

**ESF Final report**  
**ARCANE Meeting of TG 1: History and Epigraphy**  
**Munich, July 13-15**

**1) Summary**

The ARCANE project is concerned with the chronology of the third millennium. The meeting of "Transregional group 1: Epigraphy and History" focused on the written cuneiform evidence. Since the rediscovery of Mesopotamia in the 19th century, chronology has always been a central concern for historians of the ancient Near East. Various contributions have helped to develop and to refine the historical chronology of the third millennium. The meeting was intended to define the state of art and to open up ways for future developments.

The first part was devoted to various periods or cultural regions (Uruk IV/III, Fara period, Ebla texts; Presargonic and Sargonic texts etc.). In these historical presentations, mostly including the regional extension of contacts, the current state of knowledge was presented. The many new texts from this period led to various corrections and adjustments of the traditional chronology and history. Furthermore, the discussions have helped to develop some consensus on some much debated issues.

Various contributions concentrated on the contacts attested in the textual record. By this undertaking it is hoped to define both regions of cultural homogeneity and influence and to define more precisely the overregional importance of certain places and regions of the ancient Near East. This has proven to be a very important tool for the link of the historical record with the archaeological data.

The discussion of paleography has brought up many methodological issues. Basically, a paleographic study has to observe all features, and it has always to be precise on specific objects. Besides general statements about the development any fine chronology seems impossible at the moment.

The meeting was important to define the state of art for the chronology of the third millennium. Since the archaeological definition of phases has to be correlated with the historical periods, this group of the ARCANE project has to deliver a chronological frame which can serve as a point of reference for the archaeologists. The effort of so many specialists, combined with the new evidence which has become available recently, leads to a new definition of the period, which will after the publication remain a cornerstone for the study of the period.

## 2) Description of the scientific content of and discussion at the event

In the following description the contribution of the discussions is included in the description of the various presentations.

The meeting was opened by the Dean of the Faculty of Cultural Studies of the LMU München, Professor Dr. Hans van Ess, who pointed to the importance of chronology in other regions of the ancient world, namely China.

The first and main part of the meeting dealt with the history and dating of texts of the third millennium. In accordance with the ARCANE program, the regional distribution was especially considered besides the chronology. The general problem of the third millennium history is that the historical chronologies tend to shorten and thus to 'lower' the chronologies, whereas the archaeological chronology based on radiocarbon dating prefers earlier dates. Thus, the second half of the third millennium for which we possess a wealth of written documentation, becomes condensed and shortened, whereas the beginning of writing at Uruk becomes earlier. The result of these two tendencies is that the ED I-II period at the beginning of the third millennium, to which relatively few monuments are

Bob Englund presented the main data for the earliest epigraphic evidence from Mesopotamia from the Uruk IV/III period (radiocarbon dating of Uruk IV to 3600/3300 BC; no *terminus ante quem* for Uruk III available). He focused on the parallel development of numero-ideographic texts at Uruk and Susa (Acropolis level 17, Ax; ca. 3450 BC). With one exception, a group of texts from the *Roter Tempel*, no tablets are from 'sealed context', and so the development is completely based on paleography, and therefore the Susa link is so important to link archaeological and epigraphic evidence. The numerical system of Susa's Proto-Elamite texts depends on Uruk IV and thus the Susa tradition can be regarded as a local development. New texts from the Schøyen collection add significantly to the corpus of archaic texts.

Manfred Krebern timer applied various methods to fix the date of the Fara tablets from DOG excavations and thus of the Fara period. Although most texts stem from homogenous archives, there exist older tablets at Fara, even dating back to the Jemdet Nasr (Uruk III). The end of Fara is marked by a destruction layer as is the Palace A at Kish, which may be related to the destruction at Girsu before Urnanshe. Inscribed seals, the style of the drawings on tablets, the seals found together with tablets all point to an 'early' date at ED II/IIIa. The dominance of Sumerian in the onomasticon and the absence of month names support the relative sequence of Fara before Abu Salabikh, which shares many features of Fara. Paleographically, Fara seems to be not too distant from the archaic texts of Ur. All features show that Fara is to be dated before Urnanshe of Lagash. The system of titles employed leads to the following sequence: Mesilim, *lugal* of Kiš, is overlord of an *énsi* of Lagash and another one of Adab; he is (probably only little) earlier than Urnanshe. Local rulers of Lagash or Adab were called *lugal* in earlier inscriptions. Apparently, Fara is considerably older than Mesilim; the tablets from the Schmidt excavations are according to paleography and the places names

mentioned (H. Steible) younger than the DOG Fara tablets, but probably still earlier than Mesilim. The duration of the Fara period (covered by the DOG tablets and related texts) was discussed; the ultra-short duration, based especially on the low number of persons with *bala*-remark (F. Pomponio), is less likely, especially since the *bala*-designation may have some legal implication.

