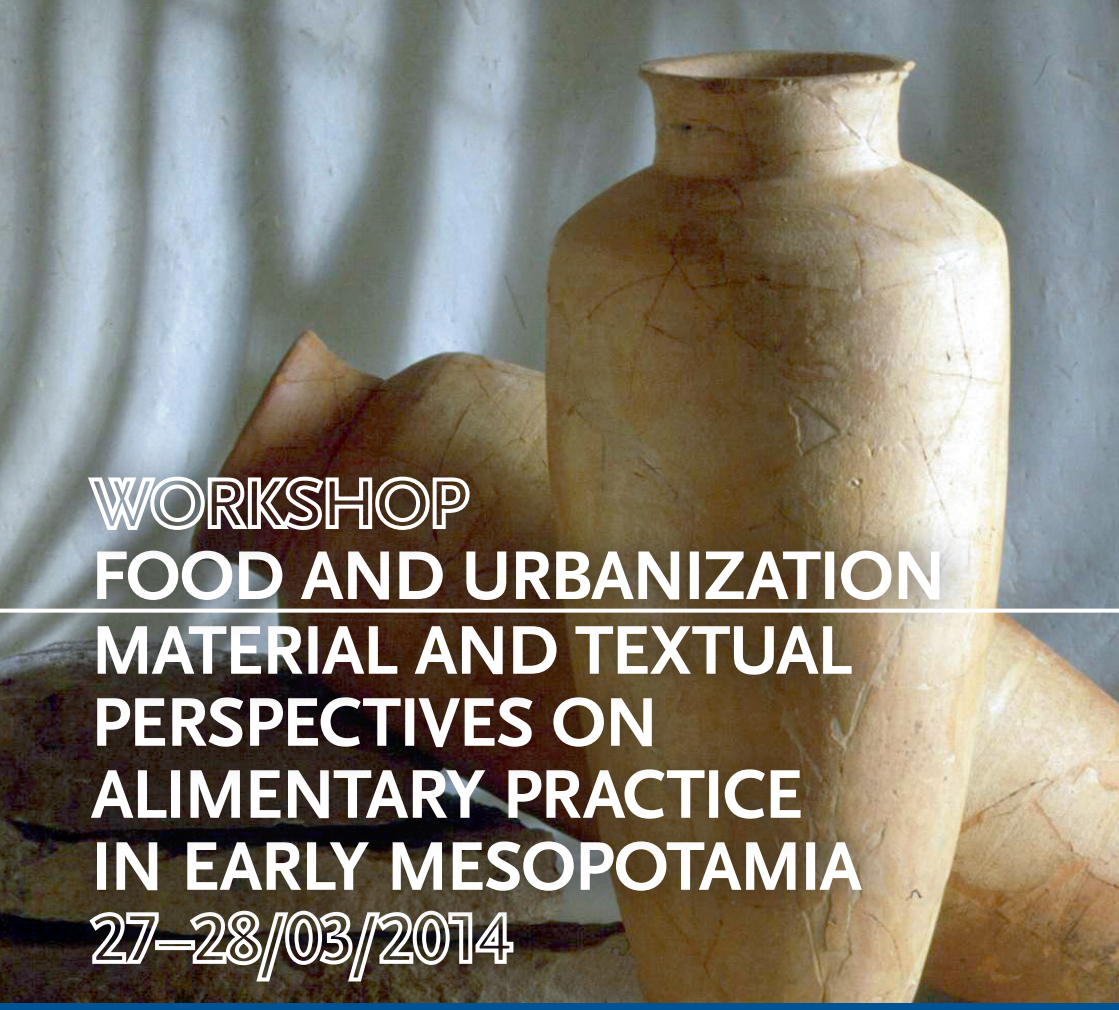

WORKSHOP
FOOD AND URBANIZATION
MATERIAL AND TEXTUAL PERSPECTIVES ON ALIMENTARY PRACTICE IN EARLY MESOPOTAMIA
27–28/03/2014

ABSTRACTS

Freie Universität Berlin
EXCELLENCE CLUSTER TOPOI
ielhca
Vorderasiatisches Museum
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Workshop

Food and Urbanization
Material and Textual Perspectives on Alimentary Practice in Early Mesopotamia

Berlin, March 27th - 28th 2014

Freie Universität Berlin
Institut für Vorderasiatische Archäologie
Institut für Altorientalistik
Excellence Cluster Topoi

