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Multilingualism and Domains of Language Use in the Western Mesopotamian Periphery.

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Multilingualism is, from the very earliest periods onwards, a constant in the written culture of the Ancient Near East. This paper will address the interplay of languages in the western Mesopotamian periphery from a sociolinguistic perspective, first outlining the linguistic landscape of the western periphery in the periods in question and some of the language contact phenomena at play, and concluding with a detailed overview of the functional distribution of languages and the domains of language use in the second half of the second millennium BCE.

The few sites in the periphery that have yielded documents in more than one language allow us to study the functional distribution within the written corpus of Akkadian and other languages. Interestingly, very different mechanisms seem to be at play in these cases, and this paper will attempt to investigate them from a comparative perspective. The only domain where Akkadian is used almost exclusively over the entire geographical area in question is international correspondence, thus fulfilling the main function of a lingua franca, and satisfying the need for basic communication between speakers of different linguistic groups, whereas the situation is considerably more complex for other genres such as legal texts and royal inscriptions.

The paper proposes a model in which the Akkadian language was originally adopted and used for an array of functions in the Late Old Babylonian period, at least in Northern Syria and Anatolia, but was then replaced in certain domains by the local languages in a diglossic distribution. The use of cuneiform writing and Akkadian in the furthest periphery (Egypt and Cyprus), however, was conditioned by the need to communicate with West Asia, but never penetrated beyond the realm of fulfilling diplomatic requirements.

Choosing (and refusing) to write in Cuneiform in the Early Iron-age Ĝazīra.

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With the steady improvement in the textual and historical documentation of the Early Iron-age Ĝazīra, an increasing number of the region's early Neo-Assyrian governors are proving to have actually been local Aramean rulers who had retained their power and control of their territory in return for its formal incorporation within the land of Assyria. This is evident not only from the historical and archaeological evidence, but also the strange onomastics of many of these governors, whose names vary distinctively in the Akkadian sources (e.g. Ḫadi-/Iḫtadi-libbušu, Ilu-bāni/-ibni) in a way which can only be explained by them having been erroneously translated into Akkadian from alphabetic Aramaic texts where ambiguities in the script permitted multiple plausible vocalisations of their names (i.e. **hdhlbbh* and **lbrh*). This suggests, in turn, that this confusion was the result of them having corresponded solely with the Assyrian administration in alphabetic Aramaic, something rendered even more interesting by these rulers sometimes using cuneiform to create commemorative inscriptions for their own purposes.

Integrating the latest historical findings, this paper investigates this strange disconnect between the (often awkward and incorrect) local use of cuneiform by rulers and elites in the 'transitional cases' of Gūzāna and Sūḫu, and their use of alphabetic Aramaic to correspond with their Assyrian overlords, seeking to establish the reasons for this phenomenon. From close philological and epigraphical study of these inscriptions, it is possible to narrow down the cuneiform traditions from which the Aramean scribes in these chancelleries borrowed in fashioning their inscriptions, to understand why they made the mistakes they did, and to identify when they asked for outside help. Finally, these findings are considered in light of what is known of this period's Aramaic scribal culture.

Cypro-Minoan, Cuneiform, and Ceramics: technological aspects of script transmission in the House of Yabninu.

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While Cypro-Minoan may constitute ‘the periphery of the periphery,’ it is hoped that the proposed paper on Cypro-Minoan-Cuneiform script transmission will highlight extra-scribal settings of script transmission and be complementary to the Workshop’s cuneiform focus. The proposed paper analyzes technical aspects of script transmission at the interface of the Cypro-Minoan and alphabet cuneiform scripts and imagines the settings in which transmission would have occurred, taking the House of Yabninu as a case study. The technological analysis is focused primarily on writing media, but writing implements are also considered.

