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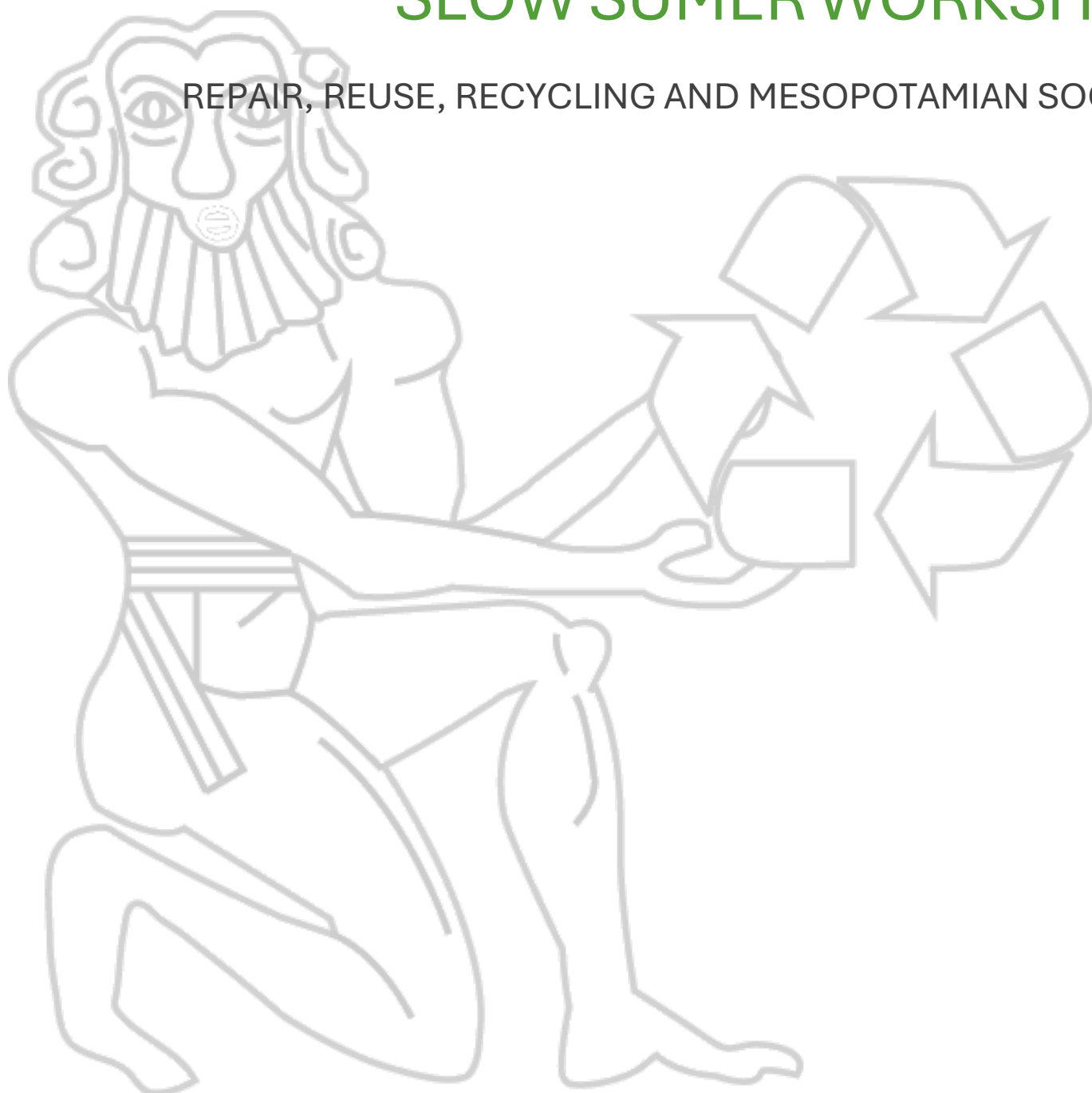