Horst Steible discussed the geographic horizon of the Fara texts. The texts show the close contacts with all cities of lower Mesopotamia, some place names indicate contacts to the east, to Elam. Fara/Šuruppak is member of a confederation of important towns of Northern and Southern Babylonia, formerly called "kiengi league" or "Hexapolis", now called "Regio", consisting of 10 towns. It extended from Zimbir (Sippar) and Kiš in the North towards Umma, Lagaš and Uruk in the South, but did not include Ur. The "Regio" apparently is the political background for the homogenous appearance of the Fara time tablets (see presentation of A. Westenholz).

Alfonso Archi concentrated on the internal chronology of Ebla, which is confirmed by the continuing study of the Ebla texts. It allows a continuous history of ca. 40 years before the destruction, which could be correlated with the destruction of Mari a few years later. The correlation with other sites is difficult because of the problems of identification. The participants discussed mostly the arguments for and against the identification of Abarsal with Tell Khuera (or Kazane Hüyük), and the evidence of Tuttul, since according to the Ebla texts no ruler is attested there.

Vanna Biga explained the direction of the wars of Ebla, a difficult topic because so few place names mentioned in the texts have been identified. Generally, during the forty years of documentation, the wars have mostly been directed towards northern and northeastern regions. After the early war against Abarsal the place is hardly mentioned at all. The only military campaigns in the South date to years Ibbizikir 7 to 11, shortly before the last large campaign against Mari and the coalition with Nagar against Armi. A better knowledge of the historical topography would help to link these data better with the archaeological developments in Syria.

Gianni Marchesi presented a revised chronology of the Early Dynastic rulers, which he had worked out together with Nicolo Marchetti. The use of hitherto unpublished inscriptions and the observation of the archaeological context of the Eninu of Urnanshe and A(ja)kurgal, the main temple at Girsu, led to the central adjustments in the chronology of Umma and other cities. The documents available point to a minimum duration of the Lagash I dynasty of 110/120 years. Concerning the historical chronology it is worth to consider Marchesi's proposal to insert a 'Proto-Imperial' period between ED IIIb (corresponds to Urnanshe dynasty of Lagash) and Akkade, that includes Enshakushana, Lugalzagesi and Sargon.

Walter Sommerfeld's concern was the Sargonic period and the chronological distribution of the texts from Mesopotamian sites. The corpus can be divided in two groups, a Pre- and Early Sargonic of Sargon and his sons Rimush and Manishtushu and a "Classical Sargonic" of Naramsin and Sharkalisharri. However, there is no evidence to link the Early Sargonic with

the Classical Sargonic group. The duration of reigns of the Akkad kings as given by the Sumerian King List cannot be confirmed by independent evidence.

Francesco Pomponio concentrated on Adab, a place from which many texts have appeared in the last years. With this new evidence, it is possible to give a more precise chronology of ED Adab. The most important single find is the proof that Meskigala of Adab under the Akkad ruler Rimush is not the same as the Early Dynastic ruler. Before, the assumed Meskigala identity had forced historians to assume a relatively short period between Lugalzagesi and Rimush. The high number of nine governors at Adab under the Sargonic kings Naramsin and Sharkalisharri corroborates the long reigns indicated by the Sumerian king list.

Ingo Schrakamp unfolded the geographical horizon of the (Mesopotamian) texts in the Presargonic and Sargonic periods. During the last years of Lagash the political developments lead to a loss of the commercial connections. In Presargonic and Early Sargonic texts, the connections towards the East (Elam) and the South (Dilmun) dominate, a few contacts with people from the North (Subir) are attested. During the Sargonic period, contacts with the North and East were intensified. The West, Ebla or Mari, however, hardly ever appears in the textual record of the whole period considered. Within Mesopotamia, it is interesting to note that cities such as Isin or Larsa have lost their importance.

