

## **WOW! Writing On Wax in the Ancient Near East and Beyond**

Katja Weirauch & Michele Cammarosano  
Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg

In addition to honey, the most valuable product of bees is wax, a complex mixture consisting mainly of esters, fatty acids, and long-chain alcohols. Beeswax was used over the millennia in a variety of fields from medicine to art, from ritual to technology; most notably, it has accompanied the history of writing almost since its invention. From the 3rd millennium BCE until the modern day, waxed boards have been used as writing medium in a variety of cultures and for scripts of different nature: indeed, they represent the longest-used writing medium in human history. Importantly, the composition of the wax paste and the writing techniques to be used are dependent not only on know-how and material and technical constraints, but also on the nature of the script as well as on specific demands posed by the kind of text to be inscribed. The talk presents the most recent results of the Würzburg-based project “Writing On Wax”, which aims to investigate the related writing techniques through an experimental approach involving philology, chemistry, biology, and conservation sciences. The focus will be on waxed boards in the Ancient Near East, as this constitutes an intriguing case study for the methodology and execution of an interdisciplinary investigation of an ancient manuscript culture. Finally it will be shown, how current findings may be transferred successfully into a museum-and-lab-day for school classes. As a Sumerian proverb puts it, writing is fun!