



## ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

# Images in/as inscriptions. Figurative elements replacing cuneiform on Middle Bronze Age cylinder seals

ROSSBERGER E. <sup>1</sup>\*

<sup>1</sup> Institute of Near Eastern Archaeology, Freie Universit Berlin, Berlin, Germany

\*Corresponding author

## Abstract

Cylinder seals' pictorial and written contents are typically differentiated by form and function. However, seals from Middle Bronze Age Mesopotamia occasionally depict figurative elements (humans, animals, and hybrid beings) in inscription fields. Contemporaneous Syrian seal carvers created columns and rows of figures, heads, hands, and symbols, building upon but also developing pictorial traditions of the region further. Were these figures meant to reference, replace, or complement cuneiform writing? How does their occurrence and use compare between Syria, Assyria, and Babylonia? And what does this tell us about regionally concurrent and divergent visual communication strategies and artifact semantics more generally? This paper investigates these questions from a comparative perspective, using quantitative data created within the framework of the "Annotated Corpus of Ancient West Asian Imagery: Cylinder Seals" project (ACAWAI-CS).

## Keywords

cylinder seals, seal inscriptions, visual communication, Middle Bronze Age, Mesopotamia

## Session

4. The materiality of inscribed and figurative objects

## Workshop

A16054JL - Beyond Visible Language: Non-linguistic Lives of Cuneiform Writing in Western Asia during the Bronze and Iron Ages

## Type of paper

Oral presentation