At the House of Yabninu, the characteristic cuneiform culture writing medium, the clay tablet, a writing medium only rarely used on Cyprus, is used to record Cypro-Minoan. Conversely, a characteristic Cypro-Minoan writing medium, rarely if ever used to record cuneiform texts, the pithos rim, records a single-sign alphabetic cuneiform text. More evidence of Cypro-Minoan influence is found in the inscribed and marked vessels scattered throughout the House. A close study of these anomalous inscriptions from the House of Yabninu, including an analysis of the construction and formatting of their writing media, paleography, and writing implements seeks to situate the texts in their broader transmission setting. Clay tablet construction and instruction in script, at least in their initial stages, are widely associated with scribal school context, Cypro-Minoan vessel texts with trade contexts. The House of Yabninu itself sits exactly at the intersection of scribal and mercantile practices. Thus, a study of the House’s texts allows us to conceive of script transmission in a non-scribal school, though certainly scribal-adjacent, setting.

Sticky Fingers: 3D Post-Processing Analysis of Fingerprint Impressions on Selected Ur III Tablets.

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The paper will present the current research that is being carried out on a sample of Ur III administrative texts housed in the collection of the Museo di Antichità – Musei Reali in Turin. The tablets record the management of animal carcasses of the so-called “office for dead animals” at Puzriš-Dagan/Drehem (Tsouparopoulou 2013a, 2013b). In addition to the information about the organization of this administrative unit that can be gained from the content of the texts, it is possible to gather new data about the scribes who wrote them through the analysis of tablets’ material features, such as the presence of fingerprint impressions. To this end, micrometric data on the fingerprints have been extracted from the tablets through detailed 3D documentation (via structured-light scanner), model filtering and metric analyses. In particular, Multi-Scale Integral Invariant (MSII) filtering and computational imaging analyses was fundamental for enhancing the readability of nearly-visible fingerprint impressions and for identifying fingerprint patterns typology; mean epidermal ridge breadth (MRB) measurements allowed the age estimation via *KA* and *modKA* formulas (Kamp et al., 1999; Králík and Novotný 2003); deviation analysis on fingerprint surfaces allowed performing metric matches on epidermal ridge depth.

The preliminary results show that post-processing analyses on 3D models could open new promising scenarios for the identification of ancient scribes as well as for the investigation of scribal practices and the workflow behind the production of cuneiform tablets.

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The Earliest Syllabic Writing System; the Examination of Proto-Elamite Clay Tablets with Phonetic Values.

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The Proto-Elamite writing system is from the same period as the Proto-cuneiform scripts in Mesopotamia. It is one of the oldest writing systems in the world, dating back to the second half of the fourth millennium BC. The origins of both writing systems go back to the earlier period and the invention of economic tablets. In Iran, recent research interest has focused on a set of manifestations that can be loosely lumped together and referred to as the Proto-Elamite phenomenon. Archaeologists have variously used the term Proto Elamite to mean a people, a script, a material culture, and a period; in addition, the term has been used to carry inherent geographic implications. Proto Elamite writing system was used during the Late Chalcolithic Age between c. 3450–2800 BCE, over a vast geographical area, stretching from Tepe Sialk, Tepe Ozbaki, and Tepe Sofalin to the north, from Shahr-i-Sokhte to the east, from Tappe Yahya and Malyan to the south and from Susa over 1 million square kilometers of Iranian highland plateau. This vast geographical range for the presence of Proto-Elamite clay tablets is explained as the gradual cultural diffusion of pastoral nomad Proto-Elamite tribes and communities. Proto-Elamite clay tablets were used contemporaneously with Proto-Cuneiform clay tablets in Mesopotamia. The Proto-Elamite writing system has a surprising feature that records some parts of the spoken language. It has been argued that it is the oldest known semi-phonographic writing system. There have been some attempts to decipher the Proto-Elamite tablets by a couple of archaeologists and linguistics made limited progress. In this article, the authors will elaborate on the chain of signs in the Proto-Elamite writing system which has a phonetic value which was the earliest man's attempt to write down some parts of the spoken language.

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Where Did The Fāra Literary Texts Come From?

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During the 1902-1903 excavations at Tell Fāra (Iraq), the site of the ancient city of Šuruppak, thirty-three Sumerian literary texts were found. These tablets were copied, and some of them may have been composed, during the ED IIIa period (2600-2500 BC), making them the earliest known examples of literature from anywhere in the world. As these texts did not spring forth from a void, but were the products of an established scribal curriculum, it is worthwhile to survey whether any of these early compositions point to particular geographic locales known to have been active during the Proto-dynastic period (c. 3000-2600 BC).

