



# Digital Humanities Case Study

Amy Richardson

## What is the subject of your research?

My research focuses on the connections between people and objects in prehistoric Southwest Asia. I currently work on two major research projects. As Co-Investigator on the **States of Clay** project, I am collaborating with the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin, to explore the origins of bureaucracy through clay objects used in the development of counting and writing. I am also Senior Research Fellow on the **MENTICA** project, focusing on applying digital approaches to identify the connections between Neolithic communities in Iraq and Iran.

## How and why did you get involved with Digital Humanities?

As an archaeologist, I discovered early on that digital skills made me a valuable team member! I started with building databases to conduct statistical analysis and I trained in digital illustration. These core skills equipped me to tackle more challenging approaches as my career developed. In recent years, I have been building Digital Humanities into projects at the design stage, to test new ways of answering old questions in Archaeology about the spread of ideas and technologies.

## How have you used Digital Humanities methods or principles in your research?

I now use a wide range of digital methods in my research. These include applying geospatial and network analysis to objects and materials, in order to understand how people were connected across prehistoric landscapes. I am also collaborating with teams on 3D visualisation of objects and digital approaches to display heritage, such as using virtual and augmented reality in museums.

## What were the benefits of doing so? Were there any challenges?

Digital Humanities methods have helped me to broaden my research questions, particularly to find meaning in large and complex datasets and examine major changes in human history. Digital approaches have also helped me to find new ways to communicate my research, to illustrate ideas and reach more audiences.

One of the most challenging issues I have found in Digital Humanities is accepting that not all attempts are successful. You can spend hours (and even days) developing an analysis of your data, only to find that the results are not useful at all! I think the expectation of failure is more ingrained in the sciences, where not all experiments are a success but, for me at least, I have had to learn to come to terms with this idea as a digital humanist.

## What would you advise others to think about when engaging with DH?

I always start by looking for inspiration in the amazing digital projects that are underway and would highly recommend talking to people who are using digital methods in their research about their experiences. Collaboration is often at the core of DH approaches and working with specialists has helped me to hone the methods that will (and will not) work in my research.

## Where can we learn more about your research?

I have written about my work on Digital Humanities in Iraq on the [Digital Humanities blog](#). Our excavations in the Kurdish Region of Iraq are published in a series of fully open access volumes; you can read the latest volume [here](#). For a preview of our forthcoming publications on clay bureaucratic objects, watch Roger Matthews and I discuss our work on [10,000 years of counting, sealing and writing in Iran](#), and sealing practices at the famous site of [Ur in Iraq](#).

### Find out more

- [Amy Richardson](#) (staff profile)
- [States of Clay: Clay Bureaucratic Objects in Early Mesopotamia](#) (project website)
- [The Middle East Neolithic Transition: Integrated Community Approaches \(MENTICA\)](#) (project website)