



25th INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF BYZANTINE STUDIES

Vienna, 24–29 August 2026

Byzantium beyond Byzantium

TUESDAY, 25 AUGUST 2026

LOCATION: BIG-HS (BIG-HÖRSAAL, UNIVERSITÄT WIEN)

THEMATIC SESSION 2.31: EPIGRAPHIC DIVERSITIES: INSCRIPTIONS FROM COMPARATIVE AND CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

Conveners: Ida Toth, Paweł Nowakowski, Arietta Papaconstantinou

SPEAKERS:

- **Maria Aimé Villano**, An Epigraphic Survey of the Pala d'Oro at the Basilica of San Marco in Venice
- **Nicholas Melvani**, Multilingualism on Mount Athos: Greek and Slavic Inscriptions in the Sacred Space of a Monastic Community
- **Ketevan Mikeladze**, Signatures of Medieval Painters on Georgian Wall Paintings: Their Function and Spatial Context
- **Nicholas de Lange**, Greek and Hebrew in Byzantine Jewish Inscriptions
- **Lilyana Yordanova**, Bilingualism in Art: Issues and Insights from the Bulgarian Material (13th–16th Century)

WEDNESDAY, 26 AUGUST 2026

LOCATION: BIG-HS (BIG-HÖRSAAL, UNIVERSITÄT WIEN)

ROUND TABLE 3.17: EPIGRAPHIC DIVERSITIES: INSCRIPTIONS FROM COMPARATIVE AND CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

Conveners: Paweł Nowakowski, Arietta Papaconstantinou, Ida Toth

SPEAKERS:

- **Rodney Ast**, Whose Monument is This? Determining Agency in Bilingual Dedications from the Port of Berenike
- **Julia Borczyńska**, Between *Licentia Epigraphica*, Linguistic Interference, and the Stonecutter's Inexperience: Non-Professional Inscription-Making as a Mode of Epigraphic Practice in Late Antique Rome
- **Olivia Ramble**, Trilingual and Bilingual Inscriptions of Sasanian Iran: Exploring a Nascent Dynasty's Choice of Languages and Scripts
- **Andrés Rea**, Shared Hands, Different Tongues? Multilingual Epigraphy, Workshop Practice and Craft Traditions in the Early Byzantine Eastern Mediterranean
- **Michael Zellmann-Rohrer**, Multilingual Magical Texts in Early Byzantine Epigraphy

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<https://www.icbs2026.org/>

ROUND TABLE AND THEMATIC SESSION

**Epigraphic Diversities:
Inscriptions from Comparative and Cross-cultural Perspectives**

CONVENERS:

Pawel Nowakowski, University of Warsaw, Poland

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Arietta Papaconstantinou, Aix-Marseille Université, France

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Ida Toth, Oxford University, UK

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Epigraphic material provides fascinating insights into “Byzantium beyond Byzantium”. Marked by broad chronological and geographic variations, it offers unmediated evidence for the development of writing habits, for strategies of public (self-)display, and for linguistic and cultural diversities. Its potential to challenge and refine existing taxonomies, not least those associated with the designation ‘Byzantine’, is second to none.

Our Round Table and Thematic Session explore epigraphic contexts attesting to the presence of two or more languages and their scripts in close physical proximity to each other. Our aims are as follows: 1) to identify epigraphic patterns, connections, and mutual influences; 2) to examine how language choices shape intended messages, and to explore the broader socio-cultural implications of this relationship, and 3) to highlight the role of language choice in the production of inscriptions and to assess the linguistic competence of their makers.

Our participants are early- and middle-career scholars as well as senior academics. They are epigraphy specialists working on multilingual inscriptional traditions from cross/intercultural and comparative perspectives. They will approach inscriptions diachronically and with an interdisciplinary (literary, historical, religious) focus while also closely engaging with any extant visual and material evidence.

The proceedings of both sessions will be published in the series *Studies in Byzantine Epigraphy* (<https://www.brepols.net/series/SBE>).

