



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Bridging the gap: a new integrated approach to inscribed objects between archaeology and epigraphy

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Abstract

This paper explores ancient Middle Eastern literacy from a material culture perspective, analysing inscribed objects beyond their documentary and historical content through the study of the observable marks left by ancient writers. Inscribed objects have traditionally been considered for the content they carry and represented as the depersonalised witnesses of the events they narrate. Beyond their documentary content, however, inscribed objects materialise the writing process and the context in which it was performed. Writing is a product of the hand as much as of the mind; not an innate ability, it is a learned and practised skill, a combination of rules and standards performed by individuals. This research interrogates the relationship between inscribed artefacts and writing practices, bridging the traditional divide between archaeology and epigraphy, and illustrates the application of a new integrated methodology considering all aspects of writing medium, inscription and written signs. It does so by contrasting the institutionalised context of writing at the epicentre of state bureaucracy in Mesopotamia in the 21st century BCE, with the practical literacy of Old Assyrian merchants trading between Mesopotamia and Anatolia in the 19th century BCE.

Keywords

inscribed object, literacy, writing practices, materiality

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