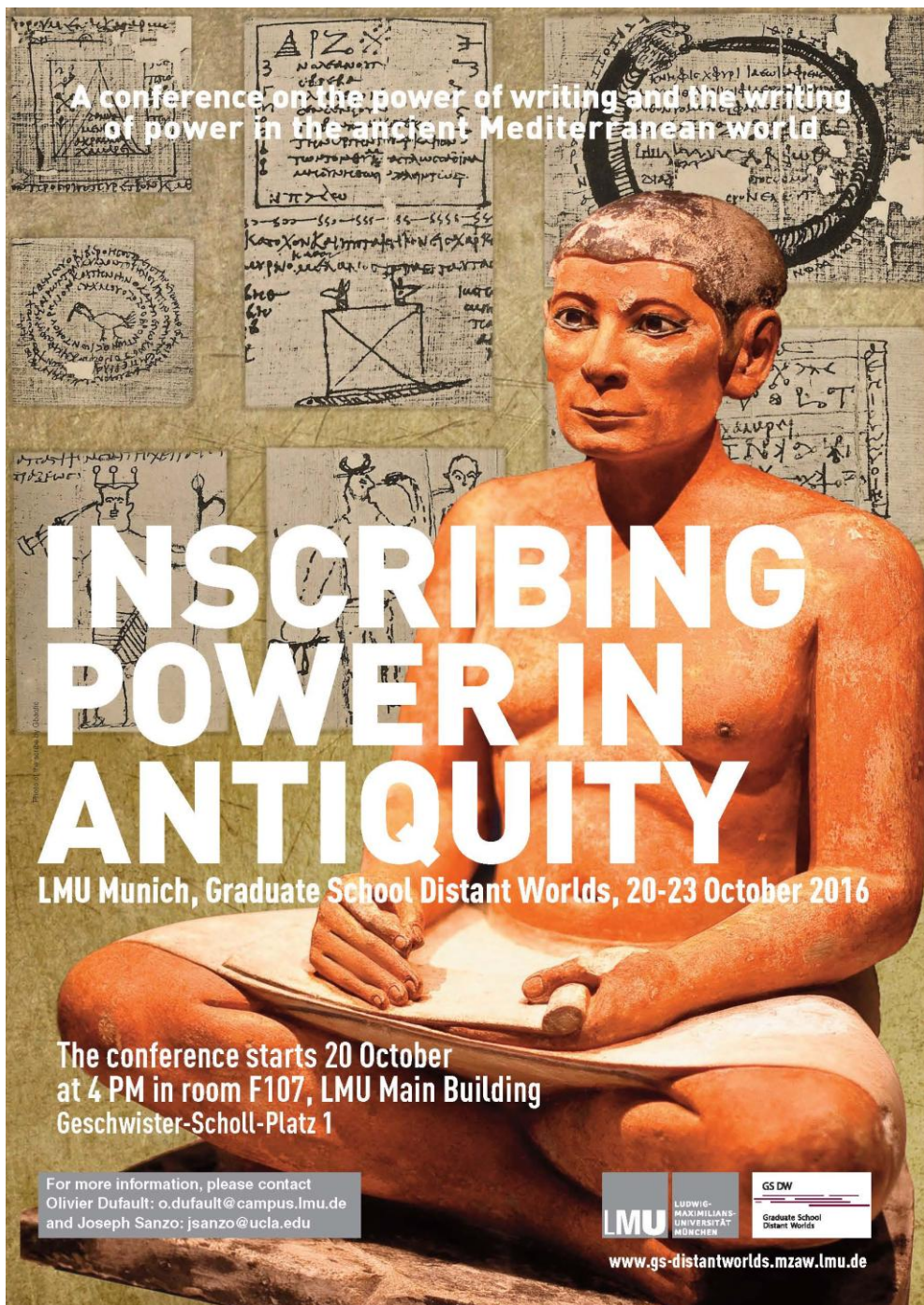


# ABSTRACTS



A conference on the power of writing and the writing  
of power in the ancient Mediterranean world

## INSCRIBING POWER IN ANTIQUITY

LMU Munich, Graduate School Distant Worlds, 20-23 October 2016

The conference starts 20 October  
at 4 PM in room F107, LMU Main Building  
Geschwister-Scholl-Platz 1

For more information, please contact  
Olivier Dufault: [o.dufault@campus.lmu.de](mailto:o.dufault@campus.lmu.de)  
and Joseph Sanzo: [jsanzo@ucla.edu](mailto:jsanzo@ucla.edu)

