CURRENT RESEARCH IN EARLY MESOPOTAMIAN STUDIES

Workshop proposal for the 65th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale

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Pre Ur-III Mesopotamia has recently attracted the attention of the Assyriologists thanks to the enormous amount of epigraphic material that has appeared in the last decades. As a result of the sudden publication of hundreds of texts, the Archaic, Early Dynastic, and Sargonic periods have assumed new relevance in the general landscape of third millennium Mesopotamia, which was until recently dominated by the Neo-Sumerian studies.

On these grounds, this workshop aims to bring together a number of scholars currently working on several aspects of the Early Mesopotamian documentation – i.e. those texts dating to the Archaic, Early Dynastic (I-II, IIIa, IIIb), Sargonic, and Gutian periods. The geographical scope of the contributions includes both southern and northern Mesopotamia, stretching the definition of Early Mesopotamia to comprehend Ebla and its royal archives.

This workshop will ideally cover as many topics as possible in the realm of philology and history, including administration, historical geography, grammar, linguistics, palaeography, lexical and literary texts, and socio-politics. New and old texts and materials will be presented combining the most traditional approaches with state-of-the-art methods in digital humanities, toward a better understanding of the early Mesopotamian world.

SPEAKERS: A. Archi, M. Bonechi and R. Winters, A. Bramanti and Emily Zeran, K. Kelley, N. Kraus, C. Lecompte and G. Benati, M. Maiocchi, E. Markina, É. Pagé-Perron, J. N. Postgate, N. Rudik, ~~I. Schrakamp~~, X. Wang.

Ebla(itologists) and Sumer(ologists): the Need for a Dialogue

Alfonso Archi (Rome)

When the archives of Ebla were discovered 45 years ago, the first aspects to face were: 1) to determine the ductus of the writing in relation with the cuneiform documentation from Mesopotamia, and the origin of the lexical documents in order to date the Ebla texts; 2) to assess the language of Ebla in relation with the classification of the Semitic languages.

Today a dialogue with the Sumerologists is necessary from one side in order to determine the meaning of the administrative terminology, which is mostly Sumerian, and from the other side to convince the Sumerologists that Sumerian writing may express different concepts in Syria, e.g.: lugal ≠ "king"; En-líl / *i-li-lu* ≠ not a Semitic deity; ^dNin-kar (a North-Semitic deity) ≠ ^dNin-kár(-ra).

Ebla through Huwawa's Gaze:
Inner and Outer Perspectives on Early Syria, between Mesopotamia, Egypt and Anatolia

Marco Bonechi (Istituto di Studi sul Mediterraneo Antico, ISMA – CNR, Rome)

Ryan Winters (Harvard University/Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena)

This paper consists of a preliminary attempt at reconciling the evidence on Early Syria coming from native written sources (primarily those of Ebla Palace G) with that coming from external and later sources, including records and stories about early contacts between Syrians and Mesopotamians (Sumerians like Gilgamesh and Enkidu, or Akkadians like Sargon and Naramsin, or "Assyrians" like Sisi king of Hamazi), Egyptians (like Pepi I and Iny, or the Ebla attestations of *Du-gu₂-ra-su*ᵏⁱ), Levantines (the Ebla *Gub-lu*ᵏⁱ or Byblos), and "Anatolians" (the entity of Armi/Armanum). The goal will be to begin to situate the historical Ebla within time and space relative to the wider Ancient Near East using these two complementary perspectives. The need for a holistic approach will be substantiated by some case studies.

