

Inscribed Art (Warsaw, 15–16 May 26)

University of Warsaw, Warsaw, May 15–16, 2026

Deadline: Mar 16, 2026

Mariana Bodnaruk

Inscribed Art in the Late Roman and Early Medieval Mediterranean Worlds (ca. 284–800 CE).

International Conference at the Faculty of History, University of Warsaw, 15–16 May 2026

Conference Organizer: Dr. Mariana Bodnaruk (Assistant Professor, Faculty of History, UW).

This international conference will explore inscribed art of the late Roman Empire and the Mediterranean from the late third to the late eighth century CE. Focusing on the intersection of image, text, and object, it examines inscriptions on monuments, mosaics and frescoes, seals and coins, vessels, ceramics, and other serialized items, including both display and utilitarian pieces. Papers will investigate how they shaped political authority, religious devotion, social identity, and everyday life, tracing their circulation across cities, courts, military camps, churches, and pilgrimage sites. By treating art and epigraphy together, the conference highlights the material, aesthetic, ritual, and communicative power of inscribed artworks in late antique Mediterranean and Near Eastern societies. Besides the late Roman state, these include both western—such as the Ostrogothic, Lombard, Vandal, Suebic, Visigothic, Burgundian, and Merovingian—and eastern polities, including Armenia, Georgia, Caucasian Albania, Sasanian Persia, Nubia, Aksum, and early Islamic societies. In light of the “material turn,” the conference foregrounds the tangible presence and variegated media of inscribed texts. It will investigate how writing functioned aesthetically, ritually, politically, and socially, whether in letters on silver tableware, gilded glass, or ivory diptychs and boxes, fleeting graffiti scratched on walls, liturgical phrases on church furnishings, invocations on coins, or incantation on bowls, to trace the circulation of formulas, scripts, and iconographies across the Mediterranean, the Caucasus, Near East, and Red Sea worlds.

Spanning four centuries and the vastness of the late Roman Empire and the neighboring polities, both West and East, the conference will examine the interaction between artistic media and inscribed word from a transcultural perspective. It will therefore focus on the intersection of art history and epigraphy, asking how inscribed objects—whether grand imperial monuments or humble utilitarian wares—shaped political authority, religious expression, social identities, devotional practices, and everyday life. Late antiquity was a period of evolving political structures, competing religious landscapes, and shifting cultural boundaries. During this era, inscriptions proliferated not only in monumental settings but also across the surfaces of luxury objects, liturgical furnishings, small decorative items, mass-produced ceramics, lamps, weights, seals, textiles, rings, and amulets. Studying late antique world through one of its most distinctive communicative media—inscriptions—this conference foregrounds the materiality, functionality, and spatial contexts of inscribed artistic objects, considering their visuality, performativity, and textuality as ways of com-

munication. In other words, it will treat inscriptions as images—and images as texts—studying how artworks and words were designed, displayed, and experienced.

We invite proposals for 20-minute papers in English. The conference is in-person and there is no conference fee. Conference proceedings will be published as an edited volume.

To apply, please send an abstract up to 300 words, as well as your short bio, to m.bodnaruk@uw.edu.pl by March 16, 2026.

We welcome applications from scholars at any stage of their career but particularly encourage early career researchers to apply. Participants are expected to secure their own funding for travel and accommodation from their home institutions, but we are currently in the process of acquiring funding to cover travel and accommodation expenses for early career scholars.

Reference:

CFP: Inscribed Art (Warsaw, 15-16 May 26). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 29, 2026 (accessed May 2, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/51610>>.