

*Uruk and Ur in the city seal impressions,
3100-2750 BC: new evidence, new
approaches*

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Dealing with Antiquity: Past, Present & Future
RAI Marburg

Alter Orient und Altes Testament

Veröffentlichungen zur Kultur und Geschichte des Alten Orients
und des Alten Testaments

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Walter Sommerfeld (Hrsg.)

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Vorwort

Die 63. *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* fand vom 24.-28. Juli 2017 an der Philipps-Universität Marburg statt. Es war das zehnte Mal, dass die *Rencontre* seit ihrer Gründung 1949 in Deutschland veranstaltet wurde, nach Heidelberg 1959, 1992, München 1970, Göttingen 1975, Berlin 1978, 1994, Münster 1985, 2006, und Würzburg 2008.

Es fügte sich gut, dass in diesem Jahr die Altorientalistik in Marburg, die durch P. Jensen (1892-1928) begründet und seine Nachfolger B. Landsberger (1928-29) und A. Götze (1930-33) weiter etabliert wurde, auf ihr 125jähriges Bestehen zurückblicken konnte. In diesem langen Zeitraum haben die reichen und einzigartigen Wissensbestände des Alten Orients traditionsgemäß das Forschungsinteresse von Nachbardisziplinen gefunden, von denen sich die Fachgebiete Altes Testament, Hethitologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie mit interdisziplinären Workshops am Kongressprogramm beteiligt haben. So konnte ein breites Fächerspektrum eingebunden und ein kreativer Austausch über die Fachgrenzen hinaus geführt werden.

Die *Rencontre* stand unter dem Leitthema *Dealing with Antiquity – Past, Present, and Future*. Diese drei thematischen Kernbereiche waren wie folgt ausgerichtet:

Past – die Rolle der Vergangenheit für die Kulturen des Alten Orients,

Present – das Erbe des Alten Orients, die Rezeptions- und Wirkungsgeschichte und sein Beitrag zur Weltkultur,

Future – zukünftige Aufgaben der Altorientalistik insbesondere in den Bereichen Kulturgüterschutz und Digital Humanities.

Dieses breite Themenspektrum stand zum ersten Mal im Fokus einer *Rencontre*. Es wurden folgende Workshops abgehalten, die die Vielfalt der beteiligten Disziplinen widerspiegeln:

1. Heritage in Conflict: A Review of the Situation in Syria and Iraq
2. Modern Approaches of Interpretation in Visual Arts
3. Relations between Judeans in Babylonia and Jehud in Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Time
4. Sumerian and Akkadian Elements in Hittite Cuneiform
5. New Archaeological and Epigraphic Research in Iraq
6. Old Assyrian News – Papers Dedicated to the Memory of Karl Hecker
7. Prayers in the Ancient Near East: Form, Extra-linguistic Context and Intercultural Adaptation
8. BabMed – Texts and Studies in Babylonian Medicine
9. Coping with and Preventing Collective Fear in the Ancient Near East: Perspectives from Texts and Material Culture

10. Oracc [The Open Richly Annotated Cuneiform Corpus] Session
11. How to Tell a Story – Theoretical Approaches to Mesopotamian Literature
12. Workshop on the Hittian Language: Problems, Trends and Perspectives for Future Research.

Hinzu kamen zahlreiche freie Vorträge, die sich in der Regel mit den drei thematischen Kernbereichen befassten; insgesamt belief sich die Gesamtzahl der wissenschaftlichen Beiträge auf 204, die durch neun Poster-Präsentationen ergänzt wurden. Die Anzahl der Teilnehmer an dieser *Rencontre* betrug ca. 450.

Ein besonderes Ereignis war die Anwesenheit von zahlreichen Fachvertreter/-innen aus dem Irak und Syrien. Dadurch war die Möglichkeit gegeben, dass in dem Workshop „Heritage in Conflict: A Review of the Situation in Syria and Iraq“ unmittelbar involvierte Akteure über die Situation im Bereich des Kulturgutschutzes berichten und wirksame Maßnahmen erörtern konnten. Eine derartige aktuelle Bestandsaufnahme von Kulturgütern aus Krisen- und Kriegsgebieten ist für die Forschungsausrichtung des Faches, aktuelle Publikationen und zukünftige Strategien essentiell.

