

Seminar SAW
History of Science, History of Text, 2011-2016

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Discussing how language shapes thought

Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum (Freie Universität, Berlin)

Encoding language - decoding script: the case of cuneiform

Abstract – The history of decipherment of the writing systems labelled ‘cuneiform’ provides an interesting perspective on the role of scholarly presuppositions about language and culture. My contribution will discuss (1) the agency of some 18th/19th century (CE) concepts of correlations between language and script. I will (2) try to show, to what extent these concepts as well as perhaps the individual linguistic background of the scholars involved shaped the process of code-breaking. (3) Finally, a sophisticated method of encoding from Ancient Mesopotamia shall serve as a starting point towards a view on ‘their’ possible thoughts about language and script.