CENTRO RICERCHE
ENRICO FERMI



SLOW SUMER WORKSHOP

REPAIR, REUSE, RECYCLING AND MESOPOTAMIAN SOCIETY



SLOW SUMER – REPAIR, REUSE, RECYCLING AND MESOPOTAMIAN SOCIETY

Organizers: Department Italian Institute of Oriental Studies, Sapienza University of Rome & Museo Storico della Fisica e Centro Studi e Ricerche "Enrico Fermi"

Organizing Committee: Licia Romano, Giulia Festa, Valentina Caruso, Franco D'Agostino, Antonella De Angelis, Gianni Denaro, Lenore Ferguson, Matteo Giaccari, Silvia Giampaolo, Angela Greco, Francesca Manclossi, Andrea Rebecca Marrocchi Savoi, Claudia Scatigno, Gabriella Spada, Alessia Tufari, Marta Zingale.

With the collaboration and support of ARWA - The International Association for Archaeological Research in Western & Central Asia

The Slow Sumer Workshop, Repair, Reuse, Recycling and Mesopotamian Society, invites scholars to reimagine the ancient Near East through the prism of cyclical economies and sustainable practices. Organized by the Italian Institute of Oriental Studies (Sapienza University of Rome) and the Museo Storico della Fisica e Centro Studi e Ricerche "Enrico Fermi", in collaboration with ARWA, this international event will unfold over three half-day sessions designed to accommodate participants connecting from across the globe. From the lifecycle of macrolithic tools and the reuse of building materials to the recycling of bitumen and the transformation of funerary practices, the workshop interrogates how ancient Mesopotamian societies engaged with their material world. By framing these practices within contemporary debates on circularity and resource management, Slow Sumer seeks to foster a critical dialogue between past and present, highlighting the relevance of archaeology for understanding long-term strategies of sustainability.

PROGRAMME

17 SEPTEMBER 2025

Time	Author	Title
9:00-9:30	Arianna Punzi, Dean of the Faculty	Institutional welcome
	Franco D’Agostino	Introduction
Session I – Material Lifecycles and Craft Practices		
Chair: Franco D’Agostino		
9.30-10:00	Marta Zingale – Manchester University	Second Lives of Clay: Ceramic Recycling Practices from Abu Tbeirah and Beyond
10:00-10:30	Daniel Calderbank – University of Glasgow	‘Residual’ or Meaningful? Rethinking An Out-Of-Place Assemblage From Tell Khaiber, Southern Iraq
10:30-11:00	Coffee Break	
Chair: Marta Zingale		
11:00-11:30	Marco Ramazzotti – Sapienza University of Rome	A Copper’s Tale. Mining, Smelting, Trading and Recycling In The Ancient Near East
11:30-12:00	Antonella De Angelis, Andrea Rebecca Marocchi Savoi, Lorenzo Verderame – Sapienza University of Rome	Worn but Useful: Macrolithic Tool Reuse in the Archaeological and Cuneiform Record from Southern Mesopotamia
12:00-12:30	Valentina Caruso, Alessandra Celant, Lenore Ferguson, Giulia Festa, Angela Greco, Silvia Giampaolo, Francesca Manclossi, Licia Romano, Maria Laura Santarelli, Claudia Scatigno, Alessia Tufari – CREF, Sapienza University of Rome	From Crude to Reused: The Lifecycle and Recycling of Bitumen In 3rd Millennium BC Southern Mesopotamia
12:30-13:00	Paola Paoletti - University of Bern, LMU-Munich	From Waste to Taste: The Afterlife of Food Residues in Ancient Syro-Mesopotamia in the Third Millennium BCE

Time	Author	Title
<i>Session I – Material Lifecycles and Craft Practices</i>		
Chair: Giada Quaranta		
14:00 -14:30	Gabriella Spada – Sapienza University of Rome	Nothing Goes to Waste: The Use of Wool By-products in the Administrative Economies of Ur III and Ebla
14:30-15:00	Louise Quillien – CNRS, ArScAn laboratory, France	The Lifecycle of Objects in Babylonian Temples (1st Millennium BCE): The Role of Repair and Maintenance
<i>Session II – Landscapes, Infrastructure, and Urban Reuse</i>		
15:00-15:30	Silvana Di Paolo - CNR, Italy	On the Reuse of Building Materials: Altering while Retaining Traces of Past Life?
15:30-16:00	Coffee Break	
Chair: Lenore Ferguson		
16:00-16:30	Davide Nadali– Sapienza University of Rome	Changing Plans: Stratigraphy of Reuse in Architecture at Tell Zurghul/Nigin
16:30-17:00	Zaid Alrawi – The Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology	Practices of Repair and Land Use in the Lagash Marshy Area
17:00-17:30	Edoardo Zanetti – Sapienza University of Rome	You Cannot Ask The River to Dike Itself: Uses And Reuses of Soil For Hydraulic Maintenance in the Land of Sumer
17:30-18:00	Augusta McMahon – The University of Chicago	Living with the Past: Re-Use Practices at 1st Millennium BCE Nippur, Iraq

