

1997 TRENDALL LECTURE

The Gadfly of Greek History
(The infuriatingly opaque nature of Greek
inscriptions as sources for Greek History)

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Distinguished colleagues...

It is for me a single honour to have the opportunity to deliver the inaugural Trendall Memorial Lecture, and it is perhaps even appropriate since both of us in our different ways have tried to illuminate aspects of antiquity by recourse to fragmentary archives of physical materials from the distant past. Dale Trendall, of course, in a lifetime of scholarly endeavour demonstrated only too brilliantly the historical, social, and artistic significance of Greek pottery, notably that from South Italy. My interest has for the most part encompassed less visually exciting materials—for few inscriptions are truly beautiful, except to the eye of the committed beholder—but I would argue that their enrichment of our knowledge of the ancient world is at least as significant. For the practice of inscribing records on durable materials, especially stone, was all pervasive in antiquity and the inscriptions have not only illuminated many dark recesses of everyday life in antiquity, some of them arguably best left in obscurity, but they have smashed for ever the unhealthy tyranny of the literary sources. Not a single historian of Ancient Greece has survived totally unscathed the chance appearance of inscriptions, which provide a uniquely direct contact with antiquity, and the early trickle of such documents has now become a torrent, especially in major cities such as Athens, on which I shall for convenience concentrate. Indeed, inscriptions have unquestionably assumed the characteristics of the gadfly in stimulating modern scholars to scepticism over the reliability of ancient historians. For the detailed information of the inscriptions seldom accords exactly with the accounts of the historians. In part at least this is because, by virtue of being records, inscriptions represent very detailed issues and in some cases their precise context is difficult to ascertain. None the less it cannot be denied that they reveal—what we ought to have realised, and would have acknowledged but for the traditional idealising of the Classical world—that ancient writers, just as some modern writers, frequently misrepresent or distort events, advertently or otherwise. The detection of ancient authors in such malefaction has been long postponed because of centuries of misplaced trust in literary giants perpetrated by the purists of the Classical tradition.

But this gadfly does not just bring potential discredit upon the long departed, who doubtless never dreamt that their accounts would be set against actual evidence; it is perfectly ecumenical, making sure that modern

interpreters are rendered uncomfortable too. This is particularly the case when, in the absence of any literature, scholars seek to reconstruct history from inscriptions. For despite their numbers, despite their durability, *despite their ubiquity, and despite their obvious authenticity, inscriptions* carry with them the treacherous attributes of being a random and for the most part fragmentary hoard of stone records. This is especially true of the massive public record in Athens where a constant stream of new fragments has had the infuriating tendency to falsify accounts so painstakingly reconstructed from earlier materials. One of the most intractable minefields has been the third century BC where the history has to be reconstructed very substantially from the epigraphical fragments because of the dearth of literary sources. Indeed, after 290 BC even the sequence of annual magistrates (*archons*) which provides the basic chronological framework is hypothetical. The upshot has been a century or more of informed (and occasionally ill-informed) conjecture, each new epigraphical discovery invariably bringing to light some flaw in the latest view. My own painstakingly constructed chronological scheme for the third century BC is, I must confess, about to fall victim to this inexorable process, but I am in excellent company and still have a long way to go to catch up with some of my predecessor epigraphists who have witnessed the demise of dozens of seemingly irrefutable chronological schemes. Also, I craftily concluded my study with the prediction that the next dated inscription to be found would falsify in part at least my chronological framework. I am now fully aware that my prediction is correct, although paradoxically few others can know this, because the important new text which provides the information is still unpublished, even though it was discovered almost twenty years ago. *Appropriately enough, it was found in Aristophanes Street and its continued concealment will undoubtedly be a stimulus for further misplaced ingenuity and subsequent mirth.*

The inherent opacity of content of inscriptions generates obvious scope for informed speculation and it has even led to a new disease which may be termed *odium epigraphicum*. The symptoms range from rancorous and unrestrained abuse of fellow practitioners, who espouse different interpretations of the lapidary evidence, to delusions that the stone records must be wrong and so need correction because they do not cohere with the presuppositions of the scholar in question. The disease has a respectable pedigree too, since it is already attested splendidly in the bitter tirades of Pittakys and Rangabé, the early excavators of the Athenian Akropolis in the 1830s. Subsequently, American epigraphists have attempted, quite successfully, to make the disease peculiarly their own.

