



Mediterranean and Middle East History

AP Art History

The Earth and Its Peoples: A Global History
Gardner's Art Through the Ages

Cultural Contexts of Ancient Mediterranean Arts

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING

CUL-1

Cultural practices, belief systems, and physical setting constitute an important part of art and art making and are often communicated in various stylistic conventions and forms. Such cultural considerations may affect artistic decisions that include, but are not limited to, siting, subject matter, and modes of display, and may help to shape the creation of art in a given setting or within a given culture.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

CUL-1.A

Explain how cultural practices, belief systems, and/or physical setting affect art and art making.

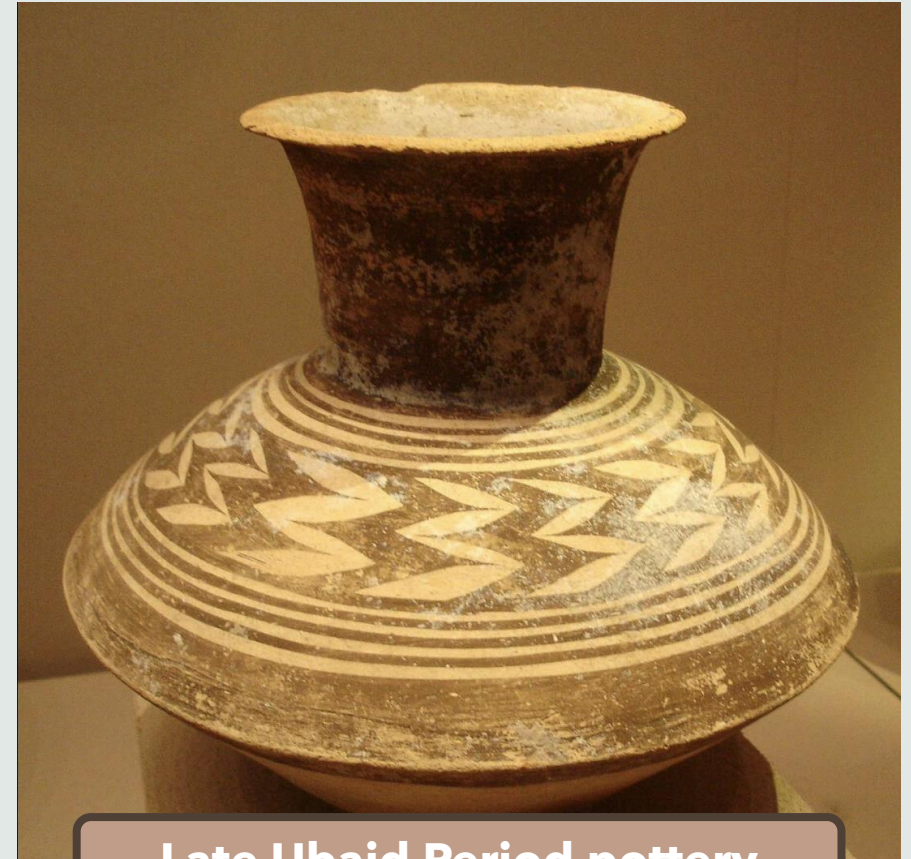
ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

CUL-1.A.5

The art of the ancient Near East (present-day Iraq, Syria, Iran, Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and Cyprus, from 3500 to 330 BCE) is associated with successive city-states and cultural powers—Sumerian, Akkadian, Neo-Sumerian and Babylonian, Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, and Persian. Religion plays a significant role in the art and architecture of the ancient Near East, with cosmology guiding representation of deities and kings who themselves assume divine attributes.

