

Being Roman, Writing Latin? Consumers of Latin Inscriptions in Greece

Latin inscriptions in Greece have, on the whole, suffered from the traditional separation between Greek and Latin studies. Although valuable site-specific and small regional studies of Latin inscriptions exist (e.g., from Attica, Corinth, Delos, Isthmia, Olympia, and Patras), none of these are broadly comparative works. Apart from the major corpora, there has been only one study of the Latin epigraphy of Greece as a distinct field (Šašel Kos 1977).

Yet the choice to write in Latin in Greece deserves examination. Unlike most objects of material culture, a language can only be useful for those who are conscious of its origins. For this reason, Latin inscriptions provide our best evidence for explicit, intentional engagement with Roman culture in Greece. The use of Latin for inscriptions would have been a highly symbolic and unusual means of self-representation in any predominately Greek-speaking context. Even within the potentially Latin-speaking enclaves of early Roman colonies in Achaia, however, the use of Latin in inscriptions was ultimately a decision not to conform to the Greek linguistic norm of the surrounding province.

In this light, it is significant that out of the 1261 Latin inscriptions documented in the *Epigraphic Database Heidelberg (EDH)* for the province of Achaia, only 106 of them are even partially bilingual with Greek. Who, then, were the creators of these inscriptions and by whom were they intended to be read? What circumstances – subject matter, occasion, place, historical events, etc. – influenced the decision to set up an inscription in Latin rather than in Greek?

This paper addresses these questions through quantitative analysis of the collection of Latin inscriptions from Achaia in the *EDH*. By identifying the provenance, author, and general content of each inscription wherever possible, I document trends and tendencies in the status of the author, the prospective audience, and the social, political, and/or religious context in which

Latin inscriptions in Greece were consumed. Based on that analysis, I suggest a list of factors which contributed to the choice to use Latin, including personal identity, the degree and frequency of local interaction between native Latin and Greek speakers, and the civic status or ambitions of individual communities vis-à-vis their neighbors as well as within the larger Roman world.

Bibliography

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