

Ancient Lives, New Stories: Current Research on the Ancient Near East - Introduction

Mathilde Touillon-Ricci¹ and Xosé L. Hermoso-Buxán²

How to cite: Touillon-Ricci, M. and Hermoso-Buxán, X. L. Ancient Lives, New Stories: Current Research on the Ancient Near East - Introduction. *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology*, 2022, 33(1): pp. 1–12. DOI: 10.14324/111.444.2041-9015.1332

Published: 27/04/2022

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the journal's standard double-blind review.

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Open Access:

Papers from the Institute of Archaeology is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

¹ SOAS-University of London and The British Museum, mtouillon-ricci@britishmuseum.org

² Institute of Archaeology, University College London, xose.buxan.12@ucl.ac.uk

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS: ANCIENT LIVES, NEW STORIES: CURRENT RESEARCH ON THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST³

Ancient Lives, New Stories: Current Research on the Ancient Near East - Introduction

Mathilde Touillon-Ricci and Xosé L. Hermoso-Buxán

The first edition of the London Postgraduate Conference for the Ancient Near East (LPCANE) took place on 1st and 2nd December 2018 at the British Museum in London. It bore the title *Ancient Lives, New Stories: Current Research on the Ancient Near East*, which aimed to highlight how new research and new approaches can shed light on hotly debated topics of the past and open new avenues of research. Aimed at graduate students (Master's and PhD) and early career researchers, the primary objective of this event was to create a forum of discussion for emerging scholars to showcase their research at any stage of progress and to foster exchange between the diverse disciplines working on the Ancient Near East, including Archaeology, Assyriology, Anthropology, Historiography, Conservation and Museum Studies. Near Eastern Archaeology, Assyriology and sister disciplines often tread separate paths in spite of having a common focus of attention. Thus, in this conference we aimed to highlight overlapping ideas and the interaction and complementarity between the knowledge derived from material culture, textual sources and other types of studies, and collaboration among scholars from different disciplines was facilitated and encouraged. The chronological periods under consideration were the Palaeolithic to the Islamic conquest, and the geographical scope, Anatolia to Afghanistan and the Caucasus to the Arabian Peninsula.

Keynote Lectures

³ **Ancient Lives, New Stories: Current Research on the Ancient Near East** was a conference held at the British Museum in London between 1st and 2nd December 2018, organised by Xosé L. Hermoso-Buxán and Mathilde Touillon-Ricci. This paper is part of the proceedings of that conference and have been edited by the organisers, with the support of *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology*.



The conference was honoured to welcome two keynote speakers, both of them leading experts in Ancient Near Eastern Studies: **Professor Andrew George**, from SOAS-University of London, and **Professor Nicholas Postgate** from the University of Cambridge. In his lecture *The Drunken Gods: Sources and Approaches to the Mythology of Ancient Mesopotamia*, Professor George presented his new research project proposing a new full analysis and synthesis of ancient Mesopotamian mythology, exploring its narrative framework in telling a coherent history of the universe, and investigating its relevance to the human condition. On the other hand, Professor Postgate, in his lecture *Sun, Sand and Sumer: An Abu Salabikh Retrospective*, presented a very personal insight into the excavations he conducted at the central Iraqi site of Abu Salabikh, as director of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq, between 1975 and 1989, when they had to be abandoned as a result of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and his return to the site more than twenty years later, in the early 2000s. Very much in line with the aim of this conference, he highlighted the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in understanding the lives of the inhabitants of this small Sumerian city.

Sessions and presentations

The conference programme was devised so as to encourage the aforementioned interdisciplinary dialogue. Papers were organised in thematic panels and each of them was chaired by a conference speaker, who also led the concluding discussion session between panel members and the audience. The conference included a total of twenty-eight oral presentations in two formats, either 20-minute or 10-minute presentations, which were organised in six thematic sessions, as well as poster presentations, which were on display throughout the conference and which the conference delegates could discuss in detail with the authors in a dedicated poster session.