Two New Early Dynastic Sign Lists: Progress and Problems

Armando Bramanti (Université de Genève)

Emily Zeran (Friedrich-Schiller Universität Jena)

Sign lists are some of the most basic tools for Assyriological work. The methods of the early 20th century have advanced, and with a steady increase of new texts available for study, palaeographical research is attempting to orient itself as an objective scientific method. This is an ongoing process, wherein we are reassessing what questions we should be asking, as well as what can successfully be answered. In this talk Armando Bramanti will present the ongoing work and the preliminary results of his current research project on the paleography of the Early Dynastic Umma Region, showing its potentialities and highlighting the critical issues in the creation from scratch of a cuneiform syllabary and sign list. Drawing on her recent experiences compiling a new sign list for the Fāra tablets, Emily Zeran will then speak on the question of "Is Script an Artefact?" with the aim of promoting a discussion of the potential for sign lists to be used as relative dating tools, and the data collection methodologies thus required.

"All the Women and All the Men":
A Previously Unidentified Fragment of Archaic Word List C
Kate Kelley (University of British Columbia)

The proto-cuneiform composition identified variously as "Tribute", forerunner to "AD-GI$_4$", or "Archaic Word List C", is known from 56 fragments which have been pieced together to form a composite text (Englund and Nissen 1993: 112 ff.) with aid of later witnesses. The nature of this unusual lexical composition, which was transmitted through the Old Babylonian period, has been frequently discussed, and it has been described as the world's earliest written work of literature, a scribal learning exercise, or a work of 'secret lore'. This talk proposes to identify Uruk fragment Heidelberg 9 (P000709), formerly published in ATU 7 as an 'unidentified lexical' text, as a part of this composition. The fragment fills in two lines towards the poorly-preserved end of the composition that are otherwise known only from Early Dynastic and Old Babylonian witnesses. The two new proto-cuneiform lines refer to females then males – understood by context to be agricultural workers – in the crucial final section of the composition. The lines will be compared to proto-cuneiform administrative terminology and practices relating to male and female workers in order to aid interpretation of this section of the archaic composition. In addition, the fragment appears to bring to light a minor difference between proto-cuneiform and later versions that will be explored, and a possible join between Heidelberg 9 and W 20572,1 (P000474) in the National Museum of Iraq. The identification of these two lines has therefore

called for some re-assessment of the Uruk witnesses and the transmission history, as well as updating the composite proto-cuneiform text.

The Lexical List Word List Z

Nicholaus Kraus (Freie Universität Berlin)

Appearing around the middle of the third millennium, the lexical list known rather enigmatically as Word List Z has gone without a comprehensive treatment for some time. At present, suggestions for the interpretation of Word List Z have ranged from literary text to a simple list of names to esoteric lexical list. Interestingly, the text has survived in manuscripts dating from the Fara period (c. 2600 BCE) to the early Old Babylonian period (c. 1800 BCE), with a high degree of standardization in its transmission. This paper presents the results of a project devoted to Word List Z whose goal is to create a complete edition and commentary for the text, as well as an analysis of the textual transmission in order to understand its purpose and place within the early cuneiform lexical tradition.

The Agricultural Lands of the Nanna Temple at Ur:
Some Insight into the Scale of Political Economies during the Early Dynastic I-II Period

Camille Lecompte (CNRS, Paris) – Giacomo Benati (Università di Bologna)

The present paper investigates some aspects of the economic scale of the city of Ur during the beginning of the third millennium (Early Dynastic Period I) and is the result of an interdisciplinary research combining archaeological and philological approaches, as well as quantitative analysis.

The main aim of the ongoing research is to approach the extent of institutional "households" during the time of the development of the Sumerian city-state by relying on the data from Ur originating from the Nanna's temple household. At the first instance, texts related with field management will be analyzed and assessed in order to highlight the institutional use of land, the different categories of plots, and the resources of Nanna's temple.

Approaching Lagash II Archives: Texts, History, Methodology

Massimo Maiocchi (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

As it is well known, the Lagash/Girsu evidence is a privileged source of information for the study of third millennium BCE administration. Available texts are in fact not only large in number, but they also cover the entire time-span from ED III down to Ur III periods.

The paper aims to provide an overview of newly edited tablets, dating to the Lagash II period, framing the evidence in a broader discourse on the local city administration in diachronic perspective. Besides traditional philological analysis, computational methods—mostly data mining and network analysis—may offer further insights on special points of interest, such as prosopography, palaeography, as well as relative chronology of Lagash II material.

