CHAPTER 2
ART OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST
GOALS

• Students will be able to understand the cultural changes in the *Neolithic Revolution* as they relate to the art and architecture.

• Students will be able to understand the concept of civilization and the importance of Sumer in the ancient Near East.

• Students will be able to examine the artistic materials, techniques, subject matter, styles and conventions developed in the ancient Near East.
SUMERIAN RELIGION, SOCIETY, AND ART

• **The Neolithic Revolution**: Revolutionary change in daily life that occurred in Mesopotamia.

• People in the Fertile Crescent learned how to use wheel, plow, irrigation and control floods.

• **Sumerian Art**:
  • Was created in the City-States of Sumer.
  • The rulers were the gods’ representative on earth, thus rulers and the priests directed all activities.
  • Labor specialization developed.

• **City Planning & Religion**: Reflected the central role of the local god in daily life. As well as administrative & economic.
The earliest writing dates to 3400-3200 BCE

- Counting using pictographs scratched into soft clay arises in Sumer & Elam [Iraq/Iran]
- Developed into cuneiform →
- By 2600 BCE complex grammar had been developed.

*The Epic of Gilgamesh* is from this period.

- Uruk’s White Temple:
  - 5,000 years old. Built of mud bricks
Uruk’s White Temple: 3200-3000 BCE [5,000 years old.]

- The “bent axis” approach to the sanctuary was standard for Sumerian temples.
- Remember: The corners of these temples would be oriented to cardinal points on the compass.
- The temple itself was small.
- The gods resided above the level of humans (in the temple on top of the ziggurat or in the sky).

*Model →*
The Inanna [?] 3200-3000 BCE
Maybe just a priestess
Imported stone, colored shells & stones, a wig of gold leaf.
Missing body of wood clothed & decorated elegantly.
THE WARKA VASE
[FOR PRESENTING OFFERINGS]
C. 3200-3000 BCE

- *Sumerians may have been the first to tell stories using pictures.*
- *The vase depicts a religious festival in honor of the goddess.*
- *Divided into 3 “registers” or friezes*
  - **Lowest frieze**
    - shows animals in strict profile.
    - Images reflected economics, but also fertility
  - **2nd band**
    - men carrying jars of offerings; nature’s bounty
    - Figures are seen in composite view: frontal & profile.
    - Conceptual vs optical representation.
  - **Top band**
    - Female figure with tall horned headdress.
    - Men bringing offerings are smaller – “hierarchy of scale”
WARKA VASE
THE GODS & GODDESSES OF MESOPOTAMIA

- **Anu**: Chief deity of sky and the city-state of Uruk.
- **Enil**: Anu’s son; winds & earth. [took over as chief god]
- **Inanna**: Goddess of love & war. Later named *Ishtar*.
- **Nanna**: The moon god, also Sin; Ur.

**Babylonian deities:**
- **Utu/Shamash**: God of the Sun.
- **Marduk**: Chief god of the Babylonians.
VOTIVE STATUES: ESHUNNA

- 1-3 ft. in height
- Made of simple shapes – cones, cylinders, but specific in dress and type.

Statue of 2 worshippers at Eshunna ➔ ca. 2700 BCE


← From Temple of Ishtar at Mari, ca 2600-2500 BCE
VICTORY & VULTURES

**Stele:** Carved stone slab to commemorate an event.

- This stele presents a labeled narrative. ca. 2600-2500 BCE
- Victory of *Eannatum of Lagash* over *Umma*.
- Takes its name from scene of vultures carrying off the severed heads of the vanquished.
  - Provides information about warfare techniques & the special status of the Sumerian ruler
- The god *Ningirsu* watched over *Ennatum*
“WAR & PEACE”/STANDARD OF UR

- The Sumerians buried their elite in vaulted chambers, under the earth, with servants and possessions. ca. 2600 BCE

- **Standard of Ur**: sloping sides inlaid with shells and lapis.
  - Called War/Peace, but may have been two parts of a single narrative.
  - Why is it called a “standard”?
The War imagery is shown in the top portions, while the Peace imagery is shown on the bottom of this work.

LYRE FROM UR
[RESTORED]

- From the “King’s Grave” in Ur.
- Bull’s head decoration
- On the sound box are animals with human faces serving a banquet, playing music & dancing.
- ca. 2600 BCE
SUMERIAN ART IN MINIATURE

- Cylinder seal depicting a banquet – from tomb of “Queen” Pu-abi. ca. 2600 BCE
- Smaller scale than Standard of Ur, but similar figure types & rules are utilized.
- How were these used?
  - Seals were used to identify documents & protect storage jars.
AKKADIAN, NEO-SUMERIAN, BABYLONIAN, AND HITTITE ART

- **Gudea of Lagash**: Ensi of Lagash c. 2100 BCE. Preferred statuettes to regal trappings, and also liked statues carved of him in diorite. [igneous/close to feldspar]

- **Hammurabi**: King of Babylon from c. 1792-1750 BCE. He established a central government over south Mesopotamia. He is most famous for his code of laws, which he had inscribed on a black basalt stele.

