

**CSMC Conference on "Manuscripts and Epigraphy"  
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**Abstracts**

**Cécile Michel, Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS), Paris**

**"The Written Sources of Ancient Mesopotamia, between Epigraphy and Manuscripts?"**

Ancient Mesopotamia is usually referred to as the birthplace of writing. The cuneiform writing, presumably invented by the Sumerians, has been used for about 3 and a half millennia (3400 BC – 75 AD), in a very large area from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf, and from Anatolia to Egypt (El Amarna). The different cuneiform writings, using logograms, syllabograms or letters, have been used by many various populations speaking different languages. Cuneiform signs were imprinted on clay, on wood or ivory tablets covered with wax, or engraved in stone and metal. But the great majority of the texts were written on unfired clay tablets.

Up to day, ancient Near Eastern archaeologists have unearthed about one million of cuneiform texts which are deciphered and studied since the middle of the 19th century by "assyriologists". Traditionally, these scholars use to call themselves epigraphists, never palaeographers. But when mentioning their source material, they usually speak about manuscripts. In order to understand this paradox we will analyse various elements dealing with the nature, typology and use of the sources, the media of writing, the organization of the text on the tablet, tablet series, copies, etc.

**Gianfranco Agosti, Università di Roma *La Sapienza***

**"The Layout of Greek Poems in Stones and in Manuscripts"**

The paper deals with the mise en page of inscriptional Greek poems (especially of Imperial and Late antique period), focusing on aesthesis, on relationship between arrangement of line-divisions and metrical structures, and on imitations of the layout of books. The main issue is to try to compare epigraphic layout with what we know from the editions of poems in papyri and in Mediaeval manuscripts.

**Jonathan Bloom, Boston College**

**"Arabic Inscriptions on Islamic Architecture"**

The Dome of the Rock (691), the first work of Islamic architecture, was decorated on the interior (and presumably on the exterior) with Arabic inscriptions taken from the Qur'an and commemorating the founder, and for centuries afterwards virtually all works of Islamic architecture were decorated with similar inscriptions worked in a variety of media, such as stone, stucco, brick and tile. This talk will introduce the various different types of inscriptions and their stylistic developments, particularly in relationship to the constraints imposed by the medium and the placement of the inscriptions on and in the building.

**Emanuel Francis, Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS), Paris**  
**"Indian Manuscripts & Epigraphs: Commonalities & Specificities"**

Manuscripts and inscriptions appear in the historical record of India (i.e. South Asia) around the same period, in the few centuries before the Common Era. This late appearance of artefacts bearing script—if we except the controversial issue of the so-called "Indus script" (mostly attested ca. 2600–1900 BCE)—is due to the Indian prejudice against script, the negative corollary of the positive value ascribed to sound (*śabda*) compared to meaning (*artha*) as illustrated by the oral transmission of the Vedic texts. The impulse for writing came from kingship in relation to the needs of chancellery (archives recorded on palm-leaves; promulgation of royal orders on stone and rock) and to the royal craving for fame, that needed to be inscribed in order to last. Buddhism, as an anti-Brahmanical tradition, probably also played an important role in this development.

There existed a difference of content between manuscripts (writings on organic and perishable materials such as palm-leaf and birch-bark) and inscriptions (writings on durable materials such as stone and metal): besides their use for chancellery archives, manuscripts were used mostly to record literary works (*kāvya*s), treatises (*śāstra*s), ritual and religious texts (*vedas*, *purāṇas*, *tantras*, etc.), whereas inscriptions usually consist in legal, commemorative, and panegyric documents. Nonetheless there are commonalities between these two mediums.

My intention is to underline these commonalities and specifics—or at least some of them. Starting from a general perspective on South Asia I will in most cases adopt a more restricted focus on the South Indian situation.

Specificities of each medium mostly bear, besides the material itself, on the content, whereas commonalities rarely concern content but rather bear on the format in some specific cases, on the function of the written artefact, and on the writing habitus and scripts.

As an instance of continuity of content, records of gift inscribed on metal or stone represent permanent ownership titles, otherwise recorded as archives in manuscript form in the chancellery. Besides content, this continuity also concerns format in the case of the early copper-plate grants (recording royal gifts) which are in the shape of palm-leaves. There is also a famous example of "stone book" in Sri Lanka, which is an inscription on a huge slab designed as a palm-leaf.

Literary genres such as dramas, for instance, that were usually written in manuscripts were also inscribed on stone, or even exceptionally on metal, but these cases are rare or relatively late. One should also be aware that royal epigraphical panegyrics are as much literary as compositions usually committed to manuscripts, that is both types share the same concern for form and content and belong to the same literary culture.

