



... GUIDE TO ...

# ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN ART



# Smarthistory guide to Ancient Near Eastern Art

**SUMERIAN, AKKADIAN, NEO-SUMERIAN/UR III,  
BABYLONIAN, ASSYRIAN, PERSIAN**

LISA ACKERMAN, DR. JEFFREY A. BECKER, DR. SENTA GERMAN,  
SEBASTIAN HAGENEUER, DR. BETH HARRIS, AND DR. STEVEN  
ZUCKER



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## Editors

### Ruth Ezra

Ruth is a doctoral candidate at Harvard University, where she specializes in the art of late-medieval and Renaissance Europe. Upon completion of her BA at Williams College, she studied in the UK on a Marshall Scholarship, earning an MPhil in history and philosophy of science from the University of Cambridge and an MA in history of art from the Courtauld Institute. A committed educator, Ruth has recently served as a Gallery Lecturer at both the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and the National Galleries of Scotland, as well as a Teaching Fellow at Harvard.

### Beth Harris, Ph.D.

Beth is co-founder and executive director of Smarthistory. Previously, she was dean of art and history at Khan Academy and director of digital learning at The Museum of Modern Art, where she started MoMA Courses Online and co-produced educational videos, websites and apps. Before joining MoMA, Beth was Associate Professor of art history and director of distance learning at the Fashion Institute of Technology where she taught both online and in the classroom. She has co-authored, with Dr. Steven Zucker, numerous articles on the future of education and the future of museums, topics she regularly addresses at conferences around the world. She received her Master's degree from the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, and her doctorate in Art History from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

### Steven Zucker, Ph.D.

Steven is co-founder and executive director of Smarthistory. Previously, Steven was dean of art and history at Khan Academy. He was also chair of history of art and design at Pratt Institute where he strengthened enrollment and lead the renewal of curriculum across the Institute. Before that, he was dean of the School of Graduate Studies at the Fashion Institute of Technology, SUNY and chair of their art history department. He has taught at The School of Visual Arts, Hunter College, and at The Museum of Modern Art. Dr. Zucker is a recipient of the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching. He has co-authored, with Dr. Beth Harris, numerous articles on the future of education and the future of museums, topics he regularly addresses at conferences around the world. Dr. Zucker received his Ph.D. from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

# Map



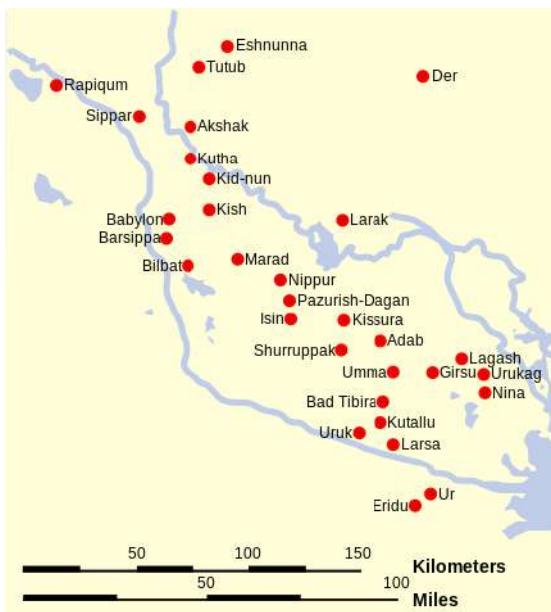
**PART I**

# **Sumerian**

# 1. Sumer, an introduction

Dr. Senta German

Sumer was home to some of the oldest known cities, supported by a focus on agriculture.



Cities of ancient Sumer (photo: CC BY 3.0) <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumer#mediaviewer/File:Cities\\_of\\_Sumer\\_\(en\).svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumer#mediaviewer/File:Cities_of_Sumer_(en).svg)>

The region of southern Mesopotamia is known as Sumer, and it is in Sumer that we find some of the oldest known cities, including Ur and Uruk.

## Uruk

Prehistory ends with Uruk, where we find some of the earliest written records. This large city-state (and its environs) was largely dedicated to agriculture and eventually dominated southern Mesopotamia. Uruk perfected Mesopotamian irrigation and administration systems.

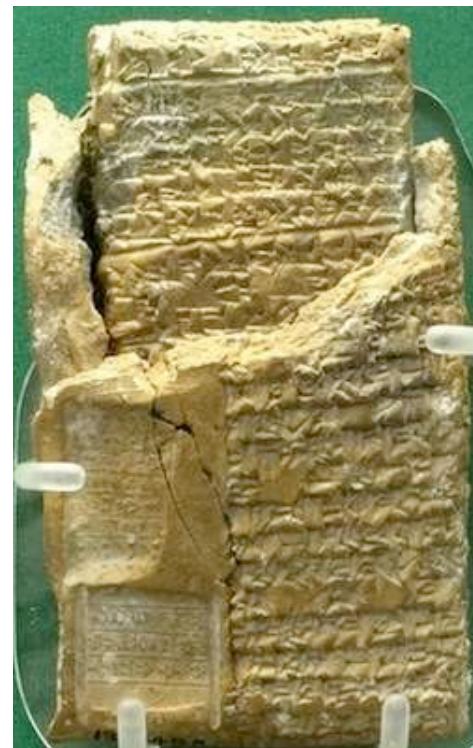
## An agricultural theocracy

Within the city of Uruk, there was a large temple complex dedicated to Innana, the patron goddess of the city. The City-State's agricultural production would be "given" to her and stored at her temple. Harvested crops would then be processed (grain ground into flour,

barley fermented into beer) and given back to the citizens of Uruk in equal share at regular intervals.

The head of the temple administration, the chief priest of Innana, also served as political leader, making Uruk the first known theocracy. We know many details about this theocratic administration because the Sumerians left numerous documents in the form of tablets written in cuneiform script.

It is almost impossible to imagine a time before writing. However, you might be disappointed to learn that writing was not invented to record stories, poetry, or prayers to a god. The first fully developed written script, cuneiform, was invented to account for something unglamorous, but very important—surplus commodities: bushels of barley, head of cattle, and jars of oil!



Cuneiform tablet still in its clay case: legal case from Niqmepuh, King of Lamhad (Aleppo), 1720 B.C.E., 3.94 x 2 in (© Trustees of the British Museum)



*Reconstruction of the ziggurat at Uruk dedicated to the goddess Inanna (created by Artefacts DAI, copyright DAI, CC-BY-NC-ND) <<http://www.dainst.org/projekt/-/project-display/50247Artefacts/DAI>>*

The origin of written language (c. 3200 B.C.E.) was born out of economic necessity and was a tool of the theocratic (priestly) ruling elite who needed to keep track of the agricultural wealth of the city-states. The last known document written in the cuneiform script dates to the first century C.E. Only the hieroglyphic script of the Ancient Egyptians lasted longer.

#### A reed and clay tablet

A single reed, cleanly cut from the banks of the Euphrates or Tigris river, when pressed cut-edge down into a soft clay tablet, will make a wedge shape. The arrangement of multiple wedge shapes (as few as two and as many as ten) created cuneiform characters. Characters could be written either horizontally or vertically, although a horizontal arrangement was more widely used.

Very few cuneiform signs have only one meaning; most have as many as four. Cuneiform signs could represent a whole word or an idea or a number. Most frequently though, they represented a syllable. A cuneiform syllable could be a vowel alone, a consonant plus a vowel, a vowel plus a consonant and even a consonant plus a vowel plus a

consonant. There isn't a sound that a human mouth can make that this script can't record.

Probably because of this extraordinary flexibility, the range of languages that were written with cuneiform across history of the Ancient Near East is vast and includes Sumerian, Akkadian, Amorite, Hurrian, Urartian, Hittite, Luwian, Palaic, Hatian and Elamite.

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#### Additional resources:

[Short video from Artefacts about the reconstruction of the Ziggurat](https://vimeo.com/58910002) <<https://vimeo.com/58910002>>

[Cylinder seals on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/keywords/cylinder-seal/) <<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/keywords/cylinder-seal/>>

[The Origins of Writing on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/wrtg/hd_wrtg.htm) <[http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/wrtg/hd\\_wrtg.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/wrtg/hd_wrtg.htm)>



Archaeological site at Uruk (modern Warka) in Iraq (photo: SAC Andy Holmes (RAF)/MOD, Open Government Licence v1.0)  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Uruk\\_Archaeological\\_site\\_at\\_Warka\\_Iraq\\_MOD\\_45156521.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Uruk_Archaeological_site_at_Warka_Iraq_MOD_45156521.jpg)>

## 2. White Temple and ziggurat, Uruk

Dr. Senta German

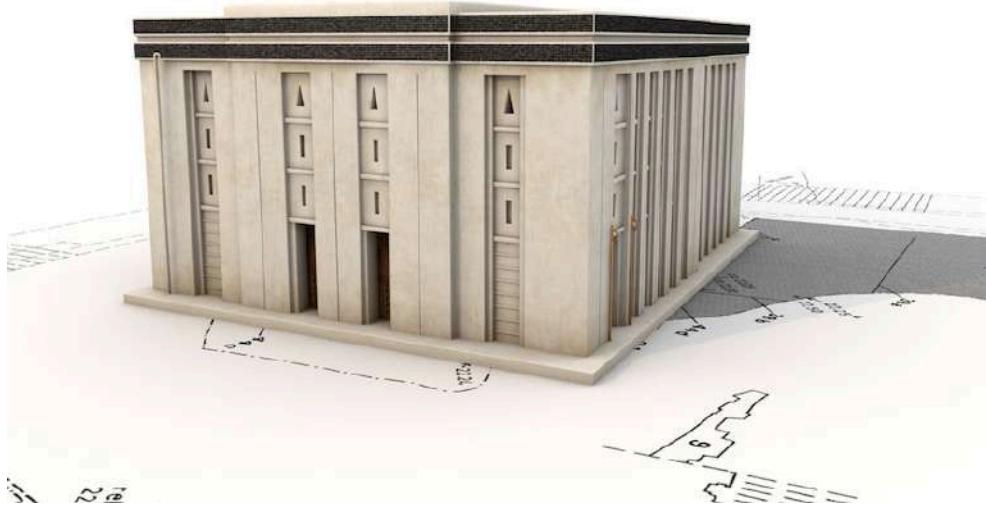


A gleaming temple built atop a mud-brick platform, it towered above the flat plain of Uruk.

Visible from a great distance

Uruk (modern Warka in Iraq)—where city life began more than five thousand years ago and where the first writing emerged—was clearly one of the most important places in southern Mesopotamia. Within Uruk, the greatest monument was the Anu Ziggurat on which the White Temple was built. Dating to the late 4th millennium B.C.E. (the Late Uruk Period, or Uruk III) and dedicated to the sky god Anu, this temple would have towered well above (approximately 40 feet) the flat plain of Uruk, and been visible from a great distance—even over the defensive walls of the city.

Digital reconstruction of the White Temple and ziggurat, Uruk (modern Warka), c. 3517-3358 B.C.E. © [artefacts-berlin.de](http://artefacts-berlin.de); scientific material: German Archaeological Institute



Digital reconstruction of the two-story version of the White Temple, Uruk (modern Warka), c. 3517-3358 B.C.E. © artefacts-berlin.de; scientific material: German Archaeological Institute

### Ziggurats

A ziggurat is a built raised platform with four sloping sides—like a chopped-off pyramid. Ziggurats are made of mud-bricks—the building material of choice in the Near East, as stone is rare. Ziggurats were not only a visual focal point of the city, they were a symbolic one, as well—they were at the heart of the theocratic political system (a theocracy is a type of government where a god is recognized as the ruler, and the state officials operate on the god's behalf). So, seeing the ziggurat towering above the city, one made a visual connection to the god or goddess honored there, but also recognized that deity's political authority.



Remains of the Anu Ziggurat, Uruk (modern Warka), c. 3517-3358 B.C.E. (photo: Geoff Emberling, by permission) <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/emberling/8609236153/in/photostream/>>

Excavators of the White Temple estimate that it would have taken 1500 laborers working on average ten hours per day for about five

years to build the last major revetment (stone facing) of its massive underlying terrace (the open areas surrounding the White Temple at the top of the ziggurat). Although religious belief may have inspired participation in such a project, no doubt some sort of force (*corvée* labor—unpaid labor coerced by the state/slavery) was involved as well.

The sides of the ziggurat were very broad and sloping but broken up by recessed stripes or bands from top to bottom (see digital reconstruction, above), which would have made a stunning pattern in morning or afternoon sunlight. The only way up to the top of the ziggurat was via a steep stairway that led to a ramp that wrapped around the north end of the Ziggurat and brought one to the temple entrance. The flat top of the ziggurat was coated with bitumen (asphalt—a tar or pitch-like material similar to what is used for road paving) and overlaid with brick, for a firm and waterproof foundation for the White temple. The temple gets its name for the fact that it was entirely white washed inside and out, which would have given it a dazzling brightness in strong sunlight.

### The White Temple

The White temple was rectangular, measuring 17.5 x 22.3 meters and, at its corners, oriented to the cardinal points. It is a typical Uruk “high temple (*Hochtempel*)” type with a tri-partite plan: a long rectangular central hall with rooms on either side (plan). The White Temple had three entrances, none of which faced the ziggurat ramp directly. Visitors would have needed to walk around the temple, appreciating its bright façade and the powerful view, and likely gained access to the interior in a “bent axis” approach (where one would have to turn 90 degrees to face the altar), a typical arrangement for Ancient Near Eastern temples.

