

*(version française)*

**L'enseignement technique en Mésopotamie**  
**Workshop — 65<sup>e</sup> RAI, Paris (8-12 juillet 2019)**

L'éducation scribale en Mésopotamie a été le sujet d'un intérêt renouvelé au cours des vingt dernières années. De nombreuses études fondamentales dédiées à ce thème ont été publiées, qui ont contribué de manière significative à comprendre comment et pourquoi les scribes étaient entraînés à lire et à écrire le cunéiforme. Pourtant, aussi importantes que ces études aient été, l'attention s'est portée sur la fonction idéologique des textes utilisés comme exercices et sur le rôle qu'ils jouaient dans la formation d'une identité scribale. Les recherches ont souvent insisté sur l'écart qui existait entre la formation des scribes et la pratique, mais les aspects techniques de l'éducation scribale ont peu attiré l'attention des chercheurs.

Un enseignement technique est un enseignement qui, outre l'enseignement général, offre aux élèves une formation et une qualification professionnelles orientées vers un secteur ou une profession déterminés. En Mésopotamie, de nombreuses activités requéraient la double maîtrise de l'écrit et de compétences techniques. Les scribes professionnels, qui travaillaient au service d'une administration (royale ou religieuse) ou des particuliers, devaient par exemple savoir écrire mais aussi connaître les procédures et le vocabulaire administratifs et/ou juridiques en vigueur. Les administrateurs du royaume (responsables des canaux, intendants...) disposaient d'un savoir technique propre à leur fonction ; nécessitant l'écrit pour exercer leurs activités (pour gérer les stocks, communiquer l'information d'un service à un autre...), plusieurs d'entre eux avaient également appris à lire et à écrire. Certaines activités comme la comptabilité reposaient sur l'écrit mais aussi sur des pratiques parfois spécifiques à une administration/un royaume : comment ces pratiques comptables étaient-elles transmises ? Les officiels du temple devaient par ailleurs connaître le cunéiforme pour lire et copier les textes qui étaient interprétés au cours des rituels culturels, mais devaient aussi savoir les réciter ou les chanter correctement lors des rituels...

Dans ce workshop, nous voulons étudier comment étaient transmis le savoir technique et les gestes qui étaient requis, en parallèle de l'écrit, pour exercer certaines activités, et voulons questionner plus largement le rapport entre la formation scribale et la pratique. Les axes de recherche suivants seront notamment explorés :

- comment le contenu des textes appris pendant la formation à l'écrit contribuait-il à l'acquisition de compétences pratiques ou professionnelles spécifiques ?
- y avait-il des groupes de textes spécialisés, qui étaient utilisés pour transmettre des compétences associées à une profession particulière et n'étaient enseignés qu'à des élèves formés spécifiquement pour exercer cette profession ?
- dans quelle mesure les textes copiés lors de la formation à l'écrit préparaient-ils ceux qui les étudiaient à exercer leur profession, et dans quelle mesure ces textes étaient-ils adaptés aux réalités locales ? Comment les scribes formés à l'écrit pouvaient-ils acquérir les compétences dont ils avaient besoin pour exercer leur profession mais qui n'étaient pas enseignées pendant la formation scribale ?
- existe-t-il des preuves d'une formation professionnelle en dehors des écoles sribales ?
- quelles compétences techniques étaient requises pour exercer les divers métiers au sein desquels l'écrit jouait un rôle (comptable, responsable du cadastre rural, devin...) ? Comment ces compétences étaient-elles acquises ?

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*(English version)*

**Practical Education in Ancient Mesopotamia  
Workshop — 65<sup>e</sup> RAI, Paris (July 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>, 2019)**

Scribal education in Ancient Mesopotamia has been a subject of renewed interest over the past twenty years, and numerous insightful and foundational studies devoted to this topic have appeared that have shed important light on how and why scribes were trained to read and write cuneiform. As valuable as many of these studies have been, however, the focus has been on the ideological function of the texts that were copied as exercises and the role they played in scribal identity formation, and little attention has been paid to the practical aspects of scribal education.