Peter Steinkeller's paper was read by his former student Benjamin Studevent-Hickman from Chicago, since Steinkeller could not personally attend the meeting due to health problems. He discussed the Gutí period, in fact the decisive period for a chronology of the third millennium. Whereas for the later periods (from Ur III to the end of Babylon I, or from 2110 to 1595) the chronology can be changed for only one or two years and for the earlier periods (the ca. 250 years from Urnanshe to the end of Sharkalisharri of Akkad) only changes within a few decades seem possible, the duration of the Gutí period is still undetermined. Whereas the proposal of 40 years has found wide acceptance, Steinkeller votes for a much longer Gutí period of up to 100 years. The evidence is circumstantial and has to be based on various assumptions. Other evidence like the list of rulers (shakkanakku) of Mari apparently corroborate this proposal. Unfortunately the history and chronology for Girsu, the only place of continuous textual evidence, has up to now not been carefully studied.

Walther Sallaberger looked at the development of Upper Mesopotamia from the late Pre-Sargonic period until the end of the third millennium. This region is characterized by the decline of urban culture and the emergence of nomads in the period under consideration. During the four centuries covered a certain fluctuation of dominant centers can be observed.

Katrien De Graef presented the evidence for Susa in the Ur III period. The small archive of Igbuni belongs to the end of the Ur III rule at Susa before the independence under Ebarat.

David I. Owen informed the participants about a new Ur III archive from Irisagrig, which features a high number of royal messengers. The place is closely linked to the royal house.

The section on paleography was opened by A. Westenholz who drew on his life-long first-hand study of tablets of the Third Millennium. In very general terms the paleographic

development can be described as follows: After a homogeneity during the Fara period from Kiš in the North to Girsu in the South, local styles are developed during the later ED IIIb period. The link of this development with the political history has already been noted above. A certain homogeneity was only reached in the classical Sargonic period, under the Akkad rulers Naramsin and Sharkalisharri. This general development was illustrated by texts from various excavations.

Two contributions led to more general thoughts on the development of paleographic studies. Bob Englund gave a view on the future of paleographic studies by an interactive search of the CDLI corpus on the internet. He also informed the participants on the current state of the CDLI project, which aims to collect all texts of the third millennium. M. Krebern timer explained the peculiarities of the cuneiform writing at Fara. This led him to the proposal of a transliteration system that represents paleographic differences.

A. Archi explained peculiarities of the archaic texts of Ebla. The style cannot be correlated with Mesopotamian styles, also because scribes from Mari are known to have been active at Ebla. At Ebla, prosopography usually allows a much more exact dating of texts.

For the Sargonic period, F. Pomponio confirmed basically the distribution of Early vs. Classical Sargonic texts by an overview of features distinguishing these groups at Sargonic Adab. W. Sommerfeld demonstrated the employment of various contemporary scribal styles depending on the text type and archival context. K. De Graef showed examples of Ur III texts from Susa and pointed to possible studies of the cuneiform writing.

A publication of the contributions in a revised form is foreseen as part of the "History and Epigraphy" volume in the ARCANE publication series

### 3) Assessment of the results and impact of the event on the future direction of the field

At the meeting, most of the specialists dealing with texts of the Third Millennium from various regions and periods and with first-hand knowledge of cuneiform tablets were gathered. This alone is, as acknowledged by all members, a unique feature in the field of ancient Near Eastern studies. Since all presentations were based on intensive research and could draw on new texts, the results will surely remain an important step forward for all those working in the millennium.

In short, the results may be described as follows: The available evidence still does not help to bridge the gap between the archaic period of the first texts (Uruk IV and III) to the archives of Mesopotamia from Ur and Fara. At various points during the meeting it became clear that the Fara period cannot have been too short, even a guess of one century cannot be excluded. It is a phase of political and cultural uniformity in Mesopotamia. This uniformity ends in the political turmoils of the EJ IIIb period, where much work of detail has to be done to fit in the various local dynasties with their dozens of rulers. The Sargonic period provides us, for the first time in history, with a time frame - of albeit doubtful historical value, namely from the Sumerian King List. It is, however, still problematic, to correlate the textual evidence with the reigns of specific kings. The interregnum of the Gutti after the Sargonic kings still poses the largest problem of the chronology of the second half of the millennium.

The discussion led surprisingly to a relatively wide consensus on some basic matters -- whereby this consensus does not always agree with the published versions. Furthermore, it became apparent that a written summary of what is known of the chronology is necessary. Although the specialists know the details of argumentation, this is absolutely not accessible to others. Even cuneiform scholars specialized in other fields would hardly understand the problems of the chronology of the third millennium. Therefore, the publication of the data, especially explaining the evidence and the methods employed, is of primary importance. The publication of the revised papers, which is foreseen as part of the respective ARCANÉ volume with an introduction by the editor, will serve as an important point of reference for a long time to come.