In Cooperation with:
Vorderasiatisches Museum
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin - Preußischer Kulturbesitz

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Tours, France

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PROGRAMME

THURSDAY, 27/03/2014

9.30–10.00

Maria Bianca D'Anna, Carolin Jauß, Cale Johnson: Welcome and introduction to the workshop

10.00–11.45

Carolin Jauß: Storing, pouring, eating, meeting. Ceramic vessels and alimentary practice

Marisol Correa Ascencio: Understanding food processing and consumption in the Late Uruk period via absorbed organic residue analysis

Klaus Wagensonner: Food and containers for food in the archaic textual record

11.45–13.00 Lunch

from 14.00

«Meeting the objects of our studies»
Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin: Tour of the archives and hands-on work with artefacts from Uruk and Habuba Kabira –> Workshop participants only.

FRIDAY, 28/03/2014

9.00–10.30

Maria Bianca D'Anna: Food control at the time of centralization. Storing, cooking and eating at Arslantepe-Malatya during period VI A (3300 BCE ca.)

Rémi Berthon: From the animals to the meals. The contribution of zooarchaeology to the knowledge of alimentary practices during the Uruk period

Eva Rosenstock: The price of urbanization? Body height development in Europe and the Near East around 3000 BC

10.30-10.45 Coffee Break

10.45–12.15

Jacob L. Dahl: The production and storage of food in Early Iran

Hagan Brunke: Food and food practices according to the Ur III administrative record

12.15–13.45 Lunch

13.45–15.30

Reinder Neef: Food and urbanization in Mesopotamia in the 4th millennium BC. An archaeobotanical view

Susan Pollock: Ovens, fireplaces and the preparation of food in Uruk Mesopotamia

J. Cale Johnson: Defining institutional scale in the Late Uruk and the Early Dynastic feast records

15.30–17.00 Coffee and Final Discussion

ABSTRACTS

Carolin Jauß
Freie Universität Berlin; Institut für Vorderasiatische Archäologie,
Excellence Cluster Topoi

Storing, pouring, eating, meeting. Ceramic vessels and alimentary practice

Alimentary practice in the late Uruk and Jemdet Nasr period was closely connected to the use of ceramic vessels. Not least this is exemplified by pictograms in the form of vessels that signify different kinds of food. Pottery vessels were omnipresent in all areas of society from small scale households and everyday activities to centralized institutions and special events like the processions depicted on seal imagery. The innovative pottery techniques that allowed mass production of vessels as well as the broad repertoire of vessel types that were in use in the Uruk period are well known. But what kinds of food were stored and processed in and consumed from these vessels? What kinds of food processing techniques were performed with them? What was their role in food consumption? How were they handled and what kind of social (inter-) action did this imply?

In this talk I investigate these questions in a study on material properties of vessels from Chogha Mish and Jemdet Nasr. Techno-morphological characteristics and corresponding functional properties as well as use wear traces that point to actual vessel use are analyzed. Special consideration is given to vessel volumes as indicators for quantities of food and drink produced and consumed. The aim is to better understand practices performed with ceramic vessels and thereby to contribute to the discussion of alimentary practice at large.

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Marisol Correa Ascencio
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Understanding food processing and consumption in the Late Uruk period via absorbed organic residue analysis

In spite of the progress in describing food acquisition, processing and consumption patterns in Mesopotamia during the Late Uruk period, significant gaps in our knowledge remain regarding the relative importance of various foods (plants and animals) or alcoholic beverages and how differences in food consumption relate to social variation. One possible means to broaden the tools available for examining diet in Mesopotamia is through absorbed organic residue analysis of pottery vessels.

This technique is based upon the premise that when different food commodities are processed in unglazed ceramic vessels organic components are released and absorbed in the ceramic matrix[1]. Lipids are the best preserved organic components providing a direct reflection of the original contents and usage of ceramic vessels[1,2]. This approach has proved to be very useful as it provides evidence invisible to the naked eye, contributing to the reconstruction of dietary practices in antiquity[1,2]. This paper will explain the basic concepts of absorbed organic residue analysis and will discuss the advantages and limitations of applying this technique in pottery vessels from the Late Uruk period.

1 Evershed, R. P. Organic residue analysis in archaeology: the archaeological biomarker revolution. Archaeometry 50, 895–924 (2008).