The north west and east corner chambers of the building contained staircases (unfinished in the case of the one at the north end). Chambers in the middle of the northeast room suite appear to have



*Interior view of the two-story version of the "White Temple," Digital reconstruction of the White Temple, Uruk (modern Warka), c. 3517-3358 B.C.E. © artefacts-berlin.de; scientific material: German Archaeological Institute*



*Section through the central hall of the "White Temple," digital reconstruction of the interior of the two-story version White Temple, Uruk (modern Warka), c. 3517-3358 B.C.E. © artefacts-berlin.de; scientific material: German Archaeological Institute*

been equipped with wooden shelves in the walls and displayed cavities for setting in pivot stones which might imply a solid door was fitted in these spaces. The north end of the central hall had a podium accessible by means of a small staircase and an altar with a fire-stained surface. Very few objects were found inside the White Temple, although what has been found is very interesting. Archaeologists uncovered some 19 tablets of gypsum on the floor of the temple—all of which had cylinder seal impressions and reflected temple accounting. Also, archaeologists uncovered a foundation deposit of the bones of a leopard and a lion in the eastern corner of the Temple (foundation deposits, ritually buried objects and bones, are not uncommon in ancient architecture).

To the north of the White Temple there was a broad flat terrace, at the center of which archaeologists found a huge pit with traces of fire (2.2 x 2.7m) and a loop cut from a massive boulder. Most interestingly, a system of shallow bitumen-coated conduits were discovered. These ran from the southeast and southwest of the terrace edges and entered the temple through the southeast and southwest doors.

Archaeologists conjecture that liquids would have flowed from the terrace to collect in a pit in the center hall of the temple.

#### Additional resources:

[Uruk: 5000 year old mega-city \(exhibition at the Pergamon Museum, Berlin\)](http://www.uruk-megacity.de/index.php?page_id=3) <[http://www.uruk-megacity.de/index.php?page\\_id=3](http://www.uruk-megacity.de/index.php?page_id=3)>

[The White Temple and Ziggurat on Art through Time](http://www.learner.org/courses/globalart/work/185/expert/1/index.html) <<http://www.learner.org/courses/globalart/work/185/expert/1/index.html>>

[The White Temple from Artefacts, Berlin](http://www.artefacts-berlin.de/uruk-visualisierungsprojekt-der-weise-tempel/) <<http://www.artefacts-berlin.de/uruk-visualisierungsprojekt-der-weise-tempel/>>

[U.S. Department of Defense, Cultural Property Training Resource on Uruk \(Modern Warka\)](http://www.cemml.colostate.edu/cultural/09476/iraq05-115.html) <<http://www.cemml.colostate.edu/cultural/09476/iraq05-115.html>>

### 3. Archaeological reconstructions

Sebastian Hageneuer

Reconstructions of ancient sites or finds can help us to understand the distant past. For non-academics, reconstructions offer a glimpse into that past, a kind of visual accumulation of scientific research communicated by means of images, models or even virtual reality. We see reconstructions in films, museums and magazines to illustrate the stories behind the historical or archaeological facts. For archaeologists like me however, reconstructions are also an important tool to answer unsolved questions and even raise new ones. One field where this is particularly true is the reconstruction of ancient architecture.

#### Early reconstructions

Since at least medieval times, artists created visual reconstructions drawn from the accounts of travelers or the Bible. Examples of this include the site of Stonehenge or the Tower of Babylon. Since the beginning of archaeology as a science in the mid-19th century, scientific reconstructions based on actual data were made. Of course, the earlier visualizations were more conjectural than later ones, due to the lack of comparable data at that time (for example, the image below).



Reconstruction drawing of Nimrud, the site of an ancient Assyrian palace, by James Fergusson for Sir Henry Layard, published in 1853. The columns depicted here were never found. The reconstruction is clearly influenced by what was known at that time of Greco-Roman architecture and by John Martin's Fall of Nineveh (1829)

#### The three building blocks of reconstructions

Since the end of the 19th century, reconstruction drawings evolved

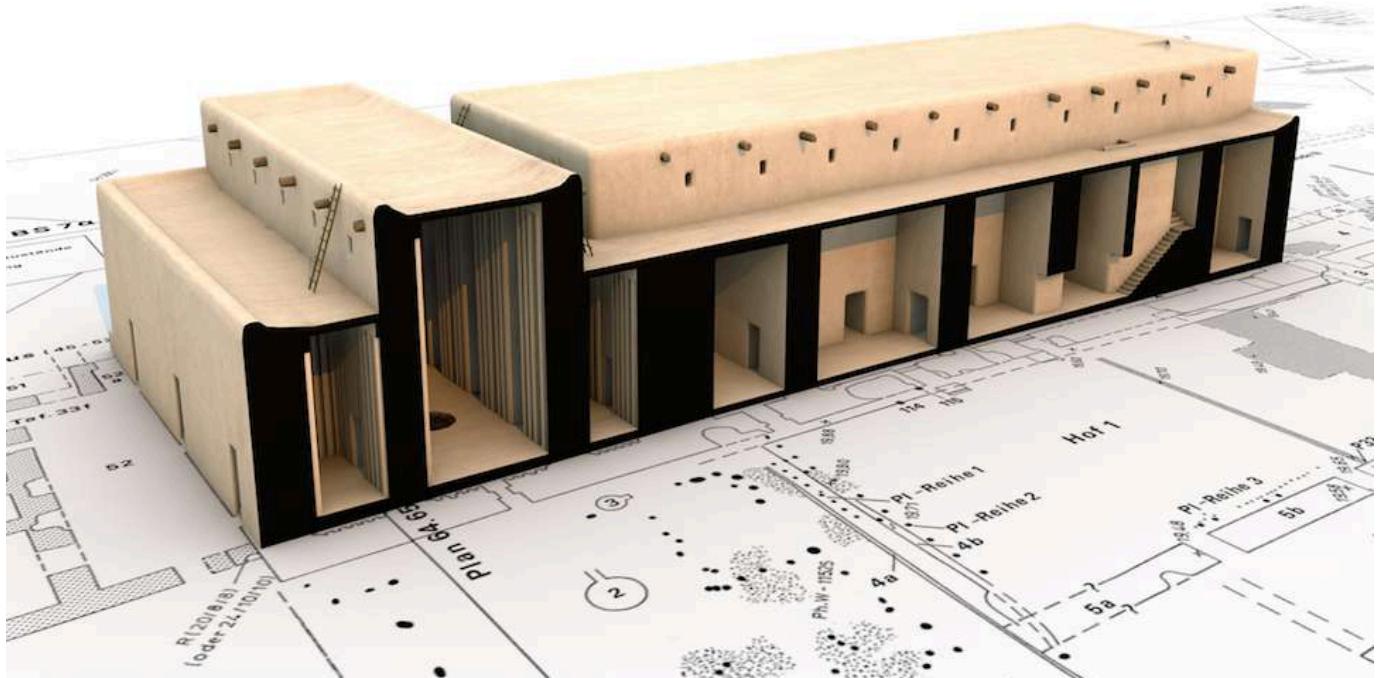
to be less conjectural and increasingly based on actual archaeological data as these became available due to increased excavations. Today we can not only look at reconstructions, we can experience them—whether as life-sized physical models or as immersive virtual simulations. But how do we create them? What are they made of? Every reconstruction is basically composed of three building blocks: primary sources, secondary sources, and guesswork.

The first step toward a good visualization is to become aware of the archaeological data, the excavated remains—simply everything that has survived. This data is referred to as the primary sources—this is the part of the reconstruction we are most certain about. Sometimes we have a lot that survives and sometimes we only have the basic layout of a ground plan (below).



Remains of Building C in Uruk. Only a couple of mud-brick rows have survived to offer a basic ground plan. The building dates into the 4th millennium B.C.E. © German Archaeological Institute, Oriental Institute, W 10767, all rights reserved.

Even when the primary Sources are utilized, we often have to fill the gaps with Secondary Sources. These sources are composed of architectural parallels, ancient depictions and descriptions, or ethnoarchaeological data. So, for example in the case of the Building C in Uruk (above), we know through primary Sources, that this building was made of mud-bricks (at least the first two rows). We then have to look at other buildings of that time to find out how they were built. In the example above, the layout of the ground-plan shows us that this building was tripartite—a layout well known from this and other sites. We also look at contemporary architecture to understand how mud-brick architecture functions and to find out what certain architectural details might mean. Unfortunately, we don't have any depictions or



*Technical reconstruction of Building C in Uruk. The southwestern part of the building is artificially cut open so we can see the inside (for example, the staircase). © artefacts-berlin.de; Material: German Archaeological Institute*

textual evidence that can help us with this example. Parallels from later times however show us that the unusual niches in the rooms suggest an important function.

After utilising all the primary and secondary sources, we still need to fill in the gaps. The third part of every reconstruction is simple Guesswork. We obviously need to limit that part as much as we can, but there is always some guesswork involved—no matter how much we research our building. For example, it is rather difficult to decide how high Building C was over 5000 years ago. We therefore have to make an educated guess based, for example, on the estimated length and inclination of staircases within the building. If we are lucky, we can use some primary or secondary sources for that too, but even then, in the end we need to make a subjective decision.

#### Reconstructions as a scholarly tool

Besides creating these reconstructions to display them in exhibitions, architectural models can also aid archaeological investigations. If we construct ancient architecture using the computer, we not only need to decide every aspect of that particular building, but also the relation to adjoining architecture. Sometimes, the process of reconstructing

several buildings and thinking about their interdependence can reveal interesting connections, for example the complicated matter of water disposal off a roof.

These are only random examples, but clearly, the process of architectural reconstruction is a complex one. We, as the creators, need to make sure that the observer understands the problems and uncertainties of a particular reconstruction. It is essential that the viewer understands that these images are not 100% factual. As the archaeologist Simon James has put it: "Every reconstruction is wrong. The only real question is, how wrong is it?"

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#### Additional resources:

**ARTEFACTS: Scientific & Archaeological Reconstruction** <<http://www.artefacts-berlin.de/en/>>

**Nicholas Stanley-Price, The Reconstruction of Ruins: Principles and Practice (2009)** <[https://www.archaeological.org/pdfs/site\\_preservation/N\\_S-P\\_Article\\_Dec\\_2009.pdf](https://www.archaeological.org/pdfs/site_preservation/N_S-P_Article_Dec_2009.pdf)>

## 4. A precious artifact from Sumer, the Warka Vase

### Dr. Senta German

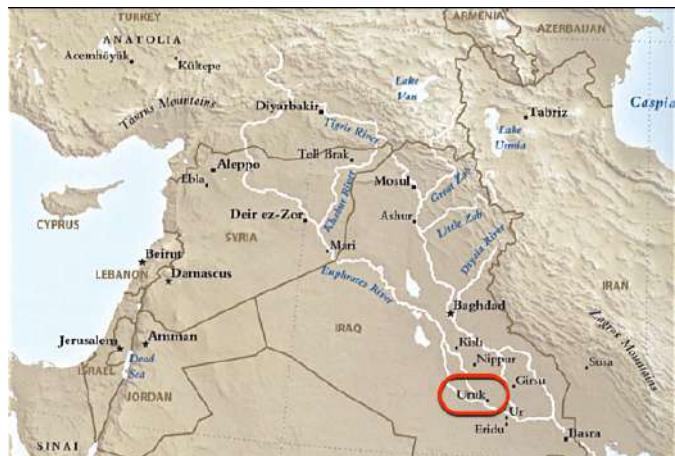
One of the most precious artifacts from Sumer, the Warka Vase was looted and almost lost forever.



*Warka (Uruk) Vase, Uruk, Late Uruk period, c. 3500-3000 B.C.E., 105 cm high  
(National Museum of Iraq)*

Picturing the ruler

So many important innovations and inventions emerged in the Ancient Near East during the Uruk period (c. 4000 to 3000 B.C.E. and named after the Sumerian city of Uruk). One of these was the use of art to illustrate the role of the ruler and his place in society. The *Warka Vase*, c. 3000 B.C.E., was discovered at Uruk (Warka is the modern name, Uruk the ancient name), and is probably the most famous example of this innovation. In its decoration we find an example of the cosmology of ancient Mesopotamia.



*Ancient Near Eastern sites (with the borders of modern countries and modern capitals)*

The vase, made of alabaster and standing over three feet high (just about a meter) and weighing some 600 pounds (about 270 kg), was discovered in 1934 by excavators from the German Oriental Society working at Uruk in a ritual deposit (a burial undertaken as part of a ritual) in the temple of Inanna, the goddess of love, fertility, and war and the main patron of the city of Uruk. It was one of a pair of vases found in the Inanna temple complex (but the only one on which the image was still legible) together with other valuable objects.

Given the significant size of the Warka Vase, where it was found, the precious material from which it is carved and the complexity of its relief decoration, it was clearly of monumental importance, something to be admired and valued. Though known since its

excavation as the Warka "Vase," that term does little to express the sacredness of this object for the people who lived in Uruk five thousand years ago.

The relief carvings on the exterior of the vase run around its circumference in four parallel bands (or registers, as art historians like to call them) and develop in complexity from the bottom to the top.

Beginning at the bottom, we see a pair of wavy lines from which grow neatly alternating plants that appear to be grain (probably barley) and reeds, the two most important agricultural harvests of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in southern Mesopotamia. There is a satisfying rhythm to this alternation, and one that is echoed in the rhythm of the rams and ewes (male and female sheep) that alternate in the band above this. The sheep march to the right in tight formation, as if being herded—the method of tending this important livestock in the agrarian economy of the Uruk period.



