



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

States of Clay: Integrated Scientific Approaches to Clay Bureaucratic Objects from Early Mesopotamia, 3700-2700 BCE

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Abstract

In the States of Clay project we apply multiple methods to the analysis of clay bureaucratic objects (tokens, sealings, inscribed tablets, hollow clay balls) from archaeological sites of Lower and Upper Mesopotamia spanning the transition from the Late Chalcolithic to the Early Bronze Age, 3700-2700 BCE. During this period, newly urban communities across Mesopotamia developed and engaged variably with systems of administration and control. These new bureaucratic systems were reliant above all on clay as a vehicle for conveying information through space and time. While research has previously focused on separate elements of these early bureaucratic systems – the seals and seal impressions, the tokens, the tablets – there have so far been only limited attempts to treat them as connected components of integrated systems. In the States of Clay project we are investigating patterns of bureaucratic behaviour through the application of techniques including high-resolution imaging, pXRF, fingerprint analysis, and iconographic and functional interpretation to generate new insights into the workings of some of the world's earliest sophisticated bureaucratic systems. We will present the results and analysis of our work so far on clay bureaucratic objects from Uruk, Fara, Ur, Jemdet Nasr, Nineveh, Tell Brak, and other relevant sites.

Keywords

clay, bureaucracy, proto-cuneiform, sealings, pXRF

Session

4. The materiality of inscribed and figurative objects

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