

BOOKKEEPING WITHOUT WRITING: EARLY ADMINISTRATIVE TECHNOLOGIES IN CONTEXT



NINO POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOW 1ST ANNUAL CONFERENCE
5TH & 6TH FEBRUARY 2021 (ONLINE)



This conference brings together varied specialists to explore how non-literate systems of information storage were used in the Near East from the late Neolithic, and why they persisted into the first millennium BC. The world's earliest known written script, cuneiform, emerged as the bureaucratic tool of administration in the city-states of south Mesopotamia during the late-fourth millennium BC. Yet crucially, tokens continue to be used as an administrative tool, alongside bullae, seals and written texts into the first millennium BC in Mesopotamia. Did tokens merely replicate the information stored within cuneiform script for the illiterate masses? Were they physical guarantees or receipts to be handled, performing a mnemonic function in a way that cuneiform tablets could not? The relationship between and social implications of the dual use of written and non-literate administration and information storage devices will be explored via examination of the evidence from Mesopotamia. This will be interpreted in alongside examples of complex, non-written administrative systems from the ethnographic and historical record from various cultures, world regions and time periods.

FRIDAY 5TH FEBRUARY 2021

INTRODUCTION | 10:30-11:00am*

Opening remarks: **Willemijn Waal** (Director of Netherlands Institute for the Near East)

Introduction: **Lucy Bennison-Chapman** (Organiser)

SESSION 1: BACKGROUND | 11.00am

Mithen "Symbolic Thought, Cognition, Prehistoric Mind: The relationships between words, thought and cultural evolution"

11:45am Coffee and snacks

SESSION 2: THE LATE NEOLITHIC | 12:00pm

Akkermans "Dating the Sealing: Revisiting Tell Sabi Abyad and the Case for Property Control in Late Neolithic Upper Mesopotamia"

Campbell "Accounting for Change? Symbols and information management in the later prehistory of northern Mesopotamia"

Bennison-Chapman "The Origins and Development of Non-Written Administrative Technologies in the Ancient Near East"

1:30pm Lunch

2.25pm Conference photo (delegates only)

SESSION 3: THE EARLY HISTORIC PERIOD | 2:30pm

Tsouparopoulou "Seals, bullae and other graphic devices"

McGinnis "The Role of Tokens in Later Mesopotamia"

3:45pm Coffee and snacks

Waal "The Role of Bullae within the Hittite Administration Revisited"

Woods (Bullae, tokens and writing)

5:00pm Virtual drinks

SATURDAY 6TH FEBRUARY 2021

SESSION 4: HISTORIC/ETHNOGRAPHIC PARALLELS | 12:30pm**

Haring "Scribal and Non-scribal Modes of Visual Communication in Egypt (Deir el Medina)"

Medrano "Cords in Court: The paper *kipus* of early colonial Andean legal proceedings"

1:40pm Coffee and snacks

Skambraks "Tally Sticks in Medieval Europe"

Monroe "The Dahomean Royal Palace Sphere"

3:00pm Coffee and break

3:45pm Virtual museum tour (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden)

SESSION 5: RESPONSE AND DISCUSSION | 4:10pm

All speakers. Chaired by Prof. D. Baird.

5:30pm Virtual drinks

* All times are Amsterdam, Netherlands which is Central European Standard Time (ECT/GMT+1).

**Please note the later start time on day two, to accommodate our USA-based delegates.

REGISTRATIONS

The conference is free and open to all. Please register in advance via the event homepage:

<http://www.nino-leiden.nl/event/bookkeeping-without-writing-early-administrative-technologies-in-context>