SPEAKERS' BIOS AND PAPER ABSTRACTS

(LISTED IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Maria Aimé Villano

CNRS/ Université de Poitiers/ ERC Graph-East

In 2020 Maria Aimé Villano obtained her PhD in cotutelle between the University Ca' Foscari of Venice, the University of Verona and the University of Poitiers. Her doctoral thesis, *Les colonnes du ciborium de San Marco à Venise*, was published as a monograph by Brepols in 2025. After obtaining a post-doctoral position at the University of Verona with a project on San Marco's liturgical furniture, she was recruited as a post-doctoral member for the ERC project Graph-East (2021-2027) at CNRS Poitiers, where she works on the Cypriot epigraphical heritage with a special emphasis on Latin scripts.

An Epigraphic Survey of the Pala d'Oro at the Basilica of San Marco in Venice

In the heart of the basilica of San Marco in Venice, over the main altar, there can be seen a work of art which embodies the dual orientation of the city, anchored in the West but facing the East. The Pala d'Oro, an enamelled altarpiece placed above the city's holiest relic, the body of Saint Mark, has undergone several alterations before reaching its current state. The first phase consisted of a core of enamels commissioned by Doge Ordelaaffo Falier (r. 1102–1118) from a workshop in Constantinople; it was expanded in 1209 by doge Pietro Ziani and completed by doge Andrea Dandolo in 1342. The enamels, which depict scenes and individual characters, feature inscriptions in both Greek and Latin.

This paper will survey the inscriptions of the Pala d'Oro in order to identify the epigraphic strategies that were used at every stage of the Pala's development. It will also analyse the mutual influence of both languages employed. Particular attention will be paid to the relationship between the inscriptions and images, in terms of graphical choices (e.g. palaeography and text placement) and the messages conveyed, whether secular or devotional.

Nicholas Melvani

Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz

Nicholas Melvani is Research Associate at the Johannes-Gutenberg University in Mainz. He received his PhD in Byzantine Archaeology and Art History from the University of Athens. He has held fellowships at Koç University in Istanbul and at Princeton University. His publications include the monographs *Late Byzantine Sculpture* (Brepols, 2013) and *Politics, Conflict and the Monastic Topography of 15th-Century Constantinople* (Routledge, 2025), as well as numerous articles dealing with Byzantine sculpture, Byzantine epigraphy, and the topography of Constantinople. He is co-PI of the research project *Patronage and Power in the Pre-Modern Mediterranean: Monumental Donor Epigraphy on Mt Athos* (DFG-AHRC Research Project, 2026-2029).

Multilingualism on Mount Athos:

Greek and Slavic Inscriptions in the Sacred Space of a Monastic Community

Since its foundation in the 10th century, the monastic confederation of Mount Athos attracted monks, pilgrims, and patrons from several regions of the Byzantine Empire and beyond; in the late Middle Ages it developed into one of the most populous religious centers of the Byzantine world with a profound influence on monasticism on an

international scale, especially in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Building, dedicatory, and funerary inscriptions in visible and easily accessible areas of Athonite sacred spaces attest to the importance of these monasteries for a broad range of audiences. Often, the reach of these inscriptions surpassed the limits of the Athonite peninsula, as their commissioners were active across the expanse of the eastern Mediterranean world and their viewers and readers came from every corner of the Christian universe. Although the majority of these inscriptions were composed in Greek (even those commissioned by patrons and donors of Slavic or Romanian origin), some are written in Slavic languages (Church Slavonic, Serbian, Bulgarian, Russian) and are often displayed together with Greek texts.

This paper focuses on the symbiosis between inscriptions in different languages dating from the 14th to the 17th centuries within the sacred landscape of Athonite monasteries. It will examine how the choice of language reflects intended readership and how it shapes the mechanisms of communication between patrons on the one hand and pilgrims and monks who populated the monastic buildings on the other. It will also ask whether these choices are evidence of a notion of linguistic correctness in Late and post-Byzantine contexts and whether they can be regarded as statements of ethnic identity.

Ketevan Mikeladze

George Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation

Dr Ketevan Mikeladze is a Researcher at the Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation. She specialises in medieval Georgian art. Her research encompasses wall painting, manuscript illumination, and Byzantine–Georgian cultural relations. She has devoted particular attention to the theological programmes, iconography, and stylistic characteristics of medieval Georgian murals, as well as to donor imagery. Ketevan Mikeladze is also a Lecturer at the Tbilisi State Academy of Arts and has published extensively in both Georgian and international peer-reviewed journals.

