

Melammu Workshop in the University of Tartu, 12.-15. September 2024 (organised by Research Center of Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean Cultures (CAEMC) [caemc.ut.ee](http://caemc.ut.ee))

## **Big and Small, High and Low, Proud and Humble: Constructing Significance in Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean Cultures**

The conference is dedicated to discussing social and cultural prestige in the ancient world. Reputation can be of local significance, global importance or both. Global trends and fashions in the modern world have their precursors in ancient times when communication took more time because the information circulated mainly by word of mouth. Accordingly, social or cultural prestige usually took much more time to develop. Much of the communication between peoples and civilisations – both on the local and global levels – was concerned with the reputations of people, ideas, things, technologies etc. Significance implies a relationship: something is essential for somebody, a group or a culture. Cultural meaning is usually a hierarchical construct, indicating that a person or phenomenon is deemed more important, better and more influential than others. These hierarchies can be created, maintained and manifested in various ways, highlighting the social, economic and political relations and cultural codes of the given societies. The conference calls for papers that study the strategies for acquiring reputation and will discuss the general questions of (inter)cultural prestige in the Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean world.

An individual's reputation can be related to age and gender or personal qualities like appearance, wisdom, skills or physical strength. On the social level, significance usually involves wealth, pedigree and power, and consequently, the strategies of wealth acquisition, claims of illustrious ancestry and power building. Power building plays a prominent role in the relations between political communities, making some polities, or rulers, more powerful and respectable, thus more significant, compared to others. By far, though not always, does reputation directly relate to power, even if reflecting the social or political hierarchies or contributing to their establishment. Good examples are spiritual authority and artistic fame. In the religious domain, the divinities, rites, festivals, and cult places can have variable reputations for different population groups, which can make the estimation of their significance a matter of dispute. In a similar way, it might be challenging to establish the degrees of significance in art and literature, although certain artefacts and literary works, genres and authors surely outweighed others in public esteem. Literature, either oral or written, has been, however, the principal means to convey and articulate reputation to all kinds of things and people and serves for us as a crucial source for discussing the subject.

We plan the workshop to discuss the ways of establishing, maintaining, manifesting and losing significance in all these and possibly other fields. We expect papers considering the related questions in the cultures evolving from Iran, Mesopotamia and Egypt to the western Mediterranean, from the emergence of civilisations to the fall of the Roman Empire. The questions to be asked could be the following: What made some persons, social groups, communities, religious phenomena, artworks, genres or authors more significant than others in various societies and cultures? How did the strategies of attaining significance relate to the character of the given society or culture? To what extent were the variable ways of attaining significance conditioned by the societal and cultural variabilities, or how did cultural diversity contribute to the different manifestations of significance in the Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean world?

We expect abstracts (up to 250 words) to be sent to [caemc@ut.ee](mailto:caemc@ut.ee) until March 31, 2024.