From a functional point of view, both mediums pursue with their means the goal of preservation and dissemination: manuscripts through their multiplicity, inscriptions through their durability. Whereas numerous manuscripts of the same text were produced, an inscription usually is an idiosyncratic document (although standardised templates could be used with a change of the specifics of the gift). There are however important exceptions to this rule: rock edicts of the king Aśoka (3rd c. BCE) were replicated in different parts of his realm; royal panegyrics in Sanskrit (*praśastis*) were sometimes reused and supplemented from one king to another in copper plates; royal panegyrics in Tamil (*meṅkīrttis*) were disseminated through numerous stone copies of the same text (supplemented on a regular basis in the course of the reign).

One also observes—besides the close resemblance between the scripts used in Indian inscriptions and manuscripts—the customary presence of auspicious beginnings, which can take the form of an auspicious sign, a short prose blessing, or a verse (or several verses).

**Arlo Griffiths, École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), Jakarta**  
**"The Combined Use of Manuscripts and Inscriptions in the Study of Pre-Islamic Indonesian Palaeography and Codicology"**

A recurrent formula in ancient Javanese inscriptions states that high court officials were to make a *sañ hyañ rājaprasāsti macihna* [KING'S NAME] *umuṅgve salaḥ sikiniñ upala tāmra ripta*, i.e. 'a venerable royal decree, bearing the seal of NAME, to stand on one or the other of stone, copper or palm-leaf'. A few rare cases have come down to us of such decrees preserved both on stone and on copper plate, although no royal decrees have been preserved from pre-Islamic Indonesia in the medium of palm-leaf. Nevertheless, a substantial number of palm-leaf manuscripts transmitting other kinds of texts has been preserved on both Java and Bali, opening up the possibility, if not for actual collation of specific texts from more than one medium, at least for codicological and palaeographic comparison with the epigraphical record on stone and copper-plate.

As in the case of India (see the abstract of Emmanuel Francis), which is the ultimate source of the pre-Islamic Indonesian writing tradition, it is the similarities between the media of palm-leaf and copper-plate that most clearly invite comparison. And the material for comparison is richest on the island of Java. This paper will focus on that island and its pre-Islamic culture of writing, both manuscript and epigraphical, in an Indic system of writing, a system that was replaced only partially by Arabic script between the 16th and 19th centuries but since then has not survived the competition with the amazingly successful latinization from about 1900 onwards.

We will first offer a brief overview of the media of writing, both manuscript and epigraphical, that we are dealing with in the study of pre-Islamic Indonesia, and will discuss some remarkable similarities as well as discontinuities between Indian and Indonesian copper-plate charters and palm-leaf manuscripts. Special features of the Indonesian tradition, seen in the case of both media, as we will illustrate, are the preliminary application of a frame of lines and the preservations of documents in boxes, some of which are preserved from distant past. A specific difference between India and Java concerns copper-plate charters: although on Java, as in India, they consist of multiple plates, such charters are on Java never bound together by a large ring, and hence never provided with a big hole for the ring to pass through. Such material differences, in themselves seemingly devoid of rationale and perhaps insignificant, will be situated against the background of a more wide-ranging comparison of the material choices made in the epigraphical traditions of South and Southeast Asia, and hence be defined as distinctive features of the Javanese culture of writing.

The last part of the paper will be devoted to the small corpus of documents in Old Sundanese, the language of the western part of Java, before the massive influx of Arabic loanwords that characterizes modern Sundanese, and written in its own Indic script. This corpus comprises less than a hundred palm-leaf manuscripts, copied between the 16th and 18th centuries, and less than a dozen very short inscriptions. As is the case more generally in Indonesian studies, the epigraphical corpus has never been studied in consultation of the manuscript tradition, and vice versa. We will illustrate from the perspective of palaeography how a comparative epigraphical and manuscript-based approach could contribute to a better understanding of the history of Sundanese writing, and hence of the (now extinct) specifically Sundanese manuscript culture.

**Joachim Friedrich Quack, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg**  
**"From Files to Secret Knowledge. Ancient Egyptian Manuscript Culture on Papyri"**

As the monumental stone inscriptions in Ancient Egypt generally come to mind first, one often tends to ignore that actually totally different media, particularly papyri, dominated daily business, cultural practices, and the transmission of knowledge in Ancient Egypt. In most cases, papyri were written on in several more or less abbreviated cursive scripts rather than in elaborate hieroglyphs.

One can closely follow a manuscript culture developing over almost three thousand years, which established different layouts and marking methods for different contents. A survey of the most important phenomena will be given.

