I.Sicily as a Tool for the Study of Roman Sicily: An Experiment in Institutional Annotation[1]

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EN **Abstract.**[1] Study of Roman Sicily is well established and has a long tradition, with the two most authoritative and well-established epigraphic corpora –*CIL* X (1883) and *IG* XIV (1890)– dating to the late 19th century. While *I.Sicily* was conceived to offer easy and up-to-date access to the ever-growing but increasingly scattered epigraphic evidence of Sicily, its digital nature also enables the adoption of new approaches and the pursuit of novel research questions. The open-access dataset has recently been expanded to include institutional annotations, which hold great promise for research, particularly in fields that rely on extensive and detailed datasets, such as administrative and onomastic history (prosopographic annotation will follow). This paper aims to demonstrate both the potential and the limitations of a digitally annotated dataset as a tool for historical research, through a preliminary case study on the practice of dedications to the Roman emperor in Sicily. Recent scholarship suggests that provincial subjects also contributed to shaping the notion and the expectations around emperorship, which were not only imposed from above. The data-driven approach facilitated by an annotated corpus is well-suited to the new bottom-up perspective, but it is not without methodological pitfalls, which will be highlighted in this paper.
Keywords: digital epigraphy; FAIR epigraphy; Digital Humanities; Roman emperor; Roman provinces.

ES *I.Sicily* como herramienta para el estudio de la Sicilia romana: una experiencia en anotación institucional.

ES **Resumen.** El estudio de Sicilia en época romana cuenta con una dilatada tradición en la investigación moderna, entre cuyos resultados se encuentran dos de los repertorios epigráficos más sólidos y reconocidos –*CIL* X (1883) e *IG* XIV (1890)– fechados a finales del siglo XIX. Si bien *I.Sicily* fue diseñado para ofrecer un acceso sencillo y actualizado a la creciente, y cada vez más dispersa, evidencia epigráfica de Sicilia, su naturaleza digital también permite la adopción

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de nuevos enfoques y la formulación de hipótesis de trabajo novedosas. En este sentido, el conjunto de datos en *open access* ha sido ampliado, recientemente, para incluir anotaciones institucionales, lo que ofrece importantes posibilidades, especialmente en ámbitos de estudio que dependen de conjuntos de datos extensos y detallados, caso de la historia administrativa y onomástica (las anotaciones prosopográficas serán incluidas con posterioridad). Este artículo, a través de un estudio de caso inicial sobre la práctica de las dedicatorias al emperador romano en Sicilia, tiene por objeto demostrar tanto el potencial como las limitaciones que posee un conjunto de datos anotados digitalmente como herramienta de investigación histórica. A este respecto, la historiografía actual ha sugerido que los provinciales también contribuyeron a dar forma a la noción y las expectativas en torno al emperador, las cuales no fueron impuestas solamente desde la administración central. La aproximación basada en datos que facilita un corpus anotado se adapta adecuadamente a la nueva perspectiva *bottom-up* ("desde abajo hacia arriba"), si bien, como se pondrá de manifiesto en este artículo, no está exenta de dificultades metodológicas.

Palabras clave: epigrafía digital; principios FAIR; Humanidades Digitales; emperador romano; provincias romanas.

Sumario: 1. I.Sicily: a digital corpus of the inscriptions of Sicily. 2. The advantages of going digital. 3. RoleNames, PyEpiDoc and I.Sicily: preliminary studies into imperial imagery in Roman Sicily. 4. Conclusions. 5. Bibliography

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Study of Roman Sicily is well established and has a long tradition, with modern scholarship beginning with the major work of Adolf Holm in the late 19th century.[2] Similarly, the data for such study, particularly the epigraphic data has also long been collected, with *CIL* X (1883) and *IG* XIV (1890) also dating to the late 19th century. However, the lack of easy access to the ever-growing but increasingly scattered evidence for the island's history makes this increasingly challenging, especially when confronting topics that depend upon extensive and detailed datasets, such as institutional or onomastic history. Such historical research seems particularly suited to the application of digital and even computational methods, although this is necessarily predicated upon the need for accessible and reliable datasets. In the following paper we briefly test this assumption by exploiting the *I.Sicily* digital epigraphic corpus for the island, extending the dataset with reference to institutional history and subjecting it to preliminary analysis in order to shed light on the practice of dedications to the Roman emperor in this particular region of the Empire. In addition to offering some new insights on that specific practice, we hope to illustrate the potential and value of such open access digital datasets and tools for historical research.

1. I.Sicily: a digital corpus of the inscriptions of Sicily

I.Sicily is an open-access, born-digital corpus of the epigraphic documents of ancient Sicily, with a public interface at https://sicily.classics.ox.ac.uk.[3] The project includes texts in all languages, from the first appearance of written texts on the island in the Archaic period (in the 7th century BCE) through to Late Antiquity (with an approximate upper limit of the 7th century CE). Although the project has initially focused upon texts carved on stone, the long-term ambition is to include texts on all materials and object types, including coin legends. Texts and associated metadata are

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[2]   Holm 1898.
[3]   For earlier and more detailed presentations and discussions, see in particular Prag and Chartrand 2018, Prag 2019, Prag 2021, and cf. https://isicily.org (accessed 13.02.2024).

encoded using the TEI-EpiDoc XML standard and images are made available via IIIF.[4] All material is published under a CC-BY 4.0 licence.[5]

The project is a long-term work-in-progress, subject to continuous updating and extension. The corpus was first made available online at the start of 2017 and has been continuously revised from that date; since October 2020 it has been part of the ERC Advanced Grant "Crossreads", which has facilitated substantial expansion and much of the technical development underpinning this paper.[6] URIs (which resolve as URLs) are maintained for each individual inscription, of the form sicily.classics.ox.ac.uk/inscription/ISic000312.[7] Individual inscription records (XML files) contain detailed records of revisions (date, nature of the change, responsibility), although the publicly visible web version currently only surfaces the date of the most recent revision (complete information can be accessed by clicking the link to view the underlying XML directly). Users should recognise that citing the URI will point to the most recent revision, and so the file reached via such a citation may change over time. Static deposits of the XML files are made at irregular intervals in the Zenodo open access repository, providing an archived snapshot of previous stages in development; the latest deposit reflects the state of the XML as used in this paper.[8] The primary copies of the files are stored and edited using the GitHub developer platform, and it is therefore possible to trace and retrieve all past revisions via the public GitHub repository (and to propose changes and revisions directly via a GitHub pull request).[9] If stable citation of a specific version of an inscription record is important, users may wish to consider making their own copy and depositing it in an open access repository as per the CC-BY licence (for instance in Zenodo) to enable long-term stable reference.[10]

We emphasise this aspect at the outset because it is perhaps a less recognised consequence of this mode of digital publication. Traditional corpus publication is often long-delayed precisely because of the scale of work required, both in gathering material and preparing it for publication, and due to the fact that publication cannot be undertaken until all the material is finalised. In order to make the material available to both the research community and the wider public as soon as possible, we choose to publish that part of the material which we have as soon as it is ready. Consequently many files in the corpus are listed as "draft", signifying that as a minimum basic information has been included, together with a working text, either based upon a previously published edition or initial autopsy (the source will be stated explicitly in the file). In many cases these files will be quite fully developed, but simply not finalised. A text listed as "edited" has been fully checked, including full autopsy if the inscription survives. A diminishing number of texts are listed as "unchecked", signifying a preliminary file containing minimal data drawn from published material and with an unchecked text or no text. The user should pay careful attention to the stated source of the online edition (reported explicitly in the apparatus) and the state of editorial work.

