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Introduction

Writing conveys its meaning not only by content but in manifold ways, such as letter-form, material, position, visibility, legibility or non-legibility. The essays in this volume originated from the conference "Writing Matters. Presenting and Perceiving Monumental Texts in Ancient Mediterranean Cultures", a symposium of the International Academic Forum Heidelberg which took place in Heidelberg from 10th to 12th October 2013.[1] The conference centred on the question of the importance attached in Antiquity, Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages to the recording in writing of public announcements and private messages in public spaces. On the basis of evidence and features from several different epochs in Greek and Roman Antiquity as well as the Middle Ages, various aspects were examined from a diachronic perspective which gave rise to new questions.

Just as a modern one, a visitor to a premodern city would naturally have encountered labelled and inscribed monuments. There would have been inscriptions on the walls of houses and temples, inside churches, on the *agora* or the *forum*, and on public works of art such as statues, reliefs, paintings and mosaics. And although the value attached to inscriptions for public display, and indeed the use and configuration of public spaces themselves, changed over time, enduring characteristics of monumental writing remained perceptible within the new contexts. The existence of objects with writing on them shaped and characterized public space and even though the inscriptions may not have been always read—or were only glanced at—they still invited observers to take note and interact, simply by their often extremely striking presence. The contributions in this volume all revolve around the presence and materiality of written records in the urban context, in private homes and on public buildings.

Particularly important for the understanding of inscriptions is the position they occupy within the spatial context. Attempts to recontextualize these artefacts in their original social and spatial surroundings have opened up new and different perspectives for interpretation. As well as observations concerning the actual form of individual written records (including the artefact inscribed, ductus of the writing and relationship between writing and image), questions concerning spatial relationships with nearby monuments, placement within the public space and the influence of these factors on public perception have gained in importance.

1 The conference and the subsequent publication of its proceedings were funded and made possible by the Collaborative Research Centre 933 'Material Text Cultures. Materiality and Presence of Writing in Non-Typographic Societies'. The CRC 933 is financed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG).

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Precisely because inscribed artefacts were always designed with a purpose and their locations selected with care, the interaction between them and their immediate surroundings is of central importance to a discussion of their public existence. How were the inscriptions designed? To what extent did the written word and the inscribed object shape and influence the appearance and perception of a particular space? In what way did the specifics of the space in turn determine the design of the inscribed artefact and the way it was perceived? Take, for example, the display of legal texts on tall stone stelae in public places. How did people interact with such textual monuments? How were they perceived by those who saw them at the time? Who was able to read the texts and how was their understanding influenced and guided? What functions could inscriptions perform? The way in which these texts were received primarily depended on a person's prior knowledge and experience in dealing with writing. People could perceive written records very differently, depending on their cultural, societal and personal backgrounds, and interpret them quite differently too. With this in mind, the present volume presents new approaches to many different material forms of the written word, with examples drawn from a wide range of epochs and cultures. The order of the articles has been chosen with a focus on specific phenomena as seen from different perspectives, so that inscriptions from Classical Athens are juxtaposed with inscriptions from Byzantine churches, and Pompeiian graffiti with mediaeval stonemason's marks. Instead of examining inscriptions from a primarily diachronic perspective, looking at differences and developments across the centuries, we have chosen instead to focus on the specific aspects of inscriptions which arise from their location within public and private spaces and their spatial relationship to other artefacts. First, these must be identified and described, and then examined from various perspectives. In choosing this approach the intention is not to look for similarities where none exist, but to focus attention on specific aspects of inscriptions—and on an approach which may also be applied to contexts and types of inscriptions that are not discussed here.

The relationship of words and images or rather 'text as art' has become the focus of increasing attention in the Humanities in the recent years. Monographs and collective volumes have been published to study these phenomena in Greek,[2] Roman[3] and Byzantine culture,[4] Medieval Art History[5] and Islamic art.[6] While many of the existing books have been conceived within disciplinary boundaries, we are not going to reproduce this approach. For this reason the case studies presented here have not been

2 See e.g. Meyer 1989; Goldhill/Osborne 1994; Lawton 1995; Snodgrass 1998; Blanshard 2004.

3 See e.g. Elsner 1996; Corbier 2006; Thunø 2007; Baird/Taylor 2011; Thunø 2011; Kiilerich 2011.

4 See e.g. Mullet 1990; Papalexandrou 2001; James 2007; Rhoby 2011; Eastmond 2015; Bedos-Rezak/Hamburger (2015); Leatherbury 2016.