*Bottom bands (detail), Warka (Uruk) Vase, Uruk, Late Uruk period, c. 3500-3000 B.C.E. (National Museum of Iraq), photo: Hirmer Verlag <[https://oi-archive.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/dbfiles/objects/14\\_6.htm](https://oi-archive.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/dbfiles/objects/14_6.htm)>*

The band above the sheep is a blank and might have featured painted decoration that has since faded away. Above this blank band, a group of nine identical men march to the left. Each holds a vessel in front of his face, and which appear to contain the products of the Mesopotamian agricultural system: fruits, grains, wine, and mead. The men are all naked and muscular and, like the sheep beneath them, are closely and evenly grouped, creating a sense of rhythmic activity. Nude figures in Ancient Near Eastern art are meant to be understood as humble and low status, so we can assume that these men are servants or slaves (the band above, displays the slave owners).

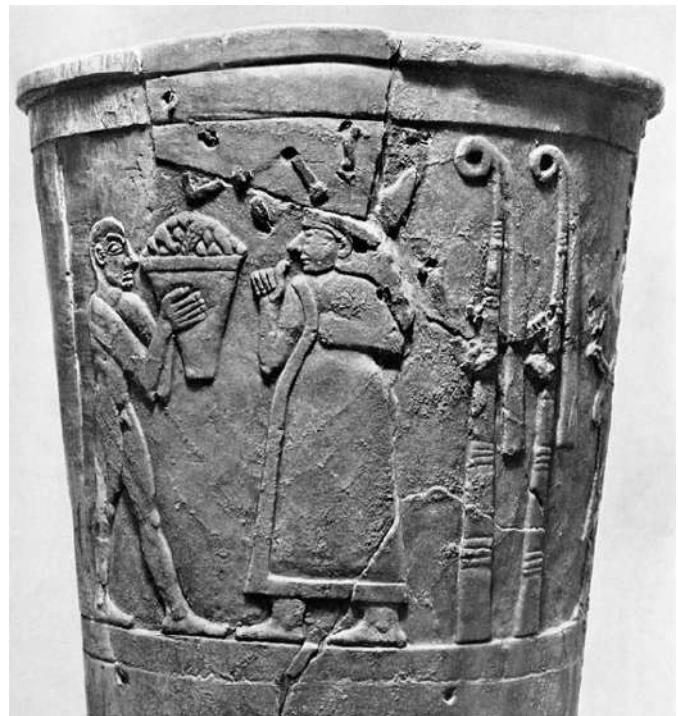
The top band of the vase is the largest, most complex, and least straightforward. It has suffered some damage but enough remains that the scene can be read. The center of the scene appears to depict a man and a woman who face each other. A smaller naked male stands between them holding a container of what looks like agricultural

produce which he offers to the woman. The woman, identified as such by her robe and long hair, at one point had an elaborate crown on her head (this piece was broken off and repaired in antiquity).



*Drawing, top register, Warka (Uruk) Vase (reconstructing some missing areas), by Jo Wood, after M. Roaf, from *Leaving No Stones Unturned: Essays on the Ancient Near East and Egypt in Honor of Donald P. Hansen* (Eisenbrauns, 2001), p. 17.*

Behind her are two reed bundles, symbols of the goddess Inanna, whom, it is assumed, the woman represents. The man she faces is nearly entirely broken off, and we are left with only the bottom of his long garment. However, men with similar robes are often found in contemporary seal stone engraving and based upon these, we can reconstruct him as a king with a long skirt, a beard and a head band. The tassels of his skirt are held by another smaller scaled man behind him, a steward or attendant to the king, who wears a short skirt.



*Top band (detail), Warka (Uruk) Vase, Uruk, Late Uruk period, c. 3500-3000 B.C.E. (National Museum of Iraq), photo: Hirmer Verlag <[https://oi-archive.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/dbfiles/objects/14\\_6.htm](https://oi-archive.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/dbfiles/objects/14_6.htm)>*

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The rest of the scene is found behind the reed bundles at the back of Inanna. There we find two horned and bearded rams (one directly behind the other, so the fact that there are two can only be seen by looking at the hooves) carrying platforms on their backs on which statues stand. The statue on the left carries the cuneiform sign for EN, the Sumerian word for chief priest. The statue on the right stands before yet another Inanna reed bundle. Behind the rams is an array of tribute gifts including two large vases which look quite a lot like the *Warka Vase* itself.

What could this busy scene mean? The simplest way to interpret it is that a king (presumably of Uruk) is celebrating Inanna, the city's most important divine patron. A more detailed reading of the scene suggests a sacred marriage between the king, acting as the chief priest of the temple, and the goddess—each represented in person as well as in statuary. Their union would guarantee for Uruk the agricultural abundance we see depicted behind the rams. The worship of Inanna by the king of Uruk dominates the decoration of the vase. The top illustrates how the cultic duties of the Mesopotamian king as chief priest of the goddess, put him in a position to be responsible for and proprietor of, the agricultural wealth of the city state.



Top band (detail), Relief-carved alabaster vessel called the Uruk Vase, Uruk, Late Uruk period, c. 3500-3000 B.C.E. (National Museum of Iraq), photo: Hirmer Verlag <[https://oi-archive.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/dbfiles/objects/14\\_6.htm](https://oi-archive.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/dbfiles/objects/14_6.htm)>

### Backstory

The *Warka Vase*, one of the most important objects in the Iraq National Museum in Baghdad, was stolen in April 2003 with thousands of other priceless ancient artifacts when the museum was looted in the immediate aftermath of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. The *Warka Vase* was returned in June of that same year after an amnesty program was created to encourage the return of looted items. *The Guardian* reported that “The United States army ignored warnings from its own civilian advisers that could have stopped the looting of priceless artifacts in Baghdad...” (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/apr/20/internationaleducationnews.iraq>).

Even before the invasion, looting was a growing problem, due to economic uncertainty and widespread unemployment in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War. According to Dr. Neil Brodie, Senior Research Fellow on the [Endangered Archaeology of the Middle East and North Africa project](http://eamena.arch.ox.ac.uk/) (<http://eamena.arch.ox.ac.uk/>) at the University of Oxford, “In the aftermath of that war...as the country descended into chaos, between 1991 and 1994 eleven regional museums were broken into and approximately 3,000 artifacts and 484 manuscripts were stolen....” The vast majority of these have not been returned. And, as Dr. Brodie notes, the most important question may be why no concerted international action was taken to block the sale of objects looted from archaeological sites and cultural institutions during wartime.



Broken-off foot of vase, tossed over, National Museum of Iraq, May 2003, photo: Joanne Farchakh <[https://oi-archive.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/dbfiles/objects/14\\_3.htm](https://oi-archive.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/dbfiles/objects/14_3.htm)>

### Additional resources:

Neil Brodie, “[The market background to the April 2003 plunder of the Iraq National Museum](#),” in P. Stone and J. Farchakh Bajjaly (eds), *The Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Iraq* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008), pp. 41-54. <<http://traffickingculture.org/publications/brodie-n-2008-the-market-background-to-the-april-2003-plunder-of-the->

iraq-national-museum-in-p-stone-and-j-farchakh-bajjaly-eds-the-destruction-of-cultural-heritage-in-ira/>

Neil Brodie, “[Iraq 1990–2004 and the London antiquities market](#),” in N. Brodie, M. Kersel, C. Luke and K.W. Tubb (eds), *Archaeology, Cultural Heritage, and the Antiquities Trade* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), pp. 206–26. <<http://traffickingculture.org/publications/brodie-n-2006-iraq-1990-2004-and-the-london-antiquities-market-in-n-brodie-m-kersel-c-luke-and-k-w-tubb-eds-archaeology-cultural-heritage-and-the-antiquities/>>

Neil Brodie, “[Focus on Iraq: Spoils of War](#),” *Archaeology* (from the Archaeological Institute of America), vol. 56, no. 4 (July/August 2003). <[http://traffickingculture.org/app/uploads/2012/08/Focus-on-Iraq\\_Spoils-of-War.pdf](http://traffickingculture.org/app/uploads/2012/08/Focus-on-Iraq_Spoils-of-War.pdf)>

On looting in Iraq from SAFE (Saving Antiquities for Everyone) <<http://savingantiquities.org/a-global-concern/iraq/>>

Documentation on this object in “[Lost Treasures from Iraq](#)” from the Oriental Institute in Chicago <<https://oi-archive.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/dbfiles/objects/14.htm>>

Lauren Sandler, “[The Thieves of Baghdad](#),” *The Atlantic*, November 2004 <<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2004/11/the-thieves-of-baghdad/303570/>>

On looting in Iraq from The Antiquities Coalition <<https://theantiquitiescoalition.org/?s=iraq&lang=en>>

Uruk: The First City on the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History <[http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/uruk\\_hd\\_uruk.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/uruk_hd_uruk.htm)>

## 5. Standing Male Worshipper (Tell Asmar)

### A CONVERSATION

Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris

*This is a transcript of a conversation held in the Ancient Near Eastern Art Gallery of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.*



*Standing male worshipper, 2750–2600 B.C.E., Early Dynastic period II (Sumerian), excavated at Tell Asmar (ancient Eshnunna), Iraq, alabaster (gypsum), shell, black limestone; 11-5/8 inches (29.5 cm) high (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Steven:* Almost 5,000 years ago somebody carefully buried a small group of alabaster figures in the floor of a temple.

*Beth:* And we're looking at one of those figures now. The Metropolitan Museum of Art calls this a standing male worshiper. He was buried along with eleven other figures for a total of twelve, most of them male.

*Steven:* We're looking at one of the smaller figures. They range from just under a foot to almost three feet.

*Beth:* The temple where these were buried was in a city called Eshnunna, in the northern part of ancient Mesopotamia.

*Steven:* What is now called Tell Asmar. The figures from Tell Asmar are widely considered to be the great expression of Early Dynastic Sumerian art. And we think the temple was dedicated to the god Abu.

*Beth:* At this time, the third millennium B.C.E., in this area around the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, some of the earliest cities in the world emerged and writing emerged. This is a watershed in human history. The cities had administrative buildings, temples, palaces, many of which have been unearthed by archeologists.

*Steven:* This is the transitional period right after the Bronze Age, the tail end of the Neolithic when civilizations are founded in the great river valleys around the world. And this figure is adorable.

*Beth:* He is adorable. His wide eyes and his sense of attentiveness are very appealing I think, but of course he wasn't meant to be looking at us. He was meant to be attentive to a statue, a sculpture of a god who was believed to be embodied in the sculpture.

*Steven:* In fact, we believe that the person for whom this was a kind of stand-in was also embodied in this figurine.

*Beth:* So an elite member of ancient Sumerian culture paid to have this sculpture made and placed before the god to be a kind of stand-in to perhaps continually offer prayers, to be continually attentive to the god.

*Steven:* His hands are clasped together, he stands erect, his shoulders are broad so there is a sense of frontality.

*Beth:* Even though he is carved on both sides, he was meant to be seen from the front. Although that term “meant to be seen” is a funny one.

*Steven:* Well, he was meant to be seen by a god. You can see that the hair is parted at the center of the scalp and comes down in wavelets or perhaps braids that spiral down and then frame the central beard, which is quite formal and cascades down in a series of regular waves. His hands are clasped just below the beard. His shoulders are really broad, his upper arms very broad, and then there’s very fine incising at the bottom of his skirt.

*Beth:* But it’s odd to me how cylindrical the bottom part of his body is and how flattened out the torso is.

*Steven:* If you look at the face carefully, you can see that the very large eyes are in fact inlaid shell and in the center the pupils are black limestone. And you can also see that there is an incising of the eyebrows that might have originally been inlaid as well.



*Standing male worshipper (top), 2750–2600 B.C.E., excavated at Tell Asmar, Iraq  
(The Metropolitan Museum of Art) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Beth:* This is really different from Egyptian culture, which emerges at the same time. In Egyptian culture, the sculptures primarily represent the Pharaoh—the king—and indicate his divinity, but in the ancient Near East, we have these votive images of worshipers but not so much of the kings. At least during this Early Dynastic period, the figures at Tell Asmar that were unearthed are very similar. They’re not meant to be portraits of a specific person but a symbol of that person.

*Steven:* But he does look very humble, his mouth is closed, his lips are sealed together, and of course he is wonderfully attentive.

*Beth:* And the fact that his hands are clasped I think makes him seem more humble as well.

*Steven:* There are some interesting, subtle choices that whoever carved this made. Look at the way that the skirt extends out and attaches itself to the forearms, a bit wider than we would expect.

*Beth:* And the torso—it’s just this almost V-shape. There is a sense of geometric patterning here and not the naturalistic forms of the body.

*Steven:* If you look at the back of the figure you can see that there is a little cleft that’s been carved in horizontally. And there’s also what seems to be the indication perhaps of a tied belt that hangs down.

*Beth:* You understand, I think, the artist’s decision not to make a naturalistic figure because a naturalistic figure before the god might give a sense of someone just visiting, just passing through. Instead, this idea of a static, symmetrical, frontal, wide-eyed figure gives a sense of timelessness, of a figure that is forever offering prayers to the god.

[Watch the video.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKMWS9qJ_1U) <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKMWS9qJ\\_1U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKMWS9qJ_1U)>



*Standing male worshipper (back), 2750–2600 B.C.E., excavated at Tell Asmar, Iraq (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*



*Perforated relief of Ur-Nanshe, king of Lagash, limestone, Early Third Dynasty (2550–2500 B.C.E.), found in Telloh or Tello (ancient city of Girsu). 15-1/4 x 18-1/4 inches / 39 x 46.5 cm (Musée du Louvre) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

## 6. Perforated Relief of Ur-Nanshe

Dr. Senta German

More than 4,000 years ago, Ur-Nanshe, the chief priest and king, displayed his piety and power by building a temple.

Archaeologists believe that the years 2800-2350 B.C.E. in Mesopotamia saw both increased population and a drier climate. This would have increased competition between city-states which would have vied for arable land.

As conflicts increased, the military leadership of temple administrators became more important. Art of this period emphasizes a new combination of piety and raw power in the representation of

its leaders. In fact, the representation of human figures becomes more common and more detailed in this era.