19 SEPTEMBER 2025

Time	Author	Title
<i>Session III - Materialised Memory: Reuse of Bodies, Images, and Texts</i>		
Chair: Alessia Tufari		
9:00-9:30	Tom Hercules Davies – University of Melbourne	City Bread, Bonfire Loaf: Recycling Images in the Mesopotamian Epic Tradition
9.30-10:00	Imane Achouche, Université de Liège, Aspirante FRS-FNRS (Belgium)	Circle of Life: Recycling Mesopotamian Statues
10:00-10:30	Jacob Dahl, Lara Bampfield - University of Oxford	Cut&Tag - Rinse and Repeat: Cylinder Seals and the Digital Annotation of Glyptic Artefacts
10:30-11:00	Coffee Break	
Chair: Gabriella Spada		
11:00-11:30	Matteo Giaccari, Mary Anne Tafuri, Licia Romano – Sapienza University of Rome	Breaking Dead: Skull Removal and Other Secondary Funerary Practices at Abu Tbeirah
11:30-12:00	Frances Pinnock – Sapienza University of Rome	Some Thought about the Re-Use of Royal Iconographies in Pre-Classical Syria
<i>Final Remarks and Discussion</i>		
12:30-12:40	Licia Romano – Sapienza University of Rome	Reframing Ancient Craft: Archaeological Practice through the Lens of Contemporary Circular Economies
12:40-13:00	Discussion	

SESSION I – MATERIAL LIFECYCLES AND CRAFT PRACTICES

SECOND LIVES OF CLAY: CERAMIC RECYCLING PRACTICES FROM ABU TBEIRAH AND BEYOND

MARTA ZINGALE, MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY

This paper investigates the intentional reuse and recycling of ceramics at the third-millennium BCE southern Mesopotamian site of Abu Tbeirah in southern Iraq. The archaeological evidence, here, reveals a repertoire of ceramic transformations. These practices are examined in light of broader comparative cases from the Mesopotamian landscape and beyond, suggesting that ceramic recycling was not merely a response to scarcity, but rather a culturally embedded approach to material value and lifecycle. The present paper contributes to ongoing discussions on sustainability, resource management and the affordances of ancient material culture by reframing these acts through the lens of circularity and intentionality.

Keywords: Pottery Recycling; Mesopotamia; Abu Tbeirah; Material Reuse; Third Millennium BCE

‘RESIDUAL’ OR MEANINGFUL? RETHINKING AN OUT-OF-PLACE ASSEMBLAGE FROM TELL KHAIBER, SOUTHERN IRAQ

DANIEL CALDERBANK, UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Tell Khaiber is dominated by a Sealand-period fortified building (ca. 1600-1450 BCE). This was constructed on a much older, long-abandoned tell, dated by pottery collections to the late 4th - early 3rd millennium BCE. Significant amounts of this earlier pottery were mixed into stratified Sealand-period occupational deposits. Archaeologists have traditionally labelled these out-of-place assemblages as ‘residual’, the inadvertent products of complicated site formation processes, to be separated off from the in situ assemblage. We know from textual evidence, however, that the Sealand communities of the Mesopotamian marshlands actively drew upon a Sumerian legacy – based in literature, religious practice, and personal names – to help forge a collective identity. This paper looks to the lesser acknowledged material evidence, hidden and revealed within the rhythms of everyday life at Tell Khaiber, around which collective memory would have been encountered and negotiated.

