

Introduction

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The eight papers collected in this section stem from the two-days' international workshop *Scribes and Librarians at Work. Making, Writing, Marking, and Handling Tablets in 1st Mil. BC Mesopotamian Libraries*, organized by Paola Corò and Stefania Ermidoro and hosted by Ca' Foscari University Venice on the 26th-27th of April 2023.

This event originated from the activities carried out in the framework of the project LIBER: *The King's Librarians at Work. Applying Machine Learning and Computer Vision to the Study of Scribal Marks on Cuneiform Tablets*, funded by Ca' Foscari University through a Supporting Principal Investigators Measure 2 call, and directed by Paola Corò (Ca' Foscari University of Venice) in partnership with J. Taylor (British Museum; The Ashurbanipal Library Project) and in collaboration with the Centre for Cultural Heritage Technology of the Italian Institute of Technology, directed by A. Traviglia.

The goal of LIBER was to systematically re-evaluate (with the aid of AI) the function and characteristics of the so-called 'firing holes' marked on tablets from the Library of Ashurbanipal, in order to verify if and to what extent they represented scribal or librarian marks of any kind, and how they can shed light on the procedures and mechanisms underpinning the Library's formation, its ordinary management by the king's librarians and the scribes' work.¹

The workshop *Scribes and Librarians at Work* however did not just mark the end of the project LIBER: rather, it acted as a springboard for new scholarly collaborations and ideas, to expand the original purpose of the project. This is also reflected by the articles which form the present dossier, that includes materials not only from Assyria, but also from Babylonia, in a fruitful comparative perspective. Articles focus on the physical and typological features of the tablets (Corò, Ermidoro and Schnitzlein, Taylor), on the role of scribes and colophons (Cohen; Young), and on the serialization of corpora within the Library of Ashurbanipal (Simkó; Häntinen; Rozzi). Notably, the paper given by Rocío Da Riva ("The Divine Love Lyrics in a Librarian Context") and that by Anna Baldon ("Materiality, Firing Holes, and Colophons in Ashurbanipal's Divination Tablets") at the 2023 workshop could not be included in the present dossier as well as Sara Ferro's and Arianna Traviglia's one ("Creating a Dataset to Train Machine Learning Models to Understand Assyriological Scribal Marks") which will be published elsewhere; on the other hand, Kristzian Simkó's contribution, which was not originally presented in Venice, is now part of it, and similarly focuses on the development of a well-defined corpus in the Library.

The materiality of tablets, specifically of those conceived, created and kept in a librarian context, represents the main topic of all the present articles. In line with the general scope of LIBER and of *Scribes and Librarians at Work*, they aim at investigating the organization of first-millennium Mesopotamian libraries and the role and functions of the professionals who worked in them, as well as to explore modern methods and techniques for reconstructing ancient libraries and manuscripts. We believe that one of the main results of the workshop, and of the present dossier of contributions, consists in of-

¹ See Corò, P.; Ermidoro, S. (2020). "Firing Holes: New Perspectives on an Old Question". *KASKAL. Rivista di storia, ambienti e culture del Vicino Oriente Antico*, 17, 303-23.

fering new ideas and suggestions on how to study the materiality of cuneiform tablets from previously unexplored or underestimated perspectives. Such methodological concern will establish a sound basis for future research and study, as well as for scholarly collaborations which will bring even forward the current research on this topic. The methodology applied for the LIBER project has been conceived as a pilot, that can be further extended to other corpora for a full investigation of materiality in tablets from all periods: focusing in particular on the significance of the connection between the hole's pattern and the layout of tablets, we have thus extended the methodology devised for LIBER to study the formats and layout of the Ashurbanipal Library texts. This has been done in the framework of a wider study aiming at exploring how the structural and visual organization of knowledge is reflected in written documents, both stemming from an administrative context (taking as a reference Kassite Babylonia), and from a library one (using the Library of Ashurbanipal as a reference).²

² We refer here to the project *Exploring Scribal Minds: The Structural and Visual Organization of Knowledge in Mesopotamian Archives and Libraries*, directed by Elena Devecchi (the University of Turin) in partnership with Paola Corò (Ca' Foscari University Venice). The project received funding from the European Union Next-GenerationEU - National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) - MISSION 4 COMPONENT 2, INVESTIMENT 1.1 Fondo per il Programma Nazionale di Ricerca e Progetti di Rilevante Interesse Nazionale (PRIN) - CUP N. H53D23000390006.