This votive plaque, which would have been hung on the wall of a shrine through its central hole, illustrates the chief priest and king of Lagash, Ur-Nanshe, helping to build and then commemorate the opening of a temple of Ningirsu, the patron god of his city. The plaque was excavated at the Girsu. There is some evidence that Girsu was then the capital of the city-state of Lagash.

The top portion of the plaque depicts Ur-Nanshe helping to bring mud



*Detail, Perforated relief of Ur-Nanshe, king of Lagash, limestone, Early Third Dynasty (2550–2500 B.C.E.), found in Telloh or Tello (ancient city of Girsu). 15-½ x 18-½ inches / 39 x 46.5 cm (Musée du Louvre) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

bricks to the building site accompanied by his wife and sons. The bottom shows Ur-Nanshe seated at a banquet, enjoying a drink, again accompanied by his sons. In both, he wears the traditional tufted

woolen skirt called the kaunakes and shows off his broad muscular chest and arms.

#### Additional resources

This sculpture at the Louvre <<http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/perforated-relief-king-ur-nanshe>>

Early Dynastic Sculpture 2900-1350 B.C.E. at The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History <<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/edys/edys.htm>>

## 7. Signing with a cylinder seal

Dr. Senta German

### Signed with a cylinder seal

Cuneiform was used for official accounting, governmental and theological pronouncements and a wide range of correspondence. Nearly all of these documents required a formal "signature," the impression of a cylinder seal.

A cylinder seal is a small pierced object, like a long round bead, carved in reverse (intaglio) and hung on strings of fiber or leather. These often beautiful objects were ubiquitous in the Ancient Near East and remain a unique record of individuals from this era. Each seal was owned by one person and was used and held by them in particularly intimate ways, such as strung on a necklace or bracelet.

When a signature was required, the seal was taken out and rolled on the pliable clay document, leaving behind the positive impression of the reverse images carved into it. However, some seals were valued not for the impression they made, but instead, for the magic they were thought to possess or for their beauty.



*Cylinder Seal (with modern impression), royal worshipper before a god on a throne with bull's legs; human-headed bulls below, c. 1820-1730 B.C.E. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)*

The first use of cylinder seals in the Ancient Near East dates to earlier than the invention of cuneiform, to the Late Neolithic period (7600–6000 B.C.E.) in Syria. However, what is most remarkable about cylinder seals is their scale and the beauty of the semi-precious stones from which they were carved. The images and inscriptions on these stones can be measured in millimeters and feature incredible detail.

The stones from which the cylinder seals were carved include agate, chalcedony, lapis lazuli, steatite, limestone, marble, quartz, serpentine,

hematite and jasper; for the most distinguished there were seals of gold and silver. To study Ancient Near Eastern cylinder seals is to enter a uniquely beautiful, personal and detailed miniature universe of the remote past, but one which was directly connected to a vast array of individual actions, both mundane and momentous.



*Cylinder Seal with Kneeling Nude Heroes, c. 2220-2159 B.C.E., Akkadian (Metropolitan Museum of Art) Cylinder Seal (with modern impression), showing Kneeling Nude Heroes, c. 2220-2159 B.C.E., Akkadian (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)*

### Why cylinder seals are interesting

Art historians are particularly interested in cylinder seals for at least two reasons. First, it is believed that the images carved on seals accurately reflect the pervading artistic styles of the day and the particular region of their use. In other words, each seal is a small time capsule of what sorts of motifs and styles were popular during the lifetime of the owner. These seals, which survive in great numbers, offer important information to understand the developing artistic styles of the Ancient Near East.

The second reason why art historians are interested in cylinder seals is because of the iconography (the study of the content of a work of art). Each character, gesture and decorative element can be "read" and reflected back on the owner of the seal, revealing his or her social rank and even sometimes the name of the owner. Although the same iconography found on seals can be found on carved stelae, terra cotta plaques, wall reliefs and paintings, its most complete compendium exists on the thousands of seals which have survived from antiquity.

## 8. War, peace, and the Standard of Ur

### A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

*This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the British Museum, London.*



*Standard of Ur with viewers, c. 2600-2400 B.C.E., shell, limestone, lapis lazuli, and bitumen, 21.59 x 49.5 x 12 cm (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Steven:* On the back of the US dollar bill there is an emblem of an eagle. In its talons you have arrows, of course, a symbol of war. But on the other side, you have an olive branch, a symbol of peace.

*Beth:* That's not so different than this object that we're looking at that's nearly 4,500 years old, an object known as the Standard of Ur, which comes from the city-state of Ur, which is now in present day Iraq...

*Steven:* ...in Mesopotamia, really the birthplace of civilization, and Ur is one of the great early cities. The word "standard" is a little misleading because a standard is really a flag that's often brought into battle. And the original excavator of this hypothesized that perhaps this was on a pole originally and was brought into battle. But in truth, we have no idea.

*Beth:* So often, when we're in a museum, and we're talking about

ancient objects, we're talking about objects that had been buried, but buried just because of the passage of time. And here, we're looking at objects that were *intentionally* buried. They were part of what seems to have been an elaborate burial ritual. These were excavated in the 1920s and the early 1930s by a man named Leonard Woolley, who discovered about 16 tombs that he called "royal tombs."

*Steven:* Again, we really don't know. But what we do know is that we see fabulously expensive objects.

*Beth:* And one of those valuable objects was the object we call today the Standard of Ur, which is small but quite beautiful and elaborately decorated.

*Steven:* Historians have thought that perhaps this is a sound box for a musical instrument. Others have thought it might have contained something important, perhaps even the currency that was used to pay for warfare. We simply don't know.

*Beth:* So that's one of the wonderful things about this object is that it tells us so much, and at the same time, it tells us so little.

*Steven:* So let's start off with just a simple description. So we have this object that is small enough so that it could easily be carried.

*Beth:* One long side seems to represent a scene of peace and prosperity.

*Steven:* It's divided into three registers, and it's framed with beautiful pieces of shell. Now, this is important because it really does show us the long distance trade that this culture was involved with. You've got blue lapis lazuli that came from mines in Afghanistan. You have a red stone that would come from India. And you've got the shells, which would have come from the gulf just to the south of what is now Iraq. And it reminds us that these first great cities were possible because agriculture had been successful. In the river valley between the Tigris and Euphrates, it was possible to grow a surplus of food that allowed for an organization of society where not everybody had to be in the field all the time. Once there was enough food, some people could devote their lives to being rulers, and some, to becoming artists or artisans.



*Standard of Ur (Scene of peace), c. 2600-2400 B.C.E., shell, limestone, lapis lazuli, and bitumen, 21.59 x 49.5 x 12 cm (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Beth:* And some to priests, right? You had a whole organization of society with different people performing different roles that was suddenly possible.

*Steven:* And you can see that organization represented in the three registers here. The most important, wealthiest, most powerful figures are towards the top. And then, we have the common laborers down at the bottom.

*Beth:* And it's really typical in ancient Near Eastern art, for us to see scenes divided into registers.

*Steven:* So let's start at the bottom and move up. I see a human figure bearing a heavy bag.

*Beth:* And that's really what we have along the entire bottom register, figures who seem to be bringing things to a destination. We see animals, figures carrying things across their shoulders or on their backs.

*Steven:* Just above that, you can see a number of people leading more clearly identifiable animals. You can see somebody herding along what looks like a sheep or a ram. You see a bull in front of that being led by two people. And then, perhaps goats, perhaps sheep, ahead of that, and another bull. These are people that might be bringing these animals to sacrifice. They might be bringing them as a kind of taxation. We really don't know. But people have hypothesized that this is showing a kind of collection, perhaps for the king, for the city. The register at the top clearly shows one figure that's more important than the rest. The king is larger, in fact so large that his head breaks into the pictorial frame.

*Beth:* And he also wears different clothing that helps to identify him.



*Standard of Ur (detail of ruler, scene of peace), c. 2600-2400 B.C.E., shell, limestone, lapis lazuli, and bitumen, 21.59 x 49.5 x 12 cm (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Steven:* He's seated on a chair that is interesting because it's got three straight legs and one leg that seems to be the leg of an animal.

*Beth:* Some of the objects that we see here are objects that were also found in the burials. But I don't think they found a chair that resembles that. That would be fun to see.

*Steven:* One of the objects that has been found, however, are the cups that so many of the figures here are holding. And so clearly, these figures are joining the king in some libation. They're drinking—perhaps beer, perhaps wine. We're not sure.

*Beth:* There's some kind of celebration going on. Some festivity or perhaps a religious ceremony.



*Standard of Ur (detail of drinking figures, scene of peace), c. 2600-2400 B.C.E., shell, limestone, lapis lazuli, and bitumen, 21.59 x 49.5 x 12 cm (British Museum, London)*  
(photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

*Steven:* It's worth noting that even the secondary figures here, that is the figures who are seated but are not the king, are larger than the servants that surround them that are standing. And so even within the register, you have a hierarchy that shows the relative importance of three levels of society.

*Beth:* And then we have two figures at the far end, who seem to be entertaining the seated figures who were drinking. One is playing a harp and another figure on the far right, perhaps singing.

*Steven:* Let's go to the other side. It's a very different story.

*Beth:* So again, we have a scene divided into three registers. But here, we see terrible scenes of violence.

*Steven:* We see a rendering of what is pretty clearly warfare. There are four chariots that are pulled by what seem to be four male donkeys. On the back of each chariot seem to be a driver, as well as a warrior. The figure towards the rear, you'll notice, is holding either a spear or an ax. And then being trampled by the horses, perhaps felled by those weapons, are the enemy. If you look closely, you can see some extraordinary detail. Look at one of the men that has been felled under the horse, you can see his wounds. You can see blood flowing. And if you look closely you can notice the mechanism of the actual wheels of the chariots. There's a kind of specific engineering that's being rendered here.



*Standard of Ur (scene of war), c. 2600-2400 B.C.E., shell, limestone, lapis lazuli, and bitumen, 21.59 x 49.5 x 12 cm (British Museum, London)*  
(photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

## 21 Smarthistory guide to Ancient Near Eastern Art

*Beth:* One of the most interesting things about the bottom panel is a kind of naturalism in the battle that seems to be taking place.

*Steven:* You seem to move from a walk to a kind of canter to a full gallop.

*Beth:* On the other hand, some elements are really symbolic, like the felled enemies that you were talking about before. I don't think we're meant to assume that there were actually just four people who died in this battle. That's the number we see. But clearly, that's symbolic of many more.

*Steven:* The middle register shows a line of soldiers readied for battle. They are in full garb. They're wearing helmets. And these helmets have, again, been found in the so-called royal tombs.



*Standard of Ur (detail of chariot and soldiers, scene of war), c. 2600-2400 B.C.E., shell, limestone, lapis lazuli, and bitumen, 21.59 x 49.5 x 12 cm (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Beth:* What's wonderful about these soldiers is their regular placement. That gives you a real sense of an army that's sort of marching along.

*Steven:* You get a sense of order. You get a sense of structure. You get a sense of real discipline. But towards the middle of that register, you see the actual battle taking place. And you see these soldiers victorious, slaying their enemies. On the right side of that middle register, you see soldiers that are perhaps being captured.

*Beth:* And our eye in the top register goes immediately to the large figure at the center, which is obviously, once again, the king, his head, again, breaks the decorative border along the top, on the left, a chariot and soldiers and on the right, other soldiers or attendants bringing to the king prisoners of war. And we can tell that these are prisoners of war because they're naked. They've been stripped. And they're wounded and bleeding.

*Steven:* So there's the sense of their humiliation, their enslavement, and the great victory of the king. It's interesting to look closely at the stylistic conventions of the rendering of the figures. Just about everybody's seen in perfect profile. We see one eye. And that one eye is not so much looking forward as looking out.



*Standard of Ur (detail of vanquished, scene of war), c. 2600-2400 B.C.E., shell, limestone, lapis lazuli, and bitumen, 21.59 x 49.5 x 12 cm (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Beth:* Right, it's sort of frontal, on the side of the face.

*Steven:* That's right. In a way that is familiar from Egyptian art, we see the shoulders squared with the picture plane. And we see feet pushing in one direction rather than being seen in perspective.

*Beth:* So we can use our visual detective work, but there's still so much that's a mystery.

*Steven:* What it does tell us, though, is that the way that we tell a story, the way that we tell one over time, the way that we organize our society, even now, in the twenty-first century, has a lot in common with the third millennium B.C.E.

[Watch the video.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=528&v=Nok4cBt0V6w) <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=528&v=Nok4cBt0V6w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=528&v=Nok4cBt0V6w)>



*Standard of Ur (detail of ruler, scene of war), c. 2600-2400 B.C.E., shell, limestone, lapis lazuli, and bitumen, 21.59 x 49.5 x 12 cm (British Museum, London) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

**PART II**

## **Akkadian**

## 9. Akkad, an introduction

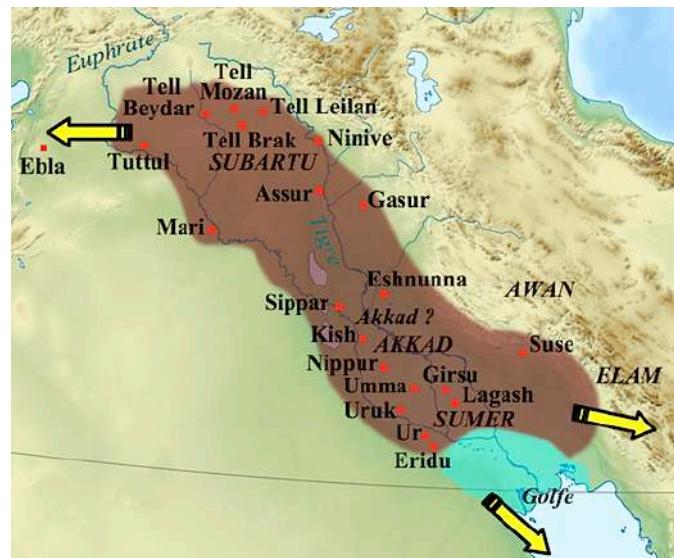
Dr. Senta German

Founded by the famed Sargon the Great, Akkad was a powerful military empire.

