

## *Writing and Accounting in Early Mesopotamia*



The project *Writing and Accounting in Early Mesopotamia* aims to reconsider the interplay between writing and accounting devices in early Mesopotamia (late fourth to the early second millennia BCE).

Recent archaeological discoveries prompt us in fact to challenge old evolutionary paradigms: as recent discoveries in Turkey make clear, writing did not replace prehistoric means of administration throughout Mesopotamian history. In addition, newly found traces of pigments on Early Dynastic cuneiform tablets invite us to reconsider the main writing medium – i.e. clay – as a complex one.

The research will focus on both Philology of cuneiform sources and Art History. As for the former line of inquiry, the project will provide a coherent, in-depth study of the ancient terminology for writing and accounting (a desideratum in the field, as only scattered outdated articles are available). The goal is to have the complexity of media, actors, and techniques for the transmission of knowledge emerge on the scholarly debate. As for the Art History record, the study will consider selected iconographic evidence (mostly cylinder seal impressions) in order to look for as yet unrecognized representations of ancient devices in administrative context. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, the research will be informed by original Digital Humanities solutions for data mining of cuneiform texts (PostgreSQL database, Python scripts), which will greatly facilitate the identification of all primary sources relevant to the project. In addition, comparative Anthropology will provide a broader theoretical background to test assumptions and possible interpretations. The evidence thus gathered will be framed in a broad methodological discourse routed in History and Archaeology of the Ancient Near East, which is of great interest to scholars in diverse disciplines related to the theme of Cultural Evolution.

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