

PAST, PRESENT, & FUTURE

ENCODING AND ACCESSING MEMORIES IN EPIGRAPHY IN POST-CLASSICAL MEDITERRANEAN

On-line workshop, Leiden University
13–15 January 2021

PROGRAMME

13 January (Wednesday)

Funerary and monumental epigraphy in search for memory of persons and events

- 9:00 – 9:30 **Welcome / Introduction**
- 9:30 – 10:30 Aaltje Hidding, Staatliche Antikensammlungen and Glyptothek at Munich
Remembering little Sophia: A Christian funerary stela from Late Antique Egypt
- 10:30 – 11:30 Jelle Bruning, Leiden University
Commemorating slaves and clients in Abbasid Egypt: Tombstones connected to the Banū al-Ashajj
- 11:30 – 12:30 Break
- 12:30 – 13:30 Paweł Nowakowski, University of Warsaw
Epigraphy, historical memory, and a kneading-trough at the abbey of Qartmīn

14 January (Thursday)

Scribblings of remembrance: Graffiti as memorial device

- 9:00 – 10:00 Ilkka Lindstedt, University of Helsinki
The act of writing and reading in early Islamic inscriptions
- 10:00 – 11:00 Abdullah Alhatlani, Leiden University
Death on stone: A new Arabic graffito from the Black Desert, north-eastern Jordan



Horizon 2020
European Union funding
for Research & Innovation



11:00 – 12:00 Break

12:00 – 13:00 Jacques van der Vliet, Radboud University / NINO / LIAS Leiden University
Graffiti as a social event: Visitors' inscriptions in the Kharga Oasis

13:00 – 14:00 Adam Łajtar, University of Warsaw
Between devotion and commemoration: Visitors' graffiti in the Upper Church at Banganarti (Sudanese Nubia)

15 January (Friday)
Places/spaces of remembrance

9:00 – 10:00 Grzegorz Ochała, Leiden University
The cathedral of Faras: A Christian Nubian memorial monument

10:00 – 11:00 Cécile Treffort, University of Poitiers / CNRS
L'hypogée des Dunes à Poitiers: de la mémoire du lieu au lieu de mémoire

11:00 – 12:00 Break

12:00 – 13:00 Georg Leube, Universities of Bayreuth and Hamburg
Producing a coherent space: Epigraphy in the 15th century CE Qara- and Aqqyunlu realms

13:00 – 14:00 **Summary of the workshop / final discussion**

ABSTRACTS

Abdullah Alhatlani, Leiden University

Death on stone: a new Arabic graffito from the Black Desert, north-eastern Jordan

The aim of this paper is to present a new Arabic graffito from the Black Desert, north-eastern Jordan in order to shed light on the practice of the dating system used before the Umayyad era, in which the dating of the inscription is linked to a specific event. The graffito was discovered during the 2019 Badia Epigraphic Survey. It dates to the death of an Umayyad caliph. In addition, this paper argues that according to the epigraphic records, when a caliph died his title was removed.

Jelle Bruning, Leiden University

Commemorating slaves and clients in Abbasid Egypt: Tombstones connected to the Banū al-Ashajj

The current corpus of published Islamic tombstones from Abbasid Egypt includes a small group of stelae dedicated to the commemoration of slaves and clients (*mawālī*). Whereas interest in the history of slavery and dependency during the first centuries of Islam has increased over the past few decades and scholarship into these topics now embraces non-literary sources, these tombstones largely escaped the attention of historians of early Islam. This presentation studies tombstones for slaves and clients for what they tell about the commemoration of persons who were often considered second-rate members of Abbasid society. It does so by focusing on a small but fascinating group of texts: tombstones connected to the Banū al-Ashajj, a Muslim family with branches in Fuṣṭāṭ and Aswan. The Banū al-Ashajj are among the very few early Islamic families who left traces in historical literature, documentary papyri and monumental epigraphy. Tombstones connected to this family form a particularly interesting sample because many of them are dedicated to the family's slaves or clients. This presentation first introduces the Banū al-Ashajj. It then turns to the tombstones in question and presents a thick description of their contents, including their commemorative context. The presentation ends with some thoughts about the representativeness of tombstones for the history of slaves and clients in Abbasid Egypt.

Aaltje Hidding, Staatliche Antikensammlungen and Glyptothek at Munich

Remembering little Sophia: A Christian funerary stela from Late Antique Egypt

In the construction of Christian identity, Christian bishops such as Athanasius and monastic leaders like Shenoute drew a sharp line between Christians and 'pagans', the right religion and superstition, and the one true god and the multitude of demons. Although scholars have long acknowledged that these deep distinctions appear sharpest in polemical writings and that the social experience was different, these new concepts of reality imposed a way of thinking and speaking about religion that has influenced the history of Western thought until today. A new vocabulary of religion and discourse of the religious is, however, not only to be found in literary accounts produced by the Christian elite but also in documentary evidence.

