



## “To Appeal to the Judge of the Netherworld: the Role of Literary Figures in Mesopotamian Incantations.”

**Wednesday, October 20**  
**12:00PM – 1:00PM**  
**Royce 314**

Mesopotamian incantations were, at their core, practical texts with specific purposes, whether that was the protection of a dwelling from future threats or driving out a malevolent demonic force afflicting an individual. Throughout the extensive corpus of such texts, found in languages such as Sumerian and Akkadian from the third to first millennium BCE, we see several persistent tropes. Incantations may cluster in categories, according to form and function; draw upon the legitimation of a number of deities; and even directly reference texts outside the ritual and religious sphere, including, notably, literary texts. This talk focuses on the ways in which incantations incorporate literary figures and imagery, examining in particular references to the Epic of Gilgamesh. By far Mesopotamia’s most well-known text, the Epic of Gilgamesh is a narrative concerned with journeys, particularly those of its eponymous protagonist. Here he journeys outside the bounds of the text itself, invoked in several incantations consigning antagonistic figures such as witches or ghosts to the Netherworld. Although the literary texts focus on Gilgamesh’s standing as king and his skill in battle, in incantations he is presented in another role entirely, as a judge of the dead. This different focus underscores the adaptability of such characters across textual categories, as well as the larger scope of connections between the texts themselves.



**Gina Konstantopoulos** is an Assistant Professor in Assyriology and Cuneiform Studies in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at UCLA. Her research centers on religion, magic, and literature in Mesopotamia, with a particular focus on the role of demons and monsters in Sumerian and Akkadian texts. Her current research examines the creation of distant and imagined lands and notions of space and place in the ancient Near East, particularly the intersection of distant space and empire in the first millennium BCE. She has previously held research positions at the University of Tsukuba, University of Helsinki, and Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University.