



UNIVERSITÀ DI PISA



Abstracts

BEYOND THE TEXT

The Materiality of Ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern Texts



INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP
PISA, 11th December 2017

Workshop location: Chiesa di Sant'Eufrasia and Seminar Room Sal-1 (first floor),
Dipartimento di Civiltà e Forme del Sapere, via dei Mille 19, Pisa (Italy)

Organised by: Marilina Betrò, Jesper Eidem, Jeanette C. Fincke, Gianluca Miniaci

www.egittologia.cfs.unipi.it

www.nino-leiden.nl

John Baines*Material and other constraints on the development of written texts*

This paper, which focuses on early Egypt but with comparative intent, understands text not as anything written, whether or not it exploits language, but as culturally salient genres of discourse, including specific and binding formulations. Text genres often use continuous syntax, but in written form they may not do so. The core institution of text is oral and can be sustained orally for millennia. Oral forms can be brief and tied to particular modes and contexts, but they can be extensive and suitable for performance before an audience, often in variable formulations. In a number of traditions material text genres develop slowly and their manifestations are much briefer than is likely in the oral domain. Materiality constrains the development of texts through context and medium of inscription (on perishable or durable surfaces), as well as the investment necessary for a written tradition. These factors tend to temper the speed of change. Partly for that reason, spoken and written diverge from each other, so that the written, material text can be remote from its oral counterpart, or the language of the latter is far from normal speech and perhaps incomprehensible to most people.

Stefano de Martino*Archaeometric analyses on the clay of cuneiform tablets and the historical geography of Hittite Anatolia*

Mineralogical, neutron activation and portable X-ray fluorescence analyses mostly conducted by Y. Goren and his team (Tel Aviv University) offered significant data to determine the origin of clay of several corpora of cuneiform tablets. The results of the aforementioned analyses were compared to known pottery database in order to establish the provenance of said tablets. The analyses on tablets, whose provenance was western Anatolia, when compared with Hittite textual evidence, offer food for thought concerning the historical geography of this region and the exact placement of the cities of Apaša and Milawanda and the lands of Arzawa and Mira.

Elena Devecchi*The power of format: tabular bookkeeping in Kassite Babylonia*

In the modern world, the use of tables as a device for visualizing and processing complex information is so ubiquitous and widespread that its appearance also in the written output of ancient cultures can be easily taken for granted. However, the choice of presenting data by using a two-dimensional, instead than a one-dimensional layout is not that obvious, as it is shown by the distribution pattern of tables among Mesopotamian written records. In Mesopotamia, scribes started employing tables as a bookkeeping tool for recording, storing, and sorting data only in the Old Babylonian period (ca. 2000-1600 BC), thus relatively late in the history of cuneiform writing. And even then, tables accounted for only 1 or 2 percent of all

administrative documents, while simpler linear or prosaic document formatting was preferred as a method of managing information. The situation changes radically in the Kassite or Middle Babylonian period (ca. 1550-1150 BC), which can be regarded with good reason as the heyday of cuneiform tabular account. At this time, the amount of administrative records in tabular format raises to ca. one third of the whole archival documentation. The central role played by tables in the accounting practices of the time is reflected not only by their high percentage, but also by the development of very well-defined and precise formats according to the function these documents had within the archival system. This paper will discuss some examples of such tabular accounts from the Kassite period, especially those related to the accounting of revenues. The goal is to highlight the connection between their extrinsic, physical features and their intrinsic, intellectual ones, and by doing so to contribute towards a better understanding of administration in Kassite Babylonia.

Silvia Ferrara

Iconicity in writing: early scripts and the Cretan hieroglyphic case

The standpoint adopted here focuses on a specific, if often neglected, aspect of 'materiality' as broadly construed, namely the reliance on image-bound configurations of the sign shapes in early writing, often with referents selected from the natural world, ('iconicity'). Studying the underlying principles that lead to sign-shape selection is therefore crucial for our understanding of how literacy develops from icons. This has, in turn, the potential to offer tremendous insight into cultural evolution, to ultimately answer: what is the connection between marks/emblems/symbols/icons and true writing? This paper explores this question from a multifaceted perspective that touches upon archaeology, epigraphy, linguistics, and cognitive studies. A brief global survey of first writing will introduce the topic and its multidisciplinary ramifications, and will then turn to the earliest attestations of writing from the Aegean during the second millennium BC, represented by the highly iconic Cretan Hieroglyphic script.

Jeanette C. Fincke

Proof correction marks on cuneiform tablets: evidence for the procedure of proofreading

Colophons on literary cuneiform tablets from the 13th century BCE onwards state that the text on the tablet has been "checked" and "collated" "in accordance with" the exemplar from which it was copied. Some colophons identify scribe and collator as different individuals and occasionally even give both their names. A scribe, after completing writing his tablet, will have given it to a collator. But where can we find his collations? Two colophons suggest that they were written on the tablet itself, but even modern autographs fail to record what are probably collator's marks. But they are there. Ancient proofreaders simply marked the line where they noted errors without correcting the mistakes themselves. Of five types of such marks on tablets from the Old Babylonian Period onwards (ca. 18th -16th century BCE) in Assyria and Babylonia only one has been identified until now. This is probably because they were all impressed in a small, shallow script in a position on the tablet where they can easily be overlooked. It has proved worth making a closer examination to reveal them.

Ben Haring

Ostraca: preliminary scribbles or finished products?

