

Times of Crisis – The Archaeology of Social Discontinuity in the Ancient Near East (a project-seminar and workshop)

Prof. Dr. Peter Pfälzner

Project-seminar, SoSe 24

2 h, Thursday, 10-12 am

Start: 25.4.24

Room: 141



Content:

In this seminar, we will explore periods of crisis and social discontinuity in the cultural development of the Ancient Near East. To achieve this goal, we will closely examine four specific periods: the collapse of the Uruk system at the end of the 4th millennium BC (circa 3200 BC), the collapse of Early Bronze Age cities at the end of the 3rd millennium BC (circa 2220 BC), the collapse of the Late Bronze Age palace systems at the end of the 2nd millennium BC (circa 1200 BC), and the collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire around 614-609 BC. These events brought about significant social, political, and economic changes across wide regions of the Near East. The seminar will delve into questions such as: What were the underlying causes of these collapses? Can we accurately label them as collapses, or would it be more fitting to characterize them as crises?

Remarkably, all four collapse periods coincide with severe climatic events, supported by scientific analyses, known as the 5.2 ka BP (before present), 4.2 ka BP, 3.2 ka BP, and 2.7 ka BP climatic events. While it may be tempting to link these extreme megadroughts to societal collapses, it is crucial to consider other potential contributing factors. In this frame, the seminar will also explore the resilience of cultures and states in the Ancient Near East.

The seminar will adopt a project-based format, encouraging group collaboration and discussion throughout the semester. Towards the end of the term, participants will present their results in a workshop setting. All sessions will be conducted in English, including discussions and presentations. The seminar is exclusively open to master's students and highly advanced bachelor's students (the prior personal consultation with the lecturer is required)

Topics:

1. Discussing basic concepts: collapse vs. resilience
2. The collapse of the Uruk system and the 5.2 ka BP climatic event
3. The collapse of the Early Bronze Age cities and the 4.2 ka BP climatic event
4. The collapse of the Late Bronze Age palace systems and the 3.2 ka BP climatic event
5. The collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and the 2.7 ka BP climatic event

Modules:

Bachelor: Modul VAA-BA-08.1, -08.2, -11.1, -11.2

Master: Modul VAA-MA-04, 05.1, -05.2, 06.1, -06.2

MA-Archaeology: Modul Arch-MA-3c, -5c