Session 1: Material Culture and Society

Opening the conference, the panel *Material Culture and Society* discussed what artefacts can tell us about the cultures that created and used them. **Annelies Van de Ven** (Université Catholique de Louvain, this volume) discussed the role of archaeological archives in museums as storytelling tools. Drawing on four case studies approaching different aspects

of interpretation, display, and engagement, Van de Ven demonstrated the importance of marrying archives and artefacts in museological practice in order to display the processes associated with archaeological research in interpreting the past and its narratives. In turn, **Christoph Schmidhuber** (University of Cambridge and Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg) discussed the institutional and social aspects of craft and labour as reflected in the Old Babylonian cuneiform archives from Mari (Syria). Schmidhuber analysed lists of personnel and rations to understand administrative practices, thus gaining further insight into the composition of the workforce, interactions between professional groups, as well as between social and family structures. On the other hand, **Ayhan Aksu** (University of Groningen, this volume) approached the materiality of writing in the Near Eastern scribal tradition through a threefold analysis of two manuscripts from the 1st century BCE to the 3rd century CE (*Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 654* and *Dead Sea Scroll 4Q509*). Drawing on codicology and palaeography, Aksu addressed questions of scribal practices and the recontextualization of writing, while also investigating the intertextual relationship between each composition and its manuscript. **Monique Arntz** (University of Cambridge, this volume), for her part, used craft theory to provide a functional analysis of the Neolithic figurines of Tell Sabi Abyad (Syria) and Çatalhöyük (Turkey). In contrast to traditional interpretations of these items as ‘images’ or ‘texts’ with symbolic messages that need to be decoded, Arntz proposed a sensory approach that engages with the materiality of these items and analyses them holistically, taking into account their production, use and deposition. Lastly, **Josef Bloomfield** (University of Oxford) discussed the connection between drawing and writing among the nomadic populations of North Arabia. Through a combined study of rock art and graffiti in the Al Harrah desert, drawing on examples up until the Rwala Bedouin in the 1980s and early 90s, Bloomfield demonstrated the implications of the apparent connection between graphic and epigraphic to re-address the question of Safaitic writing and why it stopped being written.

Session 2: Sacred and Profane

The panel *Sacred and Profane* approached these two aspects through time and space, from the Neolithic to the first millennium BCE and from Anatolia to Mesopotamia. First, **David Wilson** (SOAS-University of London) proposed to re-examine a collection of Akkadian ‘love incantations’ preserved on an Old Babylonian cuneiform tablet (IB 1554) from Isin (Iraq). In contrast with previous interpretations of the collection, Wilson analysed the text with a view to mapping nuances, registers and voices each incantation presents, thus providing a renewed understanding of this collection of ‘love incantations’,



presenting the story and trajectory of female-male relations. Also approaching textual sources, **Kerrie Myers** (University of Birmingham) investigated the use of language in an incantation against a demon preserved on a Neo-Sumerian cuneiform tablet (HS 1556) from Nippur (Iraq). Myers identified and discussed the use of rhetoric and poetic language to invoke particularly emotional imagery within the reader, thus demonstrating the broader performative purpose of incantations through the connection between language and purpose, and text and performance. In turn, **Michela Piccin** (Northeast Normal University) explored the Akkadian concept of ‘wisdom’ and proposed a systematic study of its lexicon in the *Poem of the Righteous Sufferer* (ludlul bel nemeqi) and the *Babylonian Theodicy*. Drawing on a comparative study of the two literary compositions, Piccin proposed a taxonomy of the terms and expressions belonging to the semantic sphere of ‘wisdom’ to better define its abstract and theoretical nuances as well as its religious and theological aspects. Moving from Babylonia to Anatolia, **Francesco G. Barsacchi** (Università degli Studi di Firenze) discussed the nature and the organisation of sacred time in Hittite Anatolia. Reconsidering the Hittite religious calendar, Barsacchi addressed issues relating to its organisation and the lunar nature of the Hittite month, drawing on the analysis of rites related to the moon cycle and focusing on two ceremonies performed by the king in connection with specific lunar phases (*Catalogue des Textes Hittites 591* and *Festival of the Moon and the Thunder*). Going back in time, **Mattia Cartolano** (University of Liverpool, this volume) provided an alternative approach to the idea of the emergence of ‘the sacred’ in the Near Eastern Neolithic, traditionally linked to interpretations of unusual or special archaeological contexts as being associated with magic practices or other concepts related to ritual performance or symbolism, the contrast between the idea of sacred and profane more likely to have been a social convention occurring in later periods. In contrast, the author argues that the sacred in the Neolithic is an externally manifested prosocial reality that is gradually adopted via mimetic practices.