**LMU**  
LUDWIG-  
MAXIMILIANS-  
UNIVERSITÄT  
MÜNCHEN

**GS DW**  
Graduate School  
Distant Worlds

[www.gs-distantworlds.mzaw.lmu.de](http://www.gs-distantworlds.mzaw.lmu.de)

## 20 October

---

### **Keynote Lecture**

Christopher Faraone

#### **Voice into Text: Writing Greek Amulets in Roman Imperial Times**

In the eastern Mediterranean basin people wore amulets that consist entirely of Greek letters: comprehensible prayers, acclamations and incantations, as well as cryptic magical names and strings of vowels and symbols. In the dry climate of Egypt numerous papyrus examples have been unearthed and elsewhere more than a hundred have survived on thin sheets of metal and many more on gems. Because most of these texts date to the Roman imperial period or later, there is a strong temptation to assume that they reflect an increase in magical ritual or superstitious belief in the period. There is, of course, one obvious problem with equating the advent of written texts with the arrival of ritual practices or beliefs: nearly all of the traditional texts found on the inscribed amulets of the Roman period -- prayers, blessings, liturgies, incantatory songs -- can be documented earlier, in some cases much earlier, as oral speech-acts. In my paper I will discuss the oral prehistory of three types of Greek texts inscribed on Roman-period amulets: the first is the so-called "flee formula" which aims at forcing diseases and demons to flee from a patient; the second is an iambic charm used to stop pain in the intestines or feet; and the third concerns the evolution of special prayers that were originally used by initiates of the Samothracian mysteries to protect themselves from storms, but which were subsequently used to ward off hail and snow from vineyards and various wind-like diseases from people.

## 21 October

---

### **Session 1 9:00-11:00**

Anastasia Maravela

#### **Encoding and Negotiating Power in Roman and Byzantine Egypt**

This paper will investigate prayers, magical and non-magical, encoded by means of cryptography as forms of negotiating power with the divine in Roman and early Byzantine Egypt. Through a comparative analysis of encrypted prayers and cryptographic practice in Greco-Egyptian and Christian settings I will attempt to sketch the modes in which the human subjects of encoded prayers related to the divine and the commonalities of encoding a message to the divine in the two distinct Egyptian settings.

Kirsten Dwziza

**The use and function of writing in ancient ritual practice based on the Greek, Demotic, and Coptic manuals**

no abstract

**Session 2 11:30-12:30**

Claudia Dobrinski

**The Benedictine abbey St. Peter and Paul, Abdinghof, in Paderborn**

The network of power and influence of the monastery is recorded in the wealth of documentary evidence (both genuine and forged) which is left to posterity.

The monastery's religious power is centered in its liturgical books (bible, sacramental etc.), the vita meinweri and legends;

Its secular power is evidenced by the contracts, deeds and account books (the archive),

Its academic and scientific power is demonstrated by the scientific material (research library), used by the monasterian school and university teachers.

The micro cosmos "monastery" stored a complex collection of written works related to all aspects of the Christian church: to liturgy, to history and arts, to medicine and agriculture, to book keeping and trade, to property and donations.

All these events, processes and transactions are faithfully recorded in manuscripts which are the tangible memory and the authority of an abbey like Abdinghof.

**Session 3 13:30-15:30**

Nils H. Korsvoll

**Text or Image? The Use of Symbols in Syriac Incantation Bowls**

Signs and symbols permeate amulets and incantations from Late Antiquity, and from the very start of modern studies they have been a focal point for the discussion on the intersection of ritual and writing. Such signs and symbols are also found in the Syriac incantation bowls, and their use here reveals some interesting features that I would like to present to the wider discussion. First, the symbols are almost all found in sequences consisting of several such symbols, and these sequences are repeated, more or less identically, in different bowls. Second, while these sequences are used within different incantations, they do seem to be found together with the same drawings, which may suggest that the symbols were considered a visual element rather than a textual one. This observation is of course modified by another familiar debate, namely whether one can distinguish between visual and textual expression in such artefacts, but it nonetheless provides some suggestions as to how these symbols were understood and also maybe as to how the incantation bowls were produced.

