

Ancient artefacts at Maynooth University

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Guest post by [Barbara McCormack](#), Special Collections, [Maynooth University Library](#) and [Klaus Wagensohnner](#), [CDLI](#), University of Oxford.

The Russell Library, Maynooth University, recently exhibited some of the oldest material from the collections of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth – a series of four thousand year old Babylonian clay tablets and stamp seals from ancient Mesopotamia.

The collection of sixty-five cuneiform tablets in the Sumerian language and a pre-writing stamp seal were amassed by an Irish army chaplain during the First World War. The material dates from c. 3,500-1,900 BC and includes both cuneiform tablets and cones bearing royal inscriptions from the early Babylonian period, as well as administrative and economic accounts from the Ur III period (c. 2100-2000 BC).



Image provided by Barbara McCormack

Perhaps the highlight of the collection is a gable-shaped stone seal from the pre-writing period, possibly originating from Anatolia (modern day Turkey) or Northern Syria, which depicts three antelopes and was presumably used as a security seal for trading goods.

Other tablets and cones depict an inscription relating to *Sîn-kāšid*, a king of the ancient Mesopotamian city of Uruk nearly 4,000 years ago during the early Babylonian period. This ruler built the temple of Eanna (literally, the 'House of Heaven') and commissioned tablets and cones bearing inscriptions relating to this deed. The inscription reads:

"Sîn-kāšid, mighty king, king of Uruk, king of Amnānum, provider of the House of Heaven, his palace of kingship he built."

The success of this propaganda campaign can be measured in the survival of many of these artefacts, which are scattered throughout the world in various museums and libraries. The Russell Library holds sixteen wonderfully preserved cones and tablets bearing this particular inscription.

Other texts in the collection offer a fascinating insight into everyday life in Babylonia during the late third millennium BC and relate to trade and agriculture. These texts bear witness to the rather complex administration of the Ur III state, which dealt, among other things, with the incoming and outgoing of goods and the assignment of workers to specific tasks.



Image provided by Barbara McCormack

This exciting collection has recently been digitised and is now freely available on the website of the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (<http://cdli.ucla.edu/>), a joint project of the University of California, Los Angeles, the University of Oxford, and the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin.

The collection is on display at the Russell Library, Maynooth University until early February and can be viewed during normal opening hours (Mon, Weds & Thurs from 10am-1pm and 2pm-5pm).

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