But, such idiosyncrasies apart, the potential value of inscriptions is enormous. For they represent a *direct* contact with the past and for some periods of history they are virtually the only source. This is true, for example, of Athens after the fourth century BC when, as noted already,

even the chronology is conjectural and to this very day is debated with feverish energy and imaginative acrimony. For sundry aspects of social and political life they are quite literally the *only* source. So they deserve careful elucidation.

In Athens many thousands of inscriptions have now come to light, although it must be acknowledged that the increasingly proprietorial attitude of excavators and/or authorities has caused only too many to disappear into the darkness of archaeological vaults, their information still unreported. It has been estimated that in Athens alone anything up to five thousand inscriptions remain unpublished and the excavations to extend the underground railway are reportedly augmenting this figure daily. This is a very disappointing situation and it means that the solutions to many key problems, not to speak of the remedy for *odium epigraphicum*, are almost certainly in existence. Incessant pleas for remedial action have fallen on deaf ears.

None the less the known archive is massive and its contents spread over many stores and museums (not all of them in Greece, never mind in Athens)—a situation not unlike that which obtains in the case of the vase paintings. The great efflorescence of discoveries in Athens began in the 1830s with the decision to excavate the Athenian Akropolis, which was by then a desperately confusing amalgam of ancient and modern buildings stretching back to the fifth century BC and even earlier, as can be seen, for instance, from sketches of travellers such as Dodwell (ca 1800). More recently, from the 1930s, the American excavations of the Agora, the business and political centre of Ancient Athens, have yielded voluminous further materials. The journal *Hesperia* has faithfully charted the progress of this massive enterprise and the earliest volumes contain fascinating photographs of the Agora area totally covered with (predominantly) modern buildings. Quite apart from these and other major excavations in Athens and *environs*, the archive of stone inscriptions has been regularly augmented by numerous chance finds in road works, demolition and reconstruction works and so on. Buildings constructed before the Second World War have been a particularly rich source of materials, since the thrifty practice of re-use of stone slabs has ensured that many have fragments embodied in their walls or floors. As will be obvious, the preserved archive is on the one hand deficient by virtue of dependence on the accident of preservation and on the other lacunose as the result of 'oblomovitis' (at best) on the part of modern practitioners. But even so there is a massive haul for modern scholars to evaluate and the prospect of a steady flow of materials for the future.

Some strange diversions have been evidenced over the years. Thus, to give but one example, Franciscus Lenormant briefly enlivened the scene by publishing a vast hoard of inscriptions which he claimed to have seen

and copied in Athens in the mid nineteenth century. Not a single one has ever been seen by anyone since and it is now clear that all were forgeries. By a curious paradox the reverse situation is evidenced at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, where a considerable collection of paper impressions (squeezes) of epitaphs from Attica provide indisputably authentic texts, but the stone originals have never been re-discovered.

Naturally, in so brief a paper I can only touch upon some features of this gadfly, which teases all so equitably, and I shall restrict myself to comment on the nature and variety of inscriptions and on some of the difficulties of elucidating their evidence.

Materials

Stone, usually marble, is the most common material utilised for inscriptions and I shall devote most attention to such documents. But occasionally metal is used—either bronze, especially for sacred texts, or lead, notably for a splendidly colourful group of materials known as *curse tablets*. These latter are quite numerous and they provide a fine insight into the vicious antipathies of people at the parochial level. A single brief instance must suffice by way of illustration: ‘We bind with evil spells’, writes one singularly aggressive denizen of Athens, ‘Kallistrate, the wife of Theophemos, and Theophilos, the son of Kallistrate, and her children and Theophemos her husband ... yes and their spirits and their deeds and everything that is theirs, including their accursed genitals ...’. The stimulus for this outburst is obscure, but it certainly tells us something of the society. Another medium for inscriptions is clay and there are examples from prehistoric times, such as the Linear B tables from the Mycenaean Age, through to later periods of antiquity, including humble, but frequently informative, inscribed bricks and tiles and perhaps most famously *ostraka*, of which more shortly. But marble was in historical times the most popular material, in part at least because it was so readily available; in part too, of course, because it was durable. In the case of Athens ample supplies were available from two nearby quarries, one at Pendeli, which was the source of the fine white marble of the Parthenon and other public buildings on the Akropolis, the other at Hymettos, admittedly of somewhat inferior quality, but literally overlooking the city. Almost all of the stone inscriptions of Athens utilise the marble of one or other of these quarries.

