

London Centre for the Ancient Near East

Report from the Chair of the Committee for 2016

This year has seen a great many changes in the London Centre for the Ancient Near East. At the end of 2015 after 15 years of service Morris Bierbrier decided to step down as chair of the committee. I was nominated without opposition to take over the position. At the same time Janet Politi stepped down after 20 years of filling the position of secretary. The whole committee and I am sure the whole membership as well would like to thank Morris and Janet for their long service and their inimitable contributions to keeping this organisation running. In fact, so used had we become to their effortless style of running things that committee meetings temporarily almost ground to a halt in the wake of the change. We were lucky that Jon Taylor from the British Museum volunteered to take over the position of secretary, and Martin Worthington from Cambridge is to be thanked for stepping in when Jon has been unavailable. 2016 also saw Richard Bußmann leave the committee, after he moved from UCL to a position in Cologne. His tireless help with organisational matters and stimulating contributions to seminars will be sorely missed.

Nevertheless, disregarding any organisational difficulties at committee level, the London Centre has continued to follow its usual routine during 2016 in organising lectures and seminars, producing and distributing the London Diary for the Ancient Near East, as well as disbursing small grants to event-organisers associated with the fields of Ancient Near Eastern Studies and Egyptology and research students attending relevant conferences.

2016 was also the 21st year of the London Centre's existence, and this was celebrated at the Annual General Meeting (25.04) by inviting Georgina Hermann, a founding member of the organisation, to give a lecture on the Nimrud Ivories. Institutional memory has it that the very first committee meetings were held in her flat. It was thus an apt choice for reasons of organisational history and the lecture was also a tour de force from someone who has been involved with the study of the material throughout her career.

The 2016 spring seminars were organised by myself, as usual on the topic of New Research generally rather than having a thematic focus. For these sessions we try to invite colleagues from around the country, including one or two from abroad in as far

as we can afford it, to inform us of the latest developments in their research projects. The first two lectures were delivered by epigraphers from the current Turco-Italian excavations at Karkemish. Gianni Marchesi (Bologna) came to tell us about the cuneiform finds, which include a late Middle or early Neo-Assyrian tablet of incantations against evil demons excavated in the so-called palace of Katuwa near the King's Gate, and fragments of three cylinders of Sargon II, which were found in a well in Sargon's palace, with a unique text telling of the conquest of the city. Hasan Peker from Istanbul informed us of the Hieroglyphic finds from the site, which include, albeit not directly from the site, the extraordinary discovery of the head of the Kubaba-statue, the inscribed body of which had been one of the very first discoveries at Karkemish from the British Museum excavations back in the 1870s.



Sargon: Copyleft Turco-Italian Expedition at Karkemish

Yağmur Heffron from UCL told us about archaeologically attested Anatolian funerary practices at the site of Middle Bronze Age Kültepe, comparing these with death ritual texts from later Hittite times. The ensuing discussion on corpse preservation techniques will not be forgotten. Christopher Metcalf from Oxford reported on his work publishing the Sumerian literary texts from the Schøyen collection, which included some unique pieces giving insights into Old Babylonian religious concepts. Finally Martin Bommas from Birmingham came to tell us with great excitement of a tomb he had discovered during fieldwork in Egypt.

As an occasional lecturer we hosted Brian Janeway (PhD from Toronto), who is responsible for the Late Helladic IIIc pottery at the site of Tell Taymat near the Turkish-Syrian border, which is crucial for the

Late Bronze Age-Iron Age transition in the area. It is unusual for us to be able to put on a lecture by a trans-Atlantic scholar due to cost considerations. Brian is a airline pilot and flew here himself!

A further London Centre event was organised by Andrew George and involved a performance of the Epic of Gilgamesh by professional story-teller Ben Haggarty together with Jonah Brody. This was scheduled to coincide with the beginning of SOAS' centenary celebrations in June and was held in the large Brunei Lecture theatre. The free event was attended by almost 200 people of all generations. The performance was exhilarating and illuminating, and Andrew George is to be thanked for the considerable effort he put into the organisation and advertising.

The Autumn series was organised by Diana Stein from Birkbeck on the topic of ritual materials and techniques, a theme on which she had spoken at the workshop on seals and sealings in honour of Dominique Collon in December 2015, from where the idea developed to have a whole series devoted to similar issues. We started with Ammar Annus from Tartu, Estonia, who told us about neuro-scientific interpretations of mythology, in particular the myth of Adapa, which bring insights from the scientific investigation of autism and related conditions to bear on mentalities associated with the production of myth. After this Margaret Serpico from UCL brought an impressively thorough multi-disciplinary approach to a presentation of research on resins and "incense" in Egyptian ritual, which elicited numerous comparisons with scholarly problems experienced researching related phenomena in the Ancient Near East.

Mónica Palmero-Fernández from Reading told us about the Ishtar-cult in Mari during the third millennium BC, including reflections on the notion of gender, which also stimulated an interesting discussion. Réka Esztari and Ádám Vér from Budapest gave an excellent talk on a previously poorly understood ritual against still-birth preserved on a compilation tablet from Hattusa, and the year was brought to a close with another talk by Yağmur Heffron, this time on the division of ritual space in households at the site of Kültepe/Kanesh. Yağmur is also to be thanked for encouraging us to extend the practice of wine and nibbles after the talk from once a year at the AGM to a regular institution after the lectures and for organising the necessary funding and logistics. Diana Stein provided a stimulating lecture series with a brave line-up of speakers that led to all sorts of new connections. In my view this is precisely what the London Centre needs to be doing.

In 2016 the London Centre supported several events. The Gilgamesh story-telling event made use of funds that had been ring-fenced for Gilgamesh-related activities for a number of years. As in the last few years we were able to support the Oxford Postgraduate Conference in Assyriology, which has developed into a regular institution. Six grants were given to research students to cover registration fees at conferences, one to BANEA, four to ICAANE and one to the RAI.

The amount we have given to such activities over the last few years currently means that we have now (purposefully) depleted a financial surplus that had built up in the previous period. Gross disbursements for these kinds of events will thus likely somewhat decrease over the coming years, while we make sure we keep enough reserves for what we regard as our core activities, namely the two seminar series and the production and distribution of the London Diary three times a year, which continues to be a useful guide to events related to our fields in the London area and surroundings. Here particularly Jan Picton is to be thanked for the considerable amount of work she puts into producing this.

We have already pledged money to support five more research students attending conferences in the coming year, as well as the 6th form conference on Assyriology and Egyptology, an exciting new initiative from Martin Worthington, which aims to publicise our fields among school-leavers. This is absolutely what we need to be doing if our disciplines are to survive.

This year we have also started trying to use social media more conscientiously for advertising and communication purposes. Beside the website which we have now had for a couple of years where London Centre events are advertised (banealcane.org/lcane), we now also have a Twitter account (@londoncentrene), which I recently used to post photos from archaeological trips in Turkey. And Yağmur Heffron has also started a Facebook group that is already attracting significant membership: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/LCANE/>

This chair's report on the year's activities is hopefully the first of many. We would like to thank all members for their support, without which none of this would be possible. Please accept the best wishes of the committee for the coming year.

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Chair of the LCANE Committee

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