This paper will discuss the Fāra texts and their potential derivations in terms of five groups, (1) the long UD.GAL.NUN compositions which currently only point backwards in time, (2) the the long UD.GAL.NUN compositions that have parallels from Tell Abū Šalābīḥ, (3) home-grown Fāra literary compositions and the proverbs and incantations that may reflect the beliefs of contemporary persons living at ED IIIa Šuruppak, (4) the Fāra practice tablets with mythological contents, and (5) the “new” compositions of late ED IIIa Tell Abū Šalābīḥ.

While we are not yet at the point of being able to discuss manuscript continuity in Early Dynastic Mesopotamia in the same way as can be achieved in Classical studies, this paper will discuss in detail a small yet remarkable literary corpus, most of which was found within one building and much of which appears to have been copied by a single group of contemporary scribes.

Signs of the Times: paleographic study of ITI.

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The intricate web of cultural exchanges in the ancient Near East followed multiple pathways, encompassing linguistic, technological, and cultural exchanges. Writing was undoubtedly one of the tools most subject to exchange and modification, adapting to different cultural contexts and the languages it conveyed. This study will present a palaeographic analysis of the cuneiform sign ITI throughout the 3rd millennium BCE. This sign was used to convey the concept we translate as "month" in various languages, such as Sumerian, Eblaite, or Akkadian. Although it was used almost in the same way within the administrative texts of various local realities, it shows significant palaeographic differences across different sites. In this study, the sign will be first presented in its variants attested during the Proto-Dynastic IIIb period between the Southern Sumerian region and the documentation from Mari. The situation changes in the subsequent period, the Paleo-Akkadian period, where in the Southern Sumerian area, for example at Umma, a graphic variant appears alongside the one already attested in the previous period. The case study of Nippur, a city considered in the Mesopotamian tradition as the Sumerian city par excellence, will then be presented. Here, a particular phenomenon is observed: the graphic variant not previously attested seems to be limited to months with Semitic names. The aim of this contribution is to review the palaeographic history of the ITI sign from the periphery to the centre, reconstructing the history of the sign.

The Transmission of Emesal-laments.

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Emesal is a variant of Sumerian and is clearly attested in the early second millennium. The last dateable Emesal-texts stem from the 1st century BC, so we can trace almost 2000 years of transmission of these texts after the assumed language death of Sumerian at the end of the Ur III period. Emesal-laments, obviously somehow rooted in an oral tradition of the third millennium, spread from southern Mesopotamia to Assyria in the Middle-Assyrian period and became part of the Assyrian state cult. Most probably also the Emesal-list was compiled in this period of the sake of knowledge-transfer from Babylonia to Assyria. In Neo-Assyrian times a catalogue of balaĝs and eršemmas was established and numerous texts were copied. In this process of compiling and copying laments from various places the ancient scribes developed methods for the transmission of textual variants in the Sumerian text and the Akkadian interlinear translations. The last phase of the transmission of Emesal-laments is the Hellenistic and Parthian period, where the texts were still copied by families of lamentation-singer and scribes.

In this presentation I will seek to outline the history of the transmission of Emesal-texts and highlight the creative efforts of the scribes who managed to preserve this tradition for such a long time.

The Conquests of Nabû and Babylonian Sacred Knowledge

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As the Babylonian god of the cuneiform scribal arts, the character of Nabû was tied to both cuneiform learning and to the changing character of Babylonian identity. As such, this paper will explore the developing cult of this god, both in Babylonia and in lands to its northwest, to ascertain the shifting influence of Babylon on the spread of cuneiform culture. It proposes that Babylonian influence came in several waves over the course of the Middle Bronze Age through Early Iron Age, each of which brought a new manifestation of the god to the west. Each wave, fostered by foreign demand for Babylonian wisdom, brought a new flow of learning that had been developed previously at Babylon. Several episodes in this exchange are considered. First is the inception of the Nabû cult in the early second millennium, when the god was apparently appropriated from an earlier tribal deity and tethered the god to Babylon and to cuneiform learning, and his limited early reception in the region at large. Second is the spread of cuneiform learning to its fullest extent in the Late Bronze Age, when the cult of Nabû spread to Ugarit, Emar, Hattusa, and Assur. Last is the appropriation of Babylonian scholarship by the Neo-Assyrian empire, which resulted in Nabû becoming one of the most celebrated gods in the Assyrian pantheon. Through these cases, this paper will argue that the local cults of Nabû responded to the influx of new scholarly material from Babylonia, and updated themselves according to the Babylonian cult of the god.

