

Silvio Panciera

(21 March 1933 – 16 August 2016)

by John Bodel

On the night of 16 August, 2016, Silvio Panciera, emeritus Professor of Epigraphy and Roman Antiquities at Sapienza University of Rome, succumbed to an illness that he had faced optimistically 6 months earlier but that overcame him quickly at the end. One of the greatest epigraphists of our age, Panciera for 40 years presided over the territory encompassed by the 50,000 surviving Latin inscriptions from the city of Rome with the authority of an Augustus and the magnanimity of a Lorenzo. “Principe degli epigrafisti”, according to the obituary by G. Zecchini that appeared in *L'Osservatore Romano* a month after his death, and no one familiar with the field would contest that claim. Born in Mestre and educated at the University of Padua, where he graduated in 1956 with a thesis on the economic life of Roman Aquileia directed by A. Degrassi, Panciera in the following year transferred from his native Veneto to the city he would call home for the next 6 decades, thanks to a Fulbright Fellowship in 1957-58 at the American Academy in Rome. There he met H. Bloch, then Director, and L. R. Taylor, scholars whom he later recognized among his mentors and who planted the seeds of a relationship that over the next half-century would blossom for generations of young Romanists (many, but by no means all, American) working in the library of the American Academy, which Panciera made his principal place of research and where he gave his time and offered advice with a generosity as great as his wisdom was valued. On the occasion of his retirement from teaching in 2006, in recognition of his longstanding patronage of that library and its users, a desk in his honor was dedicated at a location of his choosing (on the mezzanine), where he continued to work regularly until the last year of his life.¹

Over the next 5 years he divided his time in Rome between university and high-school teaching. By the time he assumed his first regular faculty appointment at Sapienza in 1963, he had already secured from the Berlin Academy of Sciences a commission to edit the much-needed supplement to the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* vol. VI dedicated to the inscriptions of the city of Rome, a project on which he worked selflessly for the rest of his life and which provided the core material for the legendary seminars in Roman epigraphy he taught annually at Sapienza over 40 years. In 1965, he added to his university duties those of Inspector (subsequently Director) in the Superintendency of Antiquities of Rome, which gave him direct access to the inscribed materials that would form the basis both for the supplement to *CIL* VI and eventually, beginning in 1978, for his advanced seminars in Roman epigraphy, in which students confronted unedited material directly and, under Panciera's supervision, contributed substantively to the publication of hundreds of unedited inscriptions from Rome in the Capitoline Museums, from the area of the Forum and Palatine, and in the municipal Antiquarium of the Caelian.²

Succeeding Degrassi as Professor of Epigraphy and Roman Antiquities at Sapienza in 1973, Panciera from the start put into practice in his seminars two principles that defined his approach to the subject. The first was to recognize, as he put it in the opening lecture of his annual seminar, that “the true subject of epigraphy is not inscriptions but the world that produced them, in all its complexity” and that effective epigraphic research, therefore, depended as much on posing new questions and investigating multi-disciplinary approaches as on exercising technical expertise in traditional antiquarian skills. The second, directly related to the first, was that teaching the subject effectively could scarcely be separated from practicing it, and that pedagogy and research could be advanced simultaneously by

1 In recalling his debts to the foreign academies of Rome at a conference held in his honor in the same year, Panciera recognized first the long friendships he had forged at the American Academy during his early years in the city with scholars such as T. R. S. Broughton, F. E. Brown, R. Ross Holloway, R. E. A. Palmer, R. T. Scott, J. H. D'Arms and W. V. Harris: see “Altri pensieri e ringraziamenti,” in M. L. Caldelli, G. L. Gregori and S. Orlandi (ed.), *Epigrafia 2006* (Tituli 9; Rome 2008) 37-38; also Panciera's *Scritti vari* [below, n.4] 1974-77

2 S. Panciera (ed.), *La collezione epigrafica dei Musei Capitolini. Inediti – revisioni – contributi al riordino* (Rome 1987); id. (ed.), *Iscrizioni greche e latine del Foro romano e del Palatino: inventario generale, inediti, revisioni* (Rome 1996); G. L. Gregori (ed.), *La collezione epigrafica dell'Antiquarium Comunale del Celio. Inventario generale, inediti, revisioni, contributi al riordino* (Rome 2001). All three volumes are published in a series, “Tituli”, that Panciera himself founded in 1980 expressly for the purpose of disseminating the results of these research seminars.

engaging more advanced students directly with editing new and unpublished material. The hundreds of neophyte epigraphists who underwent the bracing experience of this form of deep-immersion tutelage under Panciera's patient but exacting oversight learned not only the rigors but also the joys of the discipline. In the dedication, openness and passion with which he pursued both his teaching and his research, they also witnessed a model of the qualities of mind and character that he used to say made not only better scholars but better citizens.