5 See e.g. Kendrick 1999; Cavallo 1994; Diebold 2000; Hamburger 2011.

6 See e.g. Bierman 1998; Blair 2013.

arranged by chronological or geographical terms, but instead to underline the shared ways writing could be engaged in different societies, areas and times.

Contrary to the prevailing methodology in previous studies, we have chosen not to see inscriptions primarily as finished texts whose meaning lies solely in their wording.[7] The wording can, of course, provide information on prosopographical questions and clues with regard to the date and nature of the monuments that are mentioned in the inscriptions. However, seeing inscriptions as artefacts rather than written records brings into focus groups of people and aspects of cultural-historical relevance, which are not explicitly mentioned in the texts. Aside from clients or named recipients, stonemasons, painters and readers were also involved in the creation of these inscriptions or bestowed on them the status they were intended to have by performing certain practices of reception or engaging in certain types of behavior appropriate to the specific location. The value of an inscription as an intentionally designed artefact and its significance within a milieu made up of other inscriptions, artefacts and living beings thus becomes evident.

The aim is therefore to recontextualize inscriptions as artefacts within their original social and spatial surroundings. For any given case, this means that in addition to studying the wording and categorizing the inscription within the spatial context, we ask how it was created and erected, what materials were used, who might have read it (was it intended for a specific audience?) and what the conditions were for seeing and reading it. The term 'context' is therefore seen, on one hand, as a spatial dimension and on the other as a range of factors which embedded an inscription within the societal circumstances and which must be described and reconstructed.[8] We also define here two terms, the 'materiality' and the 'presence' of the written word, which play an important role in this. These are two factors with which some of the above-mentioned parameters can not only be linked, but without which some of them, for instance

7 Whilst researchers have studied the creation and public presentation of inscribed artefacts for quite some time, the reception of such records by their contemporary observers and their social and cultural significance have only recently begun to be examined. Particularly their roles as media of social communication and political discourse have been studied more comprehensively, for instance by Alföldy 1991 and 2003, Eck 1998, Hedrick 1999 and 2000, Alföldy/Panciera 2001, Chaniotis 2003 as well as Haensch 2009—usually, however, with a special focus on the meaning of the contents and on the political messages contained in the texts. Studies on the original multifunctionality of the inscribed artefacts, on their role in spatial design and on the actual perception by ancient observers are still rare; notable exceptions include Krumeich/Witschel 2009 and the contributions in the volume Eck/Funke 2014 as well as certain studies from the English-speaking world, e.g. Day 2010, Shear 2011 and Lambert 2012. The same applies to the relationship between the text and the image or between the text and the monument: whilst there are a number of individual studies on particular categories of inscriptions or monuments (for example Scholl 1996, Hölkeskamp 2000 and Horster 2001), there is a lack of attempts at correlating the partial results and interpreting them within the wider context outlined here.

8 On this aspect see Dickmann/Keil/Witschel 2015.

the conditions which influenced how writing was perceived, would be impossible to reconstruct. Both aspects, although not always explicitly formulated in the contributions of the various authors, were at the centre of the conception of the conference at which the papers in this volume were presented and discussed. The term 'materiality' covers a whole range of characteristics and features inherent in the individual artefacts.[9] They include the properties of the material used, which had an impact not just on the process of manufacturing and displaying the object and on the perception of the inscription, but also on the design of the lettering, the combination of materials, and the dimensions and arrangement of the individual components. Describing or reconstructing these properties allows us to draw conclusions with regard to the meaning and use of the written word, and to locate inscriptions within the context of activities. The term 'presence', on the other hand, relates to the spatial positioning of inscriptions within a particular area.[10] This is linked to considerations regarding their visibility, a factor which could potentially limit their impact. It also raises questions as to whether an artefact may have had only a temporary presence in a specific space and whether constellations of artefacts may have changed over time.

