

## London Centre for the Ancient Near East: Chair's Report 2017

Mark Weeden (SOAS)

The past year saw the London Centre for the Ancient Near East continue in its mission of providing a focus for activities related to the Ancient Near East in and around London. The London Diary, the backbone of our activity, was produced and sent out to members three times during the year. Copious thanks are once again due to our membership secretary, Jan Picton, for her efforts in this regard. Jan brought her term as membership secretary to a close at the end of 2017. She edited the London Diary for the Ancient Near East for 18 years, beginning with No. 14 in October 1999 and ending with No. 68 in October 2017. That's 55 issues, compiled, typed up, printed, stuffed into envelopes, labelled and despatched. More often than not, she declined the honorarium due to her. Jan was also the London Centre's representative at BANEA for many years and through her contacts to various different organisations and institutions has been and still is a lynchpin in the structure of Ancient Near Eastern studies in London. We are very grateful for her engagement over the years and can only hope that she will continue to be involved in the committee and the activities of the London Centre more generally. We are also happy to announce that Yağmur Heffron from UCL's History Department has offered to take over Jan's responsibilities.

Two series of public lectures were organised during 2017. The first, with the general theme of "New Research" was convened by myself and brought together various quite disparate topics. Amir Gilan from the University of Tel Aviv, who had been a visiting scholar at SOAS during the 2017 academic year, started the session off in January with an unforgettable talk on the removal of impurity caused by the act of bestiality among the Hittites, as detailed in laws and ritual texts. The talk drew on an array of cross-cultural parallels and was educational to say the least. Stephen Quirke from UCL gave an interesting talk questioning the application of the notion of elites in archaeology, although the talk mainly focussed on the word *p'at*, frequently translated as "nobility". Babette Schnitzlein of the Warburg Institute talked about the difficulties in identifying the referents of terminology used to describe cuneiform tablets. Agnes Henriksen, a PhD researcher on a Collaborative Doctoral Award at the British Museum and UCL, reported on her research project

concerning communication strategies for the dissemination of the results of the 1920s excavations at Ur. Finally Pekka Pitkänen of the University of Gloucestershire came to give us his view of the tricky question of the detection of migration in the historical and archaeological records, outlining a typology of migrations and the different types of evidence that can be used to identify them. His focus was on the Levant in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC.

The second seminar series was organised by Yağmur Heffron of UCL on the theme of "Taking the Patriarchy for Granted". This was the best attended seminar series that we have had in recent years, with audiences regularly packing out the rather small room that we were allocated this year. Ilan Peled of the University of Amsterdam looked at gender roles in Mesopotamia against the background of R.W. Connell's theory of a gender-spectrum. Kate Kelley reported on a part of her recently finished Oxford DPhil which looked at the designation of gender in late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC cuneiform. One interesting conclusion was that male gender was assumed as a default, while female gender had to be indicated specially, as is quite typical of language use in patriarchal societies. Jane Gordon, who had recently finished an MA at UCL, gave an interesting insight into the characterisation of women in Old Assyrian letters and modern scholarship thereon, using a rigorous, corpus-based methodology indicating the formulaic nature of much of the content of the epistolary genre.

Karina Croucher (University of Bradford) spoke to us about the interpretive pitfalls that can ensue from assuming a patriarchally-focussed view of archaeological remains, including ancient art, emphasising the many other forms of interpretation that are being excluded by concentrating on gender-based perspectives. She ended by returning to the topic of plastered skulls, for which she is so well known. Agnès Garcia-Ventura from Barcelona gave a fascinating insight into the history of the notion of matriarchy in the earlier research history of Ancient Near Eastern Studies, which had tended to reflect normal women's agency as a form of inversion of patriarchy.

The tradition of wine and nibbles after the seminars was also continued. We are grateful to Josh Britton (UCL) for helping out with the procurement and

provision of the drinks, and to Oscar Rutishauser-Mills (UCL) for advertising events on our twitter account.