2 Evershed, R. P. Biomolecular Archaeology and Lipids. World Archaeology 25, 74–93 (1993).

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Klaus Wagensonner
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Food and containers for food in the archaic textual record

The proto-cuneiform texts from Uruk, modern Warka, dating to the end of the fourth millennium BC attest to complex devices to keep track of incoming and outgoing goods. Together with lexical texts attested as early as the Uruk IV period the proto-cuneiform writing system contains a wide range of graphemes for different sorts of food as well as of containers (e.g., jars, baskets, boxes), in which food stuff was stored. This paper aims at providing an overview of various food designations and, in particular, of various forms of containers. In doing so, I will focus predominantly on the early word lists, and in particular on the lists "Archaic Pots and Garments" (ArPG) and "Archaic Food" (ArFo) [and their better preserved Early Dynastic versions].

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Maria Bianca D'Anna
Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

Food control at the time of centralization. Storing, cooking and eating at Arslantepe-Malatya during period VI A (Late Chalcolithic 5 - ca. 3300 BCE)

Amongst other important finds, the long-lasting excavation at the southeastern Anatolian site of Arslantepe brought to light large complexes of public and residential buildings dated to the Late Uruk period. As consequence of the quick and violent depositional process and only few later disturbances, the state of preservation of these buildings is often very good and significant is the amount of materials found in situ.

The presence at Arslantepe VI A of monumental architecture, more standardized pottery production, craft specialization, changes in the primary economy and bureaucratic control in absence of writing testify the establishment of social complexity and inequality. Despite the local character of its architecture, pottery, glyptic, and metallurgy, Arslantepe VI A shares numerous elements with the Late Uruk culture, above all the centralization and redistribution of primary goods, basically food.

In this paper, I will present different classes of vessels of Arslantepe period VI A in terms of their functional significance and capacity. Pottery offers precious information to investigate political, economic and cultural changes and it is also a crucial record in exploring food-related activities. The distribution of cooking pots, storage vessels and mass-produced bowls within different areas of the Arslantepe VI A public building complex and their connection to other archaeological finds and features, such as animal bones, clay sealings and fireplaces, might assess different locations and modalities of food related practices, such as centralization of foodstuff, meal redistributions and restricted feasts.

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From the animals to the meals. The contribution of zooarchaeology to the knowledge of alimentary practices during the Uruk period

Zooarchaeology aims at investigating the relations between human societies and the animal world. This paper will primarily focus on the role of animal products in the alimentary practices. The author will define how zooarchaeology and associated disciplines (aDNA, isotopic studies, GMM, etc...) can contribute to the understanding of food processing. Biases and limits inherent to the study of animal remains will also be specified. Although many Uruk sites have been excavated, only a few detailed zooarchaeological studies are available. A global view of the current zooarcheaological knowledge on the Uruk period will be given. Finally, some study-cases from Uruk sites and other contexts will be presented. In particular it will be shown how the processing and consumption of animal products have been used for the definition of social or ethnical groups.

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Eva Rosenstock
Freie Universität Berlin, Emmy-Noether-Group „LiVES“

The price of urbanization? Body height development in Europe and the Near East around 3000 BC

In economic history, body height as a proxy for net nutrition serves as a globally comparable measure for welfare. Today, Northern Europeans on the average are taller than Mediterranean and Near Eastern people, a pattern commonly explained by harsher living conditions in the South.

Preliminary data collected by our Emmy-Noether-Group is taking this approach into prehistory and suggest that, surprisingly, people in the Near East were taller than in Europe until the late Copper Age. This observation prompts speculations as to what went different along this SE–NW trajectory during the time targeted by the workshop.

The talk presents a first simulation of prehistoric body height development in the Old World and puts possible explanations up for discussion.

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Jacob L. Dahl
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The production and storage of food in Early Iran

Although the proto-Elamite writing system is ultimately derived from the earlier Mesopotamian proto-cuneiform system relatively few non-numerical signs were loaned together with the technology of writing. This, together with the lack of a successor system, a lexical tradition, and an perceived high amount of abstract signs, has hindered the decipherment of proto-Elamite. Nevertheless, it has long been clear that the content of the proto-Elamite texts is exclusively related to the production of food for self-sufficient households of modest size, and targeted studies of sub-sets of the proto-Elamite signary using general information about animal products and their preparation has increased our knowledge of the signary. In this talk I will seek to outline the potential for further sign-identifications using information from both the textual and the archaeological record.

