Cuneiform anyone?

In an ongoing Humanities collaboration known as the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (CDLI; http://cdli.ucla.edu/), linguists, museum curators, historians of science and IT experts led by research and library science teams at the University of California, Los Angeles, the University of Oxford, the Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris, and the Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, Berlin, are making available through the internet the form and content of cuneiform inscriptions dating from the beginning of writing, ca. 3350 BC, until the end of Babylonian civilization in the latter part of the 1st millennium BC. With funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Max Planck Society and UCLA, CDLI is pursuing the systematic digital documentation and electronic publication of these unique witnesses of earliest history. This international effort will implement scalable access systems for a wide array of users, including researchers, museum staff, internet users, and even law enforcement officials.

By creating a unified access to a highly representative corpus of early writing and using computing technology to facilitate its semantic interpretation, the project is fostering an unprecedented scholarly cooperation between researchers and cultural institutions. At the same time, “lines of communication” to the heritage of pre-scientific civilizations dead many millennia are being opened to a networked public. As a result, we believe that modern culture achieves a deeper appreciation and understanding of its own roots.

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This proto-cuneiform tablet now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York, dates to the 31st century BC. The account records the distribution of barley by an archaic brewery to members of its staff. The seal impression depicts a ruler with his dogs engaged in a wild boar hunt.