustrated by an epitaph of an *optio tabellariorum officii rationum*, a “senior messenger of the department of the imperial financial department” (CIL VI 8424a).<sup>27</sup>

Private individuals were forced to find people they could trust, who happened to be travelling to the required destination and would transmit their messages. Soldiers entrusted letters addressed to their family back home or to friends in other military camps to fellow soldiers travelling to these locations or, if the distance was relatively short, sent a slave with the letter. Sometimes even Cicero apparently depended on someone travelling in the right direction (*Fam.* 4.9.1, 10.1; *Att.* 5.20.8), though wealthy families often had their own messengers. There were probably also professional couriers for hire (CIL X 1961; XII 4512).

Literary, papyrological, and epigraphic sources have preserved numerous letters of both a private and an official or administrative nature. On the one hand, copies of letters from Roman emperors, edicts, and rescripts from and to governors, communities, associations, or individuals were inscribed on stone.<sup>28</sup> Such letters regularly contain a positive message for the recipients, which is why the decision was taken in the first place to inscribe such texts on a public monument. Letters with unwelcome contents as a rule have not survived. Some inscriptions even contain details about how the correspondence had been conveyed: for instance, a rescript of Caracalla, accompanied by letters from imperial officials, from Takina in Pisidia (SEG 37, 1186). On the other hand, the wooden writing tablets from the military camps at Vindolanda (Britain) and Vindonissa (Switzerland) provide examples of private as well as official correspondence by soldiers, commanders, and their respective family members. These discoveries make it clear that

<sup>26</sup> Kolb 2000: 130–139, 143–145. Note that Mitchell 2014 now proposes animal breeding on imperial ranches.

<sup>27</sup> Kolb 2000: 264–307.

<sup>28</sup> Oliver 1989; Hauken 1998; Kokkinia 2004; cf. Chs. 14–15.

letter writing was a very common phenomenon in the Roman Empire, and this is borne out by references in the letters themselves to the keeping and sending of letters: ... *et epistulas [-c.4-]s quas acceperas ab Equestre centurione coh(ortis) III Batavorum [-c.3-]i ad te pr(idie) K(alendas) Ma[ias?]* (“and those letters which you (?) had received from Equester, centurion of the Third Cohort of Batavians, I sent (?) to you on April 30 (?)...,” *Tab. Vindol.* II 263, revising I 23; transl. Bowman). There was correspondence even about the forwarding of letters: *Oppius Niger Priscino [suo] s[alutem] Crispum et +e[-c.8-]s ex coh(orte) I Tungrorum quos cum epistulis ad consularem n(ostrum) miserat a Bremetennaco [- - -]um Kal(endis) F[eb]r[- - -] vale domine frater* (“Oppius Niger to his Priscinus greetings. Crispus and (?) from the First Cohort of Tungrians, whom you had sent with letters to our governor, [I have straightaway sent on (?)] from Bremetennacum to ... (?) on February 1. (*second hand*) Farewell, my lord and brother,” *Tab. Vindol.* II 295, revising I 30; transl. Bowman).

In Vindonissa it seems that a large part of the letters were sent only short distances, and they often contain little information or simply treat everyday business such as an invitation to a party (*convivium*) (*Tab. Vindon.* 45 = *AE* 1996, 1133) or the ordering of hob-nailed boots (*Tab. Vindon.* 36). The soldiers evidently wanted to be kept abreast of the life of their comrades-in-arms and in general letters were always welcome: [- - -] *si tandem feriatu[s], quiquam vaco castris. ut a{c} cohorte mi<hi> rescribas, u[t] semper in mentem (h)abe<a>s, ut mi<hi> rescribas* (“Finally enjoying my leave! I am completely free from camp life. Please write back to me from the cohort. Please always keep it in mind to write back to me.” *Tab. Vindon.* 40 = *AE* 1996, 1132).

## MOBILITY AND CONNECTIVITY IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Mobility in the ancient world was limited. In predominantly agrarian societies people lived in close proximity to where they worked. There was also little in the way of travel services and very limited means of transport. What transport there was was owned by just a small minority of society, and not many people could afford to pay to hire such facilities. Yet because of the extensive road network in the Roman world it may be surmised that mobility in general was higher than elsewhere and at other times in the ancient world. People usually travelled for business purposes, whether of a private or official nature. The main types of travellers included merchants, soldiers, civilian administrators, and professional couriers. A few small bronze plaques survive which were fixed onto a horse, wagon, or even boat to attest that the traveller(s) was on official business, as in the following example from the area around Rome: *Thoantis / Ti(beri) Caesaris / Aug(usti) / dispensatori[s] / ab toris // de / statione / [Ti(beri)?] Caesaris Aug(usti) / tabellari(i)s / diplomari[s] / discede* (*CIL* XV 7142 = *ILS* 1702: “Belonging to Thoas, slave of Ti. Caesar Augustus, accountant, responsible for couches. From the



FIG. 30.4 Portable bronze sundial for travellers found near Mérida, Spain. Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, Mérida.

*statio* of [Ti.?] Caesar Augustus. Reserved for authorized couriers. Keep off!”).<sup>29</sup> To aid the process of travel, portable inscribed bronze sundials (*viatoria pensilia*) were used (cf. Vit. 9.8.1); these marked various provinces or cities of the Empire and their respective latitudes (Fig. 30.4).<sup>30</sup>

Many fewer travelled for pleasure (“tourism” as it would be called today), on pilgrimage, or as students.<sup>31</sup> A phenomenon almost like modern-day tourism can be observed in Egypt, where for two centuries members of the Roman elite visited the singing statues of Memnon, inscribing their names on them; even members of the imperial family are attested (*CIL* III 30–66). *Memnonem audivi /audi* (“I have heard Memnon”) is the standard phrase.<sup>32</sup>

Information about different kinds of travel, the reasons for these journeys, and their frequency can be found in many kinds of sources. Among inscriptions, epitaphs and

<sup>29</sup> For other broadly similar objects, cf. *CIL* XV 7125–70; Panciera 2000.

