It is impossible to do justice to the work of Tony Birley in only two words. Yet, if pressed, no two words would be more apt to encapsulate the vast corpus of his work than the ones used as the title of these proceedings of the international colloquium in his honour, which took place on the 28th of September 2002. From Birley's very first publication on the emperor Marcus Aurelius in 1961, to his recent *The Roman Government of Britain* (a fully rewritten version of the earlier *Fasti of Roman Britain*), his research has contributed greatly to the study of Roman individuals, both at specific and collective level. The theme of ancient biography, in its various historical and methodological contexts, thus fits a *Festschrift* for Birley well.

The thin volume consists of a short introduction by the editor followed by six articles on different aspects of ancient (almost exclusively Roman) biography. This allows for much more coherence than is normal for the genre. *Festschriften* typically form a hotchpotch of essays, hardly ever a systematic approach to an important historical theme. Here, however, two more general articles on the importance of inscriptions in researching biography in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds respectively are followed by pieces on more specific subjects: the *cursus honorum*, funerary poetry (of the *equites singulares Augusti*), literary biography (Plutarch's *Lycurgus*), and panegyric. Together, they highlight the different aspects that defined different ancient 'biographical' approaches, and have structured Birley's scholarship. This is all the more apparent from the extensive 18 page bibliography of Birley's work, including reviews, up to 2003 -- a valuable tool in its own right.

The introduction by the editor (pp. 7-11) sets the scene. It emphasises the centrality of biographical tendencies and notions within ancient literary texts, and questions both definition (what makes 'biography', and how does it relate to autobiography, panegyric or history proper?) and origin of these 'biographies'. As is well known, of course, literary texts constitute only part of the evidence. Epigraphic evidence can be equally important -- especially for the prosopographer. The centrality of funerary inscriptions with their *cursus honorum* to this kind of research is self-evident. Again Vössing seems to be particularly interested in exploring (methodological) relations between 'biography' and 'prosopography'. In general, the introduction appears to aim at analysing different modes in which different types of biographical evidence can be employed, rather than analysing ancient individuals. This is, indeed, a general feature of the volume, made apparent again and again, not least through the inclusion of an index *locorum* of literary texts and inscriptions, but the absence of an index of personal names.
R. Malcolm Errington starts the volume proper, with the only contribution analysing aspects of the non-Roman world (pp. 13-28). Though titled 'Biographie in hellenistischen Inschriften', his fascinating paper discusses much more. As he states at the very beginning of his piece: 'Biographisches ist überall: man muss es nur suchen' (p. 13). Thus, he manages to mention in passing matters ranging from oral culture to Christopher Wren, whilst trying to find the 'missing link' between classical Greek lives and Plutarch's bioi. This missing link, according to Errington, is formed by the biographical sections of Hellenistic honorary inscriptions. He sketches the development of this 'genre', noting that the earliest examples, interestingly, almost all stem from Athens. This is not a coincidence; the inscriptions arose through a culmination of parallel processes, amongst them the extension in making popular decisions public and a connected general increase in writing habits (p. 22). Later the genre incorporates inscriptions from a wider variety of regions, all with substantial attention to the 'biography' of the honoured individuals. His discussion thus focuses on both questions of origin and definition (what separates the later inscriptions from biography proper?).

Attention to inscriptions, but from the Roman period, also characterises the contribution by Géza Alföldy (pp. 29-52). He focuses on aspects of definition, analysing to what extent Roman (funerary) inscriptions functioned biographically. From the outset, Alföldy makes clear that funerary inscriptions cannot be simply looked at as 'Kurzbiographien' (p. 30). Their purpose was documentation of (social) success, without noting flaws and failures. He illustrates the point emphatically by contrasting Augustus' Res Gestae with Suetonius' Life of Augustus. The former lists only virtutes, whereas the latter includes vitia as well. He notes many interesting differences between the two types of sources, such as the importance of dating events in literary biography, whereas funerary inscriptions tend to ignore specific dates. Though there were aspects of importance in both inscriptions and literary biography, such as attention to ancestors or to death, and though inscriptions can be used to establish literary biographies, the two remain very different. It is thus not coincidental that the funerary inscription nearest to a literary biography is a fictional one. Trimalchio's imagined epitaph shows character (pp. 50-51) -- something real funerary inscriptions did not do.