Sumerians and Semites

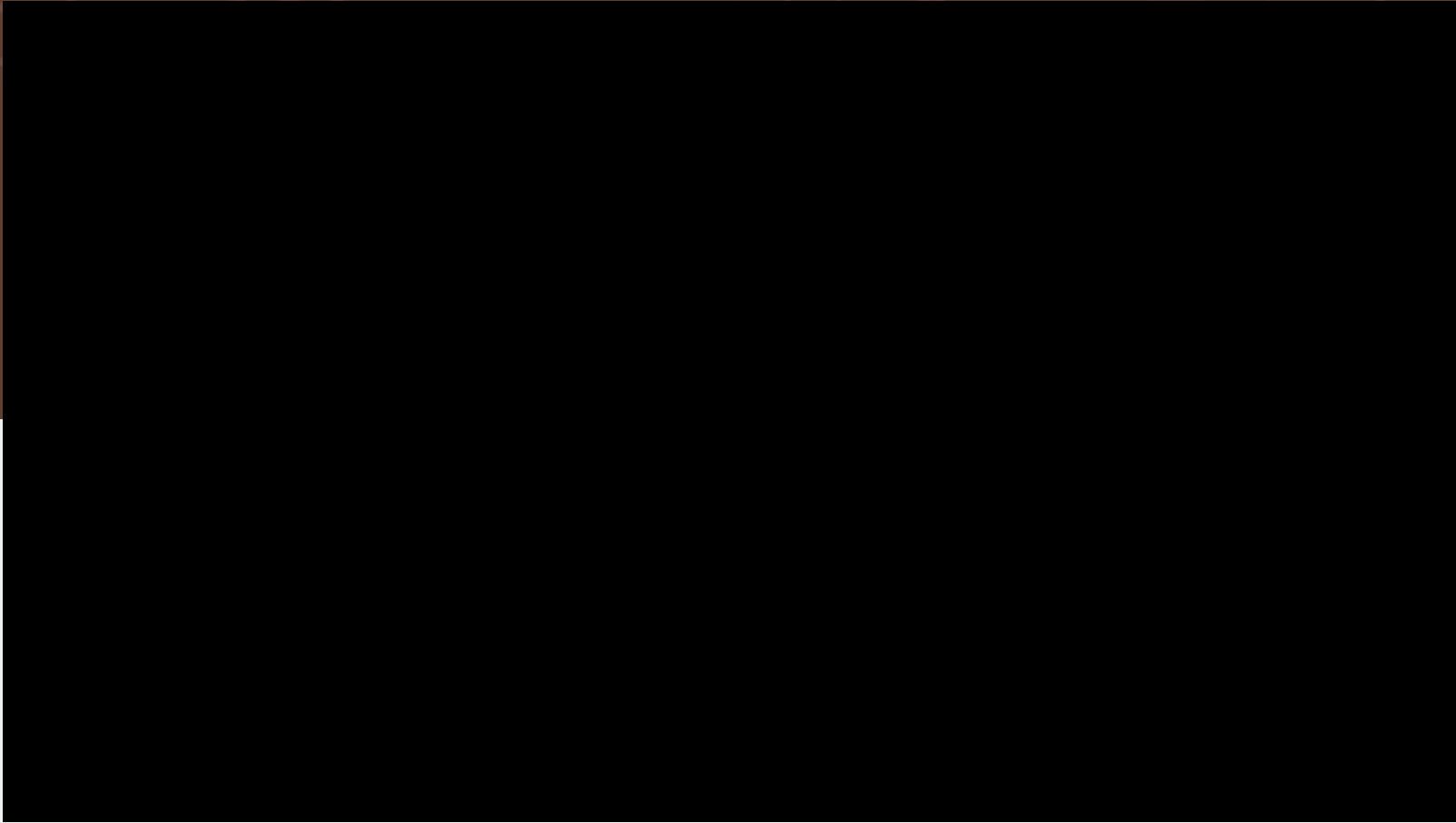
- **Who lived in Mesopotamia at the start of the “historical period”?** The Sumerians
- **How do we know this?** Archaeological evidence from c. 5000 BCE
- **How did the Sumerians affect this region?** This people group created the framework for civilization in Mesopotamia.