Investigating the materiality and presence of inscriptions is a completely distinct interpretative approach to investigating their content, but it is ultimately also aimed at the cultural classification of the written word. We assume that the written word does not contain an immanent meaning which has only to be deciphered for us to track down an unambiguous and universally-valid significance. The interpretation of an inscription as a *titulus* on a tomb, for instance, depends solely on conventionalized attributions of meaning to certain combinations of letters, how they were formed and where they were affixed. The meaning of an inscription is only established by the repeatedly performed and confirmed reception of its contents on the basis of culturally specific routines. Contrary to Michel Foucault, who viewed materiality as a component of expression,[11] we assume that an 'expression' cannot exist outside of materiality. Moreover, as opposed to a purely content-based analysis of written records, the study of the materials also provides an approach to fragmentary or completely illegible inscriptions or those whose meaning is obscure.

Alongside the focus on the "epigraphic habit",[12] where the main question is why, in a particular society, inscriptions came to be used on a huge scale as a medium for disseminating information and an instrument for public display, we introduce a decidedly qualitative line of enquiry, which asks instead exactly how these inscriptions were embedded within the specific culture. This approach also broadens the

9 On the term *materiality* and its different levels of meaning see Karagianni/Schwindt/Tsouparopoulou 2015.

10 On the term *presence* see Hornbacher/Frese/Willer 2015.

11 Foucault 2013, 145–153.

12 On the term *epigraphic habit* see MacMullen 1982.

field of enquiry to include not only the epochs and cultural areas where inscriptions did indeed constitute a massive phenomenon, such as ancient Athens or the cities of the Roman Empire, but also periods and areas in which inscriptions occur relatively seldom or only in a few quite distinct architectural contexts, or are mentioned in works of fiction. It also includes in certain types of writing that are not immediately recognizable as inscriptions. Mainly these are small-scale texts such as graffiti or labels made of perishable materials. Stonemasons' marks, which often merely consist of a single character with an unusual shape or a symbol especially designed for the purpose by the stonemason himself, can also be seen, from this perspective, as evidence of writing, i.e. as inscriptions.

Particularly in the case of the latter types of inscription, but also in mosaic inscriptions in churches, the praxeological perspective raises questions that shed new light on these texts.[13] Who was actually able to read the inscriptions in question? Did this change at particular times of the day or on specific occasions? What led a donor, for instance, to display his inscription in a location that was almost inaccessible? How did texts on display in a particular space influence the way people moved through it? Or conversely, how was the type and location of display influenced by people's movements?

The volume is divided up into four chapters which each focuses on a different research question and range of problems. Many of the contributions could have been included in and enriched one of the other chapters, and the aspects examined are often of significance for several topics, showing very clearly how complex and varied the study of written records and their material presence can be.

The first part includes articles on theoretical questions and methodological research perspectives. The first paper by **Ludger Lieb** and **Ricarda Wagner** studies the concept of 'affordance' as applied to metatexts, i.e. texts that mention and discuss other texts. Using inscriptions on fanciful medieval tombs as an example, they show how such texts and the associated artefacts impacted on their viewers and readers and how they encouraged or even challenged them to carry out certain actions. Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival, for instance, mentions the epitaph of Gahmuret, which was said to have admonished even heathens and nonbelievers to pray for the deceased. The article emphasizes the practical significance of metatexts as invaluable sources for researchers studying the importance of the written word in past societies, and the ways in which metatexts were used, not just in documents which actually existed, but also in fictional ones.

Alexander Starre addresses the topic of the volume from the point of view of an Americanist and highlights the ways in which classical scholars and medieval-

13 On the significance of the praxeological perspective in epigraphical research see Dickmann/Elias/Focken 2015.

ists can benefit from the approaches adopted by modern literary scholars (and vice versa). Discussing Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's and Niklas Luhmann's work alongside New Historicist theory, Starre promotes the notion of bringing the medium which bears the message once more into stronger focus, thus offering an approach to the study of human communication through writing and text which is also (and perhaps particularly) productive for the study of past cultures whose human protagonists can no longer be questioned.

Francisca Feraudi-Gruénais' study of inscriptions in the context of ancient two-dimensional works of art is an example of a methodological approach to the phenomenon of inscriptions which have hitherto been only cursorily examined. Although the interaction between image and text is a subject of debate in many disciplines of art and art history, precise definitions for the phenomena studied are still lacking, particularly if one is interested not just in the purpose of image-text compositions but also in how such arrangements actually worked. The article proposes a method of capturing the 'synactive potential' of inscriptions as a measure which can be used to define image-inscription phenomena in a heuristically practical way.