The earliest appearance of inscriptions in Athens goes back to the very end of the seventh century BC, to a period not long after the re-introduction of writing to Greece after the downfall of the Mycenaean World. The earliest texts are very short, mostly dedications, and they illustrate nicely the difficulty for the Greeks of settling upon an alphabet and of establishing a standard direction for writing. Thus some early texts from the last years of the seventh century BC exhibit retrograde script which runs from right to left. This tendency was generally supplanted by the end of the sixth century

BC by the practice of writing from left to right, but not without the appearance of a curious hybrid form of inscription known as *boustrophedon*, where, as the term suggests, the direction alternates from line to line as in ploughing. This practice was short-lived and in Athens did not survive long into the fifth century BC. *En passant*, as an antidote to misapprehensions which arise from modern admiration of white marble, it may be worth noting that the ancient masons painted the letters of the inscriptions, usually in red, and very occasionally the original paint remains. This practice explains the otherwise incomprehensible comment of Thucydides [VI.54.6] that the letters on the late sixth century BC dedication of the tyrant Peisistratos are 'faint'—for parts of the stone survive to this day with beautifully clear letters but without paint.

Public and private inscriptions

Broadly speaking it is possible to divide inscriptions into two categories, namely, those set up by private individuals or groups and those set up as public monuments. Amongst the private monuments the commonest are the tomb inscriptions and, short as the texts are, they are highly informative, telling us much about families, social *mores* and so on. Thousands are already known from Athens, and many others are known to have been unearthed, but repose safe from the scholarly eye in various stores throughout the city. In Athens in the fifth century BC and for most of the fourth century BC the tomb monuments range in nature from spectacularly beautiful works of art to humble slabs or columns, obviously reflecting the relative wealth of the families in question. But in the later part of the fourth century BC the tyrant Demetrios of Phaleron prohibited the practice of erecting monumental tombs and for a long time thereafter only very modest memorials are attested. The most popular type came to be the miniature column (*columella*) which is not entirely without aesthetic charm. Its size, however, inhibited a lengthy text and such monuments individually seldom attest the family trees that appear on the larger slabs, or *stelai*, as they are known. The latter occasionally chart the history of a family over a number of generations. In Rhamnous, a rich and distant *deme* to the north-east of Athens, whole enclosures (*periboloi*) of such monuments are coming to light. A key problem of interpretation for tomb monuments is to establish accurately and convincingly the interrelationships of the persons listed, and it has to be acknowledged that standard works are only too often deficient either in failing to recognise the full range of possibilities for reconstruction or by uncritically identifying homonyms.

Naturally there is a wide variety of inscriptions other than tombstones in the private category such as dedications, lists, graffiti, boundary markers and so on. On the island of Thasos the great wall surrounding the city carries the rough inscription 'Parmenion made me', providing information on the identity of the builder and also by virtue of the lettering on the date of the

erection of the upper part of the wall. Also on the island of Thasos, somewhat less tastefully, there exist graffiti with some claim to uniqueness, although they are hardly discordant with the sentiments of the time. These are the lustful pederastic graffiti of the mercenary commanders on the island, to whose care somewhat injudiciously had been entrusted groups of young cadets (*ephebes*). Rather more congenial to anyone in a position of responsibility or authority will be the dedication of Andreas, the governor of Asia, in Ephesos: 'The esteemed Andreas, having set to right the affairs of Asia in a manner befitting Minos or Lykourgos or Solon [all famous lawgivers], received scant thanks for his pains'.

Moving to the public and quasi-public arenas, the variety of epigraphical material is equally impressive, ranging from public monuments and altars through a bewildering variety of lists encompassing magistrates, mercenaries, priests, criminals, casualties, sporting and artistic heroes, debtors and sundry other categories of saints and sinners to the public decrees of the Athenian government. As in the private arena, tiny texts are often replete with information. Thus, to give a single instance, a preserved front seat (*proedria*) in the theatre of Dionysus in Athens carrying the inscriptions '[seat]Of Diogenes the Benefactor' must from the letters be dated to the second half of the third century BC and it must thus refer to the Diogenes who in 229 BC 'liberated' the Peiraieus for Athens for the astronomical sum of 150 Talents. It tells us, what had been disputed for years, that Diogenes was not an Athenian, since only a foreigner could be designated a 'benefactor' and confirms that his receipt of the highest honours available in Athens included a permanent theatre seat. But the public decrees of Athens are naturally the most informative source of detail and it is to these that I now turn.