It may be difficult for those whose training in epigraphy has unfolded within the past three decades to appreciate fully how sharply these practices — namely, approaching the field as an autonomous discipline capable of illuminating social and economic history in unique ways, sharing unpublished resources (chiefly the vast archive assembled by Panciera and Degrassi in preparation for the new supplement to *CIL VI*), and crediting students with authorship of editions of new inscriptions produced under supervision — diverged from traditional ways, which had earned the field a reputation as one myopically focused on antiquarian minutiae and stymied by academic polemic so toxic that it had acquired its own epithet (*odium epigraphicum*). That epigraphy holds a more respectable place in ancient studies today is due in no small part to the efforts Panciera expended to promoting the study of inscriptions at the highest levels not only through his own teaching and research but through his founding of more than a half-dozen print publication series devoted to diverse aspects of the subject, and through his early advocacy of digital editing and publication as the way of the future.³

Although himself a late-comer to personal computing, Panciera early recognized the potential of the digital medium to supply a means of fulfilling Niebuhr's dream of a comprehensive corpus of all inscriptions, and during his presidency (1997-2007) of the Committee on Epigraphy and Information Technology of the Association Internationale d'Épigraphie Grecque et Latine (AIEGL) he worked tirelessly to institute a federated union of databases of ancient Greek and Latin inscriptions, EAGLE (Electronic Archive of Greek and Latin Epigraphy, now absorbed by the *europæana eagle* project), that today comprises not only the *Epigraphic Database Roma* founded by Panciera at Sapienza, which provides updated editions of the Greek and Latin inscriptions of Rome, Italy, Sicily and Sardinia, but also databases of inscriptions of the Roman provinces (*Epigraphische Datenbank Heidelberg*), of the Iberian peninsula (*Hispania Epigraphica*), and of the Christian community of Rome (3rd-8th c.) (*Epigraphic Database Bari*), all committed to a common set of standards and guidelines (EpiDoc) and to open access via the world-wide web.

During his presidency of AIEGL (1992-97), Panciera instituted much-needed reforms into a sclerotic administrative structure, introducing the principle of quinquennially-renewed Executive and Advisory Committees, with more evenly balanced national representation on the latter, and doubling membership in the organization, in part by welcoming as an allied organization the nascent American Society of Greek and Latin Epigraphy (ASGLE). The 11th International Congress of Greek and Latin Epigraphy that he organized in Rome in 1997 was memorable for marking the inauguration of the ground floor of Rome's best epigraphic museum, housed in the Museo Nazionale Romano at the Baths of Diocletian. Even in retirement Panciera continued to promote Roman studies through Terra Italia ONLUS which he founded to advance the study of Roman Italy in schools and to underwrite basic tools of research at a time when the global financial crisis threatened public funding in Italy.

3 The print series (all published by Edizioni Quasar, thanks to the mutual esteem shared by Panciera and the publisher Severino Tognon) include:

- 1) corpora of editions of unpublished texts: in addition to *Tituli*, devoted to the inscriptions of Rome (1980-; see n.2 here), a pair of publications appearing under the imprimatur of the Unione Accademica Nazionale: a new series of *Supplementa Italica* updating, city by city, the volumes of *CIL* dedicated to the inscriptions of Italy (1981-), and a companion set of photographic supplements to both, entitled *Imagines* (1999-);
- 2) monographic works and collected papers: *Vetera* (1987-) comprising (*inter alia*) 7 volumes (*Epigrafia anfiteatrale*) dedicated to gladiatorial inscriptions of the Roman West, as well as collected papers of G. Barbieri, L. Moretti, G. Alföldy, W. Eck and Panciera himself, and *Opuscula Epigraphica* (1990-), presenting shorter works of various sorts; and
- 3) thematically oriented series dedicated to particular aspects of the subject: *Libitina* (1999-), on funerary matters, and *Instrumentum*, focusing on inscribed portable objects of daily use and their importance for social and economic history (2002-).

