

From the city or territory of Patavium in northern Italy came a puzzling group of eleven Latin inscriptions which include a notation consisting of the letter N, generally with a bar above it, followed by a numeral ranging from 225 to 428. William V. Harris was the first to tackle the meaning of these notations in a convincing fashion (Harris, *ZPE* 27 [1977], 283–93.). Harris identified the notation as a local era dating from c. 173 BCE, the year following the Roman suppression of a sedition at Patavium (Livy 41, 27, 3-4). For the past two dozens of years, both the identification of the Patavian Era and its date have been positively received by scholars like J. Linderski, C. Zaccaria, and M. H. Crawford until recently Silvio Panciera (*E_KO_* 2003, 187-199) reopened the discussion. Panciera argues for dating the first year of the Patavian era to 89 BC, when the principal cities of Transpadana were elevated to the rank of “Latin colonies” by virtue of the so-called *lex Pompeia de Transpadanis*.

Panciera and Harris’ dates are 84 years apart. This is a significant gap and has important consequences for the dating of the inscriptions in question which provide testimonies to such local phenomena as the creation of *IIIvir aediliciae potestate* (*CIL* V. 2864) and the activities of *collegia*. Moreover, the different dates would bear dramatically different implications for Patavium’s perception of her own history. In all these connections, the Era of Patavium certainly deserves further inquiry.

Which date is more plausible? Are there other possibilities? I intend to answer these questions through a thorough examination of the paleographic, epigraphic and historical evidence presented by Harris and Panciera. What I would like to draw particular attention to in my paper is that no nearby cities whose historical experience often overlapped with Patavium seem to have a local era. If Panciera were right and the beginning of the Patavian Era should be connected with the city’s elevation to “Latin colony,” why is such an “era” only attested for Patavium but not the other cities that were also covered by the *lex Pompeia de Transpadanis*? Did the change of status have particularly significance to Patavium? Or rather, does the absence of such a system of chronology in the other major cities in Transpadana point to the local peculiarity of the historical context surrounding the creation of the Patavian dating system? I will argue in favor of the latter possibility that the beginning of the Patavian era was more likely dated back to a significant event that was peculiar to Patavium alone. The era of Asia and the Sullan era, neither of which was mentioned in Harris and Panciera’s articles, will be used as further points of reference.