Aus dem Irak waren Vertreter/-innen von der Universität Bagdad und Repräsentant/-innen des Antikendienstes aus Bagdad, Dohuk und Diwaniyah anwesend, mit elf Personen (darunter drei Frauen) die größte jemals auf einem Fachkongress im westlichen Ausland präsente Gruppe. Direkter Austausch zwischen Forscher/-innen aus der internationalen *Scientific Community* mit denjenigen aus der betroffenen Region ist in diesem Ausmaße einzigartig gewesen und hat zu vielfältigen Kooperationsvorhaben geführt. Ein Höhepunkt der *Rencontre* war das „Meeting with the Iraqi Delegation“, das nach einem Lagebericht die Kooperationsmöglichkeiten und Vernetzungen zum Schwerpunkt hatte. Diese Zusammenkunft war sehr frequentiert und wurde ebenfalls von Vertreter/-innen anderer universitärer Disziplinen genutzt.

Dem Organisationskomitee gehörten folgende Wissenschaftler/-innen der Universität Marburg an:

Alexandra Grund-Wittenberg (Altes Testament)
 Markus Hilgert (Altorientalistik; Vorderasiatisches Museum zu Berlin;
 Honorarprofessor an der Universität Marburg)
 Guido Kryszat (Altorientalistik)
 Christl M. Maier (Altes Testament)
 Andreas Müller-Karpe (Archäologie)
 Elisabeth von der Osten-Sacken (Vorderasiatische Archäologie)
 Elisabeth Rieken (Vergleichende Sprachwissenschaft)
 Walter Sommerfeld (Altorientalistik).

Dieses Komitee traf auch die Entscheidungen über die Auswahl der Vorträge und übernahm ggf. die Aufgabe des *Peer Review* bei den Veröffentlichungen.

Mit den Organisatoren der Workshops war vereinbart worden, dass sie selbstständig über die Publikationen bestimmen sollten. In folgenden Fällen liegen diese bereits vor oder sind vorbereitet bzw. geplant:

- Workshop on the Hattian Language: Problems, Trends and Perspectives for Future Research.
Organisatoren: Zsolt Simon und Charles W. Steitler.
Drei Aufsätze von P. Schrijver, Ch. W. Steitler, Z. Simon sind erschienen in *Altorientalische Forschungen* 45 (2018) 213-268.
- How to tell a story – Theoretical approaches to Mesopotamian Literature.
Organisatorinnen: Frauke Weiershäuser, Dahlia Shehata und Karen Sonik.
Erscheint in der Reihe *Cuneiform Monographs* bei Brill mit dem Titel: “How to tell a Story – Theoretical Approaches to Mesopotamian Literature: Proceedings of a Workshop held at the 63rd RAI in Marburg 2017, July 27–28”.

Drei Workshops sind für die Veröffentlichung in mehreren Bänden der Zeitschrift *Die Welt des Orients* vorgesehen.

- Coping with and Preventing Collective Fear in the Ancient Near East: Perspectives from Texts and Material Culture.
Organisatorinnen Sara Kipfer und Elisabeth Wagner-Durand.
- Prayers in the Ancient Near East: Form, Extra-linguistic Context and Intercultural Adaptation
Alexandra Grund-Wittenberg und Elisabeth Rieken.
Erscheint unter dem Titel „Altorientalische Gebetsliteratur: Form, außersprachlicher Kontext und interkulturelle Adaptionsprozesse“.
- Relations between Judeans in Babylonia and Jehud in Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Time.
Organisatorin: Christl M. Maier.

Vorliegender Sammelband vereinigt die zum Druck eingereichten Beiträge aus dem breiten Themenspektrum der freien Vorträge.

Für die erfolgreiche Organisation der *Rencontre* haben sich mehrere Institutionen und zahlreiche Personen engagiert, von denen in dieser Danksagung nur einige erwähnt werden können.

Das Präsidium und die Verwaltung der Philipps-Universität haben vielfältige Unterstützung bei der Vorbereitung und Durchführung gewährt. Hervorheben möchte ich die Vizepräsidentin, Frau Prof. Dr. Evelyn Korn, die auch die *Rencontre* mit einer Ansprache eröffnet hat, sowie Frau Maria Wietzorek, Leiterin des Service-Center Geisteswissenschaften, die Mitarbeiterinnen Katharina Kauz, Monika Moog und Denise Peter aus dem Dezernat IV – Gebäudemanagement und Technik, die Hausmeister, insbesondere Herr Jens Peter; sie alle haben die Realisierung sämtlicher Anliegen, auch zahlreicher Sonderwünsche, ermöglicht.

Das Hessische Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kunst (HMWK), vertreten durch Dr. Ulrich Adolphs, hat die bildungs- und gesellschaftspolitische Funktion der *Rencontre* durch Mitwirkung bei der Eröffnungsveranstaltung gewürdigt.