At the time of writing (February 2024), the corpus contains 4694 inscription records, of which 3153 are on stone.[11] Although work has to date focused on texts written on stone, the majority of known texts on metal (301) are also already included (excluding *instrumentum domesticum*, such as strigils; *signacula* will be included soon), and a significant number of texts on ceramic (931) have also been incorporated, principally texts incised on ceramic from the Archaic and Classical

4   https://epidoc.stoa.org/ (accessed 13.02.2024) and https://iiif.io/ (accessed 13.02.2024).
5   https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.en (accessed 13.02.2024).
6   https://crossreads.web.ox.ac.uk/ (accessed 13.02.2024).
7   URIs always have 6 digits, padded as necessary with zeros to the left.
8   All versions can be retrieved under the DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.2556743 (e.g. via https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2556743; the release 0.4beta, dated 12.04.2024 reflects the dataset used in this paper.
9   https://github.com/ISicily/ISicily (accessed 13.02.2024).
10   As, for example, at: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4338085.
11   For comparison: EDR (http://www.edr-edr.it/default/index.php accessed 13.02.2024) currently contains 3390 records for Sicily, of which 1837 are classified as stone; EDCS (http://www.manfredclauss.de/ accessed 13.02.2024) returns 6244 records for Sicily, of which 2615 are classified as stone (but only 3932 have a material classification, and many of the unclassified ones are e.g. Greek stamps or *instrumenta*; and there are duplicate records).

periods. The long-term ambition is to include texts on all materials/objects, including coin legends, but probably excluding brick stamps. However, the immediate priority is the completion of the corpus on stone.

The preliminary creation of the corpus was based upon the gathering of metadata and bibliographic references from published material (work between c.2001 and 2015). Since 2014 and the signing of a formal collaboration with the Museo Archeologico Regionale "Paolo Orsi", Siracusa, data has instead been gathered primarily through autopsy, combining identification, formal recording, transcription, and photography. This work has developed alongside a growing number of formal collaborations with the museums, archaeological parks, and Soprintendenze of the island, supported by a formal convention signed with the Assessorato regionale dei beni culturali e dell'identità siciliana on 17 January 2022. To date approximately 2,500 inscriptions have been located, studied, and in most cases photographed. Not all of this material has yet been published online, due to the limited human resources available for data processing.

In the discussion that follows inscriptions will primarily be cited via their *I.Sicily* number. As noted, these take the form "*ISic*123456", and can be resolved directly online by appending this number to the URL http://sicily.classics.ox.ac.uk/inscription/, as in http://sicily.classics.ox.ac.uk/inscription/ISic000002. Each online edition presents an extensive bibliography of previous published editions, enabling the reader to find the *editio princeps* or other editions. It is also possible to generate extensive concordances with earlier published corpora through the *I.Sicily* search interface.[12]

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2. The advantages of going digital

Transforming an epigraphic corpus into a digital format has multiple advantages. Most fundamentally, a digital corpus has the potential to be both more accessible and more up-to-date than traditional paper corpora –and ideally, therefore, more complete (although this is not a given, and of course depends upon the quality of the data compilation). The relevant volumes of *CIL* and *IG* for Sicily are c.130 years old and although various subsets of material, such as individual museum collections, have been published since, there is no more recent –and no complete– corpus in either Greek or Latin. This has a direct consequence for any attempt to synthesise material, since as a minimum it entails very extensive work simply to gather the necessary material (especially when confronted by the tendency to treat Greek and Latin material separately). More than this, however, it has the further consequence that data tends to be assembled in a non-transparent way for individual studies, making it very difficult to reproduce any particular piece of research.[13] Emblematic is the study by Giacomo Manganaro of Sicily under the Roman Empire, founded upon a unique knowledge of the epigraphic material, but upon a highly idiosyncratic and personal collection of material, which may or may not be representative of the material as a whole.[14]

The same problem can be seen in attempts to gather specific datasets for institutional analysis and study, such as Robert Sherk's assembling of the evidence for eponymous magistrates in Sicily, or Prag's study of municipal institutional evidence from Sicily as part of the EMIRE project.[15] These examples reveal two further problems: the difficulty of updating such studies; and the difficulty of understanding the categories and principles employed to assemble the data. Sherk's study has been updated once, but with each such update (especially when conducted by different scholars) the degree of transparency and consistency in the data, and indeed the confidence levels in the

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12   See https://isicily.org/how-to/#search for further guidance on using the search interface.
13   Although developed in relation to the sciences, the FAIR principles should be no less applicable to humanities research when it is based upon the evaluation of data; see Wilkinson *et al.* 2016; cf. Prag 2019.
14   Manganaro 1988. Because it is possible to search *I.Sicily* by publication reference, it would theoretically be possible to analyse Manganaro's selection of material (see http://sicily.classics.ox.ac.uk/publication/RZSFKACR); however, this article has yet to be fully annotated in the dataset, so the result is still a work-in-progress.
15   Sherk 1993; Prag 2008.

data's quality, become steadily less.[16] The alternative is to repeat the original work of data gathering, which may be far from simple depending on how the original data was referenced, as well as being a frustrating waste of effort. Prag's study was part of a larger programme which, however, never established strict data principles and from which the parallel datasets are no longer available (only the derivative publications discussing them). The data gathered by Prag in 2008 is still available, but lacks supporting documentation and is consequently of very limited value.[17]

However, a suitably encoded or organised digital dataset offers the potential on the one hand to assemble such datasets for study primarily through automatic (and therefore much quicker) searches; and on the other to repeat the same analysis in the future incorporating additional data. Furthermore, it should be possible to save and make available the subset of data gathered in such analysis, enabling others to view, critique, re-use and develop the same dataset. As with any digital dataset, the data that can be extracted is only as good as the original data input and encoding. In the case of *I.Sicily*, the choice of EpiDoc XML grants a significant degree of flexibility: because XML is extensible, it is possible to extend and expand the types of data that are encoded in the inscriptions and the associated metadata, even if such data was not part of the original work of corpus building. Furthermore, by using collaborative platforms such as GitHub it is possible for multiple researchers to expand and enrich the dataset cumulatively over time, either as part of the same dataset, or as parallel derivative datasets. Thus, although the epigraphic texts in *I.Sicily* were initially only encoded to report the state of the text on the stone (i.e. reflecting what is traditionally marked up using the Leiden conventions in a paper publication), they are now being encoded with information about the text's content (i.e. what would traditionally be captured in the compilation of an index of particular terms or categories in a paper publication). Such encoding can be extremely rich, including, for example, the dictionary lemmatisation of the individual words or the prosopographical annotation of names in the texts. For the purposes of this study, we have focused on surfacing some of the institutional information reflected in the above studies by Sherk and Prag.