### Akkad

Competition between Akkad in the north and Ur in the south created two centralized regional powers at the end of the third millennium (c. 2334–2193 B.C.E.).

This centralization was military in nature and the art of this period generally became more martial. The Akkadian Empire was begun by Sargon, a man from a lowly family who rose to power and founded the royal city of Akkad (Akkad has not yet been located, though one theory puts it under modern Baghdad).



Map showing the approximate extension of the Akkad empire during the reign of Narâm-Sin, yellow arrows indicate the directions in which military campaigns were conducted, photo <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akkadian\\_Empire#media\\_viewer/File:Empire\\_akkad.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akkadian_Empire#media_viewer/File:Empire_akkad.svg)> (CC BY-SA 3.0)



Head of Akkadian Ruler, 2250-2200 B.C.E. (Iraqi Museum, Baghdad – looted?)

### Head of an Akkadian Ruler

This image of an unidentified Akkadian ruler (some say it is Sargon, but no one knows) is one of the most beautiful and terrifying images in all of Ancient Near Eastern art. The life-sized bronze head shows in sharp geometric clarity, locks of hair, curled lips and a wrinkled brow. Perhaps more awesome than the powerful and somber face of this ruler is the violent attack that mutilated it in antiquity.

### Ur

The kingdom of Akkad ends with internal strife and invasion by the Gutians from the Zagros mountains to the northeast. The Gutians were ousted in turn and the city of Ur, south of Uruk, became dominant. King Ur-Nammu established the third dynasty of Ur, also referred to as the Ur III period.

## 10. Victory Stele of Naram-Sin

### A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



*Victory Stele of Naram-Sin, 2254-2218 B.C.E., pink limestone, Akkadian (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

This monument depicts the Akkadian victory over the Lullubi Mountain people. In the twelfth century B.C.E., a thousand years after it was originally made, the Elamite king, Shutruk-Nahhunte, attacked Babylon and, according to his later inscription, the stele was taken to Susa in what is now Iran. A stele is a vertical stone monument or marker often inscribed with text or relief carving.

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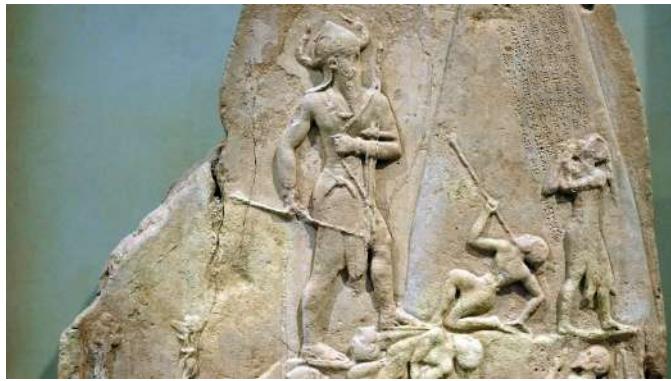
*This is a transcript of a conversation held in the Ancient Near Eastern Art Gallery of the Musée du Louvre, Paris.*

*Steven:* We're in the Louvre, and we're looking at the victory stele of Naram-Sin. This is a really old stele, which is to say, it is a really old relief sculpture. It is 4200 years old. It was made, we think, in approximately 2200 BCE. Now Naram-Sin was the great-great-

grandson of the founding king of the Akkadians, Sargon. And this stele commemorates a really important victory of his.

*Beth:* It commemorates a victory over the Lullubi people, who are mountain people who lived in the eastern region of Mesopotamia. Now normally victory scenes like this from ancient Mesopotamia are shown in registers. In other words, the scene is divided into horizontal bands. Here the artist has created a new kind of composition where we see Naram-Sin at the top of a diagonal where on the left, underneath Naram-Sin, we see his soldiers climbing the mountain. And then on the right, the vanquished falling, and defeated, and wounded.

*Steven:* What I find so interesting is that Naram-Sin's army is so disciplined, they don't break ranks, they're marching in line, there are standard-bearers followed by those with weapons, whereas on the right, you have all kinds of chaos.



*Detail, Victory Stele of Naram-Sin, 2254-2218 B.C.E., pink limestone, Akkadian (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Beth:* And Naram-Sin is so erect and noble-looking and clearly associated with the gods compared to the mortals that surround him. One of the things that I noticed immediately is how everyone's gaze—or nearly everyone's gaze—is directed at Naram-Sin himself. So his soldiers look up at him, the vanquished turned towards him. He is clearly the focal point of this composition.

*Steven:* One of the aspects that I love most about this are the vanquished, I have to say. You have one of the vanquished mountain

people who are actually being literally thrown off the mountain. You can see him upside down falling as if he's falling into water. We see somebody else literally under Naram-Sin's foot, somebody with a spear in his neck. And then most interestingly, I think, to the extreme right, profiled against the mountain, is a man who is fleeing, because you can see that his feet are facing away from Naram-Sin, but he's also turned around—turned back and pleading as he flees.

*Beth:* Clearly what we're seeing is using a symbolic language. This isn't supposed to be a naturalistic representation of an army climbing a mountain, but a symbolic image that tells the story, through symbols, of this event. And so we see Naram-Sin, much larger than everyone else, with his shoulders frontal, his head in profile, and close to the deities at the top, who are represented by what look like suns.

*Steven:* Right. The suns, or the stars above, are the forces that have helped guide him to victory. But also, and this is important, he's wearing a horned helmet, which is for the Akkadians a symbol of divinity. So through this victory he is actually assuming the importance and the status of the gods. And in fact, the whole ascension to the mountaintop certainly supports this idea. He's rising into the realm of the heavenly.

*Watch the video.* <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=59&v=OY79AuGZDNI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=59&v=OY79AuGZDNI)>



*Victory Stele of Naram-Sin, 2254-2218 B.C.E., pink limestone, Akkadian (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

**PART III**

## **Neo-Sumerian/Ur III**

## 11. Seated Gudea holding temple plan

### A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Seated Gudea holding Temple Plan, known as "Architect with Plan," c. 2100 B.C.E. (Neo-Sumerian/Ur III period), from Girsu (modern Telloh, Iraq), diorite, 93 x 41 x 61 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

*This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Musée du Louvre, Paris.*

*Beth:* We're standing in a remarkable room in the Louvre filled with diorite (igneous rock) sculptures of Gudea, ruler of Lagash. These sculptures are 4,000 years old.

*Steven:* And some of them are life-sized. Some are standing, some are seated. One of the most remarkable is a seated figure that unfortunately has lost its head and part of its knee and one of its thumbs, but he is exceptional because he holds on his lap a tablet that has inscribed in it the plan of a temple.

*Beth:* Now Gudea was the prince or governor of Lagash—a city-state in the area of Southern Mesopotamia, what we call Sumer. And this period is known as the 3rd Dynasty of Ur, or the Neo-Sumerian period.

*Steven:* So this comes after the earlier Ur period when the Sumerians had been in control of Southern Mesopotamia...

*Beth:* ...known as the Sumerian Dynastic period.

*Steven:* That was interrupted when the Akkadians, a militaristic culture, took control. But the Akkadians were destabilized when they were attacked by a people from the mountains, which allowed the Sumerians to reassert themselves. That's the period we're looking at here.

*Beth:* And Gudea built or re-built many temples, clearly concerned about demonstrating his piety.

*Steven:* And we know that from inscriptions, including the inscriptions on this particular sculpture; you can see cuneiform on his skirt, on the chair, and all the way across his back.

*Beth:* The inscription tells us that it was important to Gudea that this statue be erected of diorite, an incredibly hard stone.

*Steven:* Most stone is not available in the flood plain between the Tigris and the Euphrates in Mesopotamia. Stone had to be imported.



*Seated Gudea holding Temple Plan, known as "Architect with Plan," c. 2100 B.C.E. (Neo-Sumerian/Ur III period), from Girsu (modern Telloh, Iraq), diorite, 93 x 41 x 61 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Beth:* And diorite being such a hard stone to carve but one that's incredibly durable. As Gudea tells us in the inscription for this statue, nobody was to use silver or lapis lazuli, neither should copper or tin or bronze be a working material. It is exclusively of diorite. He's comparing this to materials that are very colorful, that are shining, clearly preferring this very dark stone perhaps as a sign of his humility.

series of temples including a temple to Ningirsu, in the city of Gersu, in Lagash.

*Beth:* Ningirsu is a primary deity of the Sumerians. The building of this temple, that's apparently very important to Gudea and is perhaps one reason why he's represented with this plan on his lap.

*Steven:* We think the plan shows the walls that would have surrounded the inner shrine within the larger temple complex, walls with fortifications, with towers and with entrances. We can even make out small buildings on the outside of the walls in between the buttresses. In addition to the plan, we see two other objects on his lap. There's a stylus which would have been used to inscribe the plan that we're seeing and there's also a tool that's in not very good condition but we can still make out that's a tool for measurement and we can see inscribed on it regular graduations.



*Seated Gudea holding Temple Plan (detail), c. 2100 B.C.E., diorite (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Steven:* Well, his hands are clasped in all of these images. His feet are together, and there is a real sense of quiet dignity.

*Beth:* These sculptures were erected in temples and in a way, took the place of Gudea before the gods continually offering prayer.

*Steven:* So we have this man, Gudea, and he's known for building a



*Seated Gudea holding Temple Plan (detail of stylus), c. 2100 B.C.E., diorite (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

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*Beth:* Everything about the sculpture is designed to last for eternity. There are no projecting parts, the arms are close to the body, there's stone between the arms and the torso, there's no openings or gaps surrounding the chair that he sits on or between his feet and the base.

*Steven:* And in that way, at least, it may remind us of the sculpture that's being produced in ancient Egypt at this time.

*Beth:* Gudea is always shown barefoot, and we do have heads here in the gallery where he's shown typically wearing a hat that is maybe made out of wool or fur, but it's very different from the kinds of crowns worn by the earlier Akkadian rulers.



*Gudea, c. 2100 B.C.E. (Neo-Sumerian/Ur III period), from Girsu (modern Telloh, Iraq), diorite (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Steven:* And the face is clean-shaven in contrast with the elaborate beards of the Akkadians.

*Beth:* These are not really portraits of Gudea. This is a kind of idealized image of Gudea.

*Steven:* And we see that idealization not only in the beauty of the shape of the face, but also in the emphasis on the musculature. This is usually understood as an expression of the favor of the gods.

*Beth:* There is a smaller sculpture here made out a lighter color of

diorite where the figure is much more intact, and he's interestingly holding a jar from which water spouts in streams in two directions.

*Steven:* And even fish play in those streams.



*Gudea (detail), c. 2120 B.C.E. (Neo-Sumerian/Ur III period), from Girsu (modern Telloh, Iraq), dolerite (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: AlintheIA, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) <<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gudea.jpg>>*

*Beth:* And this an indication of the bounty of Gudea's reign for his people. And *that's* assured by his piety toward the gods.

*Steven:* In all of these sculptures, the face is wide-eyed and the eyes are framed by these wonderful arc-ing eyebrows. Everything about this speaks to a kind of piety, a kind of simplicity, a kind of reverence.

[Watch the video.](#) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBjYUTYas9E>>

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### Additional resources

[This sculpture at the Louvre](#) <<http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/headless-statue-gudea-prince-lagash>>

[Translations of Gudea cylinders A and B](#) <<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section2/tr217.htm>>

## 12. King Ur-Nammu's Ziggurat of Ur

Dr. Senta German



Ziggurat of Ur, c. 2100 B.C.E. mud brick and baked brick, Tell el-Mukayyar, Iraq (largely reconstructed)

The great Ziggurat of Ur has been reconstructed twice, in antiquity and in the 1980s—what's left of the original?

### The Great Ziggurat

The ziggurat is the most distinctive architectural invention of the Ancient Near East. Like an ancient Egyptian pyramid, an ancient Near Eastern ziggurat has four sides and rises up to the realm of the gods. However, unlike Egyptian pyramids, the exterior of Ziggurats were not smooth but tiered to accommodate the work which took place at the structure as well as the administrative oversight and

religious rituals essential to Ancient Near Eastern cities. Ziggurats are found scattered around what is today Iraq and Iran, and stand as an imposing testament to the power and skill of the ancient culture that produced them.

One of the largest and best-preserved ziggurats of Mesopotamia is the great Ziggurat at Ur. Small excavations occurred at the site around the turn of the twentieth century, and in the 1920s Sir Leonard Woolley, in a joint project with the University of Pennsylvania Museum in Philadelphia and the British Museum in London, revealed the monument in its entirety.

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What Woolley found was a massive rectangular pyramidal structure, oriented to true North, 210 by 150 feet, constructed with three levels of terraces, standing originally between 70 and 100 feet high. Three monumental staircases led up to a gate at the first terrace level. Next, a single staircase rose to a second terrace which supported a platform on which a temple and the final and highest terrace stood. The core of the ziggurat is made of mud brick covered with baked bricks laid with bitumen, a naturally occurring tar. Each of the baked bricks measured about 11.5 x 11.5 x 2.75 inches and weighed as much as 33 pounds. The lower portion of the ziggurat, which supported the first terrace, would have used some 720,000 baked bricks. The resources needed to build the Ziggurat at Ur are staggering.



