Panel 17: Magical Epigraphy

Chairs: Celia Sánchez Natalías, Paolo Vitellozzi

Over the last several decades, studies on ancient magic have played an increasingly important role in bettering our understanding of several aspects of Antiquity: from individuals' level of literacy and the analysis of local linguistic variations to the study of religious beliefs and private lives. As is well known, such practices are not only documented in the literary record (e.g., magical handbooks or anecdotes preserved by classical authors) but also through the epigraphical record, namely curse tablets (*defixiones* or *katadesmoi*) and amulets (*phylakteria* or magical gems).

Despite their importance, these inscriptions have remained on the outskirts of conventional epigraphy for several understandable reasons. First, the material characteristics of these texts, which were often inscribed on thin sheets made of lead, gold, silver or tiny gemstones, differ considerably from other types of inscriptions; second, these texts were normally written in cursive script, either by professionals or private individuals; third, given the different linguistic and educational backgrounds of the authors of many of these texts, these documents do not always conform to the linguistic registers familiar from the literary record; fourth, these artefacts often display novel writing techniques in which the graphic arrangement of a text is treated like an image (in an interesting interplay of persuasive analogies). Furthermore, these magic inscriptions were often rolled, folded, inserted in boxes or written on mounted jewels, reflecting that their messages were originally destined for a restricted audience. These inherent difficulties, of course, point to the potential benefits of studying these texts and the ways that they can expand our understanding of religious practices, paleography and linguistics.

The decipherment and edition of such inscriptions is a notoriously complicated task that requires specific and hybrid training which falls somewhere between epigraphy and papyrology. In recent years, this scholarly undertaking has greatly benefited from the development of non-invasive imaging techniques (photogrammetry, reflectance transformation imaging [RTI], open light, x-ray tomography, etc.), allowing researchers to re-edit old texts that had been poorly understood as well as us to edit new discoveries more efficiently.

The aim of this panel is to offer a space for specialists to discuss these complicated inscriptions and evolving techniques for analyzing them. Possible topics include (but are not limited to) the following:

- re-edition of published texts;
- edition of new texts;

- the problem of dating of texts through epigraphical and papyrological comparanda;
- new technologies applied to the decipherment of magical inscriptions;
- analyzing texts written by professional practitioners *versus* individual practitioners;
- analyzing textual layouts (*ordinationes*);
- other components linked to the text: iconography, *voces magicae* and the interplay between these and the inscriptions themselves.