EpiDoc permits the tagging of individual types of data within the texts with supporting information (such as words, names, or numerals), in turn enabling rich searching and indexing. One such "tag" or "element" is "roleName", intended to capture particular social roles and positions.[18] We chose "roleName" for the purposes of this study, since it was a task of realistic practical scope to demonstrate the potential of such an approach. Using the oXygen XML editor, and working through GitHub, Alfredo Tosques undertook the tagging of all such terms across the *I.Sicily* files.[19] In addition to the individual positions (captured as values on the "subtype" attribute), roles were also classified (using the "type" attribute) according to whether they were civic, paracivic, or supracivic, and military or religious, to enable more nuanced filtering.[20] The resulting preliminary index is already available as a CSV file online, and will be used to refine the types and subtypes and ensure consistency. The resulting authority list is then potentially available for alignment

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[16] Di Veroli 1996. Examples of such attempts can be multiplied, e.g. Ghinati 1964-1965, Ghinatti 2004, Cordano 2012.

[17] Data at DOI: 10.5287/bodleian:pzMe0PZAk.

[18] As per the TEI guidelines, <roleName> "contains a name component which indicates that the referent has a particular role or position in society, such as an official title or rank" (https://www.tei-c.org/release/doc/tei-p5-doc/en/html/ref-roleName.html). The EpiDoc guidelines (https://epidoc.stoa.org/gl/latest/idx-titlesoffices.html) ignore the use of <roleName>, limiting advice to either lemmatisation or the more generic <rs> with @type, but it is not clear why, unless because it is assumed to be used only when forming part of an individual's name; and yet, as the TEI guidelines state, "like a title, it typically exists independently of its holder", and so this seems an unnecessary restriction.

[19] Gaulus (Gozo) and Melita (Malta) are not considered in this preliminary study: although formally they were part of *provincia Sicilia*, inscriptions for these islands have yet to be systematically included in *I.Sicily*, and so as of 31 March 2024 are not annotated either.

[20] A full preliminary list of the terms so tagged, and of the files/inscriptions in which they each appear, can be found at https://zenodo.org/doi/10.5281/zenodo.10965907; this list, and the tagging will be refined and republished over time. Supporting documentation can be found on the *I.Sicily* wiki, at: https://github.com/ISicily/ISicily/wiki.

with existing vocabularies, to facilitate linked data publication in the future.[21] This is a significant manual task, and it could be argued firstly that the same immediate end could be achieved simply by collecting all the files containing such terms and making a list; and it is also true that the larger task of lemmatising the texts would enable one to search for the same individual terms (such as "consul", "duumvir" or "imperator"). The task remains worthwhile, however, firstly because it enables one automatically to build up an index of such terms from their identification in the files (rather than trying to guess *a priori* what terms are used for institutional functions and then word-searching for them); secondly, because in combination with lemmatisation, it will facilitate the study of phenomena such as changes in translation of technical terms over time; thirdly because the search can be repeated indefinitely and new data can be added simply by encoding any new inscriptions in the same way; and fourthly because such an indexed category does not exist in isolation, as it would in a paper publication, but in a digital corpus can be cross-referenced against any and all other categories of data that have been encoded in the files. Thus, in the case of "roleNames", a category such as "consul" can be captured whether it appears as *consul* (Latin) or *hypatos* (Greek), or in the abstract as *consulatus* or *hypatia*; but also filtered according to language or any other encoded data field, such as geography, inscription type, date, etc., enabling a much more fine-grained and contextualised analysis of usage.

As a final practical point, it should be noted that this roleName data cannot currently be accessed for searching through the existing *I.Sicily* web interface at http://sicily.classics.ox.ac.uk (although it is likely to be available in the next iteration of the web interface currently under development). As described in the next section, however, precisely because the data is encoded using a documented international coding standard, it is possible to use basic coding tools such as Python in order to extract the information from the files, which are all available in open access. This principle extends more generally to any openly available EpiDoc corpus –namely, that through the use of basic coding tools it is possible to extract any information that has been encoded from such a body of material for the purposes of research, potentially well beyond that which was imagined by the original corpus creators.

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3. RoleNames, PyEpiDoc and I.Sicily: preliminary studies into imperial imagery in Roman Sicily

Developed by Robert Crellin within the framework of the Crossreads project, PyEpiDoc is a Python library designed to parse and interact with TEI XML EpiDoc files. Therefore, although initially conceived as a digital tool for working with the *I.Sicily* corpus, PyEpiDoc can be used with any corpus of EpiDoc files, lending itself to being used for comparisons with other corpora and research on other regions than Sicily. As of February 2024, PyEpiDoc is still under development, but is also available publicly under an open source licence.[22] Consequently, this section only serves as a preliminary introduction, offering initial insights into how its application to exploit EpiDoc mark-up of the type described above can bolster research on Roman Sicily –and, more broadly, the ancient world– through a case-study of imperial terminology.

Throughout the imperial history of Rome and across its various provinces, the emperor stood at the centre of a rich language of images and symbols, manifested across various media such as inscriptions, coins and statues.[23] Although the creation, dissemination and innovation of this repertoire of images were formerly conceived of as a top-down process, partly akin to propaganda, recent scholarship has highlighted the active participation of local agents in a discourse about the emperor.[24] This emphasis on the neglected role of other actors in the provinces entails a bottom-

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[21] Although it is not clear that there is yet a suitable published authority list available, other than individual Wikipedia pages for specific magistracies, such as https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_consul.

[22] For full information on PyEpiDoc, including instructions on how to install and run the library, see the Github repository: https://github.com/rsdc2/PyEpiDoc.

[23] Hellström – Russell 2020, 2.

[24] A summary of scholarly debate on this topic in Hekster 2020, 275-79.

up approach to imperial imagery and the notion of emperorship. Already in Zanker's influential *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder* (1987), imperial ideology does not result merely from a rigid imposition from above in purposely-designed propaganda.[25] In fact, the different expectations of subjects, changing from place to place and time to time, and their creative innovation also played a key role in shaping the emperor's image.[26] The acknowledgment of this plurality of diverse attitudes to the emperorship across the Empire requires a closer attention to local trends and features, as evidenced in different media such as sculpture, inscriptions and coins.[27] Rather than a uniform adaptation to images imposed from above, the reality across the Empire is likely to be a multifaceted picture characterised by various local nuances, shaped by the different expectations about the emperor in the different areas of the Roman world.[28]

Such regional specificities and diversity in imperial imagery can be easily captured through the filtering and analysis of a suitably marked-up EpiDoc corpus such as *I.Sicily*, in this case facilitated by the PyEpiDoc library. The proliferation of similarly annotated corpora will enable more extensive inter-regional comparisons across the different provinces of the Roman Empire. Although numismatic evidence would be of considerable interest for this question, *I.Sicily* currently does not include coinage and this study is limited to stone inscriptions (but the potential of linked open data means that in future a study across both e.g. *I.Sicily* and *Roman Provincial Coinage* begins to look like a possibility).[29] Since *I.Sicily* does not classify inscription types at the level of "imperial dedication" (and even if it did, such a category is not easily defined and likely to be too blunt a category), a digital investigation into this topic can begin by searching the entire corpus for instances of *imperator*, marked up in EpiDoc TEI as a subtype within the <roleName> element.[30]