<sup>30</sup> Price 1969; Arce 1997.

<sup>31</sup> In general, Casson 1960; Adams and Laurence 2001; Moatti 2004; Handley 2011; for official controls on mobility, Moatti 2000.

<sup>32</sup> For the texts, Bernand and Bernand 1960.

dedications are particularly important for studying patterns of mobility, especially those texts that include a reference to an individual's place of origin (*origo*) that was different from the stone's findspot.<sup>33</sup> Some people took special delight in recording the places they had visited, like the soldier Aurelius Gaius who recalls his visits under Diocletian to twenty-three provinces (*AE* 1981, 777).<sup>34</sup> Such inscriptions may give an exaggerated picture of mobility in the Roman world, but they need to be taken into account.<sup>35</sup>

Inscriptions are also valuable sources for the trials and tribulations that Roman travellers might encounter. Accidents are reported, but more commonly robberies and even murder, and not even armed soldiers were always safe, as seen in an inscription from Lambaesis in Numidia (*CIL* VIII 2728 = 18122 = *ILS* 5795): ...*profectus sum et inter vias latrones sum passus. nudus saucius evasi cum meis...* ("I set off and along the road I suffered (an attack by) robbers. Naked and wounded, I escaped with my companions..."). With these words the army veteran and field surveyor Nonius Datus describes his experience travelling in North Africa c. 150 CE.<sup>36</sup> From Lugdunum Convenarum in Gaul comes a funerary monument that records the murder of two travelling Spaniards (*CIL* XIII 259):

5  
 Canpan[us nat(ione?)]  
 H(ispanus) Iul(ia) Nov(a) [Karth(agine) et]  
 Silvanus a [latro]-  
 nibus hi[c inte]-  
 rfecti V [- - -]  
 Iun(ias) Imp(eratore) [L(ucio) Sept(imio)]  
 Sev(ero) co(n)s(ule) I[- - -]  
 Silvan[us et]  
 Martin[us]

Here lies Canpanus, a man from Hispania from Iulia Nova Carthago, and Silvanus, who on this spot were killed by robbers, (date in late May/June), when the emperor L. Septimius Severus was consul for the (2nd or 3rd) time.<sup>37</sup> Silvanus and Martinus (erected the monument).

Dedicatory inscriptions show that every Roman god and particularly *Dei itinerarii* ("gods of travel") could be asked for protection before setting off (*AE* 2000, 1191, Savaria in Pannonia Superior).<sup>38</sup> After returning safe and sound, the vow, made in connection with the initial prayer, would be fulfilled, usually through the erection of an altar, on

<sup>33</sup> Immigrants in Rome: Noy 2000; Ricci 2006; for geographical mobility in Roman Africa, Lassère 1977; for Italians in the Greek East, Müller and Hasenohr 2002.

<sup>34</sup> Wilkinson 2012.

<sup>35</sup> For a civilian recording his travels, *AE* 1977, 762, Noviodunum (Moesia Inferior), with Solin 1985: 198–200.

<sup>36</sup> Nonius Datus: Cuomo 2011. Other examples: *CIL* II 2968; III 1579, 8242; VI 20307; XIII 3689, 6429.

<sup>37</sup> The date must be 194 or 202, depending on whether the text read *co(n)s(ule) II* or *co(n)s(ule) III*, indicating his second or third consulship. He held no further consulships.

<sup>38</sup> Kolb 2005.

which the gratitude was spelled out in a dedicatory formula or by a verse honouring the deity, as occurred at Novae in Moesia Inferior (*AE* 1989, 635 = *IGL Novae* 8):<sup>39</sup>

*Deo Aeterno  
sancto  
Aur(elius) Statianus  
acto[r] pericu-  
[l]o m[a]ris li-  
b[e]ratus ex  
voto promi-  
[s]o r(estituit)*

To Deus Aeternus. Aurelius Statianus, *actor* (i.e., agent), restored (this monument) according to his promise after having been saved from the dangers of the sea.

Inscriptions normally do not provide information about travel times or the speed with which communications were delivered or goods transported. For these aspects, literary sources are more important, while papyri provide a wealth of material on the normal speed of communication and travel times between Egypt and other parts of the Empire.<sup>40</sup> Only occasionally is it possible to make deductions from correspondence preserved in inscriptions, primarily imperial rescripts and edicts. From three letters of Hadrian from Alexandria-in-the-Troad one can infer how long it took for performers to travel from one major festival to another.<sup>41</sup> Even news of an emperor's death could be slow to reach the outer reaches of the Empire. The Roman troops stationed at Dura Europus on the Euphrates, for example, were still making dedications to ensure the well-being of the emperor Commodus on 17 March 193, almost three months after his assassination on 31 December 192.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Bartels and Kolb 2011.

<sup>40</sup> Duncan-Jones 1990: 7–29.

<sup>41</sup> Petzl and Schwertheim 2006, esp. 71–86; Jones 2007.

<sup>42</sup> *AE* 1928, 86, as revised by Speidel 1993 = *AE* 2002, 1501.

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