

This paper aims to present some preliminary results and observations—historical and historiographical—relating to my research on tribunes of the plebs in the later Republic whose activities, directly attested or reasonably inferable, are recorded in our ancient sources while their names are not

Studies of the part played by individual tribunes, or the tribunate itself, in Roman politics have not been lacking in the last 30 years, but some issues have not been fully addressed, e.g., tribunician demographics or interaction with Rome's urban environment; others have not been addressed at all, e.g., tribunician modes of style and self-presentation. The success of such a study (or studies) would depend on a comprehensive database of tribunician activity to work from, but no truly comprehensive collation of such evidence exists. While Niccolini's *I fasti dei tribuni della plebe* (Milan 1934) and Thommen's *Das Volkstribunat der späten römischen Republik (133-43 B.C.E.)* (Stuttgart 1989) include some references to anonymous tribunes, they are mostly limited to legislative and intercessory activity; Broughton's *The Magistrates of the Roman Republic* 1-3 (New York 1951-1986), meanwhile, fails to mention any anonymous tribunician activity except in entries for known magistrates affected by such. This lack is so critical that, as E. Badian (1996, 189) observed, "If there is one additional rubric needed in a revision of *MRR*... it is a mention, where appropriate, of anonymous groups, especially tribunes and envoys."¹

A scrutiny of the ancient sources to gather direct, oblique or plausibly-inferred references to all tribunician activity for 220 – 2 BCE has in fact provided substantial additional material—covering more than 400 distinct actions so far—attesting to the role played by hundreds of anonymous tribunes over a two-century span. That role may seem unremarkable in many instances, even mundane. But the sheer increase in the amount of evidence for stereotypical tribunician activity—electioneering, speaking in *contiones*, legislating, arresting or interceding for others, and much more—will surely lead to a better attested, well-rounded global history of the tribunate as an institution. Besides enhancing our knowledge of the day-to-day functioning of the tribunate, the evidence for anonymous tribunician activity proves unequivocally that tribunes were not quiescent in the years for which *MRR* has no tribune entries. Perhaps even more interesting is whether the evidence reveals detectible, broad trends that account for a tribune's anonymity in the sources. It does, at least in cases where that activity involves a 'great man' who is the focus of the ancient source(s) in question. For instance, Livy is often more interested in those asking for, or affected by, tribunician legislation than the identity of the tribunes who perform the legislative functions (e.g., Liv. 30.40.12-15, 31.41.4, 31.49.7, all in 201); but he also fails to name any of the ten tribunes involved in three important, possibly violent political conflicts in 184, focusing only on the men about whom those conflicts arose (Liv. 39.32.5-13, 39.38.8-10, 39.39.1-4, 13). The universal anonymity of the tribunes of 184 may indicate that there is no firm link between a particular tribune's activity or political outlook and whether or not an author decides to record his name. More examples will be brought into play. Finally, is it possible to make any "global" statements about the evidence, in terms of what can and (still) cannot be adduced about these tribunes? While disavowing the intent to answer any of these questions in tremendous detail, it is my objective to offer a preliminary report on the current state of the evidence on anonymous tribunes, and some reasonably strong impressions of what we can do with it.

¹ Badian, E. 1996. "Tribuni Plebis and Res Publica" in J. Linderski (ed.), *Imperium Sine Fine: T. Robert S. Broughton and the Roman Republic* (Stuttgart) 187-213.