The second part of the volume is dedicated to the 'presence' of writing. Entitled "Text Spaces" the chapter deals with the extensive subject area of the space-constiuent aspect of writing based on the study of various spatial structures. The central question in this section is: in what way did the written word and inscribed objects impact on the appearance and perception of a particular space and how did the spatial specifics in turn influence the design and perception of the inscribed artefacts?

Public urban spaces in Hellenistic cities are the specialist subject of **Irene Berti** and **Péter Kató**, who have studied the list-like inscriptions from Athens and Cos. Publicly displayed on stone monuments, these inscriptions consisted mainly of catalogues of names. They were usually placed in strategic, highly-visible or symbolically important locations. On one hand they were a suitable medium for the self-promotion of citizens from various social strata and on the other they served to promote a shared identity. Whilst the outstanding deeds performed by individuals for the good of the urban community were celebrated by honorary decrees and, even more, by bronze and stone statues, the lists commemorated all citizens and praised them for their political participation, even though this was, in fact, compulsory.

The next contribution deals with the presence of writing in the Roman port city of Pompeii which, thanks to its unsurpassed state of preservation, lends itself particularly well to the reconstruction of past 'text landscapes', although the article centres on a group of ephemeral written records which have rarely survived elsewhere, namely the painted *dipinti*. The so-called *programmata*, calls to vote painted onto the façades of private dwellings, are the topic of the article by **Eeva-Maria Viitanen** and **Laura Nissin**. Based on detailed distribution plans of these *dipinti*, the paper clearly shows that their locations were very deliberately selected and highlights the criteria used when choosing the sites. Obviously it would have been important and desirable for the texts to be seen and read by as many passers-by as possible, but this would not

have been the only criterion. The political allegiances and social status of the owner of the house would have been as important—not least because he would have had to give permission to the candidate in question before the advertisements could be displayed.

The article by **Georgios Pallis** deals with a very different kind of space. Since Late Antiquity the practices of social communication and representation had increasingly moved indoors. Instead of public squares and buildings, inscriptions were now increasingly seen and read in churches. A special variety of this phenomenon were inscriptions on choir screens in Byzantine churches. As a rule, these were inscriptions by donors, sometimes with an appeal to the reader to pray for their salvation, sometimes accompanied by an instructive quote from the Holy Scripture. Precisely because these screens, often decorated with figurative imagery and elaborate ornamentation, were not only decorative architectural components but also played an important liturgical role, the inscriptions on them were also of crucial significance, both as texts to be read and as perceivable evidence of devout piety.

The function of inscriptions as prompts to memory was central to their existence as it is shown by the contributions of the third part. **Julia L. Shear** has studied the political orator Demosthenes and the celebrations that were held in his honour in 280/1 BC. Her central research question is why the Athenians decided to honour Demosthenes more than 40 years after his death in 322 BC by erecting a statue in his honour in the *agora*, and why, too, the portrait and its inscription were very different in nature. Whilst the statue portrayed Demosthenes as an introverted thinker, the associated inscription and decree praised him as an active fighter for Athenian democracy. What appears to be a discrepancy was apparently a deliberately created effect, the intention being to present Demosthenes to the Athenians as an exemplary democrat and patriot at a time when the memory of the glamorous epoch of the 4th century BC was of crucial importance to the self-image of the citizens of Athens, who had only recently rid themselves of Macedonian domination.

The interaction between words, images and messages is also the focus of the article by **Milena Melfi**. Her study revolves around the memorials to Polybios, which were erected in the 2nd century BC in the Greek cities of Mantinea and Kleitor. The monuments were fashioned as stone stelae and consisted of a semantically complex mixture of texts and images, which combined iconographic references to stelae commemorating the fallen with epically archaicised linguistic features, thus giving these memorials a timeless and almost mythical air. The stelae celebrated the "wonderful deeds" of the statesman and historian Polybios without clearly representing his political role. By consciously leaving out any historical details both from the text and the iconography it was possible to reach a wide target audience.