Introducing and Adapting Assyrian Patterns to the Urartian Culture: Cuneiform Script, Formulaic Expressions and Ideological Motifs.

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One of the most important and representative elements of the Assyrian culture that was adopted by Urartu was the cuneiform writing system with Neo-Assyrian cuneiform signs. Afterwards Urartians borrowed the cuneiform, during the reign of king Sarduri I (840–830 B.C.) the first Urartian royal inscriptions were compiled in Akkadian. The next Urartian ruler Išpuini already adapted the cuneiform signs to the Urartian language. This marks the second phase in the development of the Urartian kings' propaganda, namely composing royal inscriptions in the native language. Bilingual royal inscriptions written in Urartian and Akkadian emerged. By introducing cuneiform writing system, some Assyrian patterns were introduced as well. In this regards one of the most representative elements borrowed by the Assyrians were the royal titulary and epithets which were strongly connected to the royal ideology. Aside from them, other Assyrian ideological motifs and formulaic expressions, as well as how they affected the Urartian language, royal inscriptions and ideology will be further discussed.

From Babylonia to Emar and back. On transmission of legal practices in the Late Bronze Age Near East.

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Similarly to other aspects of Mesopotamian culture, law was also subject to transmission. While analyzing texts from peripheral sites such as Emar, Ekalte, and Nuzi, it becomes quite clear that their legal practices were heavily informed by the Babylonian legal tradition, of both Old Babylonian and Middle Babylonian periods. It is especially obvious in the two scribal formats from Emar, one displaying Old Babylonian characteristics, the other – Middle Babylonian ones, whereas only the former appears in Ekalte. A closer look at the legal formulae shows, however, that the reception was neither uniform nor indiscriminate. Some of the clauses seem to have been used the same way as in Babylonian documents, whereas others appear to be repeated without real understanding of their legal meaning or purpose; yet other ones were modified, sometimes substantially, to suit local needs. The analysis of the ways in which Babylonian legal terms and formulae were transmitted and adapted into the local practice will be the focus of the paper.

Another issue worth considering is whether the transmission worked unidirectionally, or both ways. In other words – did any legal ideas originating in the peripheries make its way to Babylonia? And why did the most peculiar legal practices, with a heavy load of legal fiction used as a universal tool for circumventing legal prohibitions, may be found both in Emar and in the faraway Nuzi, but are completely absent from Babylonia? A detailed study of those two problems is beyond the scope of this presentation, but tentative answers will be proposed.

How did Hittite scholarship work on texts of Mesopotamian cultural tradition?

Valerio Pisaniello, Alfredo Rizza***

Several texts in Sumerian and Akkadian language were kept in the Hittite archives: besides local productions in Akkadian – i.e., original historical-political compositions of the rulers of the Old Kingdom and documents pertaining to diplomatic relations with the international powers –, a number of foreign materials belonging to the Mesopotamian cultural tradition are found, physically preserved on both imported tablets displaying a foreign ductus and locally copied manuscripts in Hittite cuneiform script. There is strong evidence that the interest the Hittites had in these documents was not merely of a scribal nature, as didactic tools employed to teach the languages of Mesopotamia: Hittite scholars studied these texts, copied and often translated them, also tailoring form and content to their tastes and needs, or used them as models to produce original compositions.

In this contribution, we will offer an overview of the different aspects of the process of working on Mesopotamian documents in Hatti, addressing issues like the relationships between imported and locally drafted tablets; which texts were selected, copied frequently, and variously used, and which remained mostly isolated in the archives, without reworkings; whether and to what extent it is possible to identify different redactional stages between the original Akkadian documents and their local edited versions, also in Hittite translation; the strategies adopted in translating and adapting the foreign materials, and the possible role of other cultural traditions as intermediaries in the transmission process.

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Patterns of Literary Transmission of Songs in Hittite Anatolia: An Overview between Speculation and Objectiveness.

