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**Lapidary Praise for the Emperor in the Roman West**

A number of honorific inscriptions erected as dedications to the Roman emperor included praise language of some type, either in the form of superlative epithets or unofficial titles attached to the emperor's official titulature, or through simple citation of the specific virtue(s) for which the emperor was being honored. Because these honorific inscriptions filled the public sphere with imperial ideals and values produced not by the state but by local initiative, they offer particularly good evidence for the study of collective representations of the emperor. The purpose of this paper is to examine the diffusion of these honorific inscriptions throughout the Roman West, and to consider the nature of the praise language employed in them.

The survey of epigraphic praise language is based on a collection of over 500 honorific inscriptions set up to the emperor in Rome, Italy and the western provinces between A.D. 69 and 235. From this collection it is possible to measure the relative frequency of individual honorific terms, to analyze regional differentiation in the use of such terms, and to assess the long-term development of epigraphic praise language in the Roman West.

The paper begins with two quantitative studies of the epigraphic evidence, measuring (i) the number of honorific inscriptions to the emperor that included specific praise language and (ii) the chronological distribution of these inscriptions during the period 69-235. From these studies I turn to the praise language itself, which consists of superlative epithets ranging from the general (e.g. *maximus*) to the specific (e.g. *clementissimus*), unofficial titles that made claims for the emperor both modest (e.g. *conditor municipii*) and grandiose (e.g. *pacator orbis*), and a full gallery of virtues that warranted commemoration (e.g. *per munificentiam*). A geographical survey of this praise language reveals fundamental regional divisions throughout the Roman West and suggests that the use and nature of praise language in honorific inscriptions to the emperor can serve as an index of Romanization. The paper concludes with an examination of the considerations that governed the dedicator's selection of honorific terms. Influence from the center is clear in many cases and, drawing on evidence for the official shaping of the emperor's public image, especially the imperial coinage, I will argue that the dissemination of specific imperial ideals and values was more pervasive than is often envisioned.