Joseph E. Sanzo

**Inscription, Materiality, Text: The Intersection of Inscribed and Uninscribed Features on Select Magical Objects from Late Antiquity**

Scholars have long stressed the importance of writing in ancient magic. Indeed, certain scribal features, such as caractères, reveal that many magical practitioners placed considerable ritual significance on the written word and/or the act of writing. In this paper, I provide a contrasting perspective by examining select magical objects from late antiquity in which the felicity of the speech act or the meaning of the inscribed text is contingent upon uninscribed dimensions of the ritual, especially materiality (e.g., the “coldness” of a magical object’s lead or its physical shape). These objects not only challenge facile notions of the ostensible “power” of the written word in ancient and late ancient Mediterranean magic, but they also shed light on the range of conceptual configurations of textuality, writing, and material support in late antiquity more generally.

**Session 4 16:00-17:00**

Árpád Nagy

**Inscribing Power into Magical Gems: Three Case Studies**

Magical gems constitute a unique amulet-type of the Mediterranean in the Imperial Period. These precious stones, which were primarily used as rings and pendants, are distinguished from other amuletic jewellery by their characteristic constitutive elements (magical signs, magical names and unique iconography) that make their amuletic function explicit. Traditionally, these three elements are keenly distanced from meaningful texts. I will argue, however, that this boundary is by no means tight. Through the analysis of three gems I will demonstrate that the use of character, vox, and even that of the image shows common features with the use of text, and that these served as equally appropriate means for the magos to “inscribe” his knowledge into the stone. All three examples are related to Deus Israel.

**October 22**

---

**Session 5 9:00-11:00**

Emily Cole

**Conveying Authority with Language: Inscribing Multilingual Decrees in Ptolemaic Egypt**

Until the arrival of large populations of Greek speakers to Egypt in the 1st millennium BCE, the linguistic situation was relatively stable, with a cursive script, Hieratic, and later Demotic largely occupying the realm of day-to-day activities, and Hieroglyphs functioning in ritual contexts related to temples and the royal court. As Egypt came under Persian and Greek rule, the demographic changes also affected the value of the

different language registers. The brokering of power that took place between the foreign monarchs and the local elites manifest itself in multilingual inscriptions that contained both Greek and Egyptian cultural references and symbols.

In my paper, I begin by providing some sociolinguistic background on the language shift of the 1st millennium BCE. Throughout the Ptolemaic period and into the early Roman period, the increased language contact encouraged elites of both Egyptian and Greek background to inscribe multilingual texts with a variety of languages and language registers. Using the Ptolemaic trilingual decrees as my primary dataset, I argue that the use of traditional Egyptian Hieroglyphs alongside contemporary Demotic and Greek was a purposeful means of drawing on the prestige of pharaonic Egyptian culture. However, I then demonstrate that such monuments were simultaneously designed to uphold elite Egyptian authority and reinforce the foreign nature of the ruling monarchy. I do so through an analysis of the placement of the different language versions, the contexts in which they were erected, and the discrepancies that exist between different copies of the same decrees.

Christopher Waß

**On the use of script(s) in rituals for sending dreams in the Papyri Demoticae Magicae**

The use of different scripts within the same texts has often been noted in the Papyri Demoticae Magicae (PDM) from the third century CE. Among the scripts used in the texts assembled in the Papyri there are two Egyptian cursive scripts, namely Hieratic, a script introduced around the same time as the Hieroglyphs in the third millennium BCE, and Demotic, which came into use around 650 BCE. Texts written in either script can be found until the end of pagan Egypt.

Modern studies on the PDM tend to focus on the content rather than scribal practices. This paper addresses the juxtaposition of hieratic and demotic script in rituals for dream-sending in Papyrus Louvre E 3229. The rituals discussed follow the sequence of title, incantation and directions for use. Within this framework, the use of demotic and hieratic script varies. Thus far, the use of the historically older hieratic script has been attributed to the use of religious or mythological vocabulary and “archaic” language, without paying attention to the structure and formularies of the texts. In order to offer new insights, I will focus on the format of the texts and the relationship between demotic and hieratic script, as well as their distribution throughout the text.