Elizabeth A. Meyer deals with the phenomenon of writing in columns, which was particularly common in the 5th and 4th centuries BC in Athens and can be seen on a variety of monuments from that period. Examples include lists of those killed in battle, temple inventories, building accounts and tribute lists. In Meyer's opinion

this special form of text layout derived from the ancient practice of writing on pillars, which was used in the 6th and 5th centuries mainly for recording the *thesmoi*, i.e. laws sanctioned by the gods. By deliberately laying out an epigraphical text in a particular format—in columns—and choosing a particular medium—slender stone stelae—a visual combination was created which recalled and acknowledged an old religious tradition and helped to promote the shared identity of the *polis*.

The performative aspects of inscriptions are the subject of the last section of the volume. The articles in the final chapter examine the practical dimension of monumentalizing the written word and deal with the motivations and intentions that may have existed behind the creation and presentation of inscriptions.[14]

The article by **Andreas Rhoby** raises the question of the aesthetic potential of inscriptions in a study of Byzantine verse inscriptions in churches and their interaction with their surroundings. How were they perceived by visitors to the church? Were these epigrams, some of which were quite sophisticated in terms of their literary quality, actually read and understood? How important were they as architectural decorations and how did the written word presented in this way change the perception of the space? The article discusses these questions using concrete examples from the 7th to 12th centuries.

The material design of monumental inscriptions is also at the centre of **Vincent Debiais'** study on inscriptions on doors, gates and passageways in medieval buildings. He outlines the extent to which the visual presence of writing in threshold locations may have encouraged viewers and readers to perform certain actions, such as standing still, lingering, walking on, entering and exiting, so that the 'access route', far from being a mere physical space, would have carried semantic weight in its own right. A particularly significant case study in this respect is the Abbey of Moissac in what is today the South of France. Built in the 12th century, it is decorated with a particularly rich collection of inscriptions. Almost all the capitals in the cloister bear inscriptions, some of which interacted in a highly complex manner with the figurative and scenic depictions, and whose specific locations and designs encouraged the observer to engage in serious contemplation of the images.

However, inscriptions were not always targeted as purposefully at the viewer, nor could they always be clearly seen and read by all. Records of this kind are dealt with by **Wilfried E. Keil**. Taking an art historical stance, he examines a category to which very little attention has so far been paid: signatures that were placed in hidden or barely visible places in early and high medieval churches. The texts are mysterious in many ways. Were they really craftsmen's and artisans' signatures or would the donors of a certain edifices or works of art have immortalized their names in this manner? One would expect signatures, of all things, to be placed in a location that was clearly visible to the visitors of a church. However, as we have seen time and time again, this

14 Thomas 2015.

was often not the case. Apparently, knowing about a hidden or inaccessible inscription, in other words its mere existence, was more important than its reception and legibility.

Unlike the other types of inscriptions mentioned so far, graffiti are characterized, among other things, by the fact that they were not created in regulated contexts, did not adhere to any patterns of monumental design and allowed many people to make a contribution who would otherwise not have been involved in the exchange of the enduring written word. The extent to which it is possible to distinguish between urban and suburban contexts in the way graffiti were applied is shown by the article by **Rebecca Benefiel** using features from the Vesuvian region. Both the exterior façades and the interior walls of houses were inscribed with texts which included names, greetings and good wishes for the inhabitants and their friends, quotes from literary works and political statements. Numerical symbols and figurative graffiti depicting people, animals or boats are also frequently found. Interestingly, the habits in Pompeii appear to have been quite different from those in nearby suburban areas. Whilst most of the graffiti in Pompeii were of a textual nature, incised figurative drawings are more frequently encountered in the *villae* at Stabiae and Oplontis. Moreover, the latter are only rarely found in clusters but are more often spread throughout the entire residential area. Indeed, there appear to have been differences in the way the inhabitants led their everyday lives, in the kinds of social relationships they maintained and in their chief interests; differences which were reflected, amongst other things, in the types of graffiti with which they decorated their homes.

This book brings together 13 case studies from a wide range of academic fields spanning a wide chronological and geographical range. They show the manifold but even corresponding aspects of writing, the various ways of presentation and reception and how the presenting and perceiving of texts have a large share in meaning. This makes clear that we have to deal with an array of perceptions and just as many meanings. We hope that the essays gathered in this book will be a stimulus for new approaches to deal with inscriptions in Antiquity and Middle Ages.

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