



# Forum Antike

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## **Graffiti and Cultural Memory in Greco-Roman Egypt: The Case of Abydos**

Graffiti – texts or images painted or scratched onto the walls of buildings – are a very widespread medium in ancient cultures which seem to provide a unique direct record of the voices of the ordinary and extraordinary people who left them. Information they convey may be very different from what we learn from official historical narratives: in every historical site, people come from a broader variety of cultures than we would have expected, enabling multicultural interaction.

An excellent area to study graffiti is Greco-Roman Egypt, where large numbers of graffiti survive, partly because the structures on which they were inscribed are so well preserved, and partly because they were *lieux de mémoire* where people tended to commemorate their presence and express both their identity and their concerns.

This paper will focus on the sacred complex of Osiris at Abydos in Egypt. The graffiti here are in seven different languages, and constitute one of the most extensive multilingual archives in the ancient world. More broadly the paper aims to situate Abydos within the transcultural religious networks of the Greco-Roman world, which was a multicultural space characterised by high levels of transnational connectivity, mobility and cultural transfer.