Session 3: Movement and Communication

Closing the first day of the conference, the panel *Movement and Communication* focused on ideas of connectivity across the Near East from various perspectives. In her presentation, **Eleanor Preston** (UCL Institute of Archaeology and UCL Qatar) discussed maritime trade in the Persian Gulf in the context of the Ubaid-phenomenon. Focusing on the mid-late sixth millennium BCE, she used inductively coupled plasma atomic emission spectroscopy (ICP-AES) and petrographic analysis of ceramics to provide new evidence

that highlights the importance of the exchange relationship between Mesopotamia and Arabia for the understanding of the Arabian Neolithic nomadic population and later social economic developments. Also focusing on trade but, in his case, on the role of women in long-distance commercial exchanges during the Old Assyrian *karum* period, **Joshua Britton** (UCL Institute of Archaeology) discussed the relationship between agency, gender and mobility and used archaeological theory to analyse letters authored by Old Assyrian women and to argue that the geographical distance between family members led to new expressions of female agency which negotiated with, challenged or reiterated patriarchal structures. Lastly, in his paper, **Taylor Gray** (University of Saint Andrews, this volume) discussed cross-cultural artistic exchange in the Ancient Near East. Using the example of a seventh-century BCE pendant from Tel Miqne-Ekron (Israel), he argued that when a culture borrows imagery from another culture, it does not necessarily also borrow the meaning it had in the source culture, but can adopt autochthonous meanings. Thus, in this case, the pendant could have represented a local Ekronite goddess displayed in an ‘Assyrianising’ style.

Session 4: Environment and Subsistence

Opening the second day of the conference, the panel *Environment and Subsistence* explored the dynamics of human settlements, whether adapting to the environment or adapting the environment. **Elizabeth Farebrother** (UCL Institute of Archaeology) presented the results of her research into changing human-animal interaction, animal husbandry and subsistence across the Zagros Mountains and their foothills over a period of almost 7,000 years, using evidence from the Neolithic sites of Jarmo, Tepe Marani and Gurga Chiya (Northeastern Iraq). **Kyra Kaercher** (University of Cambridge), also using a case study from the Iraqi Kurdistan, based in this instance on the Rowanduz Archaeological Programme, redefined in her paper the concept of ‘peripheries’ and emphasised the role played by these areas in the development of societies in the Ancient Near East. Moving eastwards to India, **Mumtaz Yattoo** (University of Kashmir) introduced the material culture and botanical evidence from the Neolithic site of Qasim Bagh (Kashmir), which showed analogies with neighbouring sites in Kashmir, Northern Pakistan and China and is coherent with the location of the site at a crossroads of ancient communication routes and reflects its participation in a wider system of regional exchange in the Inner Asian Mountains. On the other hand, **Ben Dewar** (University of Birmingham) discussed the structure and meaning of the narrative presented in the New Assyrian inscription known as *Ashurbanipal Prism A*. Dewar demonstrated that the tetrapartite geographical ordering



of Ashurbanipal's campaigns in *Prism A*, mirroring the royal titulary of 'king of the four quarters of the earth', used the episode of the rebellion led by Shamash-shum-ukin to serve Ashurbanipal's narrative of conquest, loss and re-conquest of the known world. Finally, in the last paper of this panel, **Noy Shemesh** (Bar-Ilan University) presented a stylistic analysis of water features in Roman Israel as well as a study of the reasons for the use of these as status markers among the Roman and Jewish Elites.

