The Age of Innovation: Famous Firsts 5000 Years Ago

“The first man on the moon”, “the first Thanksgiving” or “the first kiss” – our society is still fascinated and remembers the exact moment something happened for the first time. The history of the Middle East, especially the civilizations of Mesopotamia, are quite rich of such “firsts in history.” When writing was invented around 3500 B.C.E many things were recorded for the first time. This knowledge is preserved in clay tablets, ancient ‘time capsules’ which allow us to explore innovations which happened 500 years ago in administration, education, economics, law, and royal inscriptions.

This course focuses on object-based inquiry. Each session revolves around original inscribed objects from ancient Mesopotamia in the Oriental Institute Collections. During class we will discuss all aspects of the ancient texts as well as the object on which the text is written. Participants will learn how to approach a complex object and discuss aspects of provenance, materiality, text and context.

Requirements

- No prerequisites. Open to all undergraduates.
- Preparing the reading requirements for each class
- Regular and active participation in the discussion (20 % of grade).
- Two response papers (1 page each) due at the beginning of week 2 and 3. (20 % of grade)
- Five object ‘histories’ due at the end week 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 (30 % of grade).
- Final project: a story with 5 to 10 objects (ca. 10-15 pages) due end of week 10. This story should cover a topic based on the areas studied in class, for example “invention of writing,” “the status of women,” or “education in Mesopotamia.” You can include some of the objects you prepared for. In agreement with the instructor, you can choose a different topic. Details on the assignment, methodology, and expectations will be given in class. (30 %)

Recommend Texts

All readings will be available on CANVAS.

Important Object databases for your work

- https://oi-idb.uchicago.edu/ (Oriental Institute)
- http://cartelen.louvre.fr/cartelen/visite?srv=crt_frm_rs&langue=en&initCritere=true (Louvre)
- http://britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx (British Museum)

Reference and Context materials

These books are valuable research for context under reserve at the Regenstein Library.


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<th>Week 1</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tuesday</strong></td>
<td><strong>Object-based inquiry</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Requirement:</strong> Bring your favorite object to class (if portable). Otherwise bring a photo of your favorite object.</td>
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<td><strong>Thursday</strong></td>
<td><strong>Context: Mesopotamia</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Friday</strong></td>
<td>Response paper ‘My favorite object’ (500 words) is due at 12 p.m.</td>
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<th>Week 2</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tuesday</strong></td>
<td><strong>Telling Stories with objects</strong></td>
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<td>Guest Lecture by Jean Evans, Chief Curator and Deputy Museum Director followed by a visit of the Mesopotamian Galleries at the Oriental Institute.</td>
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<td><strong>Thursday</strong></td>
<td><strong>Materiality</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Friday</strong></td>
<td>Response paper ‘Narrating with objects’ (500 words) is due at 12 p.m.</td>
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<th>Week 3 – First Writing</th>
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| **Thursday** **Readings:**  
Wagensonner, Klaus, “Vessels and other Containers for the Storage of Food According to the Early Lexical Record.” *Origini* 37, 2015, 15–26. |
| **Week 4 – First bookkeeping** |
| **Tuesday** **Readings:**  
| **Readings:**  
| **Friday** First object story is due at 12 pm. |
| **Week 5 – First schools** |
| **Tuesday** **Readings:**  
### Week 6 – First secondary education

**Tuesday**

**Readings:**


**Thursday**

Same as Tuesday.

**Friday**

Third object story is due at 12 pm.

### Week 7 – First time capsules

**Tuesday**

**Readings:**


**Thursday**

**Readings:**


**Friday**

Fourth object story is due at 12 pm.
### Week 8 – First laws

**Tuesday**

**Readings:**


**Thursday**

**Readings:**


**Friday**

Fifth object story is due at 12 pm.

### Week 9 – First legal records

**Tuesday**

**Readings:**


**Thursday**

**Readings:**


### Week 10 – Discussion of the final projects

**Tuesday**

**Requirement:** Bring a draft of your final project including a list of the chosen objects and an outline of your story.

**Week 11**

Your final project is due on Wednesday 12 pm.