

Christopher Woods

Chris Woods devoted much of this past year to continuing work on several long-term projects, completing several publications, presenting papers at several international conferences, and implementing the Writing in Early Mesopotamia as well as the Signs of Writing projects.

As described in our project report (see separate report), the Writing in Early Mesopotamia project has focused on implementing a database that will facilitate the study of Sumerian writing by capturing and categorizing orthographic variation and allowing for complex queries. Our work has also centered upon collecting, inputting, and morphologically parsing texts for inclusion in the database. This year has also seen the launch of our Neubauer Collegium project, Signs of Writing: The Cultural, Social, and Linguistic Contexts of the World's First Writing Systems (in collaboration with Edward Shaughnessy, East Asian Languages and Civilizations). Signs of Writing is a three-year research project designed to investigate, from a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective, the cultural and social contexts and structural properties of the world's oldest writing. Particular emphasis is placed on the four primary writing systems from Mesopotamia, China, Egypt, and Mesoamerica, looking at the similarities and differences in the archaeological and paleographic records across regions and the psycho-linguistic processes by which humans first made language visible. The first of our three annual conferences will take place this November 8–9; a second conference will take place in China on June 25–30, 2015, and will be hosted jointly by the Chicago Center in Beijing and Fudan University in Shanghai. Organized broadly around the linguistic, social, and cultural contexts of early writing, the conferences will bring together specialists in various early writing systems and cover a range of topics, including the origins and structures of writing systems, the relationship between speech and writing, reading and cognition, the adaptation of writing systems and bilingualism, scribal transmission and education, literacy, the materiality and archaeological contexts of writing, and the rise of written genres.

Chris gave keynote addresses at the annual meeting of the British Association for Near Eastern Archaeology at the University of Reading, speaking on “New Light on an Administrative Device from the Dawn of Writing in the Ancient Near East” in January, and at the Ancient Egyptian Biographies: Forms, Contexts, and Functions conference at the University of Basel in May, presenting on “Self-Representation in Mesopotamia: The Literary Evidence.” In November, Chris spoke on “Evidence for Economic Forecasting in the Earliest Texts from Mesopotamia” at the Approaches to Textual Transmission in the Cuneiform World symposium at Johns Hopkins University. He also presented papers at the Women's Athletic Club of Chicago, the University of Chicago Divinity School, and gave a Harper Lecture on Gilgamesh in Tempe, Arizona. Chris's article “Grammar and Context: Enki & Ninhursag ll. 1–3 and a Rare Sumerian Construction” appeared, and, finally, the Festschrift in honor of our colleague Matthew Stolper — *Extraction and Control* — was published this year. Substantial progress has been made this year on another overdue, long-term project, *Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon*, volume 18, which is devoted to the lexical series Igituh, Idu, Lanu, and the Group Vocabularies; the volume should be completed this year. Chris continues to edit the *Journal of Near Eastern*

INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH

Studies and to oversee the Oriental Institute's Post-doctoral Scholars program, as well as to chair the search committee to rebuild our Assyriology program with three new appointments.