Late Ubaid Period pottery

Ancient Mesopotamia 101

National Geographic Video Clip



Sumer

- **Where do we begin?** Ur
 - The treasures found at Ur provide evidence that the Sumerians were a prominent culture in this region - and the world!
- **What has been proven here?**
 - Ancient Sumer was comprised of several (~12) independent city-states.
 - Each city-state was under the protection of different Mesopotamian deities (Read *The Gods and Goddesses of Mesopotamia* on pg. 34).





Aerial photo of Ur 1927

- **Rulers and priests directed community activities.**
- **What kinds of community activities are noted?**
 - Canal construction, crop collection, and food distribution
- **What was unique in Sumerian civilization?**
 - Sumerians had developed an extensive agricultural structure
 - This allowed for greater job diversity in society - the development of a complex society!
- **What are the TWO significant inventions of ancient Sumerians?**
 - The city-state and writing!
 - The oldest known written documents are Sumerian administrative acts and trade documents

- **Sumerian documents provide inventories of goods such as cattle and food items.**
- **These writings are on clay tablets containing written text (cuneiform) and pictographs.**
 - Cuneiform: wedge-shaped writing read from top to bottom, right to left.
 - Sumerians also produced LITERATURE!
 - One of the most famous texts is the Epic of Gilgamesh.
 - Gilgamesh is an epic hero – the slayer of the monster Huwawa

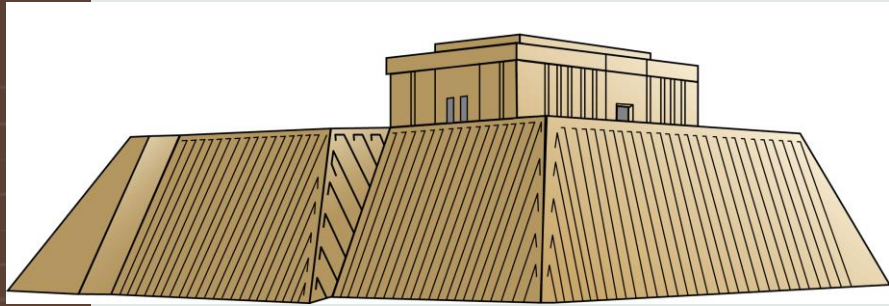


**Relief from the façade of the throne room,
Palace of Sargon II, Dur Sharrukin**

White Temple, Uruk

- **How did the city-states reflect the Sumerian reliance on the gods?** The layout of each city-state!
 - The center of the city (its nucleus) was the temple dedicated to the chief god of that city-state!
 - The temple complex was essentially a city within a city!
 - A staff of priests and scribes carried out the city's administration, commerce, and religious functions.
 - The best-preserved example from ancient Sumer is the White Temple found at Uruk.





- **What was this structure made of?** Mud-brick
- **Why mud-brick?** Sumerians had access to this material.
- **Is this material durable?** Yes, but...
 - Mud-brick is NOT as durable as stone - weathering when exposed to water.
- **What is interesting about the White Temple at Uruk?**
 - It was constructed several CENTURIES before the stone pyramids in Egypt!
 - The walls were whitewashed - giving it its name
 - The temple was on top of a 40' platform
 - The temple was found in the city center
 - It had a bent-axis plan - a contrast to the linear Egyptian temples.
 - The corners are oriented to the cardinal points of the compass.
 - There were several chambers.
 - Sumerians called their temples "waiting rooms" - believing the gods would descend into the temple.

Comparing Sumerian beliefs to other Mediterranean cultures:

Sumerian Cultures:

Sumerians believed the gods resided above the world.

This is consistent as a widespread religious concept.

These temples provide an understanding of the people of ancient Mesopotamia.

The tallest ziggurat/temple was in Babylon (estimated @ 270 feet high)

Other Mediterranean Cultures:

• Beliefs of Jewish and Greek cultures:

- Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments.
- Ancient Hebraic texts reference the "Tower of Babel" - the ziggurat/temple at Babylon (read *Babylon, City of Wonders* on pg. 49).
- The Greeks believed the gods resided on Mount Olympus