‘Signatures’ of Medieval Painters on Georgian Wall Paintings: Their Function and Spatial Context

Painters’ ‘signatures’ on Georgian wall paintings extend over a wide chronological range, from the ninth century to the late medieval period. These inscriptions, placed on church walls, form an integral component of the painted ensemble and offer valuable insights into the artistic and cultural contexts of their creation. This paper examines the function and spatial placement of painters’ ‘signatures,’ considering their textual content, size, arrangement, and artistic execution, as well as their interaction with the surrounding imagery.

Particular attention is given to the ways in which medieval painters selected specific — sometimes visible, sometimes concealed — locations for their inscriptions within the church interior, each choice reflecting a distinct conceptual or devotional intention. The study also explores how the placement and visual design of the inscriptions shaped their potential readership and the interaction between text, image, and beholder. Ultimately, the paper seeks to shed light on how medieval Georgian artists perceived and ascribed meaning to their own ‘signatures,’ revealing their self-awareness and their role within the sacred space.

Nicholas de Lange

University of Cambridge

Nicholas de Lange's interest in epigraphy was first aroused when he was a student reading Classics and Ancient History at Oxford in the 1960s. It developed further during a term spent in Jerusalem in 1967, when he began to study Hebrew as well as Greek and Latin inscriptions. He subsequently studied Hebrew palaeography in Paris with Colette Sirat, and, at her invitation, he is currently editing a corpus of medieval Hebrew inscriptions from the territories of the Byzantine empire. He has published the Hebrew inscriptions in Chania (Crete) and was a contributor to the *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum Graeciae* (2018).

Greek and Hebrew in Byzantine Jewish Inscriptions

This paper is concerned with a radical change which took place in the languages of Jewish inscriptions from the Byzantine empire. (The study excludes the eastern territories of Syria, Palestine and Egypt, which were definitively lost to the empire during the Arab conquests in the 7th century.) In the western diaspora the normal language for Jewish inscriptions in Late Antiquity was Greek. Occasionally a word or two in Hebrew is added. Very rarely there is more substantial use of Hebrew side by side with Greek. By the 9th century at the latest, all the known Jewish inscriptions are in Hebrew. The aim of this paper is to investigate the background and reasons for this change, and to attempt to date it more precisely.

Particular attention will be paid to the phenomenon of inscriptions written in both Greek and Hebrew. How is it to be explained? Was the Hebrew element carved at the same time as the Greek, or was it perhaps added at a later period?

Lilyana Yordanova

UMR 8167 Orient et Méditerranée, Paris

Lilyana Yordanova is an art historian working on late medieval and early modern art in Southeastern Europe. She holds a PhD in History and Archaeology of the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine World from the Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes (2020) and is a former scientific member of the École française d'Athènes (2020-2023). Currently a full-time member of the Byzantine research team at the UMR 8167 Orient et Méditerranée in Paris, she coordinates (with Dr Olivier Delouis, CNRS) the five-year programme *From Byzantium to the Ottoman World in Southeastern Europe*. Her first book *A la gloire de Dieu! Commande et donation pieuses en Bulgarie médiévale* was published in 2025 by EfA Éditions.

Bilingualism in Art: Issues and Insights from the Bulgarian Material (13th-16th century)

In recent years, the topic of bilingualism has enjoyed greater attention within the context of the cultural and ethnic diversity, which characterized the late Byzantine and early Ottoman periods. Looking at medieval Bulgaria, it is curious to observe that inscriptions on icons and sacred objects during the First Bulgarian Empire (681-1018) were systematically written in Greek despite the development of Cyrillic letters since the late 9th century, and their spread over other media, from funerary stone slabs to seals. The earliest known bilingual dedicatory inscription dates back to the first decades of the 13th century, that is, to a time soon after the foundation of the Second Bulgarian Empire (1185-1396). Responding to the absence of a thorough assessment of this category of written material for the long period between 13th and the 16th centuries, my paper will re-examine well-known churches, icons and objects from Bulgarian territories. It will explore

different modes of bilingualism by taking into account the visual impact of the inscriptions as well as their visibility, perception, and the function of the texts within their iconographic settings.

Rodney Ast
University of Heidelberg

Rodney Ast is Academic Director in the Institute for Papyrology at Heidelberg University and co-director (with Emilia Smagur) of the Berenike Project. His interests are: Greek and Latin papyrology and epigraphy, the archaeology and history of Greco-Roman Egypt, and Red Sea/Indian Ocean trade. He is currently preparing a monograph about Berenike based primarily on inscriptional and papyrological sources.