**Andreas Rhoby, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien**  
**"Inscriptions and Manuscripts in Byzantium: A Fruitful Symbiosis?"**

Despite the decline of the epigraphic production in post-late Antiquity, inscriptions were omnipresent components of Byzantine civilization, especially in the middle and late Byzantine period (9<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> centuries). They were attached to all different kinds of media: stones, frescoes, mosaics, metalwork, wood, ivory, glass, textiles, etc. Letters, words and texts were transferred in both directions: from manuscripts to inscriptions and from inscriptions to manuscripts. Epigraphic letter forms found their way into manuscripts as palaeographic conventions were included into inscriptions. The following questions will be addressed: to which extent did texts change when they were transferred from templates or manuscripts to inscriptions? Are differences in the manuscript and in the epigraphic transmission of a text due to "mistakes" or were they included on purpose? How far were epigraphic layouts of texts transferred into manuscripts? (Texts as quasi-inscriptions accompanying miniatures in manuscripts will be discussed). Which persons were responsible to transfer texts from manuscripts to inscriptions? How does the "manuscript scribe" differ from the "inscription scribe"?

**Sheila Blair, Boston College**  
**"Kufic: From Koran Manuscripts to Coins and Monuments"**

Most parchment manuscripts of the Koran made in the early centuries of Islam are done in a distinctive blocky script usually dubbed "kufic" after the city of Kufa in southern Iraq, although not all of the manuscripts were made there. Dating these manuscripts is difficult, as none is signed or dated. To do so, scholars often examine the use of this script in other dated media, notably coins, milestones, and buildings. This paper will illustrate some of these examples and discuss some of the questions raised by these comparisons. It will conclude by comparing this situation with developments in later times, when calligraphers increasingly adopted more rounded styles of script at the same time as, and perhaps because of, the adoption of paper.

**Ellen van Goethem, Kyûshû University, Fukuoka**  
**"Written, Used, Discarded, and Unintentionally Preserved: Writings on Wood in Ancient Japan"**

This paper will provide an overview of the discovery, typology, and practical use of kodai mokkan, inscribed wooden tablets that were produced in large numbers between the seventh and tenth centuries in Japan.

While a small number of these mokkan had been carefully preserved for centuries in imperial repositories, the vast majority of the tablets was not discovered until recent decades. Excavations of sites mostly related to local or central government facilities, elite residences, and temples have yielded hundreds of thousands of inscribed tablets or shavings (kezurikuzu).

As a result, our understanding of various aspects of government, economy, and society in ancient Japan has changed and we have been allowed glimpses of the practical execution of government regulations and of daily life. Mokkan have also contributed to a better understanding of archaeological remains as they occasionally allow for precise dating and identification.

**Ryôsuke Furui, Institute for Advanced Study on Asia, Tôkyô University**  
**"Copper Plate Inscriptions of Eastern India"**

One category of inscriptions peculiar to South Asian epigraphy is copper plate inscriptions recording transfers of land or revenue rights mostly as religious endowments. They carry grants or charters issued by the king or the other authorities to donees, which were to remain for eternity as evidence of conferred rights and privileges. The function of those inscriptions to convey such texts, which could have been written on sheets of parchment or paper in other contemporary cultures, is facilitated by their two properties, namely, supposed imperishableness and mobility. The former differentiates them from the other writing supports like palm leaf and birch bark manuscripts, and the latter from inscriptions fixed on rocks, stone objects and architectural elements. The peculiar environmental and historical context of South Asia, namely the tropical climate inimical to preservation of organic materials and the relatively late arrival of paper, necessitated such an inscriptional genre.

Due to their character as legal documents, those copper plate inscriptions have highly formalised contents. Nevertheless, specificities of donations inscribed on them including objects, donees and terms of grants provide us precious information on the contemporary society, otherwise unavailable from the other sources. Another feature exclusive to royal grants, namely lengthy eulogy of the king and his lineage, also gives us clues to the historical incidents perceived by them and the ideological aspects of their power. Furthermore, forms and formats of the inscriptions themselves would reveal the power relation among all the parties concerned with the documents. In the present study, I would like to discuss such aspects of copper plate inscriptions of South Asia, in special reference to those of early medieval eastern India on which I have worked for some time.

**Peter Stein, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena**  
**"Manuscripts and Epigraphy in Ancient South Arabia"**

The rich writing culture of Ancient South Arabia presents itself in two different modes: representative epigraphy, mainly chiselled in rock surfaces and stone blocks or cast in bronze, on the one hand, and every-day correspondence scratched in wooden sticks, on the other. Both modes of writing make use of their particular type of script: a geometrical lapidary script called "monumental" for the inscriptions and some kind of cursive script called "minuscule" for the manuscripts. Since each type of script is largely depending on its particular writing material, the two modes of writing appear to be used completely separately from each other, each being restricted to specific genres of text.