## Session 6

Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony

**The Power of Non-Inscribing Prayer in Late Antique Eastern Christianities**

From the fourth to the seventh centuries, several theories and practices of individual prayer were developed in ascetic culture, among them, Jesus prayer, remembrance of God, unceasing prayer, and the *antirrhesis* method of struggling with demons and evil through reading Scriptures and reciting short prayers. Two ritual approaches emerged

as powerful techniques for shaping the ascetic self: The provision of formulas for individual prayer, thus drawing on the inscribing power of the word and the text, and the interiorization of the practice of prayer and the development of an inner memetic performance in which there is no inscribing power. My aim in this paper is not to rectify the category of individual prayer or to attest the flexibility in antiquity of the term "prayer," even though the terminology is not always clear. Rather, I wish to discuss the ambiguity and the inherent tension in several theories of prayer concerning the topic of writing and prayer. In doing so, I shall break down into several main types the concept of individual prayer, and distinguish these from meditation, for which the ancient Greek and Syriac authors preserved a specific terminology. I will analyze, therefore, the individual non-inscribed prayers using their own terms, namely: pure prayer, non-prayer, silent prayer, and hidden prayer. This paper deals particularly with the theories of non-inscribing individual prayers in Greek and Syriac ascetic literature, in which the word and the written text have no function. I shall explore the ambiguous approach to inscribed prayer and the religious complexity of these theories. The theories are set out in considerable detail in the writing of the monastic author, Evagrius Ponticus (d. 399), and the early fifth-century Syriac author, John of Apamea. I shall argue that the distinction made by Evagrius between "a monastic man" and "a monastic intellect", and that made by John of Apamea between two sorts of people, namely the "perfect" and the "just", may underlie the tension inherent in the theories of these two authors, and highlight the hierarchy of inscribing and non-inscribing power in their teaching.

## Session 7

Evelien Roels

### **The Power to Inscribe – Civic dossiers on Text Monuments in Hellenistic and Imperial Asia Minor**

One of the most striking features of the cityscape of the cities of Asia Minor was the conspicuous presence of assemblages of inscriptions on different kinds of buildings, making these buildings into so called 'text monuments'. This observation applies specifically to the ancient temple. From the Hellenistic until the Roman period both in the coastal regions of Caria and Ionia and in the more inland regions of Phrygia and Galatia temples can be found whose walls were inscribed with a variety of official documents, turning these temples into Schrifträger.

These assemblages of inscriptions, or inscription dossiers, generally consisted of important civic documents that testified to the city's status, privileges, rights and collective identity. Still, these documents published on the temple walls could greatly differ in subject, Stifter and presentation and it seems that very different social groups were entitled or empowered to publish their documents on the walls. Moreover, these inscriptions did not solely fulfil a displaying function, but had an active role themselves as well as they shaped the sacred and ritual space of the temple and the surrounding sanctuary in turn. The questions I would like to explore in my paper relate to the power of these inscriptions in shaping the character of the monument they were written on (in this case, the temple) and how temples in Hellenistic and Imperial Asia Minor differed in the way they were used as a medium to visualize messages of power, belief and rights.

This paper will therefore examine the political and religious power conveyed by these inscriptions on the temple walls as well as their relation to the rituals that took place around them. The temples that will be discussed are the temple of Zeus in Aizanoi, the temple of Hecate in Lagina, the temple of Athena in Herakleia on the Latmos and the temple of Roma and Augustus in Ancyra.

Polly Lohmann

### **Writing for the Sake of Writing: The Materiality and Agency of Pompeian Graffiti**

The culture of graffiti-writing in Graeco-Roman antiquity has received increased attention within the past years, a development which reflects a general trend in ancient epigraphy to understand inscriptions not merely as texts (content), but also as visual products (form). Whereas the majority of extant graffiti had long been regarded as random scribbles, recent scholarship highlights the dialogic nature of graffiti, their interaction with their surroundings and the interplay of texts and images.

The proposed paper addresses the 'agency' of Pompeian graffiti, i.e. the way the materiality and form of graffiti influenced their content or inspired their production at all. Although most of the verses and frequently repeated phrases on the walls of Pompeii seem to be derived from famous literary and theatrical works, some graffiti texts were clearly composed exclusively for their medium, as they refer to the wall as the physical surface into which they were scratched. And since they – in contrast to the many greetings, messages, and tituli memoriales – do not communicate new information to their readers, their existence derives solely from their physical materiality as wall-graffiti. Another type of graffiti is composed in such a way as to catch the unsuspecting reader unawares in a way similar to modern graffiti: 'Whoever reads this is stupid!' Such graffiti are proof not only that the writers expected a certain readership (and thus saw graffiti as a communicative medium), but also that graffiti could be written only for the sake of writing, with the sole intent of confusing or annoying their readers. The paper analyses examples of Pompeian graffiti in which the purpose of writing goes beyond conveying information, the graffiti exercise an influence ('agency') over the writers, or the materiality of the graffiti determines their content, and in this way explores the power of the written word.