Frau Theresa Birk, Marburg Stadt und Land Tourismus GmbH, hat die oft komplizierte Logistik der Unterkünfte für die Teilnehmer organisiert.

Das Centrum für Nah- und Mittelost-Studien trug die Verantwortung für die Durchführung der *Rencontre* und konnte sich dabei auf die Mitwirkung seiner Angehörigen verlassen. Ausdrücklich erwähnen möchte ich die Mitarbeiter Frau Elisabeth Korinth M.A. und Herrn Stefan Schulte M.A. sowie stellvertretend für die vielen studentischen Helfer, die mit ihrem stetigen Einsatz für den effizienten Ablauf des Programms und das angenehme Ambiente gesorgt haben, Herrn Miguel Sánchez, der die Büchertische betreut hat. An erster Stelle steht allerdings Frau Denise Schaffrinski M.A., die in allen Phasen – von der Anfangsplanung bis zur Abwicklung der Abschlussaufgaben – als verantwortliche Kongressmanagerin fungierte; mit ihrer Erfahrung, ihrem Talent und unermüdlichen Engagement hat sie für die erfolgreiche organisatorische Durchführung der *Rencontre* eine entscheidende Rolle gespielt.

Die Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, der Ursula-Kuhlmann-Fonds und das Centrum für Nah- und Mittelost-Studien haben mit ihrer finanziellen Unterstützung die Durchführung der *Rencontre* ermöglicht.

Schließlich danke ich dem Ugarit-Verlag für die umsichtige redaktionelle Bearbeitung und den Herausgebern Frau Prof. Dr. Angelika Berlejung, Herrn Prof. Dr. Dr. Manfred Dietrich, Herrn Prof. Dr. Enrique Jiménez und Herrn Prof. Dr. Holger Gzella für die Aufnahme der Kongressakten in die Reihe *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*.

Ihnen allen sei für ihre Mitarbeit und Unterstützung nachdrücklich gedankt.

Marburg/Leipzig, im März 2019

Walter Sommerfeld

Inhaltsverzeichnis

Walter Sommerfeld, Marburg/ Leipzig

Vorwort..... v

Stefan M. Maul, Heidelberg

In Search of Origins – Constructions of the Past and the Ancient Near East ... 1

Gary Beckman, Ann Arbor

Ancient Near Eastern “Aryans” and the Third Reich 9

Markus Hilgert, Berlin

Transformative Research and Digital Transformation: How Current Challenges
to Ancient Near Eastern Studies May Shape the Future of the Discipline... 21

Silvia Alaura, Rome

The Fate of Ancient Near Eastern Studies in the Correspondence of the Thirties
and Forties between Albrecht Goetze and Hans Gustav Güterbock 29

Alfonso Archi, Rome

Eblaite Social-Administrative Terminology and the Sumerian Tradition.... 55

Richard E. Averbeck, Chicago

Enki and Cultural Memory in the Gudea Cylinders and Other Temple Texts .. 79

Marco Bonechi, Rome

Data and Problems Concerning the Intercalary Month in the Ebla Palace G
Texts (with Special Focus on *MEE* 2 39 and 40)..... 101

Petr Charvát, Pilsen and Prague

“Pictura est laicorum litteratura?” Image and Word on an Archaic Ur Seal .. 165

George Damoun, Paris

Le « très long mur » en Syrie et le mur d’Ur III en Mésopotamie : une
leçon du passé 173

Silvana Di Paolo, Rome

Linking *Micro and Macro* Trading of Antiquities: The Cylinder Seals
Collection of John Pierpont Morgan..... 187