Public decrees

The public decrees of Athens represent the public decisions of the government. From an early point in the fifth century BC the Athenian government was a democracy and, reflecting democratic principles, it became the custom to inscribe the public decisions of the government on stone slabs (*stelai*) and set them up in a prominent and suitably auspicious place 'for all to see'. In practice most were set up on the Akropolis under the protection of the goddess Athena. The use of the term 'for all to see' was cynically accurate too, since the prevalent illiteracy in Athens will have rendered ridiculous the term 'for all to read' and the ruling group would undoubtedly have found such a notion preposterous. The absurdity of the idea that anyone might actually consult the stone texts is also reflected in the crowding together of so many monuments in so restricted a space in the temple precinct—a situation which in practical terms appears to have facilitated the regular purloining of the stone slabs for other purposes. As is only too obvious too, the major historians did not care to utilise this seemingly rich quarry of

primary evidence; and politicians observedly felt able to modify texts to suit their predilections, secure in the belief that few, if any, would be likely to clamber about on the Akropolis to find evidence to contradict them and, if they did, that fewer still would believe them. The inscribed texts are certainly better known to modern scholars than they were to the historians and public of antiquity.

The process of government in Athens was quite straightforward. Firstly, a decision would be achieved by a show of hands in a public meeting. The resultant *decree* would then be inscribed on stone and set up for all to see, as described already. Texts were usually continuous without breaks between words or sentences; obviously they did not invite inspection and the rationale of their placement must have been to all intents and purposes symbolic. In the early fifth century BC the texts were very succinct and the letters very large; by the late fourth century BC the decrees had become tediously long and the letters minuscule. In view of the scantiness of the literary sources after about 300 BC this is very fortunate, but the very detailed nature of the texts does bring difficulties of interpretation. Thus in honorific decrees, which are common in all periods, in the fifth century BC it is usually sufficient to congratulate a benefactor because he has displayed virtue towards the city [often leaving us in obscurity as to his deeds] whereas by the early third century BC anything up to one hundred lines of detailed beneficence will be recounted.

Interestingly, it is clear that, despite the essential emptiness of the gesture of publicly displaying the content of the decree, great care was taken to ensure that the text was full and accurate. Indeed, even quite minor errors were often corrected by way of amendment, no doubt in deference to expectations or perhaps more likely apprehensions flowing from having sought divine patronage for the *stèle*. This renders worthless the claims (or hopes) of some modern historians, who rather than allow primary epigraphical evidence to undermine their prejudices, assert that the texts of the decrees are unreliable or untrustworthy. The simple fact is that the decrees themselves regularly state that the text is 'to be inscribed on stone and set up on the Akropolis'. The hypothesis that this was not done in practice is as gratuitous as it is reckless and it represents a suicidal response to the sting of the epigraphical gadfly.

Ostracism

Whilst in the public domain it is appropriate to mention the short-lived practice of ostracism—an unusual practice which some, in despair of current political leadership, think should be revived. For it provided annually for the honourable expulsion of one political leader from Athens for a period of 10 years. Voting was by inscribing the name of the person that one wanted excluded from the city on a potsherd (*ostrakon*) and the person who had most *ostraka* cast in his disfavour had to go into exile for a decade. The practice

was discontinued in 417 BC when the two leading ‘candidates’ (Nikias and Alkibiades) colluded to get the proposer of the ostracism (Hyperbolos) ejected.

After each ostracism it was customary simply to dump the *ostraka* and the modern discovery of such dumps in the Agora and in the nearby Kerameikos has provided important insights into the leading families of Athens at the time. It has also revealed that whole batches of *ostraka* were mass produced to be handed out to prospective voters. This is no doubt a further reflection upon the prevalent illiteracy of the time, but doubtless one should not rule out the possibility of more sinister objectives. Very occasionally the *ostraka* transcend the banality of the inscribed name to provide an additional message. One of the most colourful such examples is an *ostrakon* cast against a certain Kallias son of Kratios, where the image of a Persian archer has been scratched on the back, presumably to eradicate any doubt that Kallias is stigmatised as being overly favourable to the Persians.

Interpreting inscriptions

Moving to the problems of modern interpretation of inscriptions, the capricious, fragmentary, and damaged nature of so much of the evidence is a key difficulty. This has been exacerbated by the practice of re-use even in antiquity. Thus, for example, the prospect of invasion would regularly lead to the appropriation of *stelai* for the city walls, and even sacred monuments were not entirely free from such depredation. In late Antiquity and beyond the ancient *stelai* were used with impunity as building materials. Looming, however, as an all pervasive problem is the simple fact that the preserved inscriptions, fragmentary or otherwise, represent an unknown percentage of an unknowable totality.