Werner Eck also looks at Roman inscriptions (pp. 53-72), but places emphasis on the development of the most obvious biographical aspect of Roman inscriptions: the cursus honorum. In fact, as Eck notes at the outset, this does not denote an epigraphic type, but exists in a wide array of inscriptions, such as funerary, building or dedicatory inscriptions (p. 54). In the Empire, the presence of the cursus in inscriptions became unavoidable ('eine Massenerscheinung', p. 61), implying importance at a day-to-day level. At the same time, however, it remains unclear how far these 'standardised' texts can supply individual characteristics. Still, analysis of individual texts from different moments in time shows subtle ways in which a cursus could betray positions that were deemed important or relationships with the emperor. Sometimes subtleties were ignored, as in the case of Marcus Valerius Maximianus from Diana Veteranorum (pp. 67-69). This is the longest and most detailed cursus honorum from the Empire. Not coincidentally, Maximianus was a 'new man'. As Eck rightly concludes (p. 69): 'Es ist der Stolz des homo novus auf das, war er errichtet hat, der sich hier offensichtlich ausdrückt'. It is, then, possible to find character in inscriptions. Like Alföldy, however, Eck recognises the limits of this biographical element. Confrontation between Tacitus' literary Agricola and the (equally fictitious) inscription of the same man in the Forum Augusti (pp. 71-72) shows these limits clearly.

Michael P. Speidel, also starting from inscriptions, tries to overcome the epigraphic biographical limitations (pp. 73-89). His more restricted set of evidence is formed by funerary
poems for *equites singulares Augusti*. The main emphasis is on two poems. The first is the famous poem on Soranus (allegedly written by Hadrian himself), who claims to have crossed the Danube swimming, with Hadrian as witness, and to have been able to split one arrow in mid air with a second arrow. Speidel explores the context of this Soranus, and tries to reconstruct his life (including a tentative image). He similarly tries to reconstruct the life of the Paphlagonic Priscus, known from a second funerary poem (AE 1993, 1547 = SEG 43, 1993, 911). Finally, he compares these poems with a funerary poem (again said to have been composed by Hadrian) about Zenodotus. Speidel aims to show how these inscriptions are close to 'real biographies', in that they describe important experiences and accomplishments of individual lives, adding some details that literary texts would not have supplied.

Different limits of biography -- this time of the strictly literary kind -- are explored by Lukas de Blois, in the only English contribution to the volume (pp. 93-102). He places emphasis on the Platonic elements in Plutarch's life of Lycurgus, by clearly showing how Plato's 'model' of a good statesman and lawgiver dominates this *Life*. It thus makes clear how literary evidence may supply much more detail than epigraphic material, but is not necessarily more unproblematic for reconstructing ancient biographies. Similarly, François Paschoud (pp. 103-118) shows the limits of trustworthiness of literary biographies of a different kind. He focuses on similarities in Late Antiquity between biographies of deceased emperors and panegyrics of live ones. With great eye for detail, he shows how the language of panegyric influenced biography. The relation becomes even more interesting when historians wrote biographies of living emperors, uniquely done critically by Aurelius Victor when describing Constantius II at the end of his *Liber de Caesaribus* (p. 109). From this starting point, Paschoud analyses the Praefatio of the last six books of Ammianus' work, arguing that Ammianus purposefully uses panegyric commonplaces in such a way that he can make ambiguous statements about history, without taking the risks that a historian would take when being critical about contemporary leaders. These are problems that funerary inscriptions for very obvious reasons did not have to deal with.

Together, then, these articles admirably show how different sources, ranging from early Greek to late Roman times, can be employed to analyse ancient biographies. At the same time, however, they show time and again how careful one must be when trying to use the different types of evidence to reconstruct the lives of ancient individuals. It is one of the great strengths of Tony Birley that he has the methodological care and breadth of knowledge of different types of evidence that enable him to reconstruct (Roman) lives in great detail. The fact that this volume, in a way, leaves the individual out of ancient biography, though disappointing at one level, is at the same time acknowledgment of the difficulty of Birley's accomplishments.

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Notes:


3. I must here declare interest: Luuk de Blois is my direct colleague at the Department of History at the Radboud University Nijmegen (the Netherlands).