Inscriptions, prominently present in the landscape, helped to structure, order and define the rituals and religious practices of local Christian communities. Furthermore, the costly production of an inscription was based on a conscious decision in a situation of special importance and involved careful evaluation of what to say and how to say it. Epigraphic monuments thus contribute to our understanding of the development of a new vocabulary of religion among Christians. My project is the first to comprehensively study this phenomenon in Egypt by including the epigraphic evidence and

placing this in dialogue with the other sources. The funerary stela of 'little Sophia' provides a compelling case study for this purpose. This well-preserved seventh-century stone shows Sophia dressed in simple, sleeveless tunic, standing below a portico that carries her commemorative inscription. In this paper, particular attention will be paid to how her memory was encoded and accessed: 1) context: where was the stela found, who set it up and what roles did it perform; 2) content: which words and expressions were used to communicate the message on the inscription; 3) comparison: how did the message and the medium differ from or equal to non-Christian inscriptions?

Adam Łajtar, University of Warsaw

Between devotion and commemoration: Visitors' graffiti in the Upper Church at Banganarti (Sudanese Nubia)

Walls of the so-called Upper Church at Banganarti, excavated by Polish archaeologists between 2002 and 2006, carry an unusually big number of graffiti left by visitors. The inscriptions seem to have come into being in a relatively short period between the mid-13th and mid-14th centuries. Their authors used two languages of Nubian literacy of the period, viz. Greek and Old Nubian, whereby the languages are frequently mixed with one another within a single text. The majority of inscriptions emphasize the person of the author (= the visitor), most frequently through giving his/her name, frequently preceded by the pronoun of the first person singular 'I', and optionally provided with other elements of personal presentation. In addition, a large number of inscriptions accentuate the act of their execution, which is expressed through a verb-form, mostly 'I wrote'. These two elements – emphasizing the person of the author and accentuating the act of writing – clarify what the inscriptions are meant to be: They are mementos of visits paid by pious individuals in a cult place, whom the written format grants permanence. They perpetuate an individual before the divinity in order to establish his/her eternal worshipful presence in the cult place and receive the blessing of God. At the same time, the inscriptions incorporate individual authors into the community of believers, identified his/her position within this community through his/her name(s) and title(s), and show his/her cultural preferences through the choice of language and the form of his/her inscription. In this way, they are not only a religious gesture but also a cultural and social one, engaging the present and the future public of the church.

Georg Leube, Universities of Bayreuth and Hamburg

Producing a coherent space: Epigraphy in the 15th century CE Qara- and Aqqyunlu realms

Building on a habilitation project engaging with the representational culture of the so-called 'Turkmen' dynasties of the Qara- and Aqqyunlu in 15th century Eastern Anatolia and Western Iran from an iconographical perspective, I present three case-studies of the deployment of epigraphy. In the first case-study, I argue that the spatial distribution of epigraphy in the 'entangled urban sphere' of Işfahān reflects the hierarchies of the multi-layered Qara- and Aqqyunlu courts, grounding the performative representation of the court in a coherent public sphere of visible epigraphy that structures the town and its surroundings. My second case-study engages with the establishment of a coherent diachronic space or tradition, which roots the calligraphic verses inscribed into the Achaemenid ruins of the so-called Tachara of Takht-i Jamshīd / Persepolis by the Aqqyunlu court in an intertextual *longue durée* of graffiti inscribed in the same locale during the courtly performances of earlier Muslim dynasties. My final case-study examines the establishment of inter-regional and trans-dynastic coherence across the Qara- and Aqqyunlu realms by means of tax-edicts in the name of 'Turkmen' rulers that were written in stone and displayed in the entrance of the great mosques of towns. Thereby, I argue that a joint close-reading of individual inscriptions linked by spatial, intertextual, and pragmatic links allows

the reconstruction of a coherent space that paradoxically both structures the individual inscriptions, while being established anew by the agency of every single text.

Ilkka Lindstedt, University of Helsinki

The act of writing and reading in early Islamic inscriptions

Early, seventh-ninth century CE, Islamic-era Arabic inscriptions offer an interesting corpus of epigraphic texts (mostly lapidary graffiti). They number a few thousand, of which ca. 10% are dated by their writers. Most of the inscriptions are religious in nature. The engravers underscored the written nature of these texts and sometimes entertained the hope that their texts will last forever. The writers also wished that people passing by will read the texts (aloud). Many of them undoubtedly did, and some wrote their own marks next to an existing graffiti, sometimes centuries later. The engravers, moreover, were afraid that other people will erase their texts, and added special curses against such acts of vandalism (needless to say, the curses did not always curtail people of erasing or altering the original texts). In addition to the contents, I will also discuss the formal aspects of the Arabic graffiti, for instance their use of the third person and suffix conjugation verb, to be understood in the optative or performative sense, but also adding timelessness to the writing act. Moreover, different dating mechanisms were used by the writers, such as an exact date or mentioning a famous event.

