



## **CRASIS Call for Abstracts**

CRASIS invites applications for its fifteenth Annual Meeting and Masterclass, which will take place on 5 (Masterclass) and 6 (Annual Meeting) March 2026 at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. The Annual Meeting and Masterclass is a two-day event, designed to promote discussion and the exchange of ideas about the ancient Mediterranean world across traditional disciplinary boundaries among graduate students, postdocs, and established scholars. Each year, an internationally acknowledged expert in one of the fields represented by CRASIS is invited to teach a masterclass for MA and PhD students and to deliver the CRASIS Keynote Lecture at the annual meeting.

This year we are honoured to welcome **Prof. Roberta Mazza** (University of Bologna), who will teach the masterclass and deliver the keynote at the Annual Meeting. The theme of the 2026 Masterclass and Annual Meeting will be:

### **The Materiality of Texts**

This year's CRASIS Masterclass and Annual Meeting is dedicated to the materiality of texts. European scholarship has given great importance to textual evidence for the study of the ancient Mediterranean world. Historical narratives of Greek and Latin authors, for instance, have been both the main sources for modern historians' reconstructions of the past and models for modern writing about empires and other historical and political issues. Similarly, the Bible has been the focus of most research on the origins of Christianity and its relationship with previous, contemporary and subsequent religious traditions, and has also inspired modern European literature. Despite this obsession with texts, far less attention has been paid until recently to the materiality of text-production in antiquity: Who was involved in the process of text-making? What was the relationship between scribes and authors? And what about the skills and technologies involved in writing, copying and disseminating texts, from literature to documents, letters, and in brief any other kind of written words?

Another aspect of the materiality of ancient texts is their physical and archaeological dimensions, considering that papyri, inscriptions, wooden tablets, ostraca, and so on – i.e. things, objects – carried them to us. Are physical copies of texts providing us different, richer or more

complex information when closely analysed? And what about the provenance of these ancient physical copies: where were they found, by whom and how did they end up in modern day library or museum collections? Does their provenance matter to current scholarship? What about the future of these ancient manuscripts, will they last forever? Should we envisage more ethical and responsible ways of taking care of and sharing this cultural heritage? This perspective opens a new set of interesting questions connected with both the cultural biographies of objects and the ownership of antiquities, especially if transferred from one country to another illegally or under colonial duress. The politics underpinning the transformation of inscribed ancient objects into collectibles of high economic and academic value, and their circulation through the legal and illegal markets, call for further multidisciplinary investigations on the ontology of ancient textual objects and their various entanglements with people and other subjects during their long existence. It is also hoped that this Masterclass and Annual Meeting will serve to inspire scholars working with texts as material objects in fields/disciplines where this has not typically been a strong focus.

Questions/topics to be discussed may include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Production and craft of texts: Who produced texts in antiquity and what can we reconstruct about their lives, identities, social positions and skills? What role do schools and workshops play, both in terms of the development of writing techniques and the impact of economic and social factors on text creation?
- The agency of authors and scribes in antiquity: How might we access and understand the marginalised when thinking of texts as objects - i.e. enslaved scribes, women scribes etc.? What does multiple authorship do to our understanding of a text?
- Theoretical approaches to the entanglement between texts and things
- The text as object: How does the physical format of a text affect how it was read, handled, and experienced? How can texts be studied archaeologically as objects and what can wear patterns, repairs or traces of use tell us about an object's life history? What role does the heritage of texts as objects play (i.e. digital repatriation, open access repositories, 3D models)? How do we define and understand context when dealing with physical objects? Is only the production or discovery context relevant, or can/should we access others?
- The afterlives of ancient textual artefacts: how do questions of provenance and findspot affect our interpretation of ancient textual artefacts? How should we address the colonial and imperial histories behind major papyrus, manuscript, and inscription collections, e.g. questions surrounding looting and smuggling of unprovenanced objects?
- The conservation and future of ancient texts: What are the responsibilities of modern scholarship and heritage institutions surrounding the conservation and future of ancient texts (ethics, visibility, digital reproductions, local community stakeholders)? What can methodological innovations in how we study material texts (ink analysis, multispectral imaging, XRF, 3D scanning) reveal about their production and use?

### **About the Keynote Speaker:**

Roberta Mazza is a papyrologist at the Department of Cultural Heritage at the University of Bologna. An expert on Egypt during the Roman and Byzantine periods, she has worked closely with the papyri at Manchester's John Rylands Library, co-curated an exhibition of papyri, portraits and Egyptian contemporary art in 2012, and publishing papyri held in the collection. Her most recent book, *Stolen Fragments: Black Markets, Bad Faith, and the Illicit Trade in Ancient Artefacts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024) brings issues facing ancient historians, textual scholars, and those working in cultural heritage institutions into the spotlight. The book examines the purchase of a 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE papyrus fragment containing part of the Apostle Paul's Letter to the Galatians from the New Testament by the billionaire owner of the craft chain Hobby Lobby. Sold without its owners' consent from the holdings of Oxford University, the fragment is one example of the shadowy goings on in the ancient artifact trade.