This great devotion to teaching, to supporting the work of others, and to patronizing the field did not come without cost to his own research. The fascicle of the supplement to *CIL* VI to which he devoted his years of retirement, on sacred inscriptions, remained only half-finished at the time of his death, nor was he able to complete the multi-volume manual of epigraphy for which he had long compiled preliminary material. His scholarly legacy is instead represented mainly by two volumes of *Scritti vari* (totaling more than 2,000 pages) from the first 50 years of his career, which were published along with a third volume of Indices in 2006,⁴ and by a final volume (projected for 2018 or 2019) that will gather another 30 essays written during his final decade. The sections demarcated in those volumes provide a fair indication of the subjects to which he gravitated: above all, the epigraphy of the city of Rome, but scarcely less often the social and economic history of Roman Italy as seen primarily through the administrative and commercial institutions of its municipalities and colonies; followed by essays of a prosopographical nature, on men and women of the senatorial and equestrian orders and on soldiers and military affairs; and, finally, significant amounts of scholarship devoted to the history of Latin epigraphy (he developed an early interest in epigraphic forgeries and the question of *falsae*), and to *practica* — essays relating to instruction and the practice of epigraphy, including (with H. Krummrey) a program of editing conventions and diacritical marks that has been widely adopted in print publications (including *CIL*).⁵ If there is a characteristic quality to his research, it lies in the combination of meticulous analysis and balanced historical judgment. Panciera was an epigraphist's epigraphist who combined expertise in all the relevant philological and archaeological skills — in his conception, text and text-carrier (*supporto*) were inseparable — with an unerring ability to set inscriptions into their broader historical contexts. Time and again he teased out of a difficult or unpromising inscription insights into Roman life that made clear the unique perspectives epigraphy, as an independent discipline, can offer on the ancient world.

Awards and honorary affiliations naturally attended these accomplishments — e.g., a Max-Planck Forschungspreis in 1992 and a Certamen Capitolinum prize from the Istituto Nazionale di Studi Romani in 2007 for his *Scritti vari* — but Panciera cared little for prizes, and of the honorary affiliations he valued most highly those that he felt he had fairly earned (such as those offered by the American Academy in Rome and the Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, where he long served as president of the “Amici di Villa Lante”). For those who knew him personally, however, these achievements pale beside his exemplary comportment as a scholar and a gentleman. Mild in manner, self-effacing and patient, as a teacher he was sparing with praise and could be stringent in criticism, but none ever questioned his dedication to the craft or the sincerity of his aim to improve a collaborative enterprise for which he seldom claimed any credit. For him, academia was a noble calling and research at the highest levels an unquestioned good. He approached his stewardship of the intellectual heritage of his discipline with the passion and reverence of a disciple. To his uncompromising regard for open, honest and rigorous critical inquiry, Panciera added a human warmth and personal kindness less commonly found in consort with exacting standards. He instinctively worked to ‘level the playing field’, encouraging and when necessary defending the positions of the young, modulating the views sometimes taken by more assertive colleagues, smoothing irritations among peers. Behind the scenes, he upheld the highest standards of propriety and equity in defending both the cultural patrimony of Italy and the rights of individuals to be free of official harassment; more than once Panciera's quiet intervention ensured that an inscribed artefact believed lost or acquired under dubious circumstances was returned to its proper home without fanfare or repercussions. The merits of his scholarship and his Herculean service to the profession will no doubt be recognized more widely, but, to those fortunate enough to have known him, Panciera will be remembered first as a man of the highest quality in what matters most. He is survived by his wife of 57 years, Mara Bonfioli, a Byzantinist and Fulbright Fellow at the American Academy in Rome (1958–59), whom he met and married in 1959 and with whom he shared more than half a century of a life well lived at their home in Monteverde Vecchio.

john_bodel@brown.edu

Brown University, Providence, RI

4 S. Panciera, *Epigrafi, epigrafia, epigrafisti. Scritti vari editi e inediti (1956–2015) con note complementari e indici* (Vetera 16; Rome 2006). For what currently exists as a complete bibliography of Panciera's works, see https://www.academia.edu/12221971/List_of_Papers

5 For the best updated key to the best epigraphic editing conventions for scholars to adopt, see <http://www.stoa.org/epidoc/gl/latest/app-epi-panciera.html>. This provides Epidoc equivalencies to the most up-to-date editing conventions.