<i>Mustapha Djabellaoui</i> , Paris – <i>Lousie Quillien</i> , Paris	
Orient Cunéiforme: The Benefits of New Technologies for the Propagation of Knowledge and Scientific Research	199
<i>Stefania Ermidoro</i> , Newcastle upon Tyne	
Not Only <i>Niniveh and Its Remains</i> : A. H. Layard's Contribution to Assyriology	211
<i>Jeanette C. Fincke</i> , Paris – Leiden	
The Series <i>iqqur ipuš</i> . Reworking a Composition to Modern Standards ...	225
<i>Erlend Gehlken</i> – <i>Tim Collins</i> – <i>Sandra I. Woolley</i> – <i>Eugene Ch'ng</i>	
Searching the Past in the Future – Joining Cuneiform Tablet Fragments in Virtual Collections	233
<i>Szilvia Jáka-Sövegjártó</i> , Heidelberg	
“Whose Name is Suitable for Songs” – Šulgi in Old Babylonian Cultural Memory	243
<i>Nicholas Kraus</i> , Yale	
The Prism of Lugal-ušumgal: Didactic Methods and the Orientation of Tablets in the Sargonic Period	263
<i>Harald Maier-Metz</i> , Marburg	
Albrecht Götzes Lebensweg und wissenschaftliche Karriere aus universitäts-geschichtlicher Sicht	275
<i>Roger Matthews</i> , Reading – <i>Amy Richardson</i> , Reading	
Uruk and Ur in the City Seal Impressions, 3100-2750 BC: New Evidence, New Approaches	285
<i>Sam Mirelman</i> , London	
Tradition and Innovation in Mesopotamian Textuality During the Late First Millennium BC: The Case of Balaḡ and Eršema Prayers	295
<i>Manuel Molina</i> , Madrid	
The Looting of Ur III Tablets after the Gulf Wars	323
<i>Virginie Muller</i> , Lyon	
The Use of the Dead and the Mortuary Ceremonies to Ensure Socio-Political Construction according to Akkadian Texts (2 nd -1 st Millennium BC)	353

<i>Gerfrid G.W. Müller</i> , Würzburg/ Mainz	
Intra- und Inter-Schreiber-Variation: Zur Unterscheidung ähnlicher Schriften mittels häufiger Keilschriftzeichen auf 3D-Modellen	361
<i>Marie Ondříčková</i> , Pilsen	
The History of the Musical Bow	381
<i>Emanuel Pfoh</i> , Buenos Aires	
Western Scholarship, Ethnogeographies and Heritage in Israel/Palestine....	391
<i>Nelson Henrique da Silva Ferreira</i> , Barcelona	
Images of Inana and Dumuzi: The Language of Prosperity of the ‘Silent People’	399
<i>Ariane Thomas</i> , Paris	
Une visite virtuelle de Dûr-Sharrukin/Khorsabad, du site au musée et vice-versa.....	415
<i>Hayedeh Torabi</i> , Marburg	
Cyrus the Great and his “Perpetual Audience”	439
<i>Karolin Ulbricht</i> , Jena	
Enki-Ea in den Götterlisten ^d an: ^d Anu und ^d an: ^d Anu ša amēli.....	451
<i>Kamran Vincent Zand</i> , Heidelberg	
Relationship Status: Complicated	463
<i>Annette Zgoll</i> , Göttingen	
Condensation of Myths. A Hermeneutic Key to a Myth about Innana and the Instruments of Power (me), Incorporated in the Epic <i>angalta</i>	475
Indices	495
A. Texts	495
1. Eblaitic	495
2. Sumerian	497
3. Others.....	497
B. Names	498
1. Divine Names	498
2. Personal Names.....	498
3. Topographical and Ethnic Names.....	500
C. Things & Other Designations	504
D. Words	517

Program	519
Poster Presentations.....	551

Uruk and Ur in the City Seal Impressions, 3100-2750 BC: New Evidence, New Approaches

Roger Matthews, Reading – Amy Richardson, Reading

Uruk and Ur at the dawn of urban history

Uruk and Ur were two of the most important centres in the early development of the world's first urban settlement in Lower Mesopotamia in the later fourth and early third millennia BC (Liverani 2006; Crawford 2015). And yet our knowledge of their socio-political structures and intercity interactions during these earliest centuries of urban development is highly restricted. For Uruk, the earliest levels underlying the extensive Uruk IV and III precincts are known only from limited soundings and without extensive architectural contextualisation, while the Uruk IV-III buildings themselves were rebuilt and eventually severely truncated in a programme of planned rebuilding at ca. 3100 BC (Eichmann 1989). For Ur, while recent studies have significantly augmented our understanding of the city's early development (Benati 2015), we are nevertheless limited to glimpses of Ur's early urban phases through small soundings at the base of Woolley's major trenches within the sacred precincts. Any new information and insights into the socio-political landscapes within which Uruk and Ur operated at the turn of the fourth-third millennia BC are therefore greatly to be welcomed, especially as it is likely to be a long time before modern scientific excavations at either of these key sites investigates levels of this period.

In this article, we present new evidence relating both to the specifics of early urban development at Uruk and Ur and to their interactions with each other and with other urban polities of the Mesopotamian plain and beyond. The evidence takes the form of clay sealings with seal impressions in the so-called 'city seal' style (Matthews 1993; Steinkeller 2002) which have either been published previously but are capable of yielding new insights, partly through application of newly developing analytical approaches, or have never been adequately published. The documents sealed with city seal impressions stand at the very threshold of world history (Steinkeller 2013, 145) as they attest some form of interaction or engagement between early Mesopotamian cities at the nascence of urban life itself.