Whose Monument is This? Determining Agency in Bilingual Dedications from the Port of Berenike

Like any port, Berenike (Red Sea coast, Egypt) was a cosmopolitan place. Not surprisingly, excavations have uncovered multiple bilingual dedications in a range of languages. The more exotic among them are in Greek and Tamil, Greek and Brahmi-Sanskrit, Greek and Ge'ez, and Greek and Palmyrene-Aramaic. One question that inevitably arises when studying such texts is whether one can understand the cultural background of the agent(s) responsible for a given dedication (not only the stonecutter but also the commissioner). Determining this requires close inspection of formal features of a monument, including its shape, the layout and lettering of the text it bears, the extent and positioning of each language, etc. Given the exotic nature of some of the bilingual dedications from Berenike, unmasking the agents behind them has the potential of shedding light on the broader cultural makeup of the port in the later Roman period.

Julia Borczyńska
University of Warsaw

Julia Borczyńska is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of History of the University of Warsaw. Her dissertation focuses on the monumentalisation of Christian cult sites in Rome and examines the reception of the poetic and epigraphic models established by Pope Damasus. She is also a research assistant on the STONE-MASTERS project, in which she works on identifying and analysing stonecutting workshops through epigraphic evidence, particularly from Italy and North Africa. Her recent publications include “The Roman Presbyters and ‘la bella scrittura filocaliana’”, published in *Early Medieval Europe*. A further study, devoted to the followers of Filocalus and entitled “Continuity and Change in Late Roman Epigraphy: The Most Talented Disciples of Filocalus”, will be published in the *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*.

Between *Licentia Epigraphica*, Linguistic Interference, and the Stonecutter's Inexperience: Non-Professional Inscription-Making as a Mode of Epigraphic Practice in Late Antique Rome

Bilingualism is a conspicuous feature of the Christian epigraphic record of late antique Rome. The material assembled in the *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae* (ICUR), *Inscriptiones Graecae Urbis Romae* (IGUR), and *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum* (CII), and subsequently incorporated into the *Epigraphic Database Bari*, documents more than

five hundred instances of the coexistence of Greek and Latin between the third and eighth centuries, attesting both to the persistence of this linguistic interaction and to the diversity of forms it assumed.

This paper examines bilingual Christian inscriptions from late antique Rome, with a particular emphasis on texts produced by non-specialist or occasional *lapicidae* outside established professional workshops. Inscriptions combining Greek and Latin reveal a range of features indicative of their makers' limited linguistic and epigraphic competence, including inconsistent transliteration, the mixing of alphabets, irregularities in textual layout, and errors arising from the mechanical reproduction of conventional formulae. The paper selects the cases where multilingual features result from deliberate, planned activities of the commissioners and carvers, distinguishing them from unconscious linguistic influence and mistakes resulting from insufficient training. It argues that such inscriptions illuminate not only the practical circumstances of their production but also broader transformations in the written and epigraphic culture of late antique Rome. They also reveal the gradual decline in the role of specialised letter cutting workshops and the growing participation of occasional, non-professional letter cutters.

Olivia Ramble

University of Oxford (Wolfson College/AMES)

Olivia Ramble studied Classics at the University of Oxford (Wadham College) and completed a two-year Masters in Ancient Iranian Studies at the Ecole pratique des hautes études (Paris). She conducted her doctoral research (2017-2024) in the framework of a cotutelle between the EPHE and Leiden University. Her doctoral dissertation focused on Middle Persian epigraphy and palaeography as well as Sasanian history and historiography. It received the Edward Zakarian Award from the Austrian Academy of Sciences (2025). Olivia's research interests include the history, languages, and material culture of pre-Islamic Iran and the social history and economy of the late antique world.