Further complexities arise when stones are now lost and known only from the records of early scholars. In the early nineteenth century, for example, the French consul Fauvel was an avid collector and transliterator of inscriptions. Unfortunately, a perusal of his preserved records suggests an advanced form of dyslexia, since most are virtually incomprehensible. In this domain the great antagonists of the early nineteenth century, Rangabé and Pittakys, have left some curious puzzles too. Thus, for example, Pittakys published (in 1835) a decree which mentioned a certain Orontes and incorporated a date (by the annual *archon*) of 341/0 [Nikomachos]; the stone then became lost [and still is] but some years later (in 1855) by some obscure means Rangabé managed to produce a variant text which gave the name of the *archon* as Kammachos (sic). There is no such name and obviously there can never have been such an *archon*. Paradoxically, later editors all ignored the perfectly intelligible reading of the only person to have seen the stone and instead of accepting Nikomachos emended Rangabé’s reading to Kallimachos (the *archon* for 349/8). The rationale for this curious proceeding is quite obscure. The whole issue, however, is rendered the more curious by

the consideration, fatal to the date of Pittakys and Rangabé alike, that the only plausible Orontes had disappeared from Asia Minor and hence from contact with Athens by 360 BC. A scholarly debate, interspersed with considerable *odium epigraphicum*, continues on the interpretation and dating of this puzzling document.

These problems apart, the preserved data from the Akropolis and the Agora generate quite enough difficulties. A key reason is that both venues faced the excavators with an undifferentiated agglomeration of centuries of buildings containing centuries of stone fragments, some of them re-used more than once. The *stèle* for Herodoros is a fine example of the inglorious fate of such monuments although, to be fair, it did not share the ignominious fate of so many *stelai* in becoming part of the Great Drain in the Athenian Agora. Herodoros was given the highest honours that Athens had to offer in 295/4 BC for assistance in keeping the city 'free' and a large *stèle* was erected to commemorate his deeds. By the first century AD the *stèle* had been sawn in half to become part of a gate, and a gate-keeper had crudely inscribed his credentials thereon; subsequently like so many other *stelai* it ended up as building material and was found serving as a doorstep for a building on the Akropolis early last century.

The practical upshot of the varied life of inscriptions is that most are fragmentary and many are very badly damaged, with serious consequences for their interpretation. A first and obvious problem is that texts are often exceedingly difficult to read, a problem that is greatly exacerbated by the unwillingness of essentially armchair scholars to undertake autopsy of the stones. In this regard a classic instance was my discovery in 1985 that one crucial letter on an inscription from the 290s BC had been incorrectly read by the original editor in 1898. No one had scrutinised the stone in the interim, despite its crucial significance, and the misreading had served as the foundation for a mistaken view of the chronology for nearly a century. This is a prevalent problem, although the implications are not always so acute.

A second issue is the extent to which fragmentary texts are susceptible to re-construction. In Athens the predilection of the masons for the so-called *stoichedon* style, where the letters are aligned vertically and horizontally, is a stimulus to restoration. For the style, which contrary to the views of some ideologues of Classical Antiquity, is common in many parts of the world (notably China), appears to allow the exact calculation of the number of letters in a line, particularly since the masons normally did not divide words or even sentences but inscribed the text continuously, using every square. In practice, however, numerous anomalies are to be observed, and, of course, knowing the number of the letters cannot always provide security for restoration. This is a fundamental dilemma for epigraphists, particularly since historians are as apt to ignore texts which are left unrestored as they are to repose blind faith in those that are. Whilst agreeing that restoration is

more helpful than not, I restrict myself here to the observation that only letters that are actually preserved on the stone can be taken to be incontrovertible and that reconstruction is strictly illustrative.

A number of devices have been invented to assist in the study of inscriptions. Amongst these is the so-called *squeeze*, which to the disappointment of the more imaginative enthusiasts is not an expression of affection between consenting epigraphists but a paper impression of the inscribed surface of a stone, acquired by applying wet paper to the wetted surface with a brush. In practice it is an excellent medium for archival and study purposes, and there are major collections (for example) at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton and in Oxford and La Trobe Universities in the United Kingdom and Australia respectively. *En passant* and in lighthearted vein I feel bound to mention that the popularity of the squeeze has had an elevating effect upon the humble long-handled brush, which in Athens under the designation 'archaeological brush' now sells for ten times its normal price.