Gasur in the Sargonic Period

Ekaterina Markina (National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow)

The paper presents the results of my work on the corpus of Sargonic texts from Gasur. The work took me several years and yielded a dozen of new joins (including those between Harvard and Baghdad fragments), as well as new readings and interpretations of previously obscure terms. In addition to that, the evidence of the texts allowed a more precise dating of the archive, while mentions of Gasur in contemporary documents shed some new light on its connections to other Sargonic cities and its overall importance for the Sargonic state.

Digital approaches to Old Sumerian

Émilie Pagé-Perron (University of Toronto/University of California, Los Angeles)

Digital methods for the study of cuneiform text have seen sustained development through the years. Notably, Sumerian has not been left behind: notation, storage, annotation, processing and various analysis approaches have been explored. Some of these methods can be applied indiscriminately to Sumerian of all periods; some tools explicitly address problems found in Old Sumerian texts, for instance, Massimo Maiocchi's processing work of Ebla vocabulary and Old Akkadian paleographic work, and my own studies of vocabulary and network analysis in Early Dynastic Girsu, and Old Akkadian Adab texts. However, most tools geared for the analysis of the Sumerian language have been developed for working either with literary texts or with Ur III administrative texts. Can these tools be adapted to Old Sumerian texts and if so, what are the challenges brought by the particularities of older corpora? To answer this question, the Machine Translation and Automated Analysis of Sumerian Languages morphological pre-annotator (https://github.com/cdli-gh/morphology-pre-annotation-tool) and the Western University

Sumerian Named Entity (people, gods, places) Recognition tool (https://github.com/wwunlp/sner/) will be tested against Early Dynastic and Old Akkadian administrative texts, and compared with Ur III samples to reveal to which extent they can be reemployed and how they can be better adapted to older corpora.

Gudea's dynamic diction: fresh thoughts on Sumerian verbal prefixes

John Nicholas Postgate (Cambridge)

It has been notoriously difficult for students of Sumerian grammar to achieve even an approximate consensus on the verbal prefixes. Building on a footnote published in 1974, this fresh assault on one of the thorniest problems advances the following propositions, primarily applying to the inscriptions of Gudea:

1) the morpheme written **i₃-** (/ĭ/) is a short vowel and is also present in forms beginning **im-** (e.g. **im-ta-**, **im-da-**, **im-ši-**, **im-ma-** and **im-mi-**).

2) **im-ma-** and **im-mi-** are the equivalent of /i+ba/ and /i+bi/ (widely, though not universally, accepted).

3) elsewhere **im-** results from the /ĭ+m(u)-/, the /u/ being elided as it is the second of two short syllables (also proposed by Jagersma).

4) accordingly the /ĭ/ prefix stands in the same rank as the much less frequent /a/ and /u/ (as already seen by e.g. Th. Jacobsen), preceding the prefixes /mu/, /ba/ and /bī/, despite regular attempts to assign /ĭ/ and /mu/ to the same rank, making them mutually exclusive.

5) the force of the /ĭ/ prefix (which has never been generally agreed) therefore needs to be redefined, giving particular attention to the surrounding syntax. It is here proposed that verbs with this prefix lay emphasis on the **performance** of the action, and should be designated as "dynamic", in contrast to most verbs lacking the /ĭ/, which tend to describe a **result**, and can be termed "static". Having settled on this terminology, I was encouraged to discover that these very terms are regularly in use among NW Caucasian linguists to describe a very similar binary opposition.

6) In the process of formulating these observations it proves necessary to address the issues of long and short (or "strong" and "weak") vowels in Sumerian, and of the ellipsis of the second of two weak syllables.