Leonard Woolley photo of the Ziggurat of Ur with workers, Ziggurat of Ur, c. 2100 B.C.E., Woolley excavation workers (Tell el-Mukayyar, Iraq)

#### Moon goddess Nanna

The Ziggurat at Ur and the temple on its top were built around 2100 B.C.E. by the king Ur-Nammu of the Third Dynasty of Ur for the moon goddess Nanna, the divine patron of the city state. The structure would have been the highest point in the city by far and, like the spire of a medieval cathedral, would have been visible for miles around, a focal point for travelers and the pious alike. As the Ziggurat supported the temple of the patron god of the city of Ur, it is likely that it was the place where the citizens of Ur would bring agricultural surplus and where they would go to receive their regular food allotments. In antiquity, to visit the ziggurat at Ur was to seek both spiritual and physical nourishment.

Clearly the most important part of the ziggurat at Ur was the Nanna temple at its top, but this, unfortunately, has not survived. Some blue glazed bricks have been found which archaeologists suspect might have been part of the temple decoration. The lower parts of the ziggurat, which do survive, include amazing details of engineering and design. For instance, because the unbaked mud brick core of the temple would, according to the season, be alternatively more or less damp, the architects included holes through the baked exterior layer of the temple allowing water to evaporate from its core. Additionally, drains were built into the ziggurat's terraces to carry away the winter rains.



Ziggurat at Ali Air Base Iraq, 2005 Ziggurat of Ur, partly restored, c. 2100 B.C.E. mudbrick and baked brick Tell el-Mukayyar, Iraq

#### Hussein's assumption

The Ziggurat at Ur has been restored twice. The first restoration was in antiquity. The last Neo-Babylonian king, Nabodinus, apparently replaced the two upper terraces of the structure in the 6th century B.C.E. Some 2400 years later in the 1980s, Saddam Hussein restored the façade of the massive lower foundation of the ziggurat, including the three monumental staircases leading up to the gate at the first terrace. Since this most recent restoration, however, the Ziggurat at Ur has experienced some damage. During the recent war led by American and coalition forces, Saddam Hussein parked his MiG fighter jets next to the Ziggurat, believing that the bombers would spare them for fear of destroying the ancient site. Hussein's assumptions proved only partially true as the ziggurat sustained some damage from American and coalition bombardment.



US soldiers descend the Ziggurat of Ur, Tell el-Mukayyar, Iraq (public domain)

**PART IV**

# **Babylonian**

## 13. Visiting Babylon today

### A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Lisa Ackerman



Map showing Babylon (map data © Google)

*This is the transcript of a video produced in cooperation with the World Monuments Fund.*

*Beth:* I'm here in the offices of the World Monuments Fund and we're going to talk about the ancient site of Babylon that so many of us have heard of from the Bible—we've heard of the story of the Tower of Babel, which may have come from a ziggurat in ancient Babylon. But what is it like to visit Babylon today?

*Lisa:* It's great to talk about Babylon because it's one of my favorite places. We've learned a lot in the seven years that World Monuments Fund has been working on the site. Babylon conjures up these great images of the ancient world, and many achievements, and famous people. But it actually is a very humble-looking site. People are often shocked that it's mud-brick, that it's simple construction technologies and except for the raised brick animal figures that are very famous, the rest of it doesn't look the way we expect.



*Babylon in 2009, original city walls (left) next to Nebuchadnezzar's Palace (right), reconstructed in the 1980s (photo: Gwendolen Cates/World Monuments Fund)*

*Beth:* We read about Hammurabi, King of Babylon (1792-1740 B.C.E.) and his building campaign and his Code of Laws, and then later, during the period that we call Neo-Babylonia, when Nebuchadnezzar, King of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (c. 605-562 B.C.E.), rebuilt the walls and made luxurious palaces and how it was this center for learning and the arts. And the site of one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon and an imperial capital.



*Circle of Juan de la Corte, The burning of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's Army, c.1630-60, oil on canvas, 112 x 66 cm (Fundación Banco Santander)*

*Lisa:* I think it's beautiful in so many ways. It's a long, particularly beautiful bend of the Euphrates, lined with palm trees and certain times of the year, very green and lush. Other times of the year, sandstorms, but I think that's what made it a desirable settlement and antiquity that you could grow things very easily and it was clearly along a trade route.

*Beth:* And we know that the site has been occupied for thousands of years. People still live adjacent to the ruins today.



*Babylon and its cultural landscape: a farm to the north of the site, 2012 (photo: Jeff Allen/World Monuments Fund)*

*Lisa:* One of the great surprises of the site is we think that these sites are abandoned. Because we look at the ruins and we don't see people living right there, but in fact, less than a 30-minute walk away from the most famous parts of the site are agricultural communities and thriving modern settlements. Before the invasion in the early 2000s,

this was the most visited site in all of Iraq. And virtually every Iraqi, at some point, during either his or her schooling or in their adult life, came to Babylon. And so it's a site that people really loved and even today, where there is not international tourism, Iraqis still come to the site. And a lot of them come just to take a walk along the river or picnic. So it's great to see people using the site even amidst the chaos we have today.

*Beth:* Part of the work of the World Monuments Fund is to—when things settle down politically—make this a place that people can come visit. And to make it a place that's sustainable for tourism, while still protecting the site and making future archaeological excavations possible.



*Nebuchadnezzar museum and courtyard after rehabilitation, 2011 (photo: Jeff Allen/World Monuments Fund)*

*Lisa:* We were invited by the Iraq State Board of Antiquities and Heritage in 2007 to work with them to do several things. One was to create a site management plan. One was to do condition surveys, and the final element, which is what we're doing today, is to develop conservation plans that we're implementing on site. And very much with an idea that international tourism will return to Iraq before too long. And one of the things we're working on right now is developing tourism paths. And in the meantime, we work very intensively with a group of State Board of Antiquity employees at Babylon—archaeologists, engineers, architects, conservators, and then our international experts come and go as needed on the site.

*Beth:* So the site was excavated in the early twentieth century/very late nineteenth century by Robert Koldewey (excavations began in 1897). Much of what he excavated ended up in museums around the world, including, most famously, the amazingly beautiful enormous Ishtar Gate, which is in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin. But quite a bit still remains on the site.



*Robert Koldewey*



*Ishtar Gate and Processional Way (Reconstruction), Babylon, c. 575 B.C.E., glazed mud brick (Pergamon Museum, Berlin) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Lisa:* There are dozens of buildings that were excavated that are still visible on the site. And even the Ishtar Gate, in fact, its predecessor is still there on the site. So what was taken away to Berlin was a top layer. And then it turns out that there are two more layers of the Gate. So they just kept building on top. So you were asking me about what it's like to visit the site today and I think one of the great surprises is even though mud-brick is a very humble material, the monumentality of the site is in the scale. So you look at these walls and they are meters and meters thick and they are 20-feet high.



*Cleaning out drainage gutters at Ishtar Gate for the rainy season, Babylon, 2012 (photo: Jeff Allen/World Monuments Fund)*

*Beth:* You were talking a minute ago about the rebuilding that happened several times in antiquity, but there's recent rebuilding by Saddam Hussein, who saw himself as a heir to Nebuchadnezzar, the sixth-century ruler of Babylon. And then there have been restoration efforts that have gone on in the twentieth century since the discovery of the location of Babylon.

*Lisa:* Well I think Babylon has a history like many sites in Europe and the Middle East. It was excavated at the end of the nineteenth century, spilling into the early twentieth century. Then because of World War I, excavation activity stopped. Then between the wars it resumed a little

bit again. And then there was quite a bit of activity in the 1950s and 1960s. Then, in the 1970s and 80s, there were a lot of reconstructions and a lot of restoration efforts on the site. One of the things that you can see if you look at "before" and "after" images...so there's the palace, which we can see what it looked like in the 1920s and 30s, and then you see in the 1980s that what were ragged footprints of buildings have now all been made very uniform. And so that's a little bit of a concern to understand exactly how the reconstruction was undertaken.



*View of excavations at Babylon, 1932*

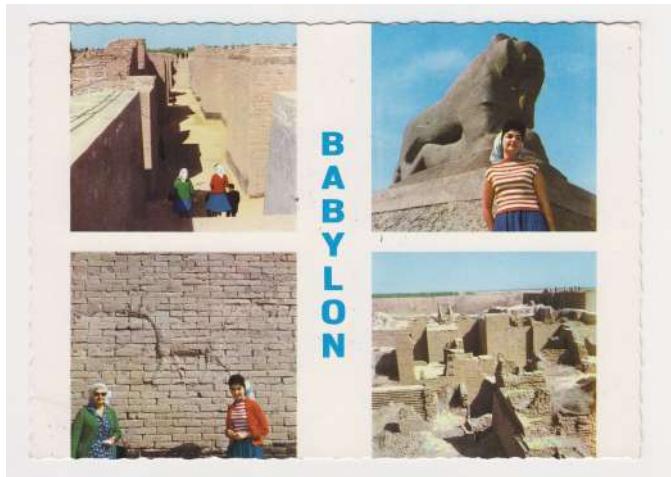
*Beth:* So there's some concern that the restorations that happened and the rebuilding that happened under Hussein, were not undertaken with the kind of scientific archaeology that would be ideal in the twenty-first century.

*Lisa:* It's not just Babylon that suffers from this. There's a taste that ebbs and flows about how we look at archaeological sites. At one end of the pendulum is very heavy reconstruction, so that we understand what we're looking at; at the other end of the pendulum is: do nothing and leave it in a pure state. I think here we don't necessarily know enough about how the decisions were made, and it does appear to have been made more for political than scientific reasons.



*Reconstructed Greek Theater with banner, Babylon, 2009 (photo: Jeff Allen/World Monuments Fund)*

*Beth:* To get a *real* sense of that imperial city and it's scale and what it meant in the ancient eras, we'd have to go.



Babylon postcard, 20th century (photo: ebay)

*Lisa:* I hope that we all have that chance. I think what will happen if you do get to go, is not just that sense of grandeur and scale about the ancient world, but I think what you'll find fascinating is the world we see today at Babylon. That it's not a static museum experience. It's the birds that fly overhead, it's the dates we might find on the ground, it's the honey we might buy from local residents, and it's wandering around the site and imagining both the ancient world and maybe thinking about where we're going to go and relax later in the day sitting by the river, enjoying a beautiful vista that I think people have enjoyed for 5,000 years.



Ancient city of Babylon (public domain)

Watch the video. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ya1Io0F468c>>

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#### Additional resources:

*New York Times* article on how the World Monuments Fund and CyArk are using laser technology to digitally preserve monuments in the Near East (December 29, 2015) <<http://nyti.ms/1JbimYu>>

## 14. Law Code Stele of King Hammurabi

Dr. Senta German



Babylonia at the time of Hammurabi

Hammurabi of the city state of Babylon conquered much of northern and western Mesopotamia and by 1776 B.C.E., he is the most far-reaching leader of Mesopotamian history, describing himself as "the king who made the four quarters of the earth obedient." Documents show Hammurabi was a classic micro-manager, concerned with all aspects of his rule, and this is seen in his famous legal code, which survives in partial copies on this stele in the Louvre and on clay tablets (a stele is a vertical stone monument or marker often inscribed with text or with relief carving). We can also view this as a monument presenting Hammurabi as an exemplary king of justice.

What is interesting about the representation of Hammurabi on the legal code stele is that he is seen as receiving the laws from the god Shamash, who is seated, complete with thunderbolts coming from his shoulders. The emphasis here is Hammurabi's role as pious theocrat, and that the laws themselves come from the god.



Law Code Stele of King Hammurabi, basalt, Babylonian, 1792-1750 B.C.E. (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

### Additional resources:

[Feature from the Louvre on the Stele](http://musee.louvre.fr/oval/code/indexEN.html) <<http://musee.louvre.fr/oval/code/indexEN.html>>

[This work at the Louvre](http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/law-code-hammurabi-king-babylon) <<http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/law-code-hammurabi-king-babylon>>

## 15. Law Code Stele of King Hammurabi

### A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



*Law Code Stele of King Hammurabi, basalt, Babylonian, 1792-1750 B.C.E. (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*This is a transcript of a conversation conducted at the Musée du Louvre, Paris.*

*Steven:* We're in the Louvre, in Paris, looking at one of their most famous objects. This is the Law Code Stele of King Hammurabi.

*Beth:* It's interesting to me that this is one of the most popular objects to look at here (it was made in the Babylonian Kingdom, which is now in Iraq). I think it's because of our modern interest and reliance on law as the founding principles of a civilization. And this is such an ancient object, this is nearly 4,000 years old.

*Steven:* A stele is a tall carved object. This one is carved in relief at the top, and then below that, and on all sides, we have inscribed cuneiform (script that is used on the stele) It's written in the language of Akkadian, the court language of the Babylonians...

*Beth:* ...which was used for official government decrees.

*Steven:* But that's the language. The script is cuneiform. It's divided into three parts. There's a prologue, which talks about the scene that's being represented at the top, the Investiture of Hammurabi. What we see is the king on the left, he's smaller, and he's facing the god, Shamash. This is the sun god, the god of justice.

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*Beth:* And we can tell he's a god because of the special horned crown that he wears and the flames of light that emanate from his shoulders.

*Steven:* We can think of this as a kind of divine light, the way that in so much Christian imagery, we see a halo.

*Beth:* And we have that composite view that we often see in Ancient Egyptian and Ancient Near Eastern art, where the shoulders are frontal but the face is represented in profile.

*Steven:* Shamash sits on a throne, and if you look closely you can see under his feet the representation of mountains that he rises from each day. He's giving to the king a scepter and a ring, these are signs of power. Hammurabi is demonstrating here that these are divine laws—that his authority comes from Shamash.

*Beth:* So we have more than 300 laws here.