By filtering by <roleName subtype="imperator">, PyEpiDoc provides a list of all the texts in which this term is used within a selected EpiDoc corpus, regardless of the grammatical inflection. After a first search, we learn that 54 inscriptions including at least a <roleName subtype="imperator"> are present in the *I.Sicily* epigraphic corpus.[31] However, searching only by <roleName subtype="imperator">, without any further instruction, yields an incoherent set of inscriptions: apart from honorific titles addressed by local communities to the Roman emperor, results of the search also include dedications set up in the context of the imperial cult, building projects funded by the imperial house and members of local elites showing off their proximity to the emperor. Additionally, in the later Empire a small number of funerary inscriptions mentions the emperor, but primarily as a dating mechanism.[32] While other genres of inscription should not be completely overlooked, honorific inscriptions set up by civic communities or local magistrates and directed to the emperor arguably represent the primary evidence for

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[25] Zanker 1987, 3.
[26] See Russell – Hellström 2020, following the methodological framework of Dench 2018, 34-35. Bönisch-Meyer 2020 conceives of the development of imperial nomenclature as shaped by "dialogue requests" (*Dialogangebote*). Hekster 2022, 13-17 highlights the "great expectations" influencing the behaviour of the emperor.
[27] Hekster 2015, 30-37.
[28] Hekster 2022, 43-45.
[29] Note that the production of local coinage in the West stopped under Claudius (Howgego 1995, 58), and already under Tiberius in Sicily (Burnett *et alii* 1998, 167). *Roman Provincial Coinage Online*, at https://rpc. ashmus.ox.ac.uk is currently engaged in a major project leveraging AI to encode all the coin legends in EpiDoc; for numismatic LOD, see https://nomisma.org.
[30] Originally, *imperator* was a purely military honorific title awarded to a general following a spontaneous acclamation by his soldiers, as was still the case for Sextus Pompeius in *ISic*000007, dated between 39 and 36 BCE. It was under Octavian that it evolved into the praenomen of the *princeps* (Magioncalda 1991, 4-7). His successors Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero (until 66 CE) refused this title, which was fully restored by Vespasian (Magioncalda 1991, 27-28).
[31] All the figures in this paper are reflective of the *I.Sicily* corpus in February 2024; repeating this analysis in future will show some variation consequent upon the continuous updating of the corpus.
[32] E.g. *ISic*000084 = *CIL* 10.7330 ("hic requiescit in pace / Petrus Alexandrinus / negotia(n)s linatarius / qui vixit an(nos) pl(us) m(inus) LX dep(ositus) / sub die XI Kal(endas) Februari/as ***Imp(eratore)*** d(omi)n(o) n(ostro) Mauricio / Tiberio p(er)p(etuo) Aug(usto) an(no) XX p(ost) c(onsulatum) eius/dem an(no) XVIII ind(ictione) quinta"), which can be dated precisely to 603 CE by the information about the reigning emperor.

provincial understandings and expectations about the ruler. In order to highlight some local patterns and features in imperial imagery in Roman Sicily, we can identify a more suitable set of inscriptions (46) by adding an additional filter, using the text class of honorific inscriptions.[33] This step excludes religious dedications related to the imperial cult, as well as building and funerary inscriptions that mention the emperor. However, this still retains a handful of honorific inscriptions for local notables, which can be easily edited out. Notably, only one post-Diocletian emperor –Valentinian I, mentioned in two inscriptions from Lilybaeum– can be identified in this new list, which reflects the shift to "*dominus*" as the preferred imperial title in the later Empire.[34] To include the latter title, one can filter by <roleName subtype="dominus"> and <textClass> with "function.honorific" and integrate the results (9) with our initial list.[35] Table 1 presents the results of this digital research, efficiently completed in just three steps: the inscriptions in the list are addressed not only to the emperor but, particularly in the Severan dynasty, also to members of the imperial family (underlined); a few local individuals and officeholders boasting their proximity to the emperor are highlighted in black.

Table 1. Imperial honorifics in Sicily

ISic	Name	ISic	Name
*ISic*000011	Marcus Aurelius	*ISic*000506	Tiberius
*ISic*000012	Septimius Severus	*ISic*000507	Domitian
*ISic*000013	Julia Domna	*ISic*000508	Caracalla
*ISic*000015	Caracalla (heir)	*ISic*000509	Valentinian I
*ISic*000016	Septimius Severus	*ISic*000510	Valentinian I
*ISic*000017	Geta	*ISic*000517	a Sicilian senator
*ISic*000018	Septimius Severus	*ISic*000582	Augustus
*ISic*000019	Caracalla	*ISic*000676	Probus (?)
*ISic*000020	Elagabalus	*ISic*000679	Septimius, Caracalla and Geta
*ISic*000021	Severus Alexander	*ISic*000695	Trajan
*ISic*000024	Diocletian	*ISic*000707	Marcus Aurelius (and Verus?)
*ISic*000025	Maximinus Daza	*ISic*000724	(Augustus?)
*ISic*000026	Licinian	*ISic*000726	Trajan
*ISic*000063	Trajan	*ISic*000816	aedile
*ISic*000064	Marcus Aurelius (heir)	*ISic*001102	procurator
*ISic*000065	Marcus Aurelius	*ISic*001673	Caracalla
*ISic*000066	Lucius Verus	*ISic*002907	Poppaea and Nero
*ISic*000068	Julia Mamaea	*ISic*002908	Caracalla and Geta
*ISic*000069	Valerianus, Gallienus' son	*ISic*003333	soldier
*ISic*000091	Septimius Severus	*ISic*003584	praetorian prefect
*ISic*000279	Caracalla	*ISic*003585	Julia Soaemias

[33] Epigraphic types are encoded in *I.Sicily* using the <textClass> element, aligned with the EAGLE type vocabulary (http://www.eagle-network.eu/voc/typeins.html), and specified in a local authority list maintained at https://github.com/ISicily/ISicily/blob/master/alists/ISicily-taxonomies.xml; honorifics are "function.honorific", aligned to http://www.eagle-network.eu/voc/typeins/lod/69.html.

[34] Magioncalda 1991, 81-82 and Hekster 2022, 32 (see also the graph.1.1 on p. 33, showing the evolution of different titles in the imperial nomenclature).

[35] Out of 9 honorific inscriptions bearing the title *dominus*, only four (*ISic*000025, *ISic*000026, *ISic*000484, *ISic*001102) do not overlap with the list of honorific texts including *imperator*.

