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RADA VARGA, *CARVING A PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY.
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IRVINE/LOS ANGELES, CA: JORDAN CENTRE
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Reviews

Rada Varga, *Carving a Professional Identity. The occupational epigraphy of the Latin West*, Archaeopress Roman Archaeology 73, Oxford, Archaeopress, 2021, 119 p., ISBN 9781789694642.

Rada Varga's book focuses on the occupational inscriptions from the Roman period, coming from the geographical area of the Latin West (excluding Rome and Italy), but bringing also as case study the evidence from Moesia Inferior. More precisely, the attention revolves around a certain category of the Roman society, the „independent professionals”, who therefore chose to (self-)represent themselves on stone monuments in association with their occupations. As exception, „state workers, imperial slaves, freedmen or military personnel” (p. 1) were rightly not included in this category.

The author is a researcher at the Babeş-Bolyai University (Cluj-Napoca, Romania), specialised in Roman archaeology and history, as well as in Latin epigraphy and digital classics, and has focused her research in the last years on occupational epigraphy,¹ the book being the result of her investigations. While various aspects and topics of the occupational history² have been dealt with in the past decades, through this work an important contribution is being brought, updating the already existing information and bringing a novel approach (from the many possible options), influenced by social sciences and delivered with the help of new methodologies and research tools. Remarkable and original is especially the encoding of ancient occupations (see chapter III, subchapter 2. **Encoding the attested occupations**), adapted for the Roman world realities from the model provided by the Historical International Standard Classification of Occupations (HISCO), as well as the use of the online database Romans 1 by 1 (<http://romans1by1.com/>) for recording the epigraphical evidence and for making it available to anyone interested.

The prosopographic catalogue represents the core source on which the author builds the three main chapters; but before diving into the analyses, Rada Varga expresses her perspective and motivation, and introduces the reader to the historiography of the topic (**II. Historiographic coordinates for Roman-era occupational epigraphy**; p. 4-11). The latter is essential in understanding the diversity and richness of approaches and the polemics raised by the subject, and the way in which the topic was previously addressed, being an explanation and a *plaidoyer* for the approach she proposes (respectively studying professions „as a freestanding agent” (p. 7), and for its relevance.

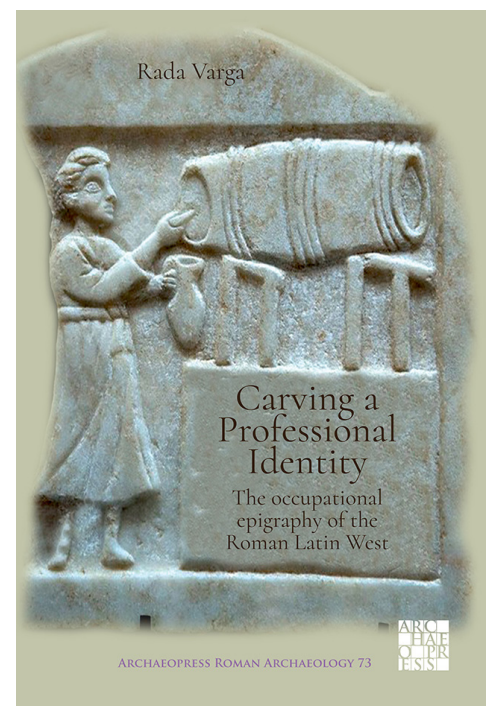
Then, in chapter **III. Quantitative analyses on the primary data** (p. 12-25) the attention is drawn to the quantitative analyses which resulted from the available epigraphic data. More precisely, the author discusses aspects such as demography and representativeness, types of occupations (213 individual occupations, out of which the sales workers are the most numer-

1 VARGA 2016, 27-34; VARGA 2018a, 9-21; VARGA 2018b, 1106-1107; VARGA 2019, 78-109.

2 I.e. occupational categories: ANDRÉ 1987; BOUNEGRU 2006; APARASCHIVEI 2012, 99-118; BROEKAERT 2013; MIHĂILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2015, 185-198; APARASCHIVEI 2019, 57-81 etc.; social aspects: MAXEY 1938; TREGGIARI 1976, 76-104; BONSANGUE 2002, 201-232; FLOHR 2013 etc.

