

Voices at the City Gates: Graffiti in Liminal Spaces at Dura-Europos and Hatra

Ilaria Bucci, Durham University

The morning session began with a paper presented by Ilaria Bucci (Durham University), titled *Voices at the City Gates: Graffiti in Liminal Spaces at Dura-Europos and Hatra*. Her contribution focused on the concepts of liminality and sacrality. A significant number of graffiti, particularly at Hatra, were inscribed near city gates—spaces understood as transitional zones between the secular and the sacred. In this context, the gates functioned not only as architectural thresholds but also as symbolic conduits, enhancing the communication of messages intended for divine recipients. Hatra, in particular, was perceived as a sacred site, and the act of engraving graffiti at its gates reflects the belief that such locations enhanced the spiritual efficacy of the inscriptions.

Between Personal and Monumental: The Late Antique Graffiti from Wadi Hajjaj (Sinai)

Rachael Banes, University of Wien

The second paper, presented by Rachael Banes (University of Wien), focused on *Late Antique Graffiti from Wadi Hajjaj (Sinai)*. Her research demonstrated how certain points along the route between Jerusalem and St. Catherine's Monastery became significant areas of aggregation in the desert landscape. These sites saw the emergence of numerous graffiti, left by travelers and pilgrims as markers of their passage. This practice reflected a kind of “and me” instinct, where the presence of existing inscriptions encouraged others to contribute their own, reinforcing a shared experience of movement through the landscape. The graffiti were not limited to Greek; other languages, such as Nabatean, were also represented, highlighting the linguistic and cultural diversity of those who traversed this region.

Graffiti in Caves

Ian Rutherford, University of Reading

The first session of the afternoon featured a presentation by Ian Rutherford (University of Reading), who discussed graffiti found in caves, inscribed in a range of languages including Greek and Phoenician. His paper explored how caves were perceived as significant sacred spaces or key sites of communal activity, where large numbers of graffiti were carved. These locations served both religious and social functions, acting as focal points for the traveler's and communities who passed through them.

Greek Graffiti from the Temple of Ptah at Karnak

Michael Zellmann-Rohrer, Macquarie University

The second paper of the afternoon was delivered online by Michael Zellmann-Rohrer (Macquarie University), titled Greek Graffiti from the Temple of Ptah at Karnak. His presentation offered a preview of his forthcoming edition of the Greek graffiti from the Temple of Ptah in Karnak, highlighting how the practice of inscribing graffiti on Egyptian temples persisted into the Greco-Roman period. Zellmann-Rohrer demonstrated that this tradition was not only sustained over time but also reflected the ongoing interaction between Greek-speaking communities and the sacred Egyptian landscape.

Graffiti from Wadi Hammamat and Eastern Desert

Colin Adams, University of Liverpool

One of the final two afternoon sessions were led by Colin Adams (University of Liverpool), who examined the graffiti from Wadi Hammamat and the Eastern Egyptian Desert. His analysis highlighted how environmental conditions, and the broader contextual landscape played a significant role in shaping the production of these inscriptions. Adams focused on concepts of space and place, showing how the physical and psychological experience of the desert—sometimes even boredom during extended periods of waiting—could motivate individuals to inscribe graffiti. His presentation offered valuable insight into the relationship between human behavior and the desert environment in antiquity.

Bronze Age Graffiti at Hatnub (Egypt)

Roland Enmarch, University of Liverpool

The final session was delivered by Roland Enmarch (University of Liverpool), who presented his ongoing research project on Hatnoub, a prominent limestone quarry located in the Eastern Desert of Egypt. His paper focused on the wide variety of graffiti and rock inscriptions found at the site, exploring their significance within the broader context of ancient Egyptian writing practices. These inscriptions, many of which were created by quarry workers, provide valuable insights into their daily lives, identities, and the working environment. Enmarch's research also examined the relationship between these secondary inscriptions and the surrounding landscape, considering both their social context and intended audience.