## **Session 8**

Edward O. D. Love

### **Bilingualism and 'Digraphia' at the Nexus of Magical Traditions: The case studies of Egyptian-Greek and Coptic-Arabic bilingual magical texts from Roman and Coptic Egypt**

Twice in Egyptian history an immense shift in the spoken, and thereby written, language of the ruling class occurred: the Greek and Arab conquests each resulted in the introduction of a new language to the political, domestic, and ritual spheres. During the Roman period, Egyptian magical texts written in hieroglyphs, Demotic, and Old Coptic scripts were practiced in parallel to Egyptian-Greek bilingual texts, before those in the former language obsolesced and were superseded by texts solely in the latter. In



comparison, during the final centuries of the attested Coptic magical text tradition, bilingual examples written in both Coptic and Arabic were increasingly common, before Arabic subsumed the entire tradition. Utilising Roman (Demotic-Greek in the PDM and Old Coptic-Greek in the PGM) and Arab (Coptic-Arabic) period case studies, this paper will treat: the emergence and obsolescence of bilingual and bigraphic magical traditions in Egypt; and the relationship between the type of magical text, the constituent element of the magical text (e.g. ritual instructions vs invocations), and the language utilised. Through this approach, implications will be drawn regarding the eventual obsolescence of the magical tradition in the written Egyptian or Coptic language, and what this can inform about the shift in the perceived efficacy of archaic or traditional magical texts at the nexus of two concurrent magical traditions.

**23 October**

---

### **Session 9**

Michael Swartz

#### **Physicality and Literary Form in Jewish Magical and Divination Texts**

David Frankfurter, Mary Beard, and others have stressed that the act of writing is more than a medium for conveying information in religion and ritual practices; it carries a special valence of mystery and sanctity. This dimension of ritual is especially relevant to how we understand and interpret ritual texts in ancient Judaism given the primacy of the Torah and the centrality of the text. Although it is also true that ancient Jews found sanctity and significance outside the text, the very physicality of the text plays a part in Jewish divination and magic. This paper will explore how ancient and early medieval Jewish divination texts are structured so as to make their physical status as books indispensable to the ritual functions they prescribe. The evidence for this argument will come from sources in the Cairo Genizah and medieval Jewish codices in comparison with recent discoveries in Greco-Roman papyrology.

Sara Chiarini

#### **Expressing the Power of Writing in Ancient Curses**

The well attested use of letters and symbols on ancient curse tablets is alone a sufficient proof that the practitioners of this form of witchcraft believed that writing owned the power of influencing and even altering the reality of human relations and individual luck. Although we have no clue about whether and how this magical practice was carried out before the invention and diffusion of writing, it is reasonable to assume that rituals to harm and curse enemies were performed well before the advent of this techno-cultural revolution. Thus it is safe to say that writing did exert an impact on both the conception and the execution of such spells.



The specific question addressed by this paper is whether there is evidence of an awareness of the power of writing within curse texts. A lexical survey of terms and phrases attested in these magical sources and designating (1) the inscribed support as a physical object, (2) the action of writing and (3) the text itself is combined with a careful examination of the values and functions that are attributed to each of these items. The analysis aims to supply a clear picture of the magical power of writing as perceived and formulated within a specific epigraphic corpus of ancient sorcery.

To offer an example of the approach adopted in the paper, one of the Greek verbs expressing the magic act of cursing is καταγράφειν, 'to write down'. Remarkably, the objects of the formula καταγράφω, 'I write down', happen to be not only the personal names of the victims of the curse - which alone might not display the 'metaphoric-illocutionary' value of the assertion so prominently -, but also parts of their body or other features of their person. Such instances attest to the magical power ascribed to the act of writing: to write down the tongue (γλῶτταν) or the energy (δύναμιν) of someone signified an immediate and concrete harm to the target individual, much like in the better known formula καταδῶ τὸν δεῖνα, 'I bind down so-and-so'.

This and further relevant lexical evidence is collected and arranged in a cross-linguistic and systematic overview, so as to illustrate how the notion of the magical power of writing was interpreted and adapted in different linguistic areas of the ancient world.

## **Session 10**

<b>William A. Johnson</b>
---------------------------

Ancient Magic and Ancient Literacies: Conference Response