In an ambitious project, we are applying the technique of portable x-ray fluorescence (pXRF) in order to characterise the elemental composition of inscribed clay tablets and sealed clay sealings from multiple early Mesopotamian cities, including Uruk, Ur, Fara, Jemdet Nasr, 'Uqair, and Kish (Fig. 1). Our results, to be published in a series of articles including this one, enable patterns of clay use to be articulated city by city and investigated as a means of understanding early

Mesopotamian bureaucracy and intra- and intercity engagement. In this article we focus on selected samples of examined materials directly relevant to the early phases of urban development at Uruk and Ur.

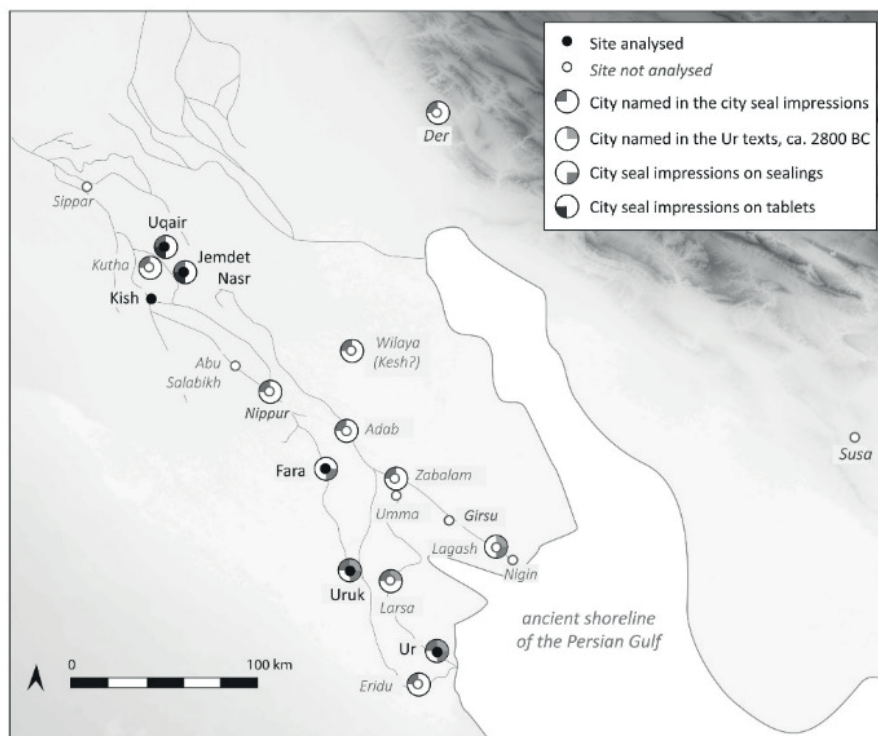


Figure 1. Map of Lower Mesopotamia to show ancient river courses and cities named in the city seal evidence. After Benati 2015, fig. 6.

New evidence from Uruk, relating to Uruk and Ur

The city seal evidence from Uruk has not been adequately treated, till now. For the Uruk III phase the evidence comprises a single large clay sealing, W 11456/VA10803 (originally published in UVB4 = Nöldeke et al. 1932, pl. 15g and UVB5 = Nöldeke et al. 1934, pl. 27c), whose provenance is Uruk III rubbish layers within the Eanna precinct at Uruk. A previously published drawing (Matthews 1993, fig. 10b) was based solely on the UVB photographs. Recent hands-on examination of the sealing in the Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin has enabled the production of a new improved drawing of the seal impression which covers the obverse of this sealing (Fig. 2).

