This volume publishes fourteen papers, that is, all but three of the plenary lectures presented at the Thirteenth International Congress of Greek and Latin Epigraphy held in Oxford in 2007. The general aim of the event was to make epigraphy more approachable to a wider readership, and to tell when, how and why ancient inscriptions can or cannot be used as sources in the historical sciences.

The opening address by Denis Feissel (pp. 1-14) underlines the importance of Late Antique and Byzantine epigraphy and onomastics for historical analysis. Indeed, personal names from these periods, for which inscriptions are our main source, have the potential of telling us much about culture, religion and people’s concept of the world. Highlighting the interplay between Graeco-Roman, Christian and oriental names, Feissel’s material makes it possible to point out regional preferences and conservative trends, which frequently cut across civic boundaries. He usefully reminds us that for all the diversity of its cultural and ethnic background, the epigraphy of the eastern parts of the Mediterranean was predominantly written in Greek.

Robert Parker (pp. 17-30) ingeniously deals with texts and writing in Greek religion, concentrating, in particular, on the question of why, where and to what extent the Greeks wrote down sacred instructions and regulations. This is a pertinent issue, considering that ritual knowledge was typically based on oral tradition. Following earlier research, Parker rightly claims that what was likely to be recorded were exceptions to the norm as well as innovations or major changes concerning rituals and cults.

Roman religion is treated by John Scheid (pp. 31-44), who presents an exemplary account of how inscriptions may be employed to research this field. He makes clear that studying religion would be useless without the evidence provided by epigraphy and archaeology, pointing out that the processing of all relevant evidence, including literature, is vital for our knowledge of Roman religion. His observations (pp. 36-37) on the question of an alleged cult of Augustus in Italy are wise and pertinent.

Georg Petzl (pp. 47-60) discusses Greek epigraphy and the Greek language (one wonders, by the way, why Latin was omitted from the volume). There is little here on the linguistic development of Greek as evidenced by epigraphic sources, and so this is rather a series of interesting, though scattered observations on loan words or contacts between Greek and Latin. The author also
concentrates on modes of language (poetry, prose, “Kunstprosa”) and their respective styles and vocabularies.

In his lengthy analysis of (votive and expiatory) epigraphy and identities in Asia Minor, Christof Schuler (pp. 63-100) argues convincingly against an over-simplistic opposition between town and country: even if there were obvious differences between urban centres and rural areas, inscriptions suggest that the two had much in common in their epigraphic habits. Parallel to this development, there were, of course, chronological and regional variations (cf. the περὶ καρπῶν and περὶ βοῶν dedications from the interior of western Asia Minor, which are here discussed to great profit, showing that local concerns were expressed through a commonly adopted written medium). Schuler does well to apply his general argument about “a common basis of a certain cultural koine” to the whole of the Greek East (p. 89).

Walter Scheidel’s well-organized paper on epigraphy and demography (pp. 101-129) serves the purposes of the volume admirably. Among other things, he shows that inscriptions cannot provide useful information on fertility except, perhaps, for the observation based on late antique epigraphy that births tended to be concentrated in the early winter months. Concerning nuptiality, we know that, on average, women married at an earlier age than men, but different patterns apply to rural and urban populations as well as between civilians and soldiers (on p. 110, Scheidel refers to the noteworthy claim by Sabine Hübner that Egyptian sibling marriages were actually contracted between biological and adoptive children. Significantly, such practice is documented by inscriptions). As for family relations, while epitaphs may suggest that nuclear-family relationships generally mattered more to dedicants than other types of social ties, Scheidel observes that funerary evidence from Asia Minor, for example, suggests considerable concerns for more extended kin. He also points out that inscriptions have very little to offer concerning questions of population size, and that the epigraphic recording of the sexes is also likely to have been subject to distortions. Regarding mortality, Scheidel sensibly argues that, instead of considering the recorded ages at death, putting an emphasis on the timing of death has the great potential of illustrating average life expectancy and mortality patterns.

In his elegant essay (pp. 133-158), John Ma discusses power structures in Greek society and the various methods of displaying authority in public inscriptions. As he observes, the authority of public epigraphy ultimately emerged from human decisions and transactions, but there was a wide range of possibilities of communicating it to the reading or listening audience: inscriptions worked as orders or narratives, displaying various types of authority (communal power, divine sanction, social magic, etc.), and were located in