- **Sargon II**: Assyrian king, who started the building of a royal citadel at Dur Sharrukin that covered 25 acres.
THE FIRST NEAR-EASTERN KINGS

- The head of the *Akkadian* ruler combines both naturalism and formal abstract patterning. 2250-2200 BCE

*Naturalism*
- The shape of the nose
- Different textures of hair and flesh
- Contrasting textures of beard, mustache, and hair.

*Abstract patterning*
- Patterns in hair
- Stylistic symmetry
- Formal patterns of lozenges and triangles.
THE FIRST NEAR-EASTERN KINGS

- Victory stele of *Naram-Sin* from Susa: Defeat of the Lullubi
  - Second inscription by an Elamite king who captured Susa and took the stele as loot.
- What is the symbolism found here?
  - Storming the mountain = scaling the heavens
THE FIRST NEAR-EASTERN KINGS

- Neo-Sumerian state established at Ur: “The Third Dynasty of Ur.”
- Ziggurat built ca. 2100 BCE
- Made of baked bricks and bitumen.
- 1,000 years after Uruk.
THE PIETY OF GUDEA

- These statues showed his piety as well as his wealth and pride.
- They were designed to always be in the temple to give the gods their due.
- Diorite: Hard, costly stone: imported and difficult to carve.
- Image is of Gudea presenting his plan to Ningirsu for the new temple. ca. 2100
GUDEA

Photo of Gudea taken at the Louvre Museum, July 2014.
THE CODE OF HAMMURABI

- Ca. 1780 BCE [18th cen. BCE]

- King Hammurabi wrote a comprehensive law code for his subjects.
  - If any man puts out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out
  - If he kills a man’s slave he shall pay one-third of a mina.
  - If someone steals property from a temple, he will be put to death, as will the recipient of the stolen goods.
  - .... If a man’s wife is caught in bed with another man, both will be tied up and thrown in the water.
KING HAMMURABI

- The stele with the code written on it was carried off to Susa as booty in 1157 BCE
- It shows Hammurabi in the presence of the sun god, Shamash.
  - Symbol of Shamash?
  - Artist used convention of combined front and side views, with exception of headdress.
- May have experimented with foreshortening.

ZIMIRI-LIM & ISHTAR

- King Zimiri-Lin controlled Neo-Sumerian city-state of Mari during reign of Hammurabi.
- Royal Palace was destroyed by Hammurabi in 1757 BCE
- Painting fragment represents the investiture of Zimiri-Lin, his right to rule granted by Ishtar [formerly Inanna]
- Symbols:
  - *Ishtar*: sacred lion
  - *Right to rule*: rod/ring
- Painting symbolizes the benevolence of the gods
THE HITTITES’ FORTIFIED CAPITAL

- The Lion Gate: ca. 1400 BCE -- Lions are 7 ft. high
- Early example of protecting cities through sculptures of wild beasts at the gate.
Proto-Elamite & Elamite records are among the earliest “writing” known.

- *Elam* appears in *Genesis 10:22*

Statue of *Queen Napir-Asu* from Susa, 1350-1300 BCE – life-size

- Weighs 3,760 lbs. even now.
- Has a solid bronze core inside a hollow-cast copper shell.
- Was to be a permanent, immovable votive offering in the temple.
- Shares many characteristics with earlier votive statues. They are?
ASSYRIAN: CITADEL OF SARGON II

- Unfinished [ca. 721-705 BCE]
- Exhibited both confidence & fear. Covered 25 acres
- Had over 200 courtyards & rooms
- Represented Sargon’s grandeur:
  - Merciless & Forgiving
  - Included a ziggurat and sanctuaries for 6 deities.
CHRONICLES OF “GREAT DEEDS”: ASHURNASIRPAL

- ca. 875-860 BCE -- Later than Egyptian ones, but have greater detail. Records battlefield victories & slaying of wild animals.

- A compressed style to make the story legible.

- Combines different viewpoints.
NEO-BABYLONIAN & ACHAEMENID ART


- Babylon was built of mud bricks, but the important buildings were faced with glazed bricks.

- Images on bricks are of Marduk’s dragon & Adad’s bull in profile.

- Babylon conquered by Cyrus of Persia in the 6th cen. BCE.
  - The date of this capture is October 539 BCE!
NEO-BABYLONIAN & ACHAEMENID ART
ISHTAR’S SACRED LION
PERSEPOLIS [IRAN]

Aerial view of the site: The sculptures echo Archaic Greek Styling.

Persepolis was razed by Alexander the Great (in retaliation for the attack on the Athenian Acropolis)

Alexander the Great’s attack also symbolized the collapse (and destruction) of the power of the Persian empire!