*ISic*000281	Commodus		*ISic*003586	Marcus Julius Philippus the younger
*ISic*000482	Hadrian		*ISic*003587	Trajan Decius
*ISic*000483	Furia Sabina		*ISic*003588	Volusianus
*ISic*000484	Constantine		*ISic*004371	Domitia
*ISic*000491	a praefectus imperatoris		*ISic*004406	Caracalla

A more specific set of evidence for Sicily's imperial honorific imagery is constituted by the inscriptions where the sitting emperor, presented in the dative case, is the exclusive recipient of dedications from the city, distinct from any members of his family. The syntactic structure of this genre of epigraphic texts –with the local community at large or, more specifically, its magistrates featuring in the nominative case– suggests that these dedications were produced at the initiative of local agents, albeit within a framework of negotiated discourse. Conversely, instances where the term *imperator* appears in the nominative case suggest the emperor's role as an active agent or benefactor, often in the context of funding civic projects, rather than as the recipient of honours.[36] Therefore, such instances, denoting imperial evergetism, should be differentiated from dedications that indicate the active engagement of provincial communities with imperial ideology. Table 2 provides a comprehensive list of imperial dedications grouped by their original location, also encompassing fragmentary inscriptions lacking the term *imperator* in their surviving text. Unlike Table 1, Table 2 also includes a handful of inscriptions (underlined) that are not found by our two <roleName> queries using PyEpiDoc above, but are integrated from previous studies or further research in *I.Sicily*.[37] Indeed, given the variety in these dedications and the evolving nature of imperial imagery, two tags are hardly sufficient to capture all instances; a problem that is further exacerbated by the uncertainty that accompanies fragmentary texts. However, these particular instances, concentrated in Late Antiquity, indicate that "*imperator*" and even "*dominus*", while not entirely sufficient to identify a complete list of imperial dedications, come very close to our aim: the exceptions are few and concentrate in 270-320 CE, likely reflecting an evolution in the public persona of the emperor during those decades. Moreover, highly fragmentary inscriptions (highlighted here in black are difficult to detect using tools like PyEpiDoc, as the presence of "*imperator*" or "*dominus*" is only likely rather than certain (and there is therefore an inherent difficulty in annotating features that may not exist in the text, and the results depend upon explicit annotation).[38]

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[36] Hurlet 2015, 178-79. For example, Trajan features in the nominative and not the dative case in ISic000063, possibly suggesting that he funded a building project.

[37] Specifically Manganaro 1988, 65-86 and Henzel 2022, 137-40.

[38] So, e.g. *ISic*000603 and *ISic*002909 are extremely fragmentary and are included in this list as potential, but not certain, instances of imperial dedications, and there is no surviving trace of the terms used in these searches. Computationally, this could be addressed with a greater degree of complexity: for example, where a term can be restored, it would be possible to use the "cert" attribute in TEI to indicate the degree of confidence and searches could be filtered accordingly (https://www.tei-c.org/release/doc/tei-p5-doc/en/html/ref-certainty.html#tei_att.cert). We may add this refinement in future.

Table 2. Honours for emperors

*ISic*000011	162-163 CE	Marcus Aurelius	Panhormus
*ISic*000012	195-211 CE	Septimius Severus	
*ISic*000016	198-199 CE	Septimius Severus	
*ISic*000018	198 CE	Septimius Severus	
*ISic*000019	218-222 CE	Caracalla	
*ISic*000020	early 3rd century CE	Elagabalus	
*ISic*000021	222-223 CE	Severus Alexander	
*ISic*000023	270 CE ca	Claudius II	
*ISic*000024	285 CE	Diocletian	
*ISic*000025	305-307 CE	Maximinus Daza (Caesar)	
*ISic*000026	314 CE	Licinius	
*ISic*000063	102-103 CE	Trajan	Tyndaris
*ISic*000065	161 CE	Marcus Aurelius	
*ISic*000066	161 CE	Lucius Verus	
*ISic*000067	early 3rd century CE	Caracalla or better Severus Alexander	
*ISic*000070	3rd-4th century CE[39]	unknown	
*ISic*000676	3rd century CE	unknown (possibly Probus?)	
*ISic*000678	176-217 CE	Commodus or Caracalla	
*ISic*000679	198-211 CE	Septimius and his sons	
*ISic*000680	300-350 CE	Constantine (?)	
*ISic*001228	198-217 CE	Caracalla	
*ISic*000091	196-197 CE	Septimius Severus	Thermae
*ISic*000279	210-217 CE	Caracalla	Tauromenium
*ISic*000281	180-190 CE	Commodus	
*ISic*000695	98-117 CE	Trajan	
*ISic*000506	18-19 CE	Tiberius	Lilybaeum
*ISic*000507	84 CE	Domitian	
*ISic*000508	213 CE	Caracalla	
*ISic*000509	364-378 CE	Valentinian I	
*ISic*000510	364-378 CE	Valentinian I	
*ISic*000810	314 CE	Constantine	
*ISic*001673	214-217 CE	Caracalla	
*ISic*004406	214-217 CE	Caracalla	
*ISic*000707	161-169 CE	Marcus Aurelius (and Verus?)	Catina
*ISic*000724	43-14 BCE	Augustus (?)	Syracusae
*ISic*000726	116 CE	Trajan	

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[39] Gundel 1953, 133-34 for a 3rd-4th century dating of the formula *devotus numini eius*, which can be used as a dating element in this inscription and in ISic000485.

*ISic*000582	12 BCE-14 CE	Augustus	
*ISic*003586	Aug 244-Aug 247 CE	Marcus Julius Philippus the Younger	Halaesa
*ISic*003587	Sep 249-Jun 251 CE	Trajan Decius	
*ISic*003588	Jun 251-Oct 253 CE	Volusianus	
*ISic*003589	14-68 CE	Julio-Claudian	
*ISic*003590	3rd century CE	unknown (Decius?)	
*ISic*000482	119 CE	Hadrian	
*ISic*000484	315-337 CE	Constantine	Mazara[40]
*ISic*000485	3rd-4th century CE	unknown, but at least two dedicatees (*devota numini eorum*)	
*ISic*000603[41]	14-37 CE	Tiberius (?)	Lipara
*ISic*001228[42]	139-161 CE	Antonius Pius	Messana
*ISic*001418[43]	2 BCE-14 CE	Augustus (?)	Agrigentum
*ISic*002907	65-66 CE	(Poppaea) and Nero	
*ISic*002908	209-212 CE	Caracalla and Geta	Piazza Armerina
*ISic*002909	1st-2nd century CE	unknown	

In both Table 1 and Table 2, it is noteworthy to observe the significant number of inscriptions dedicated to the Severans in Panhormus: three dedications to Septimius Severus (out of the five attestations across the entire island), one to Caracalla as the reigning emperor, one to Elagabalus, and one to Severus Alexander. In addition, Panhormus honoured the broader imperial family with a dedication to Septimius' son Geta, one to Caracalla prior to his succession as emperor, and two dedications to Julia Domna, Septimius' wife (see Table 3 below for dedications to female members of the imperial family). This concentration of honorific inscriptions for Septimius Severus and his family in Panhormus is unparalleled elsewhere on the island, with the possible exception of Lilybaeum, which boasts three inscriptions to Caracalla but none to Septimius. Earlier scholarship has suggested that this exceptional concentration indicates a deep loyalty of the city to the Severan dynasty, reflecting perhaps a specific local allegiance or the impact of Septimius' patronage, since Septimius Severus and, some years earlier, his brother Geta had served as governors in Sicily.[44]

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[40] Although first identified in Mazara, this inscription is set up by the *colonia Helvia Lilybitanorum*. Consequently, Manganaro 1988, 46 and Wilson 2024, 242 argue that Mazara is a vicus of Lilybaeum.

[41] This instance is not necessarily an imperial dedication, as part of the emperor's nomenclature in the genitive could also point to an imperial officeholder (e.g. *ISic*000604 also from Lipara, and cf. *ISic*000491, *ISic*001102, or ISic003584 in the table above).

