

DIGITAL MAGIC FOR MAGICAL TEXTS

July 12, 2014 Kathryn E. Piquette Day of Archaeology 2014, Digital Archaeology, Science Amathus, British Museum, Cologne Center for eHumanities, Cyprus, digital archaeology, digital imaging, Germany, inscriptions, London, Near East, reflectance transformation imaging, University of Cologne, written culture

It has been a grey damp day here in London. Glad to be tucked in working from home with the cat on my lap and a fresh pot of the black stuff. I have been beavering away on a pile of image data for [Magica Levantina](#), a University of Cologne project on magical texts from the ancient Near East. Although I am a Research Associate at the [Cologne Center for eHumanities](#), I have spent a good portion of my time working in museum collections far beyond Cologne, including the Princeton, Philadelphia, Paris, Naples, and soon (all being well) Jerusalem. But for now I have been working at the [British Museum](#), which happily is not far from home and is giving me a bit of a break from the travel.



Part of a gypsum tablet with a magical Greek inscription from Amathus, Cyprus (1891,0418.50 + 59, © Trustees of the British Museum).

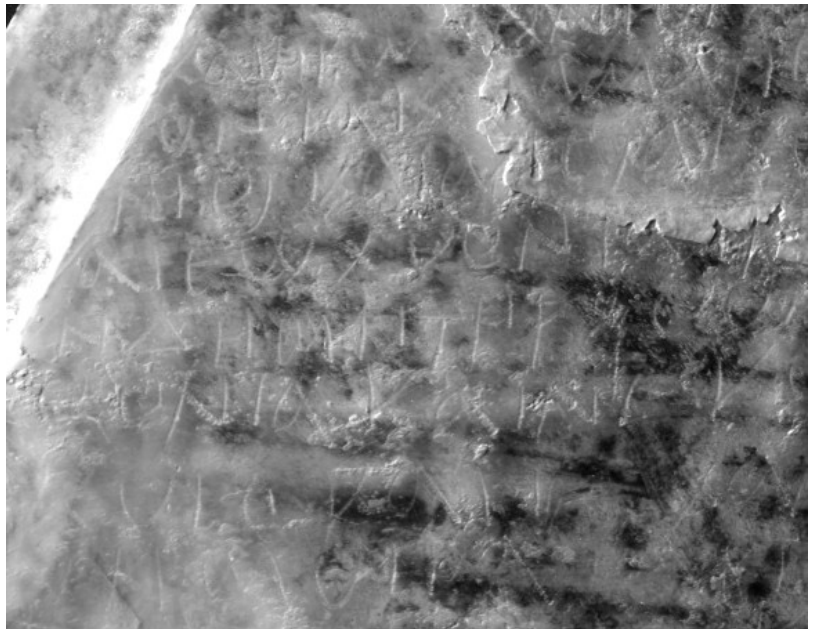
This week I have been conducting [Reflectance Transformation Imaging \(RTI\)](#) on inscribed tablets fragments in the Department of Greece and Rome. The tablet fragments are made of selenite (gypsum), and were found at the site of [Amathus](#) and date to between 100 CE-300 CE.

The [almost complete tablet](#) above bears a curse written in alphabetic Greek. However, the technique used to make the inscription, combined with its small size and the translucence of the material, make it very challenging to read or discern other potentially significant physical features.

BM staff very kindly took the tablet off display* yesterday so I could image it using RTI. The detail to the right does not really do justice to the results I processed today since it is not possible in this context to have the relighting and other functionality of the [RTIViewer](#). Nevertheless, the text is now vastly more readable.

Thanks to the magic of modern tablets, this ancient one, or at least its visual surrogate, is currently making its way through the ether to my colleagues in Cologne.

* The tablet was put promptly back on display today I am told (Room G72/2), so do pop down to the British Museum and take a closer look.



Detail from the upper left of the above, visualised using the RTI specular enhancement mode (1891,0418.50 + 59, Kathryn E. Piquette, courtesy Trustees of the British Museum)