Session 5: Private and Public Life

The panel *Private and Public Life* approached the dynamics of power display as well as the intimacy of religion and death through a variety of papers. **Marta Pallavidini** (Freie Universität Berlin) investigated the use of metaphorical language in Hittite International treaties and its role in the diplomatic discourse. Analysing the concepts expressed metaphorically, such as alliance and enmity, the phases of political life, the relations between the kings and their countries, or the characteristics of the Hittite kings, Pallavidini explored the different metaphorical expressions with regards to diplomatic discourse, chronology and language. **Petra Creamer** (University of Pennsylvania), for her part, shared her research on Middle and Neo-Assyrian burial practices at the site of Tell Billa/Shibaniba (Iraq), which she developed using legacy data from the 1930s excavations. By means of an innovative methodology, she argued that the mortuary practices and beliefs at this site fitted the larger Assyrian framework, while she highlighted the potential and value of incomplete archaeological data for modern research. In turn, **Mateen Arghandehpour** (University College London) analysed Achaemenid king Cyrus' war strategies and his use of religious propaganda in his campaign against Nabonidos as a way of legitimising his claims to the Babylonian throne. Also focusing on Achaemenid Persia, **Jack Davies** (Swansea University) looked at the psychological impact of royal palatial architecture at Persepolis on visitors from a phenomenological point of view and he argued that the build environment is actively used to manipulate experience and perception and to reinforce power dynamics. Continuing in Iran, but in the later, Sasanian period, **Aleksander Engeskaug** (SOAS-University of London) investigated the socioeconomic implications of the relationship between settlements and fire temples which, contrary to the common assumption, he claimed exist both in urban and rural environments.

Session 6: Identity and Otherness

Closing the conference, the panel *Identity and Otherness* discussed how individuals and groups relate to each other and their surroundings, and how they represent themselves, the other and the world. **Delphine Poinot** (École Pratique des Hautes Études, this volume) focused her research on Sasanian Iran. She looked at the representation of animals on sealings and concluded that the animals most commonly represented on Sasanian glyptics are those with which humans have the least interaction (i.e. wild animals), which also usually belong to the semantic fields of royalty and Zoroastrianism. On the other hand, **Philip J. Boyes** (University of Cambridge, this volume) explored writing practices and social diversity in Late Bronze Age Ugarit (Syria). Boyes investigated the diversity in who used writing beyond the traditional circles of trained scribes and state bureaucracy, considering writing practices with regards to gender and women's literacy, to social mobility and literacy outside the traditional establishment, as well as to the connection between writing and possible minority communities at Ugarit. Moving on from the connections between groups to those within, **Andrea Rebecca Marrocchi Savoi** (Università degli Studi di Roma 'La Sapienza', this volume) investigated the connection between kinship terminology and social organisation in the Neo-Sumerian period. Drawing on examples from literary compositions and case studies of administrative texts, Marrocchi Savoi demonstrated that kinship terms, such as *dumu son*, could also be used outside the familial context to identify hierarchical relationships in the workplace. For his part, **Alexander Johannes Edmonds** (University of Tübingen) presented a re-examination of the early history of the Neo-Assyrian period and the (re-) conquest of the Middle Euphrates region, ascribing previously unattributed royal inscriptions to Adad-nirari II and Tukulti-Ninurta II. Closing this panel as well as the conference, **Kaisa Vaittinen** (University of Helsinki and University of Turku) discussed the representation of the other in the *Final Apocalypse* of the *Book of Daniel*. Analysing the predictions of rising and falling nations in Chapter 11 and drawing on comparative examples from Ancient Near Eastern cuneiform sources, Vaittinen proposed to address the question of otherness in the Old Testament and how the different nations are described and represented.



Figure 1: Discussion panel after one of the Conference Sessions (Photo: Alberto Giannese).