Furthermore, the meeting has addressed the thorny problem of paleography. Although concentrating on a specific period, the contributions were mainly concerned with methodological questions. Although a good paleography of the third millennium will not be available in the near future, this methodological discussion has made us aware of the difficulties of the study of paleography. The close link with the historical and topographical discussions however alerted the participants to the relationship that exists between cultural features as the style of writing and the general history of a period.

Looking at the intensive discussion of the chronology of the second millennium, the time has become overdue to deal also more intensively with the third millennium beyond the level of introductory textbooks or specialized articles. A renewed interest in chronology and historiographical basics and the appearance of new texts led to a major revision of the hitherto

known evidence. It is self-evident that not all problems of chronology could be solved, but various serious problems were addressed and solutions were proposed.

Since the participants are working on publications of texts and working on studies, take part at conferences etc. the results of this meeting will soon be disseminated. Any serious historical study of the period simply cannot ignore the results of the meeting as soon as it will be published. A discussion of such basic matters as chronology and history will always be relevant for various fields of study.

ARCANE, July 13-16, 2006, Munich

**Chronology of the 3rd millennium: Historical Sources and Paleography**

**FINAL PROGRAM**

13. 7.: Day of arrival, preparatory meeting

14.7., *Lehrstuhl für Resturierung der TU München, Oettingenstr. 15*

9.30 Welcome

Professor Hans van Ess, Dean of the Faculty of Cultural Studies

9.45 M. Lebeau, Brussel: The ARCANE Project

**Part 1: History**

10.00 R. K. Englund, Los Angeles: Dating the Documents of the Uruk IV and III Periods

11.00 M. Krebernik, Jena: The Date of the Fara Texts

11.30 H. Steible, Freiburg: The Geographical Scope of the Fara texts

12.30 A. Archi, Rom: Ebla: Dating and Historical Relevance

13.00 M.G. Biga, Rom: The Geographical Scope of Ebla: Commerce and Wars

15.00 G. Marchesi, Bologna/Harvard Univ.: Towards a Chronology of Early Dynastic Rulers

15.30 W. Sommerfeld, Marburg: Dating the Textual Evidence from the Sargonic Period

16.30 F. Pomponio, Messina: A History of Early Dynastic and Sargonic Adab

17.00 I. Schrakamp, München: Geographical Horizons in the Pre-Sargonic and Sargonic Periods

15.7., *Historicum der LMU, HS 001, Schellingstr. 12*

9.30 P. Steinkeller, Harvard Univ. (read by Benjamin Studevent-Hickman): The Gutí Period in Chronological Perspective

10.00 W. Sallaberger, München: Upper Mesopotamia in the Late IIIrd Millennium

11.00 K. De Graef, Gent: Susa/Iran in the Late IIIrd Millennium

11.30 D. I. Owen, Cornell University: Iri-Saġrig/Āl-Šarrākī: A New Factor in the History of the Ur III Period

**Part 2: Paleography:**

12.00 A. Westenholz, Copenhagen: Introductory Presentation: from the Fara to the Sargonic Period

15.00 Presentation by

R. K. Englund: Uruk period

M. Krebernik: Fara period

A. Archi: Ebla

F. Pomponio: Pre-Sargonic and Sargonic Adab

W. Sommerfeld: Problems in the Paleography of the Sargonic Period

D. I. Owen: Tablets from Iri-Saġrig

K. De Graef: Igibuni Texts from Susa

18.30 End of Presentations and Discussions

16.7. Departure



Participants:

- 1 A. Archi, Rome (Italian)
- 2 M. G. Biga, Rome (Italian)
- 3 K. De Graef, Gent (Belgian)
- 4 J. Eidem, Copenhagen (Danisch)
- 5 R. K. Englund, Los Angeles (US) (only half price of ticket paid by ARCANE)
- 6 M. Krebernik, Jena (German)
- 7 G. Marchesi, Bologna (Italian)
- 8 D. I. Owen, Cornell (US) (travel not paid by ARCANE)
- 9 F. Pomponio, Messina (Italian)
- 10 W. Sallaberger, München (Austrian)
- 11 I. Schrakamp, München (German)
- 12 W. Sommerfeld, Marburg (German)
- 13 H. Steible, Freiburg (German)
- 14 A. Westenholz, Copenhagen (Danish)
- 15 P. Steinkeller, Harvard Univ. (US) could not personally attend the meeting; his paper was read by Dr Benjamin Studevent Hickman, who attended the meeting