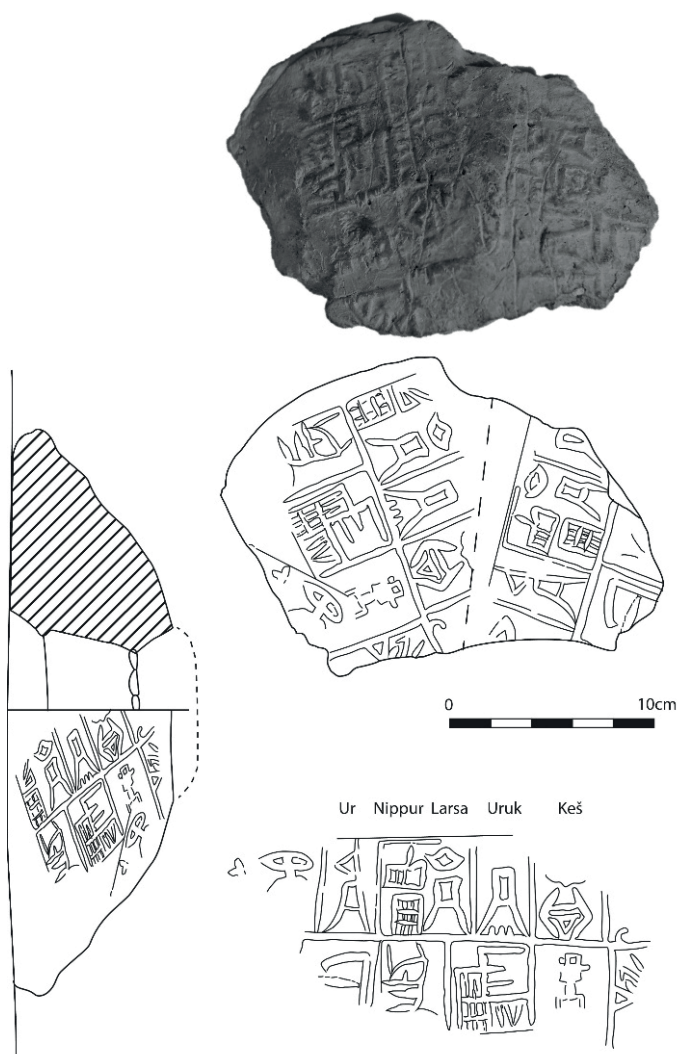


Figure 2. Uruk clay sealing with city seal impression, W 11456/VA10803.

The new drawing of this seal impression gives a fuller list of the cities attested on the Uruk sealing, reading from left to right:

Top register:

Ur, Nippur, Larsa, Uruk, Keš, ?, ?

Bottom register:

?, edinnu?, ?, ?

The city names on this seal impression are enclosed in linear boxes, unlike those of the well-known Jemdet Nasr city seal impression (Fig. 3), which suggests a date slightly later than the Jemdet Nasr example and thus closer in date and style to the Early Dynastic I city seal impressions from Ur, several of which have city names within linear boxes (e.g. Matthews 1993, U3, U16, U28).



Figure 3. City seal impression, as attested on 13 clay tablets of Uruk III style from Jemdet Nasr (after Matthews 1993, 37).

The most significant feature of this new reading of the Uruk seal impression is the identification for the first time of the city of Ur, represented by a ligature of $URI_3 + AB (= URI_5)$. This ligature for Ur is common on the Ur Early Dynastic I city seal impressions (e.g. Matthews 1993, U1, U2, U5, U6, U8, U9) while on the slightly earlier Jemdet Nasr city seal impression Ur is represented by $URI_3 AB$ in non-ligature form (Fig. 4), again probably a chronological indicator for the Uruk sealing.

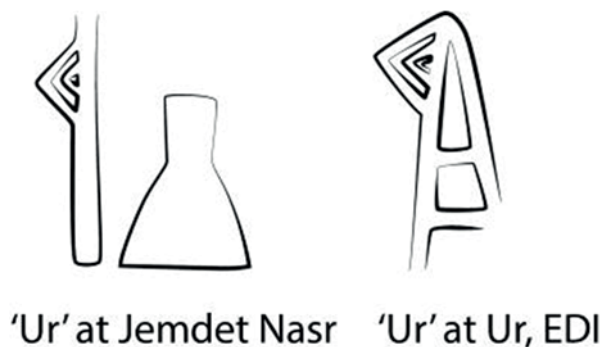


Figure 4. Rendering of Ur at Jemdet Nasr (Uruk III) and at Ur (Early Dynastic I).

The significance of the new identification of Ur on this sealing is manifold. Firstly, with regard to the sequence of city names and assuming that all three lists commence with Ur (as the Archaic City List certainly does: a list inscribed on a cylindrical seal can of course ‘begin’ anywhere in its sequence), it aligns the Uruk city seal evidence both with the city-sealed Jemdet Nasr tablets and with the Uruk III Archaic City List tablets (Fig. 5; Green 1977; Englund and Nissen 1993), whose initial entries are: Ur, Nippur, Larsa, Uruk,

Keš, Zabalam, Ereš, Gaburra, UR₂ RAD_a KU_{6a} ., ., ., ., BU_a+BU_a+NA_{2a}. Secondly, the presence of Ur on the Uruk city seal impression invalidates the argument by Wang (2011, 222, 226) to the effect that Ur's previously apparent absence from the Uruk city seal evidence indicates competitive relations between Uruk and Ur in their dealings with Nippur through the Uruk III-Early Dynastic I periods. It is now clear that Ur's pole position on the city seal evidence of Uruk III date, from Jemdet Nasr, Uruk and probably from 'Uqair as well, is beyond doubt.