Poster Session

Finally, a poster session offered delegates the opportunity to present their research in an alternative, more visually compelling format. **Daniele Borkowski** (Durham University) presented the results of his research on agricultural economy in the archives of Ebla (Syria). Borkowski's quantitative methodology, calculating the grain production and consumption by combining both textual and numerical data from the archives, proposed to re-evaluate the scale of Ebla's agricultural economy and its effects on the surrounding landscape. In her poster, **Eva Götting** (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut) outlined the process leading to the production of an amulet in second and first millennium BCE Mesopotamia, making reference to rituals, craftsmanship and the actors involved. On the other hand, **Anne-Laure Lardière** (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne) presented a study of the architectural remains of the city gates of Zincirli and Carchemish, in Syro-Anatolia, and provided insights into the nature of the coexistence between Arameans and Neo-Hittites in the Early Iron Age. **Laura Muncaciu** (Accademia del Teatro-Music Research Center) presented her research of the human 'voice' terminology in the Hittite

language and the semantic sphere relating to communication and vocal performance with regards to the wider group of Indo-European languages. **Gwendoline Maurer** (UCL Institute of Archaeology) explored the impact of Kura Araxes/Early Transcaucasian migrants in third millennium Early Bronze Age Tel Bet Yerah, in the Southern Levant, and presented the results of the study of its zooarchaeological assemblage, which provided insights into subsistence strategies, ongoing social and cultural processes and the concept the ‘diaspora’ in prehistory. In another zooarchaeology poster, **Özlem Saritas** (University of Liverpool), studied the nature of animal exploitation practices and human-animal interaction in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic of Central Anatolia, with a focus on the site of Boncuklu Höyük. Lastly, **Margaux Spruyt** (Université Paris-Sorbonne and Musée National d’Histoire Naturelle de Paris, this volume), using an innovative approach that compared Neo-Assyrian reliefs with depictions of horses and modern photographs of the actual animals, gauged the accuracy of the artistic representations and the observation quality of the artists themselves.