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The modality and timing of the transmission in Hittite Anatolia of mythologems that were widespread in Mesopotamia between the third and second millennia B.C. are among the most debated scientific questions in Hittitology. This contribution aims to offer an up-to-date overview of the patterns of dissemination of literary themes in the so-called Hittite narrative literature that we call “songs” from an emic perspective.

Are there Akkadian loanwords in Hittite at all?

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Akkadian lexical influence on Hittite has been an object of long-standing scholarly scrutiny (see especially Schwemer 2005-2006: 224-227, Dardano 2018: 352-356, and Pisaniello – Giusfredi 2023: 369-375). While it has become clear that most of the Akkadian loanwords in Hittite were in fact Akkadograms, nonce words (i.e. occasional Hittitisations of Akkadian words), or transmitted by another language (typically by Hurrian or Luwian; including *Wanderwörter*), some cases are still held to be direct loans from Akkadian or at least disputed (such as *arz/sāna-* ‘inn, hostel’, *huripta-* ‘desert’, *kapalirt-* ‘a small rodent’, *kumra-* ‘a priest’, etc.; note also the theory that some Akkadian loans transmitted by Hurrian were actually directly borrowed from the ‘oblique’ case of the Akkadian words). In this talk I will focus on these words and argue that applying the traditional methodology, i.e. if we exclude the formally and semantically not fitting cases and nonce words as well as the demonstrable and potential Akkadographic spellings and loans transmitted by other languages, we reach the conclusion that there were no real Akkadian loans in Hittite. This in turn corresponds to our expectations, since, setting aside the Old Assyrian Colony Period, due to geographic factors one does not expect direct loans from Akkadian proper in Hittite.

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The Transmission of Mesopotamian Literary Traditions to the Eastern Mediterranean: Heracles as a Case Study.

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During the last centuries and until today, countless studies have appeared on the relationship between the Greek Heracles and Mesopotamian figures such as Nergal, Erragal and Ninurta. The nature of this association, however, is not entirely clear and so far it has been based only on hypotheses that eastern literary traditions arrived in Greece, without it being clear when and how this transmission took place. Focusing on the relationship between Heracles and Mesopotamian figures, the present study, using archaeological finds and Greek, Biblical and Mesopotamian written sources, will try to show in a clearer way when and how this transmission of Mesopotamian literary traditions to the Eastern Mediterranean region took place. Moreover, modelled on the already observed proximity between the name of Heracles and the name of Erragal, additional thoughts on possible transmission of languages and names, which may have facilitated more the transmission of the above literary traditions, will be presented.

Aspects of the transmission and reception of Sumerian legal register in the Old Babylonian period.

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The early part of the Old Babylonian period witnessed a “true revolution in the uses of writing, introducing many new text types, writing styles, and text formats” (Veldhuis 2014: 143). This revolution directly affected the compilation of phrasebooks, model contracts and trials, and other related texts. Cuneiform legal culture in the Old Babylonian period is then bound up with the writing and materiality of cuneiform technology and with post-vernacular Sumerian transmitted and used in the school legal texts. Based on recently published school texts, this paper explores aspects of this transmission and reception of Sumerian legal register. In doing so it seeks to address (i) the variety of texts and local traditions involved in this transmission, (ii) the question of the transmission of ‘fossils’ or defunct legal forms, and (iii) the place of documentary practice in this transmission.

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Measuring of time as an instrument of cultural and linguistic transmission in Old Babylonian period.

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In the Old Babylonian period many kingdoms flourished. The political fragmentation that has characterized the first four centuries of the II millennium BC also affected the measurement of time: year names of course differ from one kingdom to another and sometime also calendars. Nevertheless, the majority of Kingdoms in southern, central and northern Mesopotamia used the so-called “Nippur calendar”, whereas, at the same time, there were also local calendars in use that sometimes occur in texts from Central and Southern Mesopotamia. The interconnection of year names and month names between north, centre, south also extends to the Diyala Valley, where Tell Muhammad will be considered in this paper as a case study. Linked to the materialization of political power by kings who are ‘masters of time’, the measurement of time is also connected with trade and movements of people, thus becoming a means for the transmission and dissemination of cultural and linguistic elements.