Entry	Jemdet Nasr seal impression	Uruk sealing	Uruk city list
1	Ur	Ur	Ur
2	Larsa	Nippur	Nippur
3	Nippur	Larsa	Larsa
4	Uruk	Uruk	Uruk
5	Kesh	Kesh	[Kesh (ED III text)]
6	Zabala		[Zabala (ED III text)]
7	X + AB ₃		[Eresh (ED III text)]
8	?NIR ₃ + ?		Gaburra
9	BU ₃ + BU ₃ + NA ₂		KU _{6a} UR ₂ RAD ₃ /A
10	KU _{6a} UR ₂ RAD ₃		ŠIM ₃ RAD ₃
11			
14			BU _a +BU _a +NA _{2a}
23	?Cutha		Cutha

Figure 5. Summary of Uruk III/Jemdet Nasr period city seal and city list evidence.

Turning the Uruk sealing over to examine its reverse faces, we see clear impressions of a well-formed door-peg, wound round with faint traces of fibrous string (Fig. 2, left). The presence of a door sealing indicates that the seal used to make the impressions on the sealing's obverse face was at home at Uruk, and that the sealing relates to the storage and perhaps distribution of commodities within sealed store-rooms. Given the sealing's provenance, we may deduce that those store-rooms housed special commodities - we know not precisely what - that may have featured in ceremonies or offerings on behalf of Uruk's principal deity, Inana. We consider in a separate article (Matthews and Richardson 2019) the possible socio-cultural and cultic mechanisms which may have accommodated the participation of a grouping of major Mesopotamian cities in some form of collaborative enterprise. Suffice to state here that we interpret the existing Uruk III city seal evidence as attesting a pan-Mesopotamian devotion to Inana, expressed through cultic offerings listed in the Jemdet Nasr and 'Uqair texts and sealed with the city seal.

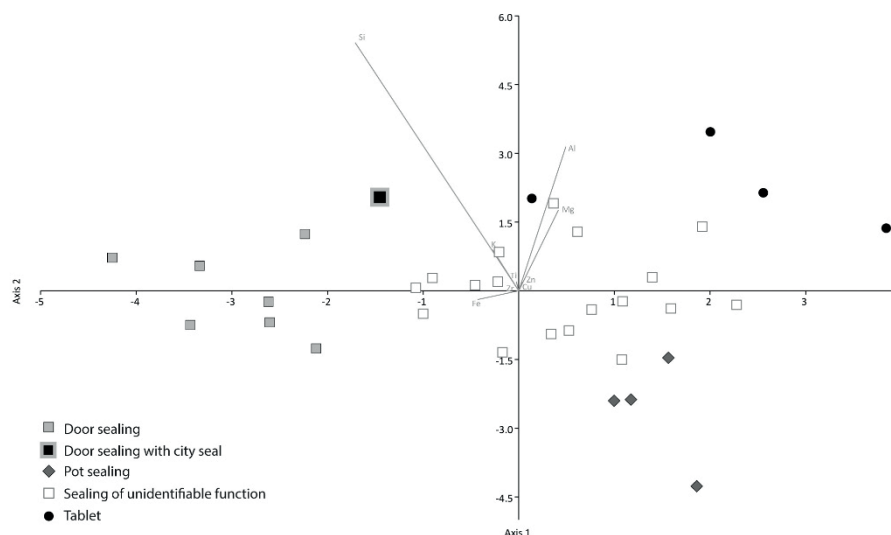


Figure 6. Discriminant analysis of pXRF data from analysis of clay tablets and sealings from Uruk according to sealing function.

We applied the technique of pXRF to the Uruk city-sealed sealing and to a total of 29 other clay sealings from Uruk. Discriminant analysis of the pXRF data (Fig. 6) shows significant clustering of sealing clays according to sealing function, with door sealings including the city-sealed sealing W 11456, and pot sealings forming separate, non-overlapping groups. This pattern suggests that ceramic vessels containing unknown commodities, but likely to be offerings of food-stuffs, were sealed at a location distant, to some degree, from the location of the store-room door sealings. That location need not have been outside Uruk but may have been at another location within the great city, thus attesting provision of sealed offerings from an Uruk neighbourhood to the central temple precincts. Looking at the pXRF data on the four examined Uruk III-style proto-cuneiform tablets (Fig. 6), it is notable that the clays used to produce tablets are broadly similar to those used for sealings.