As an occasional lecturer we had James Frazer of the British Museum talk in February about a project to re-integrate the head and body of the Kubaba-statue kept respectively in Maraş and the BM (see lecture of Hasan Peker in previous report) using 3-D photogrammetry. The Annual General Meeting in May was followed by a lecture by Peter Miglus from Heidelberg on the topic of his fieldwork on rock sculptures in the Zagros foothills which indicated that a number of these monuments were connected to each other and sometimes to further buildings and settlement complexes, rather than being hidden or remote as they are often thought to be.

During 2017 the London Centre was once again able to provide a little financial assistance to events and research students going to conferences. We paid the registration fees for four research students to attend conferences: two to BANEA (Glasgow), one to ASOR (Boston) and one to Current Research in Egyptology (Naples). As in past years, we were very pleased to be able to support the excellent Oxford Postgraduate Conference in Assyriology (OPCA) with a donation. A further limited fund was set aside to support the travel costs of students wishing to attend the conference "Divine Narratives in the Ancient Near East" at the Ioannou Centre, University of Oxford in July, which was co-organised by LCANE committee member Christopher Metcalf. The grant call stipulated that the money was for students registered at UK universities, but not one single such student applied. The one application we did receive was from a young Italian scholar from Verona. In this case we decided to waive the stipulation in the grant call and make monies available to him to come over from Italy. In return he submitted an extensive report on the conference that we will post on the website.

The lack of applications for our grant calls during 2017 was slightly disconcerting, but this is thankfully not a trend, as many more applications were received for LCANE conference grants for 2018.

Several new committee members agreed to participate during 2017: Anthea Crane (UCL, undergraduate), David Wilson (SOAS, PhD), Mathilde Touillon-Ricci (SOAS/BM, PhD), Xose Buxan (UCL, PhD).

### **Ellen Jones – LCANE grant report**

Firstly, I would like to thank LCANE for their support in enabling me to attend the Current Research in Egyptology 2017; this conference is designed specifically for early career researchers in my subject.

I arrived in Naples on 2nd May, and used the rest of my travel day to visit the archaeological site of Pompeii. I am studying the position of women in the ancient Egyptian family and so visiting this spectacularly preserved site was useful for imagining daily lived experience in ancient towns, which can then be compared to other ancient sites such as that of Deir el-Medina and Amarna in Egypt.

The conference then ran from 3rd-6th May, including a wide variety of talks ranging from Middle Kingdom personal adornment to new perspectives on ancient Egyptian family structure, and marriage and inheritance practices, all of which relate to my own area of research. During the conference I gave a 20 minute paper on my Masters research which was well received and will hopefully lead to the publication of this paper in the conference proceedings. This conference was my first international conference and so was also useful for developing contacts with the wider Egyptological community, especially for meeting and discussing with other scholars who are studying topics similar to my own.

I would like to thank everyone at LCANE again for this opportunity, which has not only benefited my current DPhil research, which builds on my previous Master's studies, but has further strengthened my ability and determination to pursue a career in academia.

### **The Rosette Motif as a Mode of Non-Verbal Communication: An Analysis of the Motif's Deliberate Concealment in the Contexts of Ritual Consumption and Elite Feasting, Cheryl Hart.**

My PhD research examines and analyses the prolific use of the rosette motif in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Bronze and Early Iron Ages, interpreting visual images of the motif via a multi-disciplinary approach. Incorporating theoretical perspectives from the fields of archaeology, art history, anthropology, and human perception and cognition, I perceive the motif to function as a means of non-verbal communication.

I used this paper to present a new aspect of my research which I am currently working on: that of the rosette motif and its deliberate concealment in diacritical feasting contexts. Through the examination and analysis of this phenomenon, I question the 'message' being communicated and the audience it was communicated to.

The paper was well received with a large number of delegates attending the presentation. My interpretation of the role of the rosette motif in this particular context initiated a number of questions and discussion points; some of which were continued during breaks following the session.

The conference generally enabled me to renew previous academic acquaintances and develop new ones which will hopefully be of mutual benefit in the future.