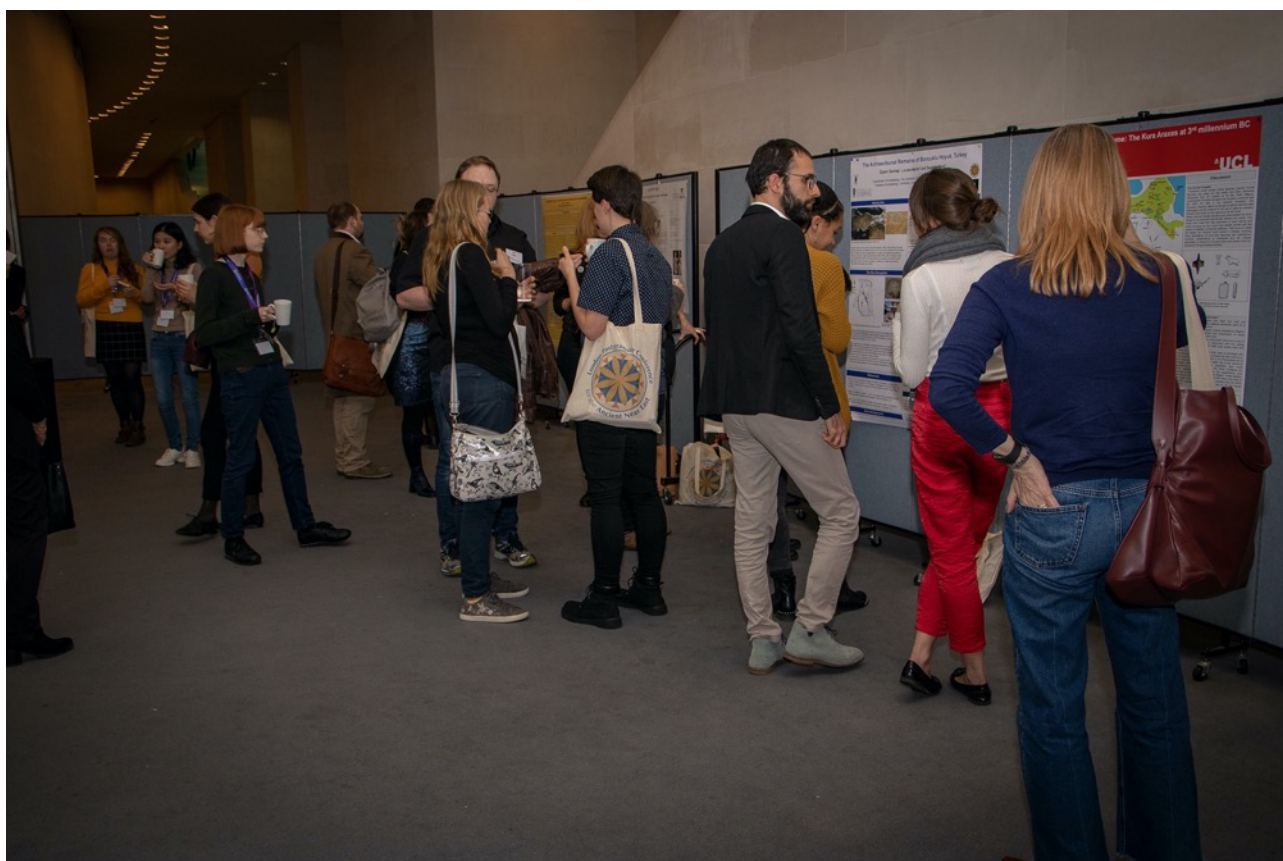


Figure 2: Poster Session (Photo: Alberto Giannese).



Figure 3: Discussion between the audience and the presenters at the Stevenson Lecture Theatre (Photo: Alberto Giannese).

Final remarks and acknowledgements

The London Postgraduate Conference for the Ancient Near East (LPCANE) was created and organised by **Xosé L. Hermoso-Buxán** and **Mathilde Touillon-Ricci**, PhD representatives at the London Centre for the Ancient Near East (LCANE). The Conference was attended by nearly 120 participants: members of the public, two keynote speakers and 37 researchers from 29 universities and 15 countries around the world. Over the weekend, conference delegates also enjoyed access to the major exhibition *I am Ashurbanipal: King of the World, King of Assyria* at The British Museum and *The Curious Case of Çatalhöyük* at the Brunei Gallery. The success and positive feedback received for the first edition of our conference confirms that we achieved the aims which were sought when the conference was first presented and highlights the importance of this type of interdisciplinary conferences for researchers at early stages of their careers.

The organisers wish to thank all the participants, Professor George and Professor Postgate, who kindly delivered the Keynote Lectures, all the presenters and the authors who contributed to the conference Proceedings volume. The London Postgraduate Conference for the Ancient Near East was made possible thanks to the valuable support of The British Museum and the generous financial support of the British Institute for the Study of Iraq (BISI), the UCL Institute of Advanced Studies (Octagon Small Grants Fund), the UCL Institute of Archaeology and SOAS-University of London (Doctoral School). Thanks are due to all those who contributed to the smooth running of the Conference, especially to the volunteers from the UCL Institute of Archaeology, the staff of the British Museum at the Middle East Department and across the institution, technicians, photographers, catering providers and security staff. We would like to extend our gratitude to UCL Press and the journal *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology*, which welcomed the publication of these conference proceedings, its managing editor, **Chloe Ward**, for her continuous support, and the anonymous peer-reviewers who kindly read through and provided feedback to the articles in this volume. Finally, we would like to thank **Jean-Luc Touillon** for designing the LPCANE logo⁴. The Ancient Near East being so broad and vast in time and space, a bespoke logo that would represent it as a whole was commissioned. The LPCANE logo thus depicts a rosette crowned with cuneiform wedges, both motif and script being found throughout the Ancient Near East, with colours inspired by the Persian Archers panels from the palace of Darius in Susa.

⁴ The logo is under copyright © Jean-Luc Touillon.



Figure 4: Members of the LPCANE Organising Committee and Keynote Speakers, from left to right: Xosé L. Hermoso-Buxán, Nicholas Postgate, Andrew George, Mathilde Touillon-Ricci, Rocío Mayol (Photo: Alberto Giannese).