[42] This inscription does not include <roleName subtype="imperator">, but is found by searching <roleName subtype="pater.patriae">. Notably, this imperial dedication is written in Greek (only two instances in Sicily) and also originates from what was probably a municipium. However, these anomalies align with the interpretation, proposed by Korhonen 2019, that this inscription was imported in early modern times from Cilicia.

[43] Like *ISic*001228, it is a rare instance of an imperial dedication in Greek from Sicily, and also originates from a *municipium* (Vera 1996, with Silvestrini 2011 for the later elevation to a colonia). The inscription was erected by an individual bearing a Roman name, but holding the local office of gymnasiarch.

[44] Bivona 1967, 209-11, Bivona 1970, 31, Prag 2008, 79, and Henzel 2022, 203-204 also highlight the development of western Sicily favoured by better connections with Africa. Pfuntner 2016, 452-56 argues that this factor should not be overstated, suggesting that these imperial dedications do not merely reflect privileged relationships with Septimius and his family, but a long process of western Sicily's integration into the Mediterranean networks culminating in the Severan age (see Prag (forthcoming) for the distinct connectivity of this region, dating back to the Hellenistic age and oriented towards the western Mediterranean).

However, the history of the Palermo epigraphic collection is perhaps worth recalling briefly, as it could offer essential context for understanding the unparalleled number of imperial dedications to the Severans in this centre. These honorific monuments addressed to the emperor and his family (*ISic*000011-*ISic*000013, *ISic*000015-*ISic*000024; note that *ISic*000012-*ISic*000021 are all addressed to the Severans) are part of a small set of inscriptions that had already been assembled by the Palermo Senate in 1586 and was displayed outside the Palazzo Pretorio (nowadays known as Palazzo delle Aquile) until 1764, later being gifted to the Palermo Museum.[45] This original core of the Palermo epigraphic collection is highly selective, largely consisting of imperial statue bases from Panhormus. The early formation of this collection, sponsored by the Palermo Senate and not a private antiquarian, suggests that it may have been selectively assembled primarily with the intention of illustrating and celebrating the Roman past of Palermo and its loyalty to the emperor. This does not undermine, within the Palermo collection, the presence of a peak under the early Severans, but should caution against comparing this exceptional density with other civic centres where –as far as the extant evidence enables us to know– Septimius and his family received fewer dedications. The high number of dedications to Septimius Severus and his close relatives still indicates an outburst of honorific activity in that age (which also aligns with the peak of the "epigraphic habit" identified by MacMullen), but was probably not as exceptional in comparison with other centres –where inscriptions primarily emerged from modern excavations– as the number of surviving inscriptions might suggest.[46]

Furthermore, it is important to highlight the different agents behind these dedications: while most dedications are issued by the *res publica Panhormitanorum*, *ISic*000016 was set up by two private citizens, Maesia Fabia Titiana and Maesius Fabius Titianus, who also made a dedication to Septimius in Thermae.[47] While earlier dedications are initiated by the civic authorities, by the beginning of the 4th century imperial officeholders emerge more frequently as agents of imperial dedications: the *corrector provinciae Siciliae* Domitius Latronianus set up two dedications, featuring therefore in the nominative case (replacing the local civic communities and their elites as the agent of the dedication).[48] The different actors involved, their underlying strategies and the social dynamics at play are also essential components of a study on imperial imagery.[49]

Another geographical pattern emerges from the table above: most imperial dedications in Sicily originate from a select group of cities, notably Panhormus, Tyndaris, Lilybaeum, Tauromenium and Halaesa, all of which, except Halaesa, were Roman colonies.[50] Intriguingly, even cities known for their economic prosperity (and privileged status), such as Centuripae (tax exempt under the Republic and probably a Latin *municipium* in the early Empire), appear less involved in this practice.[51] However, it is at least worth considering that the almost complete absence of evidence from cities such as Catina, Centuripae and Syracusae is probably a by-product of the limited excavation in these city-centres, which have been subject to continuous occupation. On the other hand, the case of Agrigentum, a *colonia* from the Severan period, largely unoccupied and fairly well

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[45] Salinas 1875, 32.
[46] On epigraphic habit, see MacMullen 1982, MacMullen 1986, Bodel 2001, 6-10, Beltrán Lloris 2015 and Bodel 2023, 1-8 (and Prag 2002, esp. 25-30, for Sicily). Bönisch-Meyer 2020, 31-39 observes that the peak of imperial dedications during the Severan age was notable not just in absolute numbers but also in terms of percentage.
[47] *ISic*000091.
[48] *ISic*000026 from Panhormus and *ISic*000810 from Lilybaeum.
[49] Russell – Hellström 2020.
[50] Augustan *coloniae* were installed in Tauromenium, Catina, Syracusae, Tyndaris and Thermae Himeraeae; Panhormus also became a *colonia*, probably in the Augustan period; Agrigentum and Lilybaeum became *coloniae* in the Severan period: see Wilson 1990, 33-45 for a full discussion, with Silvestrini 2011 for the more recently attested case of Agrigentum.
[51] Pfuntner 2019, 197. Prado 2023a for a potential attestation of the imperial cult in Centuripae and Prado 2023b for an overview of the Pompeii, a wealthy Centuripae family with extensive economic and political connections across the Mediterranean.

excavated, but with very poor epigraphic survival suggests that other factors may also be at work.[52] Table 2 also suggests that Lilybaeum exhibits a considerable increase in imperial dedications from the reign of Caracalla onwards, after gaining the status of a Roman colony (*colonia Helvia Augusta Lilybitanorum*) under Septimius Severus. One might argue that the preponderance of material from Lilybaeum and Panhormus reflects a degree of competition for status between the cities of this part of the island, given that both Lilybaeum and Agrigentum gained colonial status at this point (and an earlier inscription attests to the existence of disputes between the latter two cities).[53] However, this increase primarily coincides with the peak of the epigraphic habit observed across the entire Empire between the late 2nd century CE and the early 3rd century CE, so need not reflect specifically local circumstances.[54]

Halaesa also stands out for its active engagement in dedicating a significant number of honorific inscriptions to emperors. This centre enjoyed a privileged status since the middle Republic, when it exploited its favourable geographical position on the northern coast, facilitating trade contacts with Tyrrhenian Italy. Archaeological evidence points to a shrinkage of the city –a decrease in the number of rural sites and the abandonment of some urban spaces– from the later 1st century CE, possibly prompted by shifts in trade routes.[55] Against this backdrop, it emerges as unexpected that, following some epigraphic evidence of the imperial cult and a few honorific monuments in the 1st century CE, the *res publica Halaesinorum* also erected three (and possibly four) imperial dedications to short-lived emperors in the mid-3rd century CE: Marcus Julius Philippus the Younger (244-249 CE), Trajanus Decius (249-251 CE), and Volusianus (251-253 CE).[56] Additionally, from a slightly earlier time, two honorific inscriptions respectively commemorate Gaius Fulvius Plautianus (*ISic*003584), the praetorian prefect under Septimius Severus and Caracalla's father-in-law before his downfall in 205 CE, and Caracalla's mother, Julia Soaemias (*ISic*003585).[57] It is important to highlight that the wealth of imperial dedications from this city does not necessarily indicate Halaesa's distinctive attitude, but is largely a consequence of extensive archaeological excavation –there is no continuity of settlement, unlike other important cities in Sicily– combined with the rare chance that some inscriptions were seemingly collected for lime burning and then abandoned.[58]

Overall, the available epigraphic evidence from Halaesa, the most active city in terms of epigraphic material without the status of *colonia*, points to an intensification of honours to the emperor and his family in the mid-3rd century CE, despite archaeological evidence suggesting a decline in urban fabric by the late 2nd century CE.[59] Similarly, two imperial dedications from the *colonia* of Tyndaris, addressed to Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, were made by an imperial-appointed *curator rei publicae* in charge of public finances. The presence of such an official may suggest some economic stagnation in the mid-2nd century CE.[60] Archaeological evidence also points to a shrinking of Tyndaris' urban fabric, potentially suggesting a decline in wealth and

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[52] Prag 2018, 31-32 speculates that the limited number of inscriptions from Agrigentum in the Imperial age may reflect an underdeveloped local epigraphic culture (although recent excavations have produced several new fragments).