A practical education gives students, in addition to a general education, a professional training and qualification oriented towards a defined sector or profession. Many activities required not only the mastery of writing, but the acquisition of a specific set of practical skills that were connected with, but not limited to the ability to read and write cuneiform. For instance, professional scribes who worked for the palace or temple administrations had to be able to compile written texts, but they also had to know the actual administrative/legal vocabulary and procedures. Some professional activities such as accounting were based not only on writing but also on practices that were sometimes specific to an administration/kingdom: how were these accounting practices transmitted? Temple officials had to know cuneiform to read and copy the texts that were performed in cultic rituals, but they also had to be skilled in reciting or singing these texts correctly in the rituals in which they were performed...

In this workshop, we aim to examine how Mesopotamians acquired practical knowledge, alongside writing, associated with different professions and, more broadly, to investigate the link between scribal formation and practice. Topics relating to the aims of the workshop include:

- how might the content of texts learned during scribal training have contributed to the acquisition of specific practical or professional skills?
- were there specialized groups of texts that were used to teach skills relating to a particular profession that were only taught to pupils being trained specifically to work in that profession?
- to what extent did the texts copied during scribal training prepare those who learned them to exercise their profession, and to what extent were they adapted to local realities? How might trained scribes have acquired the skills they needed for their profession that they were not taught during their scribal training?
- is there evidence for professional training outside scribal schools?
- what technical skills were required to exercise the various professions in which writing played a role (accountant, land manager, diviner, etc.)? How were these skills acquired?

Papers: I. **ARKHIPOV** (Institute of World History, Russian Academy of Sciences), M. **BÉRANGER** (Collège de France), J. **CRISOSTOMO** (University of Michigan) and E. **ESCOBAR** (University of Chicago), P. **DELNERO** (Johns Hopkins University), M. **FELDMAN** (Johns Hopkins University), J. **LEVENSON** (Freie Universität Berlin), J. **MATUSZAK** (SOAS University of London),

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**Résumé des communications**  
**(par ordre alphabétique)**

**I. ARKHIPOV (HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS, MOSCOW)**

**The origins of the accounting terminology used in Mari**

The Mari archives include several thousands of “administrative”, that is, accounting documents. Accountant scribes of Mari resorted to a number of set expressions for recording different kinds of transactions and associated conditions. These expressions have much in common with the accounting terminology that was in use in Southern Mesopotamia in earlier periods, but they are also characterized by certain local features. How did Mari accountant scribes learn to write their documents?

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**M. BÉRANGER (COLLÈGE DE FRANCE)**

**“The king’s finger is seized”: Relationship Between Akkadian School Letters and Practice**

Akkadian school letters represent a tiny part of the school exercises produced during the Old Babylonian period. For this reason, they have received little attention from scholars and have never been published as a whole. Although they are written in Akkadian, like actual letters from that time, these school letters are basic and sometimes describe unrealistic situations. At what point during scribal training, and by whom, were Akkadian school letters studied? What knowledge and skills were developed by studying them? This paper aims to investigate the pedagogic value of these texts and their relationship to practice.

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**J. CRISOSTOMO (UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN) and E. ESCOBAR (UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO)**  
**Imperial Education and Hermeneutics: The Assyrian Group Vocabularies**

The Group Vocabularies are among the most enigmatic scholarly texts from the later periods of cuneiform cultures. These texts fluctuate between lexical lists and commentaries, providing a number of Sumerian–Akkadian correspondences that affirm their esoteric nature. The question of whether such texts could be deemed “practical” or “educational,” however, is outweighed by the imperial and cultural context within which these scholarly texts were produced. This talk will ask: What does a lexical list look like towards the end of empire?

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**P. DELNERO (JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY)**

**Lessons in Anger Management: The Training of Professional Lamenters**

Appeasing the gods through the performance of laments was one of the primary responsibilities of the Mesopotamian cultic officials known as galas. Although the content of the cultic laments that were

performed is known from hundreds of written sources dating from the early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium until as late as the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, and the professional responsibilities of gala-officials are well documented in administrative texts, letters, and other textual sources, almost nothing is known about how these cultic officials were trained to carry out their cultic responsibilities. In this paper, the training of galas will be considered by examining how the written copies of laments could have been used to teach practical aspects of the art of lamenting, including pronunciation, expressive articulation, and the mythological underpinnings of the practice of cultic lamenting itself.