*Law Code Stele of King Hammurabi (Babylonian), 1792-1750 B.C.E., basalt, 225 x 65 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Steven:* And they're very particular. Scholars believe that they weren't so much written by the king as listed from judgments that have already been meted out.

*Beth:* They're legal precedents, and they take the form of announcing an action and its consequences. So if you do X, Y is the consequence.

*Steven:* So, for example, if a man builds a house and the house falls on the owner, the builder is put to death. So there's a kind of equivalence, and this might remind us of the Biblical law of, "an eye for an eye" or "a tooth for a tooth," which is also found on the stele. It's important and interesting to note that the stele predates that Biblical text. The last part of the text, what is often referred to as the epilogue, speaks to the posterity of the king, of the importance of his rule and the idea that he will be remembered for all time.

*Beth:* This is certainly not a unique stele in terms of recording laws, but it does survive largely intact. When it was discovered, it was broken only into three parts, which you can still see today.

*Steven:* These laws, almost 4,000 years old, tell us a tremendous amount about Babylonian culture, about what was important to them. So many of these laws deal with agricultural issues, issues of irrigation, and are clearly expressing points of tension in society.

*Beth:* A lot of them have to do with family life, too, and the king is, after all, responsible for the peace and prosperity and feeding of his people. And the stele is such a wonderful reminder that Mesopotamia was such an advanced culture. Here, almost 4,000 years ago, we have cities that are dependent on good crop yields, that require laws to maintain civil society. And a reminder of the debt that the world owe to the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia and the area that is seeing so much conflict now.



*Law Code Stele of King Hammurabi, basalt, Babylonian, 1792-1750 B.C.E. (Musée du Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

[Watch the video.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=212&v=JO9YxZYd0qY) <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=212&v=JO9YxZYd0qY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=212&v=JO9YxZYd0qY)>

#### Additional resources:

[Feature from the Louvre on the Stele](http://musee.louvre.fr/oval/code/indexEN.html) <<http://musee.louvre.fr/oval/code/indexEN.html>>

[This work at the Louvre](http://musee.louvre.fr/oval/code/indexEN.html) <<http://musee.louvre.fr/oval/code/indexEN.html>>

## 16. The Ishtar Gate and Neo-Babylonian art

Dr. Senta German

The chronology of Mesopotamia is complicated. Scholars refer to places (Sumer, for example) and peoples (the Babylonians), but also empires (Babylonia) and unfortunately for students of the Ancient Near East these organizing principles do not always agree. The result is that we might, for example, speak of the very ancient Babylonians starting in the 1800s B.C.E. and then also the Neo-Babylonians more than a thousand years later. What came in between you ask? Well, quite a lot, but mostly the Kassites and the Assyrians.

The Assyrian Empire which had dominated the Near East came to an end at around 600 B.C.E. due to a number of factors including military pressure by the Medes (a pastoral mountain people, again from the Zagros mountain range), the Babylonians, and possibly also civil war.



Map of the Neo-Babylonian Empire

### A Neo-Babylonian dynasty

The Babylonians rose to power in the late seventh century and were heirs to the urban traditions which had long existed in southern Mesopotamia. They eventually ruled an empire as dominant in the Near East as that held by the Assyrians before them.

This period is called Neo-Babylonian (or new Babylonia) because Babylon had also risen to power earlier and became an independent city-state, most famously during the reign of King Hammurabi (1792-1750 B.C.E.).

In the art of the Neo-Babylonian Empire we see an effort to invoke the styles and iconography of the 3rd millennium rulers of Babylonia. In fact, one Neo-Babylonian king, Nabonidus, found a statue of Sargon of Akkad, set it in a temple and provided it with regular offerings.



Ishtar Gate and Processional Way (Reconstruction), Babylon, c. 575 B.C.E., glazed mud brick (Pergamon Museum, Berlin) ((photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

### Architecture

The Neo-Babylonians are most famous for their architecture, notably at their capital city, Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar (604-561 B.C.E.) largely rebuilt this ancient city including its walls and seven gates. It is also during this era that Nebuchadnezzar purportedly built the "Hanging Gardens of Babylon" for his wife because she missed the gardens of her homeland in Media (modern day Iran). Though mentioned by ancient Greek and Roman writers, the "Hanging Gardens" may, in fact, be legendary.

The Ishtar Gate (today in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin) was the most elaborate of the inner city gates constructed in Babylon in antiquity. The whole gate was covered in lapis lazuli glazed bricks which would have rendered the façade with a jewel-like shine. Alternating rows of lion and cattle march in a relief procession across the gleaming blue surface of the gate.

## 17. Ishtar Gate and Processional Way

### A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



*Ishtar Gate with Mušhušu and Auroch (Reconstruction), Babylon, c. 575 B.C.E., glazed mud brick (Pergamon Museum, Berlin) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*This is the transcript of a conversation held in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin.*

*Steven:* We're in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin. And one of the most astonishing objects they have is—well, it's not an object.

*Beth:* It's a gate for a city. There were eight double gates that formed part of the walls around the ancient city of Babylon.

*Steven:* It's huge.

*Beth:* It doesn't just impress us, it impressed people when it was built. In fact, it was called one of the "Wonders of the World."

*Steven:* So Nebuchadnezzar, of biblical fame, ascended to the throne and proceeded to rebuild the already ancient city of Babylon. This is a city that has its roots in the third millennium B.C.E., but had become a major political center under King Hammurabi in the 1700s B.C.E. The city had remained populated, but regained importance in the sixth century under Nebuchadnezzar II and under his father, and

what we're seeing here is part of the enormous building campaign that Nebuchadnezzar II had undertaken.

*Beth:* We might recognize Nebuchadnezzar from the Bible, from the Book of Daniel. He's the ruler of Babylon who conquers and destroys the Temple in Jerusalem and who's responsible for the exile of the Jews.

*Steven:* Clearly he was very powerful. He was able to undertake this enormous building campaign. He fortified and strengthened 11 miles of wall around the city of Babylon. He reconstructed the Great Ziggurat in Babylon, which had the temple of Marduk at its top and is probably the source of the story of the Tower of Babel. He created palaces, and he created this extraordinary gate.

*Beth:* And Hanging Gardens, which were also considered one of the Wonders of the World. So the city of Babylon had eight double gates. The one we're looking at is one of those gates, and actually the smaller of the double gate. The other one would have been even larger, if that's possible to imagine.

*Steven:* In fact, so large that the museum can't actually put it on display even in this very large space. This gate—which, of course, would only be opened for the friendly—is at the end of a long processional way lined with beautiful lions that speak very clearly of pride, of power, and of Nebuchadnezzar's rule.



*Ishtar Lion, Babylon, from Ishtar Gate and Processional Way (Reconstruction), Babylon, c. 575 B.C.E., glazed mud brick (Pergamon Museum, Berlin) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*



*Ishtar Gate and Processional Way (Reconstruction), Babylon, c. 575 B.C.E., glazed mud brick (Pergamon Museum, Berlin) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Beth:* The lions that we see on the processional way represent Ishtar, one of the Babylonian goddesses, the goddess of war and wisdom and sexuality.

*Steven:* They're raised up to eye level. And they're a little bit smaller than life-size, but they're pretty big.

*Beth:* And they're frightening. Their mouths were open in these ferocious roars.

*Steven:* It's true. They're snarling, aren't they?

*Beth:* They are, but the fact that they're placed in this very regular way makes them seem as though they're almost trained, or controlled, by King Nebuchadnezzar himself.



*Auroch from Ishtar Gate (Reconstruction), Babylon, c. 575 B.C.E., glazed mud brick (Pergamon Museum, Berlin) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Beth:* And their tails have a stinger like a scorpion.

*Steven:* Those dragons are associated with Marduk, the patron god of the city. And Nebuchadnezzar associated himself directly with Marduk.

[Watch the video.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2iZ83oIZH0) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2iZ83oIZH0>>

## 18. Kassite art: Unfinished Kudurru

Dr. Senta German

The Kassites controlled Babylonia for 400 years—now all that remains are these carved boundary stones.



Map of Kassite Babylonia (photo: MapMaster, CC: BY-SA 3.0) <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kassites#/media/File:Kassite\\_Babylonia\\_EN.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kassites#/media/File:Kassite_Babylonia_EN.svg)>

### Artistic exchange

During the second millennium, the region of Mesopotamia, with Assyria in the north and Babylonia in the south, together with Egypt and the Hittite lands in what is now modern Turkey, grew strong and exercised surprisingly harmonious political relations.

For art, this meant an easy exchange of ideas and techniques, and surviving texts reflect the development of “guilds” of craftsmen, such as jewelers, scribes and architects.

Babylonia at this time was held by the Kassites, originally from the Zagros mountains to the north, who sought to imitate Mesopotamian styles of art. Kudurru (boundary markers) are the only significant remains of the Kassites, many of which show Kassite gods and activities translated into the visual style of Mesopotamia.



“Unfinished” Kudurru, Kassite period, attributed to the reign of Melishipak, 1186–1172 B.C.E., found in Susa, where it had been taken as war booty in the 12th century B.C.E. (Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

### Combining cultures

This Kudurru, considered unfinished because it lacks an inscription, would have marked the boundary of a plot of land, and probably would have listed the owner and even the person to whom the land was leased.



Blank grid (detail), “Unfinished” Kudurru, Kassite period, attributed to the reign of Melishipak, 1186–1172 B.C.E., found in Susa, where it had been taken as war booty in the 12th century B.C.E. (Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



*Top level: Mesopotamian Gods in symbolic form, second level: animals and deities playing musical instruments (detail), "Unfinished" Kudurru, Kassite period, attributed to the reign of Melishipak, 1186–1172 B.C.E., found in Susa, where it had been taken as war booty in the 12th c. B.C.E. (Louvre) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

Although an object made and intended for Kassite use, it bears Babylonian style and imagery, especially the multiple strips or registers of characters and the stately procession of gods and lions.

The Kassites eventually succumbed to the general collapse of Mesopotamia around 1200 B.C.E. This regional collapse affected states as far away as mainland Greece, and as great as Egypt. This is a period characterized by famine, widespread political instability, roving mercenaries and, most likely, plague. It is often referred to as the first Dark Ages.

#### **Additional resources:**

This work at the Louvre <<http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/unfinished-kudurru>>



*Creatures (detail), "Unfinished" Kudurru, Kassite period, attributed to the reign of Melishipak, 1186–1172 B.C.E., found in Susa, where it had been taken as war booty in the 12th century B.C.E. (Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

**PART V**

# **Assyrian**

## 19. Assyria, an introduction

Dr. Senta German



Map of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and its expansions

A military culture

The Assyrian empire dominated Mesopotamia and all of the Near East for the first half of the first millennium B.C.E., led by a series of highly ambitious and aggressive warrior kings. Assyrian society was entirely military, with men obliged to fight in the army at any time. State offices were also under the purview of the military.

Indeed, the culture of the Assyrians was brutal, the army seldom marching on the battlefield but rather terrorizing opponents into submission who, once conquered, were tortured, raped, beheaded, and flayed with their corpses publicly displayed. The Assyrians torched enemies' houses, salted their fields, and cut down their orchards.



*Ashurbanipal slitting the throat of a lion from his chariot (detail), Ashurbanipal Hunting Lions, gypsum hall relief from the North Palace, Nineveh, c. 645–635 B.C.E., excavated by H. Rassam beginning in 1853 (British Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

#### Luxurious palaces

As a result of these fierce and successful military campaigns, the Assyrians acquired massive resources from all over the Near East which made the Assyrian kings very rich. The palaces were on an entirely new scale of size and glamour; one contemporary text describes the inauguration of the palace of Kalhu, built by Assurnasirpal II (who reigned in the early ninth century), to which almost 70,000 people were invited to banquet.

Some of this wealth was spent on the construction of several gigantic and luxurious palaces spread throughout the region. The interior public reception rooms of Assyrian palaces were lined with large scale carved limestone reliefs which offer beautiful and terrifying images of the power and wealth of the Assyrian kings and some of the most beautiful and captivating images in all of ancient Near Eastern art.

#### Feats of bravery

Like all Assyrian kings, Ashurbanipal decorated the public walls of his palace with images of himself performing great feats of bravery, strength and skill. Among these he included a lion hunt in which we see him coolly taking aim at a lion in front of his charging chariot, while his assistants fend off another lion attacking at the rear.

#### The destruction of Susa

One of the accomplishments Ashurbanipal was most proud of was the total destruction of the city of Susa.

In this relief, we see Ashurbanipal's troops destroying the walls of Susa with picks and hammers while fire rages within the walls of the city.



*Sacking of Susa by Ashurbanipal, North Palace, Nineveh, 647 B.C.E.*



*Lion pierced with arrows (detail), Lion Hunts of Ashurbanipal (ruled 669-630 B.C.E.), c. 645 B.C.E., gypsum, Neo-Assyrian, hall reliefs from Palace at Ninevah across the Tigris from present day Mosul, Iraq (British Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*



*Ashurbanipal taking aim at a lion (detail), Lion Hunts of Ashurbanipal (ruled 669-630 B.C.E.), c. 645 B.C.E., gypsum, Neo-Assyrian, hall reliefs from Palace at Ninevah across the Tigris from present day Mosul, Iraq (British Museum)*

#### Military victories & exploits

In the Central Palace at Nimrud, the Neo-Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III illustrates his military victories and exploits, including the siege of a city in great detail.

In this scene we see one soldier holding a large screen to protect two

archers who are taking aim. The topography includes three different trees and a roaring river, most likely setting the scene in and around the Tigris or Euphrates rivers.