Keywords: Mesopotamia; Sealand; Pottery; Memory

This paper presents a concise history of metallurgy and metalworking in the ancient Near East through the journey of an imagined metallurgist. Traveling from the land of Magan to Sumer, he navigates up the Euphrates around 2450 BC, eventually reaching Ebla in northern Syria. “Any resemblance to actual persons or events is purely coincidental...” Yet, through this narrative fiction, we explore copper metallurgy as both a vehicle for human interaction and a crucial technological breakthrough. The discovery of smelting, enabling the transition between solid and liquid states, played a fundamental role in the first cyclical economies.

Keywords: Magan; Dilmun; Sumer; Ebla; Ancient Metallurgy; Copper

WORN BUT USEFUL: MACROLITHIC TOOL REUSE IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND CUNEIFORM RECORD OF SOUTHERN MESOPOTAMIA

ANTONELLA DE ANGELIS, ANDREA REBECCA MAROCCHI SAVOI, LORENZO VERDERAME – SAPIENZA UNIVERSITY OF ROME

This contribution focuses on the role of macrolithic tools—specifically grinding slabs and grinders—in the broader framework of repair, reuse, and recycling practices in third-millennium BC southern Mesopotamia, with a case study from Abu Tbeirah. Large-scale geographical studies of macrolithic tools are demonstrating that these tools were not merely imported or discarded once worn out. Archaeological and textual evidence from Abu Tbeirah points to both the use of locally sourced stone and a complex operational sequence involving prolonged use, maintenance, and functional redefinition. Tools made of both imported basalt and locally sourced silicified limestone were variably preserved, with degrees of wear correlating to their functional reallocation: from cereal grinding to the processing of fish and minerals such as bitumen.

Use-wear analyses, supported by experimental replicas and combined with morphological study, point to the reuse of grinding tools in the preparation of fish, a substance well documented by the abundant remains of fish bones found at the site. Furthermore, traces of pecking observed on the use-surfaces of macrolithic tools may indicate actions intended to enhance or restore their grinding efficiency. These findings suggest deliberate strategies of reconditioning and repurposing, corresponding to a technical awareness of material fatigue and economic effort. The value ascribed to such tools is attested in cuneiform texts that include grindstones among inheritable assets. Moreover, textual references to the trade of basalt tools and the categorisation of stone implements by function reinforce the archaeological narrative of extended tool life cycles. When read in conjunction, these lines of evidence indicate that macrolithic tools were part of an embedded logic of material efficiency, where their reuse and

transformation were structurally integrated into domestic and productive activities. This study argues for a reassessment of lithic tools not as passive containers of residue but as active agents within a dynamic system of material adaptation.

Keywords: Grinding Stones; Reuse; Reconditioning; Abu Tbeirah; Cuneiform Sources.

FROM CRUDE TO REUSED: THE LIFECYCLE AND RECYCLING OF BITUMEN IN 3RD MILLENNIUM BC SOUTHERN MESOPOTAMIA

VALENTINA CARUSO**, ALESSANDRA CELANT*, LENORE FERGUSON*, GIULIA FESTA**, ANGELA GRECO***, SILVIA GIAMPAOLO**, FRANCESCA MANCLOSSI*, LICIA ROMANO*, MARIA LAURA SANTARELLI*, CLAUDIA SCATIGNO**, ALESSIA TUFARI* (*SAPIENZA UNIVERSITY OF ROME, ** CENTRO ENRICO FERMI, ***GERDA HENKEL STIFTUNG)

This paper examines the lifecycle and recycling strategies of bitumen in third millennium BC southern Mesopotamia, drawing on interdisciplinary data from the site of Abu Tbeirah and comparative philological sources from the Ur III corpus. Archaeological, physico-chemical, and textual evidence reveal a complex chaîne opératoire that encompassed acquisition, transformation, use, and systematic reuse. Imported primarily in solid form from sources such as Madga (modern Hit), bitumen was reshaped into standardised ingots and locally processed through heating and tempering. The workshop context at Abu Tbeirah, with its evidence for remelting, grinding, and additive mixing, points to an embedded practice of recycling, supported by macrolithic tools and diagnostic artefacts. Philological sources from institutional archives confirm the circulation of multiple bitumen types, including recycled material stripped from dismantled boats, and describe codified mixtures (typically 30 parts solid to 1 part liquid bitumen) employed for waterproofing and coating. These combined datasets indicate that recycling was not a marginal or emergency strategy, but a core feature of Mesopotamian material management, implemented in both domestic and institutional contexts. The paper explores these strategies assessing the relevance of ancient practices as historical analogues of systematic reuse.