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**M. FELDMAN (JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY)**

### **The Practical Logic of Sealing Tablets in the Ur III Period**

Ur III administrative texts display regularized mechanics of sealing practice, as has been known now for some time. The regularity of these practices and the large number of surviving documents offer an excellent opportunity for thinking through aspects of embodied learning and action in Mesopotamia, as well as some of the implications of this embodiment for creating social connections. This paper proposes preliminary thoughts on the topic.

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**J. LEVENSON (FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN)**

### **“And he has drawn up his document” – What Legal Phrasebooks can and cannot teach a scribal student.**

Legal phrasebooks, a genre of texts compiling legal phraseology and related content, are first attested in the Old Babylonian period. These texts, in conjunction with the closely related model contracts and excerpts from law codes, were used in educational settings in the acquisition of writing skills and the Sumerian language, but also to familiarize the students with the intricacies of the local legal system as well as cultural notions pertaining to it. This talk presents the evidence and discusses the phrasebooks' specific role within the context of scribal education and beyond.

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**J. MATUSZAK (SOAS UNIVERSITY OF LONDON)**

### **Educating the scribal elite: literary disputations and diatribes as didactic literature**

Literary disputations between apprentice scribes in particular have long been recognised as playing an important role in forging the future intellectual elite's identity and inspiring in them a certain *esprit de corps*. Similar disputations between women, however, as well as the so-called diatribes, have largely been considered mere collections of nasty insults. Recent and forthcoming editions of these compositions now allow for a more detailed and balanced analysis.

While the identity-forming potential of the disputations between apprentice scribes and other texts originating from the Edubba'a cannot be denied, their didactic potential has received less attention. This paper aims at providing an overview of the manifold pedagogic purposes of all literary

disputations between human protagonists and diatribes known to date. For this purpose, disputations between apprentice scribes, disputations between women, and diatribes against men and women will be treated separately and analysed individually for their didactic potential.

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### **C. MITTERMAYER (UNIVERSITY OF GENEVA)**

#### **The King of Trees: Who is the winner in the Disputation between Palm and Tamarisk?**

The Akkadian disputation between Palm and Tamarisk is preserved in five different versions. The oldest one from Šaduppûm dates to the Old Babylonian period and a Sumerian translation of a passage of the disputation was found in Susa. In Emar was discovered a large tablet dating to the Middle Babylonian period, and two fragments from Assur preserve parts of two Middle Assyrian versions. These manuscripts provide the unique opportunity for a diachronic study of an Akkadian literary text. This paper will compare the structural, narrative and argumentation level of these different versions in order to reconstruct the overall structure of the composition. The results shall then be compared to the Sumerian precedence debates to see whether the Akkadian poems follow an older Sumerian tradition or whether they constitute a literary innovation.

Furthermore, a thorough study of the Tell Harmal tablet and the comparison with the Sumerian predecessors will allow to reopen the discussion about the winner of the disputation in order to see if Palm as the “King of Trees” is indeed the winner of the debate as it is often assumed.

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### **J. MYNÁŘOVÁ (CZECH INSTITUTE OF EGYPTOLOGY, CHARLES UNIVERSITY)**

#### **Like father, like son. Informal and formal education of Old Assyrian merchants**

With only four documents classified as school texts but — at the same time — a high degree of literacy attested among the merchants in the Old Assyrian colonies, the issue of formal and informal learning is more than valid for an in-depth analysis. In particular, the topic of informal (“in-house”) education represents an interesting phenomenon as shown by similar examples from other cultures. Through a palaeographic analysis of selected texts, I will focus on the identification of possible family tradition(s) transmitted among its individual members and possibly moving from generation to generation.