[53] *ISic*000473 (1st century CE), a dedication to the *concordia Agrigentinorum* by the *res publica Lilybitanorum*.

[54] *ISic*000507, directed to Domitian (mentioned in the dative case), is probably related to the building of an aqueduct funded by imperial benefaction.

[55] Facella 2006, 191-92, Pfuntner 2016, 454, and Pfuntner 2019, 78-87.

[56] *ISic*003590 is also a 3rd-century honorific title to an unknown emperor (possibly Decius, as proposed in Prag – Tigano 2017, no.32). Notably, despite their apparent chronological succession, there is no dynastic continuity among these three emperors, with both Marcus Julius Philippus and Decius having been dethroned and killed by their successors.

[57] Interestingly, there is no evidence of *damnatio memoriae*, mentioned in D.C. 76.16.4, here or in the dedication (*ISic*000047) made by Soluntum to Fulvia Plautilla, his daughter and Caracalla's wife (Henzel 2022, 131). See Caldelli 2011 for an overview of the dedications to Plautianus.

[58] Prag – Tigano 2017, 14.

[59] Pfuntner 2019, 85 argues that this does not indicate decline of the city (the area was inhabited until the 10th century), but only different patterns of settlements.

[60] Manganaro 1988, 75 but cf. the different and more "optimistic" perspective of Pfuntner 2016, 456.

civic monumentality.[61] The dedication to Fulvia Plautilla (*ISic*000047), Caracalla's wife (before being relegated to Lipara), issued by the *res publica Soluntinorum,* also suggests the absence of a correlation between imperial dedications and urban development. Notwithstanding this attestation of the presence of a civic administration, there is no later archaeological evidence of occupation in this settlement: the population may have moved elsewhere shortly after.[62] Therefore, while a surge in imperial dedications is often associated with the prosperity of a city, these instances underline the complexity of the dynamics, local strategies and aims underlying this practice.[63] The peak under the Severans in cities in the western corner of Sicily, such as Lilybaeum (including Mazara) and Panhormus, should not be interpreted as compelling evidence that this micro-region was the only thriving part of the province because of its active engagement with the imperial centre. For instance, the famous villa at Piazza Armerina, possibly owned by a member of the local elite, a provincial governor, or even a member of the imperial family, indicates that southeastern Sicily was far from insignificant and underdeveloped, despite having fewer honorific inscriptions. The epigraphic centre of gravity shifts to the south-east of the island in subsequent centuries.

Table 3. Honours for female members of the imperial family

*ISic*000013	195-211 CE	Julia Domna, Septimius Severus' wife	Panhormus
*ISic*000014	195-211 CE	Julia Domna, Septimius Severus' wife	Panhormus
*ISic*000047	early 3rd century CE	Fulvia Plautilla, Caracalla's wife	Soluntum
*ISic*000068	222-235 CE	Julia Mamaea, Alexander Severus' mother	Tyndaris
*ISic*000483	241-44 CE	Furia Sabina, Gordianus' wife	Mazara
*ISic*002907	65-66 CE	Poppaea and Nero	Piazza Armerina
*ISic*003585	218-222 CE	Julia Soaemias, mother of Caracalla	Halaesa
*ISic*004371	84 CE	Domitia, the wife of Domitian	Tauromenium
*ISic*004372	late 1st-mid 2nd century CE	Augusta Lucilla (?)	Tauromenium

Table 4. Honours for sons of emperors

*ISic*000015	195-196 CE	Caracalla, not yet emperor	Panhormus
*ISic*000017	198-199 CE	Geta	Panhormus
*ISic*000064	139-146 CE	Marcus Aurelius, not yet emperor	Tyndaris
*ISic*000069	253-268 CE	Valerianus, Gallienus' son	Tyndaris
*ISic*000627	161-165 CE	Titus Fulvius, Marcus Aurelius' son	Lilybaeum
*ISic*000679	198-211 CE	Septimius and his sons	Tyndaris
*ISic*003587	Sep. 249-Jun. 251 CE	Trajan Decius	Halaesa
*ISic*003588	Jun. 251-Oct. 253 CE	Volusianus	Halaesa
*ISic*004388	317-326 CE	Licinius the Younger	Halaesa

As shown in Tables 3 and 4 (items not found by a <roleName> search are underlined), members of the imperial family also appear in the epigraphic record, reflecting a change in honorific practices

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[61] Pfuntner 2019, 131.
[62] Wilson 2024, 239.
[63] Lower numbers of inscriptions could also be caused by different epigraphic habits and elite attitudes to public display (Borg – Witschel 2001, Witschel 2004, 257, and Hellström 2020, 58-59).

during the Severan age. Besides the two dedications to Julia Domna made by Panhormus, other Sicilian cities also erected dedications to women of the Severan dynasty: Julia Mamaea (mother of Alexander Severus) in Tyndaris and the already mentioned Julia Soaemias (Elagabalus' mother) in Halaesa and Fulvia Plautilla (Caracalla's wife) in Soluntum. However, this practice was not introduced out of nowhere under the Severans, as Tauromenium erected inscriptions in honour of Domitia, Domitian's wife, around 84 CE (but she owned land in eastern Sicily, and the inscription originates from the hinterland of the city) and Augusta Lucilla.[64] Moreover, in the mid-3rd century, Furia Sabinia Tranquillina, the wife of Gordian III (241-244 CE) was honoured in Mazara.

In addition to female members of the imperial family, emperors' sons also feature in imperial dedications, which can be seen as an honorific practice probably intended to endorse dynastic continuity. It is unsurprising that such inscriptions became particularly common during periods of instability in imperial succession, such as the onset of the Severan dynasty following a civil war, and throughout the tumultuous era of the Military Anarchy (235 to 284 CE).[65] The dedications to Marcus Julius Philippus the Younger (244-249 CE) and Volusianus (251-253 CE) from Halaesa also fall into this category, since they were co-emperors with their fathers. Significantly, this honorific practice was less common under the Antonines, when future emperors were selected through adoption rather than direct lineage. Indeed, the first Sicilian attestation of an honour for an imperial son (non-adopted) is *ISic*000627, where a *sevir Augustalis* of Lilybaeum honoured Titus Fulvius, the son of Marcus Aurelius, who eventually transmitted his imperial power to his biological son Commodus.[66] To him may also be addressed the dedication of the Panhormitani –dated approximately 175-225 CE– to a *princeps iuventutis*, indicating the introduction of a focus on dynastic succession in local honorific practices.[67]

The understanding of Roman emperorship, deeply influenced by Fergus Millar's work in the 1970s ("the emperor was what the emperor did"), has increasingly moved towards conceiving it as a dynamic construct negotiated between the emperor and his subjects, influenced by local interpretations and expectations about the imperial power.[68] As a consequence, imperial dedications cannot be seen as uniform expressions of an empire-wide policy of imperial self-representation. Instead, variations specific to cities and regions, though partly a result of the uneven survival of evidence, may also indicate unique local interpretations and reactions to imperial ideology in each province and region. The annotations applied in this study and tools such as PyEpiDoc make it much easier to adopt such a bottom-up approach in studying provincial contributions to the imperial ideology and the evolving concept of emperorship.