Keywords: Bitumen; Recycling; Ur III; Abu Tbeirah; Circular economy

FROM WASTE TO TASTE: THE AFTERLIFE OF FOOD RESIDUES IN ANCIENT SYRO-MESOPOTAMIA IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM BCE

PAOLA PAOLETTI, UNIVERSITY OF BERN, LMU-MUNICH

In early Syro-Mesopotamian of the second half of the third millennium BCE, the by-products of daily food production—such as the residues of beer brewing, sesame oil milling, dairy and fish processing—were far from being mere waste. Instead, these materials were systematically recycled and transformed through various fermentative processes, often by adding them to other fresh staples and foodstuffs. This practice not only helped preserve fresh staples for lean seasons but also created new, consumable products that enriched the culinary landscape. Drawing on administrative texts together with legal and lexical sources, this paper explores the cultural logic and practical techniques behind the reuse of food residues in ancient Syro-Mesopotamia. It argues that these recycling practices reveal an advanced understanding of fermentation as both a preservative and transformative technology, deeply embedded in the region's food economies and strategies for food security.

Keywords: Early Syro-Mesopotamia; fermentation; recycling practices; food residues; preservation and processing of food.

NOTHING GOES TO WASTE: THE USE OF WOOL BY-PRODUCTS IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE ECONOMIES OF UR III AND EBLA

GABRIELLA SPADA - SAPIENZA UNIVERSITY OF ROME

This paper examines the integration of wool by-products into two major state economies of the third millennium BCE: the Ur III dynasty in southern Mesopotamia and the palace economy of Ebla in northern Syria. In both contexts, wool was a strategic resource, carefully managed by central institutions and used not only for high-quality textiles but also for simpler garments made from lower-grade material.

In Mesopotamia, administrative texts from the Ur III period provide extensive information on how the residues from wool combing were recorded, weighed, and reinvested in textile production. These by-products were not discarded but allocated to the manufacture of specific categories of fabric, reflecting a deliberate effort to reduce waste and optimize resource use.

At Ebla, a vast corpus of accounting documents attests to the large-scale distribution of garments made from coarse wool. Although of modest quality, these textiles were widely circulated and served both as part of regular allocations and, occasionally, as goods for exchange. Their systematic registration and separate accounting confirm that they formed an integral part of the palace economy.

Rather than being a marginal or improvised solution, the use of wool by-products appears as a structured and consistent practice, rooted in the administrative logic of these centralized systems. By comparing the evidence from Mesopotamia and Ebla, this paper highlights how early complex societies developed effective strategies for managing resources efficiently—long before the emergence of modern sustainability discourses.

Keywords: Wool economy; Wool waste; Resource management; Ur III; Ebla

THE LIFECYCLE OF OBJECTS IN BABYLONIAN TEMPLES (1ST MILLENNIUM BCE): THE ROLE OF REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE

LOUISE QUILLIEN - CNRS, ARSCAN LABORATORY, FRANCE

The tasks performed by craftsmen employed in Babylonian temples during the first millennium BCE are known to us through administrative records documenting the transfer of materials and goods between temple storerooms and the craftsmen themselves. These artisans were responsible for producing both cultic objects and tools for activities related to economic production. However, their work was not limited to the manufacture of new items. On the contrary, repair, maintenance, and cleaning constituted a significant part of their duties. In this presentation, I will focus on tasks grouped under the expression *ana batqa*, commonly translated as “for repair”. I will examine which categories of craftsmen were involved in these repair activities, as well as the materials and objects they worked with. We will also explore the scope of the expression *ana batqa*: does it refer exclusively to repairs, or does it also encompass other forms of maintenance? Finally, we will consider the significance of repair work, when it took place in the lifecycle of objects, and whether it had any impact on their use or value.