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ous) and their encoding (original initiative), geographical (the Gallic and Germanic provinces are the best represented, each having their epigraphic and occupational habits) and chronological (less than 10% were accurately dated) distribution, persons (690; juridical status – most being citizens; gender – women being underrepresented; number of dedicatees and dedicators) and types of monuments (mostly funerary). However, the author carefully and rightly underlines the fact that „the statistical, quantitative analyses must serve as background, not constitute the final purpose” (p. 13), since the population expressing itself epigraphically was underrepresented. Considering the rawness of the demographic data, the author also contextualized it at the scale of the Roman Empire, which certainly helps the reader in better understanding the data.

Regarding the data, as a remark, I would have probably included in the sample the individuals whom are members of professional associations (i.e. those from Moesia Inferior), since they were probably actively engaged in the respective occupation (i.e. the few individuals who were not only honorific members or benefactors). Two women from Moesia Inferior are missing from the sample: one of them is a ἰατρεινὴ from Tomis (2nd-3rd century AD),³ whose name is unknown to us. This attestation confirms the author’s observation on the involvement of women in the medical field (p. 23-24). The other woman was Βαλερία daughter of Διοκλητιανός who „works bone objects”, being probably the owner of a bone shop at Halmyris.⁴ In this latter case, the dating of the inscription to the 3rd, maybe 4th century AD might be the reason for its exclusion from the *corpus*.

After previously examining the quantitative data which provides an overview on the available evidence, the following chapter, **IV. People and professional identities** (p. 26-48), tackles the qualitative data, discussing not only the individuals behind the occupations, but also the professional identities which they created and undertook, as well as the „characteristics and common features” (p. 26) of some professional categories. As such, Rada Varga underlines the fact that the traders exhibited, for example, their connectivity outside of their nuclear family due to their profession which implied and relied on connections, while the medical personnel relied as reference on their place of provenance (mostly the representative medical schools from the East). In opposition, it results that the craftsmen displayed their specialisations as element of pride, being mostly attested through the mention of collective bodies, i.e. profile associations. Artists and gladiators were included in the entertainers’ category, the author pointing that the latter were much more prone to mention their *natio*, or various details about their activity which brought them pride and was an element of self-representation. What is interesting and highlighted by Rada Varga is the fact that each one of the discussed professional categories points to a specific epigraphic habit regarding their self-representation, which is influenced by the most important elements of their professional legitimacy.

Lastly, the author draws the conclusions from the previous chapter (**Concluding remarks**; p. 49-50), stressing the main ideas which result.

3 ISM II 333. See DANA 2011, 188.

4 ZAHARIADE/ALEXANDRESCU 2011, 36.

After a much-needed **Index** of people and places (p. 51-53), a **Glossary** (p. 54-60) of the attested occupations follows, in which the author gives brief translations of 212 specific terms, some being more commonly attested (*aerarius*, *agrimensor*, *lapidarius*, *scriba* etc.), while others being much less frequently mentioned in inscriptions (*capistarius*, *fabarius*, *mimographus*, *pilarius* etc.).

Besides the **Glossary**, very useful is also the **Catalogue** (p. 61-110) of the 690 individuals whom the author has identified as having an occupation. The catalogue includes the URL link to the Romans 1 by 1 database corresponding to each individual, along with information on the occupation, province of attestation, dating and a source reference. Complementary to the catalogue is also another study published by the author in 2019,⁵ which includes an analysis of the quantitative data and renders the catalogue of the individuals grouped by province, with active hyperlinks to the Romans 1 by 1 database.

Overall, through: the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the sources, the use of both traditional and new methodologies and tools for investigation, the diverse prosopographic and conceptual approach of the data, the encoding of the ancient occupations, the book represents another milestone in the research of Roman ancient society and occupations. As such, through its quality it deserves our full-attention and can be considered as a work of reference for future researches in the field.

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- 5 VARGA 2019, 78-109.

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