Boost your Collection: Digital Impressions

Project update

Welcome to our newsletter, where we share the latest developments within our project Digital Impressions: Creating 3D Models of Clay Tablets.

This project is conducted by the VU University Library. Funding is provided by the Npuls “Boost je collectie” subsidy.

Bringing Ancient Clay Tablets to Life with 3D Technology

The VU University Library is making history more accessible! Our heritage collection includes fragile clay tablets that are precarious to handle, but thanks to 3D scanning and printing, these artifacts can soon be explored both digitally and physically in education. We currently offer five 3D clay tablet models on edusources, but limited resources have made it challenging to expand, improve and promote the collection.

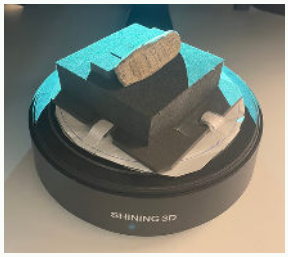
That is about to change! With funding from the Npuls "Boost Your Collection" initiative, we are refining, expanding, and enriching our collection. By integrating these 3D models into Object-Based Teaching & Learning (OBTL), we aim to enhance their educational value and encourage collaboration between students and teachers as co-creators of learning materials.

This project will help us explore the potential of the 3D-models in education. With a broader collection, we aim to improve accessibility, inspire diverse interactions, and find and work with other institutions on OBTL, digital humanities and 3D-scanning and printing. Stay tuned for updates as we bring these ancient artifacts into modern learning!

Visiting TU Delft

Before embarking on the project, we needed to establish what scanner was best suited for the clay tablets. We quickly learned that our colleagues at TU Delft had experience in creating 3D-models of clay tablets and set up a visit. On March 5th we were welcomed by Dominique Ngan-Tillard at the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Geosciences. She explained to us how she had used a MicroCT-scanner to create 3D images of clay tablets that are encased in clay envelopes. We also had a look at the 3D-prints made with a resin printer, which were very detailed and impressive.

In the afternoon, we visited Vincent Cellucci, Roland van Roijen and Nils van Veen in the MediaLab at the TU Delft Library. There, we immediately dove into scanning our replica clay tablet using their Creaform handscanner. Within just a few minutes a 3D-model (in colour!) appeared on the screen. We learned about their experience with 3D-scanning all sorts of objects and discussed the pros and cons of photogrammetry as opposed to portable scanners. All in all, this day was an amazing learning experience and it was lovely to meet our Delft colleagues!



D-LAB
DEMONSTRATOR LAB
AMSTERDAM

First day of scanning

On March 31st we started with scanning the first two clay tablets. After some deliberation, the project team decided on using the Einscan scanner from the VU Demonstrator Lab. We started with creating 3D-scans of a clay tablet (KU 036) and a seal impression (Z27). The scan of the clay tablet turned out wonderful, while the seal impression will need another round of fine-tuning.

We will be scanning every week on either Monday or Wednesday (check the schedule here). Want to see for yourself or ask a question? We are located on the first floor of the library (Library Lounge) in onderwijsruimte (1A-01B). Feel free to come and have a look!

Save the date!

July 1st 2025
Vrije Universiteit
University Library

On July 1st 2025, we will be presenting the results of the project at a dissemination event. An official invitation will follow, but reserve this day in your diary, as we are working on a programme with interesting presentations from experts, hands-on OBTL workshops, sharing of 3D-scanning experiences and much more!

Meet the team!

Hi, my name is Linde Voorend and I am an anthropologist at heart and a projectleader at the University Library of the VU. I work on various topics in the library, amongst which the use of innovative resources (3D prints, VR environments) in education. Within the digital impressions project, my role is to coördinate a smooth 3D scanning process to ensure the quality and usability of the digitalized clay tablets.

How can we create deep learning experiences, ensure materials stick, and help students develop academic skills using objects? These are key questions for the project. I am Kim Dibbets, an educational advisor at VU University Library, supporting colleagues in designing effective teaching. My focus is on Object-Based Teaching and Learning, developing materials that help educators integrate objects into their lessons to enhance engagement and align with learning goals. Together, we can create meaningful, active education!

My name is Mark Bruyneel and I work in the TechLab of the Centre for teaching and learning. I focus on initial testing and defining practical requirements for high-quality scans of ancient clay tablets. It is a great way to make the ancient clay tablets more easily available for both education and research world-wide. Not only can you afterwards use the 3D models for studying the tablets on the computer, but it then also becomes possible to create 3D replicas and use them for object-based teaching and learning.

I am Aidan, and I'm a third-year student of the bachelor Ancient Studies, specializing in the Ancient Near Eastern history and languages. As the student assistant I provide assistance within all areas of the project, for example, selection of tablets and the actual scanning process. One my passions is to make history more accessible, and I am really excited to get started and grant these tablets a new life, both in education and for the public.

My name is Michèle Meijer, and I am the subject librarian for Religious Studies, Theology, and Philosophy at the VU Library. With a background in Ancient History and Assyriology in particular, I am very excited to be part of the Digital Impressions project! As coordinator of the clay tablet expert team I discuss with my team how these incredible scans can enrich teaching at the VU and beyond, and which tablets we should prioritize for digitization. We also make sure that the scans meet the highest quality standards. After all, we want to make out even the tiniest cuneiform signs!

Hi, my name is Anouk Nuijten, subject librarian for Humanities and projectleader at the VU Library. As project leader of Digital Impressions, I am responsible for the daily coordination of this amazing initiative. A Celtic medievalist by training, all things related to heritage and script-history are close to my heart. Getting to be a part of this step to make our collection more accessible is very exciting and I am already looking forward to sharing our results with the world!