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Review [of *Dying on Foreign Shores: Travel and
Mobility in the Late-Antique West* by Mark Handley]

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Dying on Foreign Shores: Travel and Mobility in the Late-Antique West

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By Mark Handley (*JRA Suppl.* 86). Pp. 167, figs. 6, graphs 8, tables 25, maps 11. *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, Portsmouth, R.I. 2011. \$69. ISBN 978-1-887829-86-1 (cloth).

In his *Homilies on Genesis*, John Chrysostom mused on the stark change in travel conditions between the time of Abraham and the late fourth century C.E. To Chrysostom, Abraham's willingness to follow the commands of God and go to an unknown place was even more remarkable given that "it was not possible then, as it is now, to mingle with others without apprehension and so engage in travel abroad lightly" (31.17). The relative frequency with which many traveled in the later empire is evident in Handley's *Dying on Foreign Shores*, a study that utilizes inscriptions as a means of reassessing travel and mobility in the western Roman empire during the period known as late antiquity. By focusing on an underutilized body of evidence, the author further enriches a growing genre in classics and history aimed at exploring the intricacies of travel, communication, and the commemoration of foreign identity.

Handley is well known for his mastery of Late Antique and Early Medieval inscriptions—particularly those from Spain, Gaul, Britain, and North Africa. He recognizes that while travel in the Late Antique West has been a topic of interest as of late, the epigraphic evidence has gone largely unnoticed as a means of examining migration and travel within the region, except in the case of the city of Rome (D. Noy, *Foreigners at Rome: Citizens and Strangers* [London 2000]). Handley attempts to use his carefully collected sample of 567 inscriptions—identifying 623 travelers and foreigners—dated to 300–750 C.E. to contradict the perception that the current evidence on the subject is and has been static and to question many long-held views about travel in the later empire. The concise book includes seven chapters, but the most valuable component is perhaps the extensive appendix (117–38) listing the inscriptions of the travelers and foreigners.

Handley is cautious to delineate his methodology for defining the terms "foreigner" and "traveler." Those with geographical personal names are not included in his list of foreigners for that reason alone. Such names (e.g., Macedonius) often did not denote the regional origin of the person, as he deftly illustrates through the epigraphic evidence. Similarly, the language of the inscription does not necessarily demonstrate origin, nor does being identified as a Jew, for example, automatically classify one as a foreigner. Because of the author's stringent requirements, the epigraphic corpus represents a minimum number of indisputable travelers and foreigners. After establishing his methodology, Handley delves into the question of who traveled. While travelers were mostly men, it is shown that women have a definite presence within the epigraphic record. The age of these travelers is frequently problematic to discern; often we do not know at what age people left home, but rather just the age at which they died. A key contribution of Handley is his demonstration that men and women of very high status represent only 5% of the corpus and that 81% appear to have been without a religious office. This indicates that not only did many non-elites travel in late antiquity but also that the literary record is, by comparison, more biased toward elites and clerics. In terms of occupation, it is perhaps to be expected that soldiers were the most commonly attested, followed by merchant-traders.

Another chapter explores the reasons for travel. Much in the way that inscriptions make the age of travelers difficult to determine, they also rarely suggest the reasons behind travel. This is yet another deficiency in the epigraphic evidence, and a key reason why textual evidence has previously been focused on more intensely: literary and epistolary evidence often provides more information about the date and impetus for travel. As one might deduce from the heavy representation of soldiers within Handley's corpus, military service was often a key reason for travel. Others traveled to trade, to flee into exile, were refugees from their homeland, were migrating in search of job opportunities, or were perhaps depositing relics—though Handley is quick to point out that ecclesiastical business is little attested within the epigraphic record.

A caveat lies in overemphasizing what epigraphy allows us to do in ancient history. Epigraphy was a cultural habit rather than a uniform practice, and while Handley warns the reader that many prominent Late Antique towns have left few inscriptions to posterity (19) and that much travel occurred "without ever finding an echo on

stone” (37), there should be more emphasis on the ways in which regional and temporal variations in epigraphic habits can skew our views of the past. Handley does recognize the eventual decrease in epigraphic habit and the resulting death of the source material, but there remains an inherent danger in grounding too many grand assertions on such a relatively small number of inscriptions, spread as it is over a large area during a 450-year period. In many cases, it would take only a few new inscriptions to shift the delineated patterns significantly.

The epigraphic evidence presented in this volume helps to conjure a more complex and multidirectional web of travel and communication in the Mediterranean. Indeed, similar conclusions are reached in Hezser’s recent *Jewish Travel in Antiquity* (Tübingen 2011), which, while apparently unseen by Handley, uses epigraphic and textual evidence to illustrate greater interconnectivity and increased travel in the later empire—though predominantly in the East. In addition to an accessible corpus of inscriptions, Handley’s findings question assertions from key scholars within the field, as when he argues (65) that Mathisen’s (*Roman Aristocrats in Barbarian Gaul: Strategies for Survival in an Age of Transition* [Austin 1993]) belief in the Gallic aversion to travel is too heavily based on select epistolary evidence. Moreover, he expands the role of Syrians in the Latin West by indicating that they were engaged in varied occupations—not just the merchant role for which they have been singled out in scholarship. In so doing, Handley opens the doors for a more intensive study of easterners in the late Latin West.

Although the volume is not intended to provide a grandiose study of all travel in the Late Antique West, the material successfully provides a base from which to question, amend, and perhaps revise previously held perceptions of travel in the later empire—this time with a keener ear for the individual voices of the traveling non-elites, women, and children often uniquely heard in the epigraphic evidence.

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