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Looking up Roman brickstamps

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EVA MARGARETA STEINBY, *INDICI COMPLEMENTARI AI BOLLI DOLIARI URBANI* (CIL XV, 1) (Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae 11, Roma 1987). Pp. 422. ISSN 0538-2270.

JAMES C. ANDERSON, JR., *ROMAN BRICKSTAMPS: THE THOMAS ASHBY COLLECTION IN THE AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME* (Archaeological Monographs of the British School at Rome 3, London 1991). Pp. xi + 141, 82 figs. on 13 plates. ISBN 0 904152 18 9. £45.00.

Roman brickstamps present special problems to the investigator. Unlike inscriptions on stone, which for the most part preserve documents that only ever existed in a single copy, the short texts stamped with wooden dies on Roman bricks and tiles before firing tend to be found again and again. In this they resemble Roman coins, but unlike coins (with which brickstamps share certain basic formal similarities), the individual specimens that turn up in excavations and museum inventories frequently survive only in fragmentary condition, with parts of their texts and images worn away or altogether missing. Nowhere is this state of affairs more vexing than with the stamps impressed on the bricks used in Rome, which by their sheer number and close textual and graphic similarities to one another defy conventional systems of classification. Consequently, whereas most epigraphic indices serve primarily as guides to the published material, indices to the Roman brickstamps, if they are truly to be of service, must aim at something more: they must facilitate the precise and accurate identification of incomplete copies of stamps that often differ from one another only in the most minute particulars. The first of the two volumes under review here, Margareta Steinby's *Indici complementari ai bolli doliari urbani* (CIL XV, 1) (hereafter, *Indici*), fulfills this need in an unprecedentedly complete and satisfying fashion; the second, James Anderson's edition of an important collection of examples assembled during the early years of this century and initially catalogued more than 50 years ago (henceforth *Ashby*), illustrates the difficulties that continue to confront those who would edit the material. It will be useful to consider the two publications in turn.

A short history of Indices to the Roman brickstamps

Though broader in scope and grander in scale than any of their kind that have come before, Steinby's indices do not pretend to provide a comprehensive guide to the Roman brickstamps, nor are they intended to stand alone. They are instead "complementary" to the indispensable "Indices to the Roman brickstamps published in volumes XV, 1 of the *CIL* and LVI-LVII of the *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*" compiled by Herbert Bloch nearly half a century ago,¹ and, like Bloch's indices, have the principal merit of having been drawn up by one intimately familiar from long experience with the peculiar requirements of the task.

The same cannot be said of the first set of published indices to the Roman brickstamps, a series of alphabetical lists compiled by Giuseppe Gatti to accompany the publication in 1884 of the first edition of the *instrumentum domesticum* of Rome, Gaetano Marini's *Iscrizioni antiche doliari*.² Carefully transcribed and sensibly arranged, Gatti's registers of emperors and their families, consuls, *nomina* and *cognomina* (listed indiscriminately), *figlinae* and *officinae*, *praedia* and *fundi*, *horreae* and *portus*, and *notabiliora varia* (occupying barely a page), provide an accurate and useful guide to the persons and places recorded in

1 As their title indicates, Bloch's *Indices* (HSCP 58-59 [1948] 1-104) include also the material published in his valuable *Supplement* (HSCP 56-57 [1947] 1-128). The two works have twice been reprinted together under the title *Supplement to volume XV, 1 of the Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum including complete indices to the Roman brick-stamps*: Cambridge, Mass. 1948 and Roma 1967.

2 Completed in 1799, Marini's work remained in manuscript in the Vatican library for nearly a century before being published by G. B. De Rossi at Rome. According to De Rossi (p.ix) the handwritten indices appearing at the end of Marini's text were "inutilissimi", being riddled with errors and keyed to a different numeration of stamps from that employed in the final version of his catalogue.