By way of conclusion I turn to three classic instances where our epigraphical gadfly has cast into doubt the testimony of major ancient historians and in the process has puzzled modern interpreters.

Firstly, Thucydides, as is well known, provides a synoptic account of the growth of Athenian power in the fifth century BC prior to the thirty-year-long Peloponnesian War. This widely admired account has had to be greatly modified as a result of the discovery of firstly a large archive of public decrees regulating the affairs of the empire, and secondly a whole set of detailed accounts recording the income that accrued to Athens from its Empire. The overall effect has been to suggest that in his account Thucydides, wittingly or otherwise, sought to whitewash his hero Perikles, particularly by down-dating the more atrocious manifestations of Athenian imperialism to the period of his political successors. In addition, another set of decrees reveals that the Athenian interest in expanding westward to Sicily and South Italy, which was to lead to the disastrous Sicilian Expedition and ultimately Athens' downfall, had a long history going well back into the Perikleian period. This would never even be guessed from the account of Thucydides.

Secondly, Herodotos, whose truthfulness was a matter of controversy even in antiquity, relates that, when the Persians pressed down into southern Greece in the great invasion of 480 BC, the Athenians at the very last moment decided to abandon the city and to flee to the nearby islands. This account has long seemed quite unexceptionable in contrast to some of his more imaginative flights of fancy. But a stone *stèle*, found in the late 1950s and published in 1960 seems to controvert him—for it purports to be a decree proposed by none other than Themistokles, the Athenian commander at the subsequent Battle of Salamis, and it provides for an orderly evacuation much earlier. The evidence in this case is complicated because this *stèle* was

found in Troizen (not Athens) where it had been employed in recent years as a door slab, and as a result had been damaged; also the text was clearly inscribed not in the fifth but in the **third century BC**. But there are traces of archaising language in the text, consonant with it being a copy of an earlier document, and it is known that a decree attributed to Themistokles was still available for consultation in Athens in the second half of the fourth century BC, because the orator Aischines quotes from it. But is *this stele* a copy of that decree or is it a forgery? Opinions differ—but in favour of authenticity it is surely likely that a forger would have assimilated his text to the well known account of Herodotos rather than risk seemingly obvious exposure by making it different.

Finally, an inscription has seriously impugned the account of the overthrow of the Thirty Tyrants and the re-establishment of democracy in Athens at the end of the fifth century BC given by Xenophon. Xenophon's account of this complicated period is admittedly rather flimsy, but the testimony of the decree shows only too clearly that his oligarchic leanings caused him to suppress, or at least distort, a highly significant event—namely the fact that the democracy was only restored with the assistance of a large number of foreigners, some of whom were rewarded with Athenian citizenship. The text in question is not easy to interpret but the salient points are readily summarised. There are four fragments, all badly worn and hard to read, comprising in total somewhat less than half of the original text (one found on the Akropolis in 1894, one copied in the Peiraieus early in the present century but now lost, and two found as classic examples of re-use in a shrine on the island of Aigina in 1952); the text is inscribed on front and back and it comprises a decree (on the front at the top) followed by columns of names of benefactors. The fragments have been reconstructed by the present author to show that the *stèle* had three lists containing three separate categories of persons receiving honours. All are foreigners, some of them of very lowly, even servile, status and all were given important privileges in Athens. The total number of beneficiaries amounted to almost one thousand persons—a very large number in relation to the citizen population of Athens at the time. Clearly the granting of privileges, including citizenship, to so large a group must have been a truly sensational event; and the existence of the stone decree certifies that such a grant was not just proposed but put into effect. It is easy to believe that Xenophon would have heartily disapproved of such a measure; but we now know that his disapproval led him to suppress it in his history, never thinking that fragments of the stone monument would re-surface 2,300 years later to expose his xenophobia and to give further evidence for the shortcomings of his miserable chronicles.

To conclude

Inscriptions are in one sense the lifeblood of the ancient world and they will continue to appear to surprise and enlighten us regularly. But they are in a very real sense gadflies, regularly bringing to light the shortcomings of historians ancient and modern alike and stigmatising them with the silent but relentless censure of authentic evidence.

Note

A fully illustrated version of this Lecture along with an introduction by Professor Anthony Low; Timothy Potts, Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, on Trendall and the National Gallery of Victoria, and the launch of an international Trendall Memorial Appeal on behalf of the AD Trendall Research Centre for Mediterranean Studies at La Trobe University by Professor Richard Green is available from the Academy secretariat.