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### **H. RECULEAU (UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO)**

#### **A Scribal Education in the Palace? The Educational Background of the *Šandabakkum* of Mari (18<sup>th</sup> c. BCE)**

For the Old Babylonian period, excavations at the private houses of people related to the temple milieus in such cities as Sippar-Amnānum, Nippur and Ur have yielded numerous school tablets, highlighting the home-schooling and scribal curriculum through which future members of the clergy acquired the knowledge that they would need during their career. In comparison, the educational

background of the many scribes practicing their skills in the palatial administrations of the time remains frustratingly elusive. Only a limited amount of school tablets were recovered in palaces — such as Šin-kāšid's in Uruk and Enlil-bani's in Isin—and attempts at identifying schools in the archaeological remains —like that of Room 64 in the Palace of Mari, suggested by André Parrot— have long been put to rest.

In spite of this limited amount of information, FM 16 27 —a recently published letter by Šidqêpuḥ, the *šandabakkum* of Mari during the kingdom's final year (1763–1762)— suggests that at least some of the high-ranking administrators who wrote down (or had written down for them) the administrative letters that were recovered in the palace's archive had been trained within its very walls, starting during their childhood. In the absence of a direct testimony for the training of administrators and administrative scribes in 18th c. BCE Mari, this paper will attempt to identify the skills and knowledge required of one of the highest-rankings managers of the royal estate, the *šandabakkum*, by examining the activities, lexicon and other elements suggestive of the mastery of scribal art by Šidqêpuḥ and his predecessor, Yasīm-Sūmū.

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#### **G. SPADA (SAPIENZA – UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA)**

##### **What's new in the Old Babylonian model contracts?**

Model contracts were a common element in scribal schooling, belonging to the first phase of the Old Babylonian scribal curriculum. Along with model court cases, legal phrasebooks as well as series of laws, they represent the didactic tools used in schools to train scribes in the written forms of the administration and the law.

The number of model contracts known to date, 345, published and unpublished, is certainly destined to increase. In fact, the academic nature of these tablets has not always been recognized in the past, since it is often very difficult (or even impossible) to distinguish between school contracts and actual administrative documents – especially if they are fragmentary – thus making their formal features not easily identified at first sight.

Based on half of the entire corpus of model contracts, accessible online at the ORACC database “Old Babylonian Model Contracts” (OBMC), this paper will discuss some of the highlights that have emerged from the study of this material. In particular it focuses on the identification of series of contracts which seem to present a certain degree of standardization. The fact that model contracts – just as the proverbs, that coexist with them in the last stage of the elementary scribal education – could actually be taught following some standardized collections has already been hypothesized, but not yet confirmed by the documentation. Moreover, emerging formal differences and variants of texts known in several copies will be identified, also connecting them to the different tablet formats employed in scribal training (prism, Type I, II or III tablets).

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## **K. WAGENSONNER (YALE UNIVERSITY)**

### **When Legal Case Becomes Scribal Lore**

Sumerian Model Court Documents in the Old Babylonian period were, similar to model contracts, part of the scribal education. Both court documents and contracts helped the student to apply what he had learnt prior (personal names, commodities, [legal] expressions, etc.) to a practical framework. Such model texts were sometimes collected and combined into compilations. While Sumerian model court documents are fairly well attested, Akkadian examples are scarce.

Recently Andrew George published an Akkadian text under the heading “Tribulations of Gimil-Marduk” (CUSAS 10, 17a–c), which is preserved on three rather similar tablets probably originating from the site of Dur-Abieshuh. The language of this text extending over roughly one hundred lines reads like an actual court document based on facts, but the lack of sealings, the high frequency of errors and variants, and certain anachronisms show that these manuscripts are not copies of an actual court proceeding. It seems more feasible, as George points out, that this text served a didactic purpose. Fictional or not, the technical terminology suggests Nippur as a place of origin.

The Yale Babylonian Collection houses another, hitherto unpublished example of an Akkadian court document that is not an actual archival text, but a copy, and probably a fictional case as well. The text is inscribed on a small clay prism in what appears to be a late Old Babylonian hand. The case referred to in this text concerns an individual named Ibni-Amurrum, who was wronged by two other individuals, Mār-Purattim and Mār-eršetim, who appear to have violated an agreement. He, or a person on his behalf, appeals to the sun god as highest judge to render his verdict. The paper will discuss this new source and its possible links to actual archival texts.