However, interferences between the two can be found. They are characteristic for legal documents, as far as a legal deed, normally the statement of settlement of a debt, is going to be made public. Another genre that is found on both materials is, curiously enough, dedicatory inscriptions. Here we will finally face the question how the manufacturing process of inscriptions was organized: was it based on models, and on which sort of script? Though the comparatively poor evidence allows no definite answer, we may propose some ideas on the particular relevance of manuscript writing in Ancient South Arabia in respect of the much more prominent epigraphic tradition.

**Peter Kruschwitz, University of Reading, GB**  
**"Inscribing the Uninscribable: Exploring the Fringes of the Graeco-Roman Epigraphic Habit"**

The term 'inscription' is notoriously hard to define. Recent years of Classical scholarship have put significant emphasis on the materiality of the text, stressing that an inscription is a text written on an object whose primary purpose was not to be a carrier of text (apart from coins, with a big question mark over the status of wax tablets, letters, and so forth). This paper aims to explore further the

fringes of the epigraphic habit of the ancient world, offering an overview of materials for which inscriptions are reported, even though they do not (typically) survive - from carving in tree trunks to tattoos and beyond. This will result in some more general questions about the visual presence of texts in the ancient world, their role and prestige, and finally (if briefly) a comment on current views on ancient literacy levels.

**Susanne Wittekind, Universität zu Köln**  
**"The Places of 'Inscriptions' in the Miniatures in Mediaeval Manuscripts"**

As early as Late Antiquity, the Capitalis Quadrata script that is based on the Monumentalis script usually used for inscriptions is used in luxury manuscripts containing the works of Virgil to highlight the dignity of the text. During the ensuing period, in insular and Carolingian manuscripts up to the twelfth century, display script is in particular used to mark titles, incipits and explicits. The lecture will discuss the question as to where these inscription-like display scripts are used in manuscripts, focussing not on those pages that exclusively contain embellished script, but rather on those where display script is integrated into pictures. Often such inscriptions are situated in separate strips or panels that appear to be located in front of the picture surface as if floating, or as if fitted like horizontal beams between the lateral picture frames. In some cases inscriptions are inserted in framing borders, often oriented towards the central image field. In other cases, however, pictorial elements themselves may also become the medium carrying the inscription, such as a mandorla, clipeus or arcades. Focussing on a few examples, such specific places where inscriptions are found on manuscript pages will be compared to the places of inscriptions on metalwork objects. Are patterns specific to these objects being transferred to those of manuscript illumination? And what is the consequence of this medial transfer? How do inscriptions change the way in which a picture is perceived within the context of the manuscript page?

**François Lagirarde, École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), Paris**  
**"Artistic and Technical Visual Elements about the Northern Thai Manuscripts: Some Examples from the Digital EFEO Picture Library and Catalogue"**

The EFEO led a project to digitize palm leaf manuscripts from 2006 to 2011 in forty-one monastic collections of northern Thailand. A corpus of several hundred traditional Buddhist chronicles has been selected and is now studied from the perspective of literature, philology and history of Buddhism. But from the experience in this field, a number of "archaeological" or codicological remarks could be presented on the artistic (*artisanal*, technical) context in which the manuscripts are kept. Indeed not only the letter but also the arts implemented in their production and use should be understood. That is why this paper will broadly discuss the aesthetics and functionality of monasteries and libraries, present the objects related to the conservation, writing and reading of the manuscripts and finally show the technical embellishment, layout and design they received.

The question of whether this art can confer a special status to the manuscript — a sacred object, or a ritual object? — will be asked in conclusion.

**Simone Griessmayer, Universität Zürich**

**"Not for the Human Reader? Texts in Pagodas and Tombs of the Liao-Dynasty"**

During the last years many texts have been discovered in Liao-Dynasty tombs and pagodas. Characters – even if it wasn't the standard Kitan-Characters – seemed to play a major role in the transmission of beliefs and thoughts of this foreign Dynasty in the 11<sup>th</sup> century China.

The most spectacular texts are Dharani-sutras, which were enshrined to represent the Dharma-body of the Buddha. But we also have a large quantity of inscriptions that tell us about the builders and the donors of the buildings.

In this short overview of the different types of texts discovered in Liao-Dynasty tombs, and pagodas, I want to show how different materials are used to immortalize written words. In the following discussion we may think about whether the materials that were used give different values to the enshrined objects.

**Jost Gippert, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main**

**"Buddhist Mantras and Islamic Decrees - Epigraphical Monuments from the Maldives"**

The paper addresses the contents and structure of epigraphical monuments that represent the first millennium of Maldivian literacy (ca. 700 - 1700 C.E.). The inscriptions in question (Buddhist mantras on coral stone and Islamic decrees on copper plates and wooden artefacts) are classified in accordance with their relation to handwritten sources (manuscripts) with similar contents and to other epigraphical sources (esp. gravestones), with a view to establishing a general typology.