New evidence from Konar Sandal South, relating to Ur

Arguably one of the most significant recent discoveries in the field of city seal research comes not from Lower Mesopotamia but from a site far to the east in south-east Iran, Konar Sandal South in the Halil Rud region of Jiroft (Madjidzadeh and Pittman 2008, 100, fig. 32e). This seal impression occurs on a single clay sealing, the only door sealing so far found at Konar Sandal South, in rubbish deposits in Trench XIV, an area of private houses in the lower town. The excavators date the sealing to ca. 2900 BC on the basis of its similarity to the Ur SIS seal impressions (Madjidzadeh and Pittman 2008, 100), although the buildings within which the sealing was found appear to be somewhat later in date. Dates for Trench XI at Konar Sandal South suggest an occupation range there of 2880-2580 BC (Pittman 2012, 80, table 1), approximately equivalent to the Early Dynastic I period in Mesopotamia.

There has so far been no attempt to decipher the symbols on this seal impression, perhaps not surprisingly. We provide here an annotated drawing of the seal impression with tentative suggested readings, which we proffer with due caution (Fig. 7). On the left we propose a ligature of $URI_3 + AB$ (= URI_5) = Ur, while in the centre we have a plausible 'edinnu' sign. At top right, there is a possible lower half of a KID_a sign, which on a city seal impression could represent part of the city name of Nippur. At bottom right, there may be an upside down $UNUG_a$ sign, representing Uruk, but this identification is especially tentative. In order of decreasing confidence, then, we read this impression as potentially including names of the following cities, all of which feature on the Ur SIS sealings: Ur, edinnu, Nippur, Uruk.

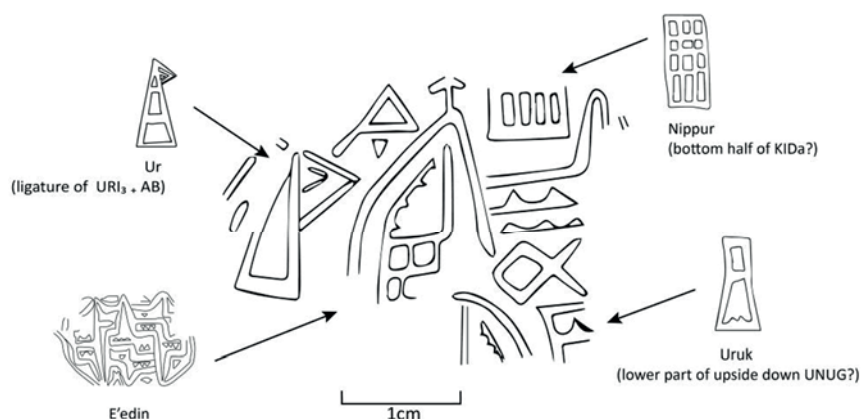


Figure 7. Konar Sandal South city seal impression with tentative city name readings along with examples from Ur (after Madjidzadeh and Pittman 2008, fig. 32e).

Identification of the city of Ur on this seal impression is of major significance, given the immense distance (1250km directly) between the sites of Konar Sandal South and Ur. If the dating of the object to ca. 2900 BC can be relied on, this single artefact suggests the engagement of Ur in far-flung connections with the world to the east well before the Early Dynastic III period, when grave goods from the Royal Tombs of Ur indicate strong eastern connections manifest in the import of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, carnelian and other materials (Zettler and Horne 1998). Given the geographically wide-ranging iconography of the seal impressions at Konar Sandal South, a systematic programme of pXRF analysis of the sealing assemblages there would be certain to yield extremely interesting results.

Conclusion: old cities, new insights

In this short article we hope to have demonstrated how new approaches to previously studied and sometimes under-studied administrative artefacts can shed important new light on the mechanics of intra- and intercity engagement at the dawn of urban history. The application of non-destructive analytical techniques such as pXRF opens a new chapter in the scientific investigation of the materiality of

bureaucracy as it operated in the great cities of Uruk, Ur and beyond. It is greatly to be hoped that future programmes of analysis can expand on these initial inter-pretations and assist us in apprehending and articulating the full significance of intercity encounters on the Lower Mesopotamian alluvium, and beyond, some 5000 years ago.

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