Paweł Nowakowski, University of Warsaw

Epigraphy, historical memory, and a kneading-trough at the abbey of Qartmīn

In 1907 Henri Pognon published a Syriac inscription from a massive limestone slab with a sunken surface, to be found in the nave of the 'great church' of the abbey of Qartmīn. Since that time, the object has been commented on by a number of scholars, and in 1987 Andrew Palmer produced a revised edition. Interested scholars agree that the stone served as a kneading-trough, originally installed elsewhere in the monastery, almost certainly in a domed octagonal building of unknown purpose, situated 'next to the kitchens'. The intriguing inscription, incised onto one of the narrow sides of the trough, describes how the stone was quarried and brought to the abbey by a certain Zechariah of the village of 'Aynwardo, aided by his cousin, Isaiah of Fofyath, in AD 776/7. Notwithstanding, the story is in striking opposition to a passage from *The Life of Mor Gabriel of Qartmīn* where the hagiographer credits the protagonist (ob. 648) with having brought the impressive stone to the convent in a most miraculous way. In my talk I shall be looking to explore the interplay between the intentions and methods of the work of the hagiographer, and the historical testimony of the inscription (apparently ignored, though still clearly visible to the entire monastic community of Qartmīn when *The Life...* was penned sometime in the mid-ninth cent.). Similar cases of objects triggering the distorted historical imagination of Eastern hagiographers, for example, a broken marble lid from the reliquary of Saint Niketas the Goth at his martyr shrine at Mopsuestia, will also be discussed.

Grzegorz Ochała, Leiden University

The cathedral of Faras: A Christian Nubian memorial monument

The discovery of the cathedral at Faras in the 1960s marks the birth of modern studies on medieval Christian Nubia. Since that moment, the building and its surroundings have been object of countless studies dealing with different aspects of their history. Special attention was paid to the cathedral's

complex architecture, its magnificent wall paintings, and innumerable wall inscriptions. Needless to say, all studies of the cathedral complex published to date greatly improve our understanding of the compound, yet, with their focus on special features or particular aspects, they tend to lose sight of the greater whole. As a result, we know a great many details about the cathedral of Faras, but not necessarily how it actually functioned in its different dimensions.

The present paper will treat jointly various aspects of the whole complex in an attempt to see it through the Nubians' own eyes. My main purpose is thus to try and see what the faithful attending the liturgical services saw and how they perceived what they saw. I will endeavour to analyse the most conspicuous features of the cathedral (architecture, wall paintings, and inscriptions) entangled in their mutually defining image-text-context relationship in the theoretical framework of Pierre Nora's 'lieux de mémoire'. In this way, I hope to unravel (some of) the manifold and multidimensional meanings hidden behind (some of) the cathedral's features and to demonstrate (some) mechanisms of *memoria Nubiana* at work.

Cécile Treffort, Université de Poitiers – CNRS

L'hypogée des Dunes à Poitiers : de la mémoire du lieu au lieu de mémoire

L'hypogée dit « des Dunes » ou « de Mellebaude », découvert par le père jésuite Camille de la Croix à la fin du XIXe siècle, est sans doute un des monuments les plus célèbres de l'art mérovingien. Il se caractérise en particulier par la quantité et la diversité de ses inscriptions peintes ou sculptées. Certains sont parfaitement conservés, d'autres très altérés voire disparus ; certaines sont encore en place dans l'édifice, d'autres ont été découvertes hors contexte ou en situation de réemploi ; certaines pourraient avoir été présentes dès la construction, d'autres furent clairement ajoutées ultérieurement, d'autres encore ont été modifiées ou complétées au cours du temps. A cause de la complexité du dossier archéologique, cet ensemble épigraphique, exceptionnel par sa qualité graphique et sa richesse littéraire, pose plus de questions qu'il n'en résout pour caractériser la fonction et des usages de cet édifice à l'époque mérovingienne et laisse une grande place à l'interprétation. Étroitement associés à l'architecture, aux structures funéraires, aux aménagements internes et au décor du monument, ces textes sont de typologie variée : élection de sépulture de Mellebaude accompagnée d'un anathème, sentence morale inscrite sur la grande marche centrale, mentions de dédicaces et de dépôts reliques, identification de saints, d'archanges ou d'évangélistes, et même une inscription énigmatique sur le seuil, peut-être à vocation prophylactique. Sans aller jusqu'à considérer, comme le Père de la Croix, le site comme un « martyrium », ces inscriptions, dont il convient d'analyser le sens et la dynamique d'association au cours du temps, font assurément de cet hypogée un « lieu de mémoire » au sens le plus fort du terme.

Jacques van der Vliet, Radboud University / NINO / LIAS Leiden University

Graffiti as a social event: Visitors' inscriptions in the Kharga Oasis

The Kharga Oasis (al-Khariga, the outer oasis) covers a huge and strategically important area in Egypt's Western Desert. Two sites in the area produced significant ensembles of late antique and early-medieval inscriptions, many of them left by visitors. These are, in the southernmost part of the oasis, the early church of Shams al-Din (ancient Mounesis or Monesis), and in the north, the legendary site of al-Bagawat with its decorated tomb chapels. The present paper will discuss inscriptions from both sites, mainly in their relationship to the space and the various social agents that shaped them.