Egyptian hieratic ostraca have often been regarded as documents without long-term value; for instance, as exercises in scribal teaching, or as drafts for texts on papyrus. But careful study reveals that documentary ostraca could be kept for months or even years, while ostraca bearing literary texts were cherished possessions, even to the extent that we find them as burial gifts. Figured ostraca have mostly been classified as artists' sketches, which may be true for many, but certainly not for all ostraca. And come to think of it: the word 'ostrakon' seems to be an ill-chosen term for carefully made textual and artistic compositions on pottery and limestone fragments, whose purposes may have been anything else than casual or preliminary. In various ways, our modern classifications of textual and figured 'ostraca', and the 'genres' within these two groups, often miss the point entirely. Some New Kingdom examples from the Theban necropolis will serve to illustrate this point.

Gianluca Miniaci

Mutilating written signs: how the materiality of text affected the forms of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs (2600-1500 BC)

For over a millennium, from 2600 BC to 1550 BC, Egyptian hieroglyphs were occasionally altered by the voluntary amendment of some graphemes, through their deformation, their mutilation, and the erasure of some of their components. For instance the sign f, representing a horned viper, could be either deprived of a part of its body (such as the tail or the head), or have the head detached from the body, or have a knife inserted into its neck. Only some signs were subject to such types of alteration, and the practice was by far not constant in all the contexts and throughout the time span considered (2600-1550 BC). Rather, it is mainly attested in two different, and chronological distant, periods: at the end of Old Kingdom (ca. 2200-2000 BC) and at the end of Middle Kingdom (1800-1550 BC). Scholars have sought the explanation of this practice in religious and magic purposes but have rarely explored the role played by the materiality of the support and its archaeological context.

Karenleigh Overmann

The material record of the Ancient Near East: new directions for research in numeracy and literacy

The material record of Ancient Near Eastern artifacts and writing is one of the longest and most extensive known in duration and scope. The record substantiates detailed chronological change in material forms that, when interpreted through a cognitive paradigm (e.g., the Material Engagement Theory of Lambros Malafouris), provide novel insights into the development of complex cultural systems like literacy and numeracy. For example, in literacy, change in written form can be related to change in psychological functioning (e.g. the fusiform gyrus becomes trained to recognize written objects through

combinations of their local and global features, relaxing the need to maintain the depictiveness that characterized archaic signs; Overmann, 2016, *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*). For numeracy, the sequence of artifacts used for counting—fingers, tallies, tokens, and numerical notations—can be analyzed for their effects on numerical content, structure, and organization, improving the understanding of how complex mathematical systems are elaborated from the perceptual experience of quantity (Overmann, 2016, *Quaternary International*). Both avenues of inquiry have significant potential to inspire new interdisciplinary engagement between Assyriology, archaeology, and neuroscience, and for the study of ancient number systems, the potential to revitalize and expand interest as well.

Ludo Snijders

High-tech imaging for the study of texts. Challenges and opportunities from Mexican cases

In 2011, a collaborative project between two universities in The Netherlands and The Bodleian Libraries was started to uncover subsurface pictographic texts from a precolonial Mexican manuscript. Since there are less than twenty such manuscripts still in existence, key to this project was the use of non-invasive techniques. Many investigation techniques did not work, since the paints used by Mexican scribes were almost all organic. Nonetheless we managed to uncover parts of the hidden pictographs and, although the investigation is still ongoing, now have a much greater understanding of this 500 year old historical narrative. Some of the techniques used during this investigation have also proven valuable on other manuscripts, such as the reconstruction of damaged images on another of these Mexican books. This talk aims to open up the floor to discussion about further applications of such techniques outside of the narrow realm of Mexican codices. Although these specific examples come from half a world away, parallels in material composition will allow us to explore their value for the study of Ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern texts.

Andréas Stauder

The Thutmoside viziral cycle: space, materiality, and induced interpretive frames

A case study is proposed in how, more generally, a monumental inscription can project significations and induce interpretive frames much beyond what any merely linguistic or textual transcription of the inscribed text would be able to render. The object is the early Thutmoside viziral cycle (Teaching of Aametju, Appointment of User, Installation of the Vizier, and Duties of the Vizier, with the associated scenes, Tributes, Taxes, and Vizir's Bureau), inscribed in the Theban tombs of the viziers User, Rekhmire, and Amenemope (ca. 1475–1425 BCE). First are the place of inscription, the necropolis of Cheikh abd-el-Gurnah as a theater for display and competitive emulation for the innermost circle of the early Thutmoside elite; and architectural space, here the transverse hall of Theban funerary chapels as a space for self-presentation in which the compositions are deployed as a cycle. Further dimensions are: the materiality of hieroglyphic writing in itself and as contrasting with other hieroglyphic inscriptions in the funerary chapel; the ways in which the

compositions integrate text and image, including significant elements in textual layout that resonate with and frame equally significant elements in the associated pictorial composition; and, finally, how the text-image compositions were materially transferred from one tomb to the next for monumental re-actualization.

Jon Taylor

More than words: what else cuneiform inscriptions tell us

Traditionally, Assyriology has paid little attention to the material features of cuneiform inscriptions or the objects on which they were written. Often these physical features have been dismissed as unimportant or inconvenient, a kind of nuisance against which a researcher must battle in order to recover a clean, abstracted text. The choice of clay as the primary medium for conveying messages in cuneiform complicates the application of methodologies developed in neighbouring fields. Yet it also opens a series of windows onto ancient scribal life. Holistic study of text and vehicle yields a far fuller picture than what can be gained through textual study alone. What may appear to be trivial details in fact represent evidence that both illuminates the very fundamentals of cuneiform scribal work, and allows us to address a range of broad, theoretical questions. This contribution touches on features of cuneiform inscriptions from materials and production, through considerations of shape and size, to the resonant echoes captured from the collision of stylus on tablet.

The event has been funded by The Netherlands Institute for the Near East (NINO), the University of Pisa, and the association VOLO, under the funding scheme for university student activities (www.associazionevol.it)



UNIVERSITÀ DI PISA