Keywords: Neo-Babylonian; Craft, Artisans; Cuneiform archive

SESSION II – LANDSCAPES, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND URBAN REUSE

ON THE REUSE OF BUILDING MATERIALS: ALTERING WHILE RETAINING TRACES OF PAST LIFE

SILVANA DI PAOLO, CNR

Royal inscriptions and year names often refer to the building programs of Mesopotamian kings who paid particularly attention to the urban layout including the defensive systems, and hydraulic infrastructures in order to ensure the prosperity of their people and the divine favor: new activities, reconstructions after abandonment or decay, or ordinary building maintenance are celebrated as initiatives aimed to preserve and perpetuate the structure and order of the world established by the gods. In the archaeological practice, phenomena of reuse are probably aimed to retain traces of past life, and through these ‘signs’ the host buildings become palimpsests, unlike the modern age in which the recycling of building materials is due to an ecological sensitivity or to the repurposing of existing structures for new uses.

Keywords: Architectural reuse; Material memory; Cultural continuity

CHANGING PLANS: STRATIGRAPHY OF REUSE IN ARCHITECTURE AT TELL ZURGHUL/NIGIN

DAVIDE NADALI – SAPIENZA UNIVERSITY OF ROME

The paper presents the first analysis of architectural changes in buildings identified so far at Tell Zurghul, ancient Nigin in southern Iraq. The research focuses on both construction techniques and the system of reusing buildings through remaking and modifying plans. In particular, attention is given to the materials used in architecture and their capabilities in terms of construction, restoration, and reuse of architectural spaces over time. In this respect, a stratigraphy of reuse will be attempted, highlighting the methods of analysis and understanding of the phenomenon of reuse, as well as changes in plans, dimensions, and the utilisation of rooms and spaces according to the morphology of the city and urban planning.

Keywords: Sumer; Mesopotamia; Architecture; Stratigraphy; Reuse

PRACTICES OF REPAIR AND LAND USE IN THE LAGASH MARSHY AREA

ZAID ALRAWI, THE PENNSYLVANIA MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

The region of ancient site of Lagash in southern Iraq is known for its widespread marshes. Seasonal fluctuation in the water level of these marshes contributes to the creation of environmental challenges to the local farmers who invest in the limited lands suitable for crops either in the marshes, or on their fringes. Through the use of remote sensing methods, Geographical Information Systems (GIS), and ethnographic information, this paper describes two strategies adopted by the local farmers in order to cope with the issues of salinization and lack of available arable land. The simplicity of these two practices suggests that they have deep roots in the regional past. It is likely that they were implemented in ancient times, as well as in other regions of southern Mesopotamia having similar natural settings. Further exploration of these two strategies, in the future, will help in better understating how ancient Mesopotamian societies repair and reuse ancient lands.

Keywords: Mesopotamia; Ancient Agriculture; Land use; Marsh; Lagash

YOU CANNOT ASK THE RIVER TO DIKE ITSELF: USES AND REUSES OF SOIL FOR HYDRAULIC MAINTENANCE IN THE LAND OF SUMER

EDOARDO ZANETTI - SAPIENZA UNIVERSITY OF ROME

Sumerian hydraulic works could reach remarkable dimensions and exerted a profound impact on the surrounding landscape. The canal network was not the outcome of a centrally planned and systematically executed project. On the contrary, in the second half of the 3rd millennium BCE, local communities began experimenting with ways to crystallize the landscape into a form suitable for the colonization of the countryside. In particular, the construction of embankments and other hydraulic structures aimed to limit - if not entirely prevent - the gradual migration of river channels over time. The deltas of the Tigris and Euphrates were subject to periodic shifts, posing serious threats not only to rural settlements but also to the cities themselves. Routine maintenance was the only effective defense against such disasters—but one that came at a cost. Structural failures could not be repaired using spoil soil readily available on-site, nor with sediment deposited by the rivers themselves. The organization of land for hydraulic maintenance was a complex undertaking, often requiring the mobilization of resources and labor across entire regions, especially when the worksite extended for several kilometers. Sumerian hydraulic maintenance projects thus allow us to trace the movement of soil—from agricultural fields and urban centers to the levees—transforming what might otherwise be considered waste into a material essential for community safety.