Kriechende Kinder, bewaffnete Kälber und Götter in Aufruhr:

die frühdynastischen Beschwörungen aus CUSAS 32

Nadezda Rudik (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen)

Auf der RAI 2015 in Genf hat Professor A. George zum ersten Mal die Beschwörungen aus der Schøyen Sammlung vorgestellt, die ein Jahr später in CUSAS 32 veröffentlicht wurden. Mit der Publikation dieses Bandes wurde die Anzahl der aus der Frühdynastischen Periode IIIa (2600-2450) bekannten sumerischen Beschwörungen fast verdoppelt: drei Tafeln (MS 4549/2, MS 4549/1 und MS 4550) mit jeweils einem, neun und wenigstens 12 Texten sind uns nun zugänglich geworden. Meines Wissens umfasste der Korpus vorher 8 Tafeln mit insgesamt 26 Beschwörungen. Von den etwa 22 neuen frühdynastischen Beschwörungen wurden in CUSAS 32 lediglich fünf vollständig und einige teilweise gelesen, kommentiert und interpretiert.

Der Vortrag zielt darauf ab, den Zuhörern einen Eindruck über die neuesten Entdeckungen zu vermitteln, die diese kleine Beschwörungssammlung für uns bereithält. Der Fokus soll hierbei auf denjenigen Zeichen(kombinationen), auftretenden Motiven, und benutzten Fachvokabeln liegen, die im Vergleich zu den bereits bekannten neu bzw. ungewöhnlich sind; die den besagten Korpus (Krebernik, *Die Beschwörungen aus Fāra und Ebla*, 1984; Rudik, *Die Entwicklung der keilschriftlichen sumerischen Beschwörungsliteratur von den Anfängen bis zur Ur* III-*Zeit*, 2015) ergänzen und in manchen Fällen verständlicher machen. Einige von diesen neuen Texten sollen daher in Kombination mit den alten betrachtet werden.

Aktuelle Forschungen zu Sumerogrammen in Texten aus Ebla

Ingo Schrakamp (Freie Universität Berlin)

In der Mitte der 1970er Jahre wurde in Tell Mardikh das Palastarchiv des antiken Ebla geborgen, das aus der Zeit von ca. 2350 bis 2310 v. Chr. datiert und ursprünglich rund 3500 vorwiegend administrative Texte umfasste. Obwohl die Ebla-Texte in einem frühen Dialekt des Akkadischen abgefasst sind, werden Nomina, Verben und administrative Schlüsseltermini üblicherweise mit Sumerogrammen geschrieben. Die Ebla-Texte repräsentieren jedoch einen eigenständigen Zweig einer präsargonischen, semitischen Schrifttradition, der sich nach der Zerstörung des Palastes nicht fortsetzte. Daher unterscheiden sich die in Ebla gebräuchlichen Sumerogramme im Hinblick auf Orthographie, Bedeutung und Gebrauch oft von jenen der gleichzeitigen sumerischen Überlieferung Südbabyloniens, manche lassen sich an die nordbabylonische, semitisch geprägte Kiš-Tradition anschließen, und andere bleiben gänzlich unerklärt.

In diesem Vortrag werden ausgewählte Verwaltungstermini im Hinblick auf Bedeutung, Gebrauch und Herkunft diskutiert und neue Interpretationen vorgeschlagen.

How many Priest-Kings in town? A review of studies on the political structure of the city of Uruk at the dawn of civilization

Xianhua Wang (Shanghai International Studies University)

In recent years the political development of southern Mesopotamia has been studied in greater depth. Yet, the internal political structure of the city of Uruk during the Late Uruk and first half of the Early Dynastic period, notably the concept of rulership and the Priest-King, remains to be explored. Instead of reflecting upon the emergence of civilization and the state, this paper examines the most illustrative art historical, archaeological, and textual sources on rulership and the Priest-King that have commanded scholarly attention. As is sometimes necessary, remarks will be made on the intellectual background from which certain interpretations of sources have arisen. Our paper hopes to demonstrate that the time is ripe for a new angle on the city of Uruk at the dawn of civilization and on the concept of the Priest-King, which must be either abandoned or radically re-defined.