

Christopher Woods

Chris Woods devoted much of this past year to implementing the Writing in Early Mesopotamia project, continuing work on the proto-literate accounting devices (token envelopes — for details, see *Oriental Institute News & Notes*, no. 215, Fall 2012), completing several publications, and continuing work on long-term projects.

INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH

Dr. Massimo Maiocchi joined the Oriental Institute this year as a two-year post-doctoral fellow in connection with the Writing in Early Mesopotamia project. Massimo's position was made possible through a Mellon Foundation grant we were fortunate to win last year through a Humanities- and Social Sciences-wide competition. As detailed in the Writing in Early Mesopotamia project report (see separate report), our efforts this year have focused on designing 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. As part of the Mellon fellowship, Chris and Massimo co-taught a course this year on writing systems and decipherments for graduate and undergraduate students.

Complementing the Writing in Early Mesopotamia project, Chris, in collaboration with Edward Shaughnessy (East Asian Languages and Civilizations), launched a new interdisciplinary effort concerned with early writing, *Signs of Writing: The Cultural, Social, and Linguistic Contexts of the World's First Writing Systems*. The project represents our successful application to the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society; *Signs of Writing* is one of four inaugural large-scale, three-year projects sponsored by the Neubauer Collegium. *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, or pristine, 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. Annual conferences and short- and long-term visiting scholars will integrate research from a wide range of disciplines — the over-arching goal of which is to make the University of Chicago an international center for the study of early writing. Organized broadly around the linguistic, social, and cultural contexts of early written language, the project will concern itself with a broad 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 talks on proto-literate administrative devices at the American Schools of Oriental Research meeting in November 2012, which took place in Chicago, and at the American Oriental Society meeting in Portland, Oregon, in March. In December he spoke on "Gilgamesh in Ancient and Modern Context" at the Smithsonian (Washington, DC) for the Iraqi Cultural Center of the Iraqi Diplomatic Mission. Chris also presented on the origins of writing in typological perspective at invited lectures at the University of Pennsylvania in October and at Cornell University in March. The summer of 2013 included a research trip to the Schøyen collection outside of Oslo, Norway, to document the important collection of proto-literate clay envelopes and tokens; these artifacts, which nicely complement those from Chogha Mish in the Oriental Institute's collection, will be published in the CUSAS series. Chris's articles "Mutilation of Text and Image in Sumerian Sources," "Grammar and Context: Enki & Nin-hursag ll. 1-3 and a Rare Sumerian Construction," and "Relative Clauses at Garshana" were published this year. Chris continues to edit the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* and to oversee the Oriental Institute's Post-doctoral Scholars program, which was expanded this year to include two post-docs serving staggered, two-year appointments.