Keywords: Landscape Archaeology; Historical Geography; Hydraulic Maintenance; Soil Mobilisation; Sumerian Civilisation

LIVING WITH THE PAST: RE-USE PRACTICES AT 1ST MILLENNIUM BCE NIPPUR, IRAQ

AUGUSTA MCMAHON, THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Mesopotamian culture is characterised by intensive recycling of materials and objects, a practice that supported urban sustainability in a challenging environment with limited resources. This paper will focus on reuse at two different scales, portable artifacts and monumental architecture. During the 1st millennium BCE, a house at the southern edge of Nippur (S Iraq) contained numerous examples of reused sherds from previous periods, particularly discs made from the bases of Kassite period (2nd mill BCE) tall goblets. Reused sherds are common across the region in many periods, and they have been identified as counters, game pieces, spindle whorls, and lids. The diversity of ceramic discs from the Nippur house supports this variety of functions, also expanding to include usage as stands to support other vessels. The frequent presence of extremely durable Kassite bases on the site surface in the past (as in the present) may have presented itself as an opportunity to save resources, labour and time. At the opposite end of the scale, the Nippur house was adjacent to the 1st millennium BCE city wall, which was probably built during the reign of the Neo-Assyrian king Ashurbanipal. This city wall was built against and reused the Kassite city wall in this location. The reuse of monumental architecture by a foreign king suggests an acknowledgement of the importance of tradition and implies an appropriation of the local sense of place.

Keywords: Reuse; Urban Sustainability; Kassite Period; Material Recycling; Nippur

SESSION III - MATERIALISED MEMORY: REUSE OF BODIES, IMAGES, AND TEXTS

CITY BREAD, BONFIRE LOAF: RECYCLING IMAGES IN THE MESOPOTAMIAN EPIC TRADITION

TOM HERCULES DAVIES, MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY

The boundary between civilisation and barbarism is a recurring theme developed over centuries in the Mesopotamian literary tradition. This theme reflects a tangible social reality: the divide between sedentary urban communities - cultivators of grain, bakers of bread, brewers of beer - and groups beyond state control - nomadic herders, hunters, and gatherers - often depicted as subhuman, consuming wild game, milk, and water. These identity demarcations are most famously explored through the figures of Enkidu and Gilgamesh: Enkidu, the wild man who becomes civilised by eating bread and drinking beer; and Gilgamesh, the king who, reduced by grief, descends into a bestial nomadism.

This paper investigates how such themes are reimagined in the first-millennium BCE epic Erra and Išum. Here, city walls still stand as barriers against barbarism, yet the poem also celebrates a return to ferocity in the service of imperial warfare. The bonfire loaf tastes sweeter than city bread, and water from a skin is more refreshing than the finest beer during a military campaign. Beyond the city walls, men may become wild beasts in the name of violent expansion; indeed, only by embracing this savagery can they attain true manhood—an ideal itself shaped by the epic tradition. This contribution examines the reuse of imagery and conceptual distinctions across Mesopotamian history, reading Erra and Išum in dialogue with Gilgamesh.

Keywords: Erra and Išum; Mesopotamian Epic; Literary Recycling

CIRCLE OF LIFE: RECYCLING MESOPOTAMIAN STATUES

IMANE ACHOUCHE, UNIVERSITE DE LIEGE, ASPIRANTE FRS-FNRS (BELGIUM)

This article examines the practice of statue recycling in Mesopotamia through the handful of currently known textual and archaeological attestations. Statues were reused, either by adapting their identity or function, or by recycling them, a practice that focuses on their constituent material. Recycling can include melting down metal, cutting out inlays, repurposing stones as blocks, or burning them to produce lime, among other methods. The motivations for recycling are pragmatic and/or opportunistic approaches towards resource management. This practice may arise in response to an urgent need for materials or following the end of a statue's use. The opposite can also be true, as metal statues can be the result of recasting.

Unfortunately, these are challenging to identify for two main reasons. First, the special status of statues, often associated with worship, likely limited the documentation of practices that damage them, such as recycling. Second, determining whether the

components of an artifact originate from a statue is a complex task, as few traces of the original statue may remain in its new form. In this paper, we will explore this practice of recycling statues through archaeological examples and textual sources.