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Hagan Brunke
Freie Universität Berlin, Institut für Altorientalistik

Food and food practices according to the Ur III administrative record

Among the rich documentation of the Ur III administration there are numerous texts that inform us about the delivery and receipt of raw materials for the preparation of food as well as of foodstuffs themselves. Some of these texts are among the earliest ones to give very detailed information that allows for the reconstruction of ingredient lists for, e.g., breads, soups, and sweets that have been served on occasion of certain festivities. On the other hand the differences in quality shown by these texts, e.g. between the deliveries for the royal table, the dishes served on occasion of public feasts, and the food served to the workforce in a building site, reflect the interdependence of food and social status. Even though the time span of about one millennium between the Late Uruk and the Ur III period forbids a one-to-one extrapolation from the latter to the former, many aspects of food, food preparation and food distribution are likely to have remained sufficiently similar to allow to speculate about food practices in the Late Uruk period.

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Reinder Neef
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Food and urbanization in Mesopotamia in the 4th millennium BC. An archaeobotanical view

Archaeobotany is the study of plant remains retrieved from archaeological excavations in order to reconstruct former agriculture, trade, environmental conditions, etc.

The development of the huge, early southern Mesopotamian centers in the 4th millennium BC, located in a steppe or desert environment, but within the vicinity of Tigris and Euphrates, could expand relying on sophisticated large scale irrigation agriculture. Mainly because of soil salinity preservation conditions for botanical remains are poor in Southern Mesopotamia; preservation is far better at the large dwelling mounds representing the early urban centers of Northern Mesopotamia. Here most of the centers are located in a climate zone which just allows rain fed cropping, with a potential natural vegetation of steppe or steppe forest. This area is sensible to minor climatic changes, major droughts and in particular human induced degradation.

In general in the Near East urbanization in the 4th millennium BC synchronizes not only with large scale (irrigation) agriculture, but also with the development of horticulture in this period, most notably the cultivation of olive, grape vine and date palm. Fruit-tree cultivation is very different from growing annual crops, like cereals and legumes: orchards need at least 3-8 years after planting to come to production. Becoming staple crops, production of and trade with valuable fruit tree products, like olive oil, raisins, wine and dates, intensified the process of urbanization.

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Susan Pollock
Freie Universität Berlin, Institut für Vorderasiatische Archäologie

Ovens, fireplaces and the preparation of food in Uruk Mesopotamia

When we speak about food preparation, what generally springs to mind is cooking, but of course this is an enormous simplification of a much more complex series of processes. I am interested in the possibility that cooking may have played a limited role in alimentary practices associated with a growing public sphere of food distribution and consumption in the later 4th millennium BCE. Carolin Jauß has demonstrated that ceramic vessels with indications for use over fire tend to be relatively small. I will pursue this question from a different angle, examining the types and spatial contexts of fire installations in sites from the middle and later Uruk periods (LC 3-5). Although published documentation of fire installations is very variable in its quality and detail, a review of the existing information provides a useful point of departure for posing questions about the place of cooking in the political economy of Uruk communities.

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J. Cale Johnson
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Defining institutional scale in the Late Uruk and the Early Dynastic feast records

How do we measure institutions in antiquity? What is the metric according to which we can judge their extension or their scale? Intellectual and economic historians have often commented on economies of scale: how certain types of social practice scale up to a particular level of complexity with relative ease, but require a great deal more energy and work, if they are to be expanded up to the next higher plateau.

In this paper I suggest that the Late Uruk and Early Dynastic bookkeeping records associated with elite feasting provide us with a rare metric for evaluating the relative size of these feasts and by extension the scale of the institutions in which they were housed. Even if these materials only allow for an approximation of the relative scale of feasting activities in the different phases of the earliest history of Mesopotamia, these approximations can then be juxtaposed to other kinds of evidence drawn from work on household archaeology, architecture, evidence of intercity trade and even the limited evidence that we have for how intellectual traditions were spread across the landscape.

Central to this investigation, therefore, will be seemingly facile questions such as the volume of beer that can be associated with particular named vessels or the amounts of meat that could be extracted from a given number of animals in antiquity.

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