Adopting this perspective in a Sicilian context, different trends emerge in the cities engaged in this practice, despite the almost uniform peak of dedications under the Severans, aligning with the "epigraphic habit" of the Empire. These may be the consequence of local strategies or uneven survival of evidence. As was noted, the limited number of imperial dedications from key cities such as Syracusae and Catina may be largely attributed to the continuity of settlement and limited excavation; by contrast, the exceptional number of dedications from Panhormus may have historical explanations in local collection-building, while Tyndaris and (a part of) Lilybaeum have both escaped overbuilding and been the subject of excavation. Although the small size of our sample entails the risk of overestimating individual features, it can be noted that Halaesa was the only Sicilian city showing substantial engagement in this honorific practice under the military

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[64] The inscription is fragmentary and hence the identity of Lucilla is debated: she may be Domitia Lucilla, Domitian's wife (as in *ISic*004372 consulted in February 2024), Lucius Verus' wife, or Marcus Aurelius' mother (as in Henzel 2022, 138).

[65] As shown by the dedication to Valerianus, Gallienus' son (253-268 CE), in Tyndaris (*ISic*000069).

[66] The same concern for a linear adoption is evident in *ISic*000806 (public building works offered by an aedile to celebrate the "*reditus Imperatoris Caesaris Marci Aureli Antonini* [...] *liberorumque eius*").

[67] *ISic*000022 (the name is erased). For *damnatio memoriae* in dedications to Geta (apparently not applied in *ISic*000679 at Tyndaris), see Mastino 1981, 62-72.

[68] The traditional interpretation of Millar 1973, already critiqued in Hopkins 1978, is now challenged by Hekster 2022 (cf. Christoforou 2023 for "popular" views of the emperor).

anarchy of the 3rd century CE.[69] Moving some decades later, it is interesting to note distinct honorific strategies from two different actors: the *corrector provinciae* Domitius Latronianus honoured Augustus Licinius as "*restitutor libertatis et fundator publicae securitatis*" and "*dominus noster*" in an inscription from Panhormus (*ISic*000026), while subsequently the *res publica Halaesinorum* honoured his son Licinius the Younger, holding the title of Caesar and heir, as "*[nob]iliṣṣiṃ[us]*" (*ISic*004388).[70] Although both inscriptions clearly express their support of Augustus Licinius, which is noteworthy in itself in the western part of the Empire, Latronianus and the city of Halaesa placed their emphasis on slightly different elements. The provincial governor expressed his loyalty to the Tetrarchy (his dedication to Licinius was likely with another to Constantine), while Halaesa focused on the dynastic continuity of the system, which had already proven fragile in the previous decades. It is also intriguing how limited the evidence is for Sicilian cities responding to the numerous cases of *damnatio memoriae* decreed from above.[71]

In the future, the increasing quantity of ancient evidence encoded according to the EpiDoc TEI standard should facilitate more comprehensive inter-regional and inter-provincial comparisons. This, in turn, will deepen our understanding of local variations in imperial engagement (among many other aspects of epigraphic culture), providing insights into the cultural histories of Roman provinces and their relations with Roman authority.

<div align="right">Alfredo Tosques</div>

4. Conclusions

The tagging of <roleName> represents a further step in improving *I.Sicily* as a developing tool for research and offers a test case for such an approach to extended annotation. It is necessary to emphasise that the tables included in this article are only intended to provide an example of the potential, and do not pretend to be a definitive reference list for the imperial dedications in Sicily. Rather, the point is that such analysis can be repeated, with variation according to specific interests, the refinement of the existing data and the addition of new data. In this regard, it is notable that several imperial dedications have already accrued since the recent publication of a catalogue of honorific inscriptions for Sicily.[72] Although this study has focused specifically on imperial dedications, the <roleName> dataset extends much more widely and offers considerable potential already in its preliminary form. *I.Sicily* and data analysis tools like PyEpiDoc offer more accessible and updateable sources of information, potentially superseding traditional reference works.

Beyond mere data collection, digital tools such as PyEpiDoc ambitiously encourage the formulation of new research questions and the adoption of data-driven approaches, which would be more time-consuming, liable to error and harder to evaluate if conducted manually. At the same time, such tools hardly replace the historian, but only gain value when informed by historical knowledge and a sound methodological framework (and this is equally true of the preceding preparation of the data). As illustrated by our case-study in section 3, such an approach still has its limitations (e.g. fragmentary inscriptions), and its effectiveness is highly dependent on user decisions at every stage, from the choice of categories and the act of encoding to the searches employed (which makes explicit documentation of methodology essential). Furthermore, any quantitative results obtained from such datasets must account for the uneven survival of evidence, which undoubtedly limits their statistical significance.

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[69] *ISic*000676 from Tyndaris might be dedicated to Probus, and Lilybaeum erected *ISic*000483 in honour of Gordianus' wife, but Halaesa has three dedications and possibly four (if *ISic*003590 was dedicated to Trajanus Decius).

[70] Portale 2021 interpreted the Augustan portrait of a young man, remodelled in the Tetrarchic style, as a depiction of Licinius the Younger, later intentionally damaged to signify his *damnatio memoriae*. However, if this interpretation is correct, it remains unclear why the (supposedly) associated inscription was left untouched and shows no signs of *damnatio*.

[71] The dedications to Elagabalus, Fulvius Plautianus, Fulvia Plautilla, Julia Mamaea, Julia Soaemias and Maximinus Daza are not erased in Sicily (cf. Varner 2004, 156-199 and 2020 for the *damnatio* of these persons).

[72] *ISic*001673 and *ISic*004406, published in Silvestrini 2020 and Silvestrini 2022 respectively, and so not available in time for inclusion in Henzel 2022, 137-40.

Our final point is about open data. The data used in this article are published in stable form on Zenodo (in addition to the "live" and continuously revised data in *I.Sicily* itself), and the software used for the analysis, PyEpiDoc, is also openly available online. This means that the arguments based on quantitative data in this article can be verified by replicating our research with PyEpiDoc and by reviewing our subsequent calculations. Furthermore, the publication of the data on Zenodo and in *I.Sicily*, both in Open Access, enables others to check the data itself as well as the quality of its annotations. From the perspective of scientific methodology and transparency, these measures can be argued to represent significant advances over some traditional scholarly research, which may on occasion be overly reliant upon authority or personal knowledge of material that cannot be verified, but in general leaves opaque and unrecoverable most of the decisions involved in assembling material for discussion.

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