Keywords: Statue; Sculpture; Recycling

CUT&TAG - RINSE AND REPEAT: CYLINDER SEALS AND THE DIGITAL ANNOTATION OF GLYPHTIC ARTEFACTS.

JACOB DAHL, LARA BAMPFIELD - UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

In this paper we will explain recent work aimed at digitising cylinder seals, and making these objects available for study using new methods of corpus research on images. Our structured annotations, added to high-resolution images, allow us to search, sort and visualise visual objects and their spatial placement. Our work enables the systematic study of reuse of seals, often carved on semiprecious stones, by identifying and tagging re-cut seals.

Keywords: cylinder seals, precious stones, re-carving, digital imaging, annotations, controlled vocabularies, materiality

BREAKING DEAD: SECONDARY BURIAL PRACTICES THIRD-MILLENNIUM MESOPOTAMIA

MATTEO GIACCARI, MARY ANNE TAFURI, LICIA ROMANO – SAPIENZA UNIVERSITY OF ROME

Secondary funerary practices at Abu Tbeirah offer a provocative lens through which explore ancient notions of value, memory, and transformation. The frequent retrieval, manipulation, and redeposition of human remains—particularly skulls—within both cemetery and domestic contexts suggest more than disturbance or looting. Instead, these acts appear to reflect socially meaningful strategies of bodily fragmentation and reassembly. By dislocating and recontextualizing the deceased, local communities may have engaged in subtle forms of ancestral commemoration, status negotiation, or spatial reintegration of the dead into the world of the living.

Drawing on parallels from earlier Near Eastern contexts and reinterpreting old excavation data from sites like Ur and Khafajah, this paper proposes that skeletal parts functioned as ritual fragments—objects of memory, identity, and perhaps even exchange. Reframed within the vocabulary of reuse, repair, and recycling, these funerary gestures offer insight into how ancient Mesopotamians conceptualized corporeal continuity, social belonging, and the afterlife not as static endpoints, but as processes of selective retention and symbolic transformation.

Keywords: Secondary Burial Practices, Reuse of Human Remains, Abu Tbeirah, Funerary Practices, Third Millennium BCE

SOME THOUGHT ABOUT THE RE-USE OF ROYAL ICONOGRAPHIES IN PRE-CLASSICAL SYRIA

FRANCES PINNOCK, SAPIENZA UNIVERSITY OF ROME

Since the Early and Mature Early Syrian period, with the flourishing of the culture of Ebla, between 2500 and 2300 BCE, we witness the elaboration of royal iconographies that had a long life in the region. Whereas politics, economy and societies changed, these motifs were still considered meaningful and fit to represent kingship. In my contribution I will try and trace the origins of these motifs and the differences with the contemporary Mesopotamian depictions of kingship. I will also propose some hypothesis about the reasons for this long-lasting phenomenon.

Keywords: Kingship Representations; Pre-Classical Syria; Ebla

REFRAMING ANCIENT CRAFT: ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRACTICE THROUGH THE LENS OF CONTEMPORARY CIRCULAR ECONOMIES

LICIA ROMANO, SAPIENZA UNIVERSITY OF ROME

This paper explores the heuristic potential of contemporary circular economy terminology—such as repair, reuse, refurbishment, and remanufacture—for the interpretation of material practices in the ancient Near East. Drawing on third-millennium BCE case studies from Mesopotamia, including bitumen recycling, reworked seals, repurposed vessels, and composite tools, we argue that these actions reflect not merely pragmatic adaptations but systemic strategies of resource management. Rather than projecting modern concepts anachronistically, this approach seeks to generate a productive dialogue between present and past, interrogating how vocabulary shapes interpretative frameworks. By reassessing archaeological phenomena through these categories, we aim to challenge the dominant interpretive paradigm that prioritizes extraction and linear consumption, highlighting instead alternative frameworks rooted in cyclical, resource-aware practices observable in ancient societies.

Keywords: Circular Economy; Ancient Near East; Material Practices; Sustainability; Archaeological Interpretation