



Universität Hamburg  
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CENTRE FOR THE  
STUDY OF  
MANUSCRIPT  
CULTURES

The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)  
announces an Informal Talk

by

**Prof. Dr. Piotr Michalowski**  
University of Michigan

**Writing Origins, Literacy and the Materiality of Communication  
in Ancient Mesopotamia and Beyond**

During the fourth millennium BCE people living in southern Mesopotamia developed the earliest system in Western Asia, which eventually developed into what we call cuneiform. This graphic tool was first applied to Sumerian, then to Akkadian and eventually to other languages of the area. In the subsequent contexts of restricted literacy, the manner in which cuneiform was used varied over the millennia was very much linked to other visual communicative systems, exploiting the possibilities offered by different materials that were used to carry messages. These communicative vehicles—clay, metal or stone—were functional but were also laden with independent cultural values linked to origin, mythical distance, availability, and aesthetic quality. This talk will offer some remarks on the shifting relationships between power, literacy and the materiality of writing in ancient Mesopotamia and neighboring cultures.

**Wednesday, 29 May 2019 at 5 pm**  
Room 0001, CSMC