Trilingual and Bilingual Inscriptions of Sasanian Iran: Exploring a Nascent Dynasty's Choice of Languages and Scripts

The very first monumental inscriptions commissioned by the Sasanian kings were all trilingual, with versions in Middle Persian, Parthian, and Greek. These date from the mid-third century CE: the Parthians had been overthrown, and the nascent Sasanian dynasty established itself as the dominant military and political force in the Near East and on the Iranian plateau. It employed epigraphy to celebrate its victories over Rome and its capture of the Roman emperor Valerian. While Middle Persian was the mother tongue of the Sasanian kings, Parthian was the language of their predecessors: an important contingent of the Sasanian nobility was made up of powerful Parthian families. The written vestiges of Dura Europos further suggest that in its early days at least, the Sasanian administration was bilingual in Middle Persian and Parthian, with Parthian scribes working at the Sasanian court and contributing to the composition of official correspondence and proclamations. Greek had been a language and script of representation (namely on coinage) and of prestige under the Parthians. However, the choice of the early Sasanian dynasts to include Greek versions of their first royal edicts was likely directly linked to their ongoing military confrontations with Rome addressing their Mediterranean enemy in the language and script accessible to them. The present contribution offers an overview of the trilingual and bilingual inscriptions of Sasanian Iran

and explores the multi-faceted motivations behind the choices of locations, languages, and scripts made by the Sasanian kings for their first monumental rock-cut epigraphs.

Andrés Rea
Ghent University

Andrés Rea holds an MA in Ancient History and Archaeology from KU Leuven, Belgium. He participated in two archaeological campaigns at Sagalassos (Ağlasun, Türkiye), where he coordinated and conducted a survey of late antique graffiti and contributed to the study of the site's monumental inscriptions. After graduating, he worked as a research assistant on the ERC-funded STONE-MASTERS project at the University of Warsaw, with which he remains affiliated. Since February 2025, he has been pursuing a PhD at Ghent University under the supervision of Lieve Van Hoof and Arjan Zuiderhoek. His doctoral research focuses on urban benefactors and the various forms of generosity in the late Roman eastern Mediterranean.

Shared Hands, Different Tongues? Multilingual Epigraphy, Workshop Practice and Craft Traditions in the Early Byzantine Eastern Mediterranean

In the multilingual environment of the early Byzantine eastern Mediterranean, inscriptions offer a crucial lens through which to explore the interplay of language, identities, and craftsmanship. While previous scholarship has primarily focused on the linguistic and textual dimensions of bilingual and multilingual inscriptions highlighting aspects of intercultural contact and exchange, far less attention has been paid to their material production and to the carvers and workshops responsible for their creation. This paper examines the intersection of multilingualism and epigraphic practice in the early Byzantine East, asking whether inscriptions in different languages, often Greek and Latin but sometimes also local languages, were produced by distinct carvers or within shared workshop traditions.

Drawing on case studies from across the early Byzantine East, this paper analyses letter forms, layout conventions, carving techniques, and methods of surface preparation. By integrating palaeographic, epigraphic, and archaeological observations with historical and linguistic contexts, the paper seeks to open a broader discussion of the material dimensions of multilingualism in early Byzantine epigraphy. How did carvers and workshops negotiate the coexistence, or hierarchy, of multiple languages within a shared visual and technical repertoire? This question invites a re-evaluation of the relationship between language, materiality, and craft in the epigraphic cultures of the early Byzantine East.

Michael Zellmann-Rohrer
Freie Universität Berlin / Macquarie University Sydney

Michael Zellmann-Rohrer is a palaeographer, epigraphist, and papyrologist with a research focus in ancient religion and magic. He holds concurrent PhD in Classics and Medieval Studies from the University of California, Berkeley. He is a Research Fellow in Papyrology at Macquarie University, and an affiliate of the ERC ZODIAC project at Freie Universität Berlin, examining the transmission of astrological texts in Greek papyri. He is also a Director-at-Large of the American Society of Papyrologists and a Senior Editor of the *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* for the Near East and Egypt.

Multilingual Magical Texts in Early Byzantine Epigraphy

Early Byzantine epigraphy (fourth through eighth centuries CE) has yielded thousands of inscriptions, conventionally termed “magical,” that enrich our knowledge of the complexities of religious life, ritual practice, and mentality. This paper examines a smaller subset that also attest multilingualism and language choice. Textual amulets on metal sheets, for example, occasionally mix Greek and Aramaic, and curse tablets on lead may combine Greek and Latin. Central questions are whether, and to what extent, the generic constraints (and liberations) of “magic” cause its epigraphy to diverge from regional norms in the eastern Mediterranean, and which aspects of their epigraphic message can be seen to respond to the different languages used.