

Christopher Woods

Christopher Woods devoted this past year primarily to resurrecting and finishing a number of article-length projects, mainly in the area of Sumerian language and grammar. With the publication of his book, *The Grammar of Perspective: The Sumerian Conjugation Prefixes as a System of Grammatical Voice* in July 2008, the time was ripe to begin tying up these loose ends. One of these pieces represents, in part, a continuation of Chris's work on voice in Sumerian, offering a new grammatical understanding of the problematic first lines of the famous Sumerian creation myth, Enki and Ninhursag ("Grammar and Context: Enki and Ninhursag ll. 1–3 and a Curious Sumerian Construction"), rooting this understanding within the broader thematic and literary contexts. A second article explores an old system of spatial deixis in Sumerian, suggesting that the language, at some early point, made spatial distinctions with a three-degree set of contrastive adverbs of location with riverine referential origins. This distance-based system, visually perceived with respect to the location of the speaker, is conceptualized in terms of watercourses of varying widths, the dominant topographical feature of southern Mesopotamia. The essentials of this paper were presented at this year's meeting of the American Oriental Society in March. Other projects have included a long-unfinished study of demonstratives in Sumerian designated for a festschrift, and a paper detailing indigenous traditions of grammatical thought in Sumerian and Akkadian for the Cambridge History of Linguistics. Most ambitiously, and dauntingly, Chris has agreed to write a full-scale grammar of Sumerian for a new series edited by Josef Tropper and John Huehnergard for Ugarit-Verlag.

In September Chris gave a paper before the Chicago-Paris working group, *Rendre visible l'invisible: Pratiques religieuses de la représentation*, on the physical manifestations of the Sumerian concepts of *me* 'essence,' *nam-tar* 'fate,' and *me-lam* 'aura.' In October he gave a talk on recent advances and prospects in Sumerian grammar before the Canadian Society of

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Mesopotamian Studies at the University of Toronto. And in April Chris became the editor of the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, succeeding Prof. Wadad Kadi. The editors are in the process of instituting a number of exciting changes that will take effect with the 2010 issue and will substantially alter the format and organization of the journal. Seth Sanders of Trinity College succeeds Chris as the editor of the *Journal of Near Eastern Religions*, although Chris remains active on the editorial board.

There are two further exciting projects in the works for next year. With Andréas Stauder, Chris is organizing a conference for next April on “Linguistic Method and Theory and the Languages of the Ancient Near East.” The goal is for the many scholars, recent graduates, and students affiliated with the Oriental Institute, who make use of modern linguistic method and theory in their research, to present their work to a wider audience; a selection of the papers will be published through the Oriental Institute. Chris will also curate a Special Collections exhibit, set to open in fall 2010, which will be concerned with the invention of writing from a cross-cultural perspective, comparing the indigenous origins of writing in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Mesoamerica, and China. In addition to the general series of lectures, which will accompany the opening of the exhibit, the organizers are planning an academic-oriented conference on the topic, with, again, the goal of publishing the proceedings through the Oriental Institute.