*Wall relief from Nimrud, the sieging of a city, likely in Mesopotamia, c. 728 B.C.E. (British Museum)*



*Winged human-headed bull (lamassu or shedu), Neo-Assyrian Period, reign of Sargon II (721-705 B.C.E.) Khorsabad, ancient Dur Sharrukin, Assyria, Iraq, gypseous alabaster, 4.20 x 4.36 x 0.97 m, excavated by P.-E. Botta 1843-44 (Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

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#### Additional resources:

[Assyria on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Timeline of Art History](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/assy/hd_assy.htm) <[http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/assy/hd\\_assy.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/assy/hd_assy.htm)>

[Ancient Near East on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Timeline of Art History](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hi/te_index.asp?i=7) <[http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hi/te\\_index.asp?i=7](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hi/te_index.asp?i=7)>

[Digital Reconstruction of the Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Assyria \(The Metropolitan Museum of Art\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VCldg1TdHc) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VCldg1TdHc>> \*According to news sources, this important archaeological site was destroyed with bulldozers in March 2015 by the militants who occupy large portions of Syria and Iraq.

## 20. Lamassu from the citadel of Sargon II

### A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



*Winged human-headed bull (lamassu or shedu), Neo-Assyrian Period, reign of Sargon II (721-705 B.C.E.) Khorsabad, ancient Dur Sharrukin, Assyria, Iraq, gypseous alabaster, 4.20 x 4.36 x 0.97 m, excavated by P.-E. Botta 1843-44 (Musée du Louvre) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in the Musée du Louvre, Paris.*

*Winged, human-headed bulls served as guardians of the city and its palace—walking by, they almost seem to move. These sculptures were excavated by P.-E. Botta in 1843-44.*

*Steven:* Ancient Mesopotamia is often credited as the cradle of civilization, that is, the place where farming and cities began. It makes

it seem so peaceful, but this was anything but the case. In fact, it was really a series of civilizations that conquered each other.

*Beth:* We're in a room in the Louvre filled with sculpture from the Assyrians, who controlled the ancient Near East from about 1000 B.C.E. to around 500 B.C.E.

*Steven:* And these sculptures in particular come from the palace of Sargon II and were carved at the height of Assyrian civilization in the eighth century BCE.

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*Beth:* So this is modern day Khorsabad.

*Steven:* In Iraq.

*Beth:* And various Assyrian kings established palaces at different cities. So there were palaces at Nimrid and Assur before this, and after there'll be a palace at Nineveh, but these sculptures come from an excavation from modern day Khorsabad.

*Steven:* The most impressive sculptures that survive are the guardian figures that protected the city's gates, and protected the gates of the citadel itself. That is, the area within which were both the temple and the royal palace.

*Beth:* So at each of these various gates, there were guardian figures that were winged bulls with the heads of men.

*Steven:* We think they were called Lamassu.



*Winged human-headed bull (lamassu or shedu), Neo-Assyrian Period, reign of Sargon II (721-705 B.C.E.) Khorsabad, ancient Dur Sharrukin, Assyria, Iraq, gypseous alabaster, 4.20 x 4.36 x 0.97 m, excavated by P.-E. Botta 1843-44 (Musée du Louvre) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Beth:* As figures that stood at gateways, they make sense. They're fearsome, they look powerful. They could also be an expression of the power of the Assyrian king.

*Steven:* They are enormous, but even they would have been dwarfed by the architecture. They would have stood between huge arches. In fact, they had some structural purpose. It's interesting to note that each of these Lamassu are actually carved out of a monolithic stone, that is, there are no cuts here. These are single pieces of stone, and in the ancient world, it was no small task to get these stones in place.

*Beth:* Well, and apparently, there were relief carvings in the palace that depicted moving these massive Lamassu into place. So it's important to remember that the Lamassu were the gateway figures, but the walls of the palace were decorated with relief sculpture showing hunting scenes and other scenes indicating royal power.

*Steven:* This is a Lamassu that was actually a guardian for the exterior gate of the city. It's in awfully good condition.

*Beth:* Well my favorite part is the crown. It's decorated with rosettes, and then double horns that come around toward the top center, and then on top of that, a ring of feathers.

*Steven:* It's really delicate for such a massive and powerful creature.

The faces are extraordinary. First of all, just at the top of the forehead, you can see kind of incised wavy hair that comes just below the crown, and then you have a connected eyebrow.

*Beth:* And then the ears are the ears of a bull that wear earrings.

*Steven:* Actually quite elaborate earrings.

*Beth:* Well the whole form is so decorative.



*Winged human-headed bull (lamassu or shedu), Neo-Assyrian Period, reign of Sargon II (721-705 B.C.E.) Khorsabad, ancient Dur Sharrukin, Assyria, Iraq, gypseous alabaster, 4.20 x 4.36 x 0.97 m, excavated by P.-E. Botta 1843-44 (Musée du Louvre) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Steven:* And then there's that marvelous, complex representation of the beard. You see little ringlets on the cheeks of the face, but then as the beard comes down, you see these spirals that turn downward, and then are interrupted by a series of horizontal bands.

*Beth:* And then the wings too form this lovely decorative pattern up the side of the animal, and then across its back.

*Steven:* In fact across the body itself there are ringlets as well, so we get a sense of the fur of the beast. And then under the creature, and around the legs, you can see inscriptions in cuneiform.

*Beth:* Some of which declare the power of the king.

*Steven:* And damnation for those that would threaten the king's work, that is, the citadel. What's interesting too is that these were meant to be seen both from a frontal view and a profile view. Well if you count up the number of legs, there's one too many. There are five.

*Beth:* Right, two from the front, and four from the side, but of course, one of the front legs overlaps, and so there are five legs.

*Steven:* What's interesting is that when you look at the creature from the side, you actually see that it's moving forward, but when you look at it from the front, those two legs are static so the beast is stationary. And think about what this means for a guardian figure at a gate. As we approach, we see it still, watching us as we move, but if we belong, if we're friendly, and we're allowed to pass this gate, as we move through it, we see the animal itself move.

*Beth:* And then we have this combination of these decorative forms that we've been talking about with a sensitivity to the anatomy of this composite animal. His abdomen swells, and his hindquarters move back, and then we can see the veins, and muscles, and bones in his leg.

*Steven:* So there really is this funny relationship between the naturalistic and the imagination of the sculpture.

*Beth:* And the decorative, but all speaking to the power, the authority of the king and the fortifications of this palace, and this city.

*Steven:* They are incredibly impressive. It would be impossible to broach the citadel without being awestruck by the power of this civilization.

[Watch the video.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=217&v=2GrvBLKaRSI) <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=217&v=2GrvBLKaRSI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=217&v=2GrvBLKaRSI)>

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#### Additional resources:

“Historians Pore Over ISIS Video of Smashed Statues for Clues to What’s Been Lost,” *The New York Times*, February 26, 2015. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/27/world/middleeast/historians-pore-over-isis-video-of-smashed-statues-for-clues-to-whats-been-lost.html>>

“ISIS Destroys Mosul Museum Collection and Ancient Assyrian Statues,” *Hyperallergic*, February 26, 2015. <<https://hyperallergic.com/185964/isis-destroys-mosul-museum-collection-and-ancient-assyrian-statues/>>

“Isis fighters destroy ancient artefacts at Mosul museum,” *The Guardian*, February 26, 2015. <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/26/isis-fighters-destroy-ancient-artefacts-mosul-museum-iraq>>

“ISIS has turned the destruction of ancient artifacts into entertainment,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 27, 2015. <<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/miranda/la-et-cam-isis-destroys-artifacts-20150226-column.html>>

P. G. Finch, “The Winged Bulls at the Nergal Gate of Nineveh,” *Iraq*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Spring, 1948), pp. 9-18 ([read for free online via JSTOR](#))

#### Backstory

The lamassu in museums today (including the Louvre, shown in our video, as well the British Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad, and others) came from various ancient Assyrian sites located in modern-day Iraq. They were moved to their current institutional homes by archaeologists who excavated these sites in the mid-19th century. However, many ancient Assyrian cities and palaces—and their gates, with intact lamassu figures and other sculptures—remain as important archaeological sites in their original locations in Iraq.

In 2015, a chilling video circulated online, showed people associated with ISIS destroying ancient artifacts (<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/27/world/middleeast/historians-pore-over-isis-video-of-smashed-statues-for-clues-to-whats-been-lost.html>) in both the museum in Mosul, Iraq and at the nearby ancient archaeological site of ancient Nineveh. Their targets included the lamassu figures that stood at one of the many ceremonial gates to this important ancient Assyrian city. Scholars believe that this particular gate, which dates to the reign of Sennacherib around 700 B.C.E., was built to honor the god Nergal, an Assyrian god of war and plague who ruled over the underworld. Islamic State representatives claimed that these statues were “idols” that needed to be destroyed. The video features footage of men using jackhammers, drills, and sledgehammers to demolish the lamassu.

The Nergal gate is only one of many artifacts and sites that have been demolished or destroyed by ISIS over the past decade. Despite the existence of other examples in museums around the world, the permanent loss of these objects is a permanent loss to global cultural heritage and to the study of ancient Assyrian art and architecture.

*Backstory by Dr. Naraelle Hohensee*

## 21. Ashurbanipal Hunting Lions

### A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



*Ashurbanipal Hunting Lions, gypsum hall relief from the North Palace, Ninevah, c. 645-635 B.C.E., excavated by H. Rassam beginning in 1853 (British Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*This is the transcript of a conversation held in the British Museum, London.*

*Steven:* We're in the British Museum in London, and we're looking at a series of magnificent low reliefs.

*Beth:* These show a very dramatic lion hunt and it's the king of Assyria who is killing the lions.

*Steven:* The Assyrians emerged in Mesopotamia before 1,000 BCE, but increased their power and by the time these reliefs were made in the seventh century BCE, the Assyrians were dominant and really at the height of their civilization.

*Beth:* The Assyrians had several royal palaces and several capital cities. Ninevah, Nimrud, and Khorsabad. The scenes that we're looking at now are from the royal palace in Ninevah.

*Steven:* These would have decorated a hallway. You would have walked through the scene and we're seeing different moments in time.

*Beth:* Assyrian kings decorated their palaces with these low reliefs depicting battle scenes, hunting scenes. These all speak to the power of the Assyrian kings, but this particular set of reliefs is especially naturalistic and dramatic. These are considered masterpieces of Assyrian sculpture.

*Steven:* It's a lion hunt. It's important to understand the symbolism. The lions, which were native to Mesopotamia and, actually, a slightly smaller species that is now extinct, were symbols of the violence of nature and the king killing the lions. By the way, there was a law that said only the king could kill lions. The king killing lions was an important symbolic act that spoke of the king keeping nature at bay, keeping his city safe.



*Ashurbanipal Hunting Lions, detail of aiming, gypsum hall relief from the North Palace, Ninevah, c. 645-635 B.C.E., excavated by H. Rassam beginning in 1853 (British Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Beth:* Even though we see the king killing lions here, he is killing them in an arena. He's not killing them out in the wild.

*Steven:* Let's move through the story. On one side of the hallway, we see the king readying for the hunt.

*Beth:* We can identify the king because of the particular crown that he wears and he's also larger than the other three figures who are helping him to get ready for the hunt. We see one figure with reigns pulling the horses, two other figures turning in the same direction as the king. On the left hand side it's obviously been damaged.

*Steven:* I'm really taken with the horses.

*Beth:* Well, the horses are represented so much more naturalistically.

place within an enclosed space and we can see other attendants that are holding a barrier of some sort to pen in these animals.

*Beth:* Now they're represented below the scene with the king, but we're meant to understand them as being around the king. We have human figures who, although they're striding forward, there's a formality to their poses, but strangely, a informality, I think, to the horses.



*Ashurbanipal Hunting Lions, triple register, gypsum hall relief from the North Palace, Ninevah, c. 645-635 B.C.E., excavated by H. Rassam beginning in 1853 (British Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Steven:* We'll see that also in the representation of the lions, who are represented quite distinctly from the greater sense of formality that the king displays or his attendants display. We have this division between man and the control of man and then nature and its wildness. As we move to the middle of the panels, we see a very different scene. We've pulled back, our view is more distant, and we see figures much smaller now. We see a hill with lots of figures on it.



*Ashurbanipal Hunting Lions, detail of horses, gypsum hall relief from the North Palace, Ninevah, c. 645-635 B.C.E., excavated by H. Rassam beginning in 1853 (British Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Steven:* Especially if you look at the musculature of the face, of the eyes. There's tremendous detail.

*Beth:* And emotion. They look as though they're resisting getting bridled for this hunt.

*Steven:* We can see one of those bridles being tightened and we can see two other figures trying to steady the horses. All of this is taking



*Ashurbanipal Hunting Lions, detail of hill with figures, gypsum hall relief from the North Palace, Ninevah, c. 645-635 B.C.E., excavated by H. Rassam beginning in 1853 (British Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Beth:* And at the very top what seems to be a monument to the king, showing itself a relief of a hunt with a king in a chariot slaying lions, so it's a representation of a representation of the hunt.

*Steven:* It's a relief of a relief. I love that.



*Ashurbanipal Hunting Lions, detail of hill with figures, gypsum hall relief from the North Palace, Ninevah, c. 645–635 B.C.E., excavated by H. Rassam beginning in 1853 (British Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Beth:* This scene does feel chaotic. Figures gesturing in different ways, climbing in different ways, some looking back, some looking forward.

*Steven:* They seem to be hurrying up the hill. They may be fleeing, they may be trying to grab a better position to watch the hunt from, these may be spectators. We think we're seeing men and women, but in fact, this is so old part of this is guesswork.

*Beth:* Of course, this would have been much easier to read in the palace where the relief was painted.

*Steven:* These were painted very brightly, in fact. They really would have stood out. As we move to the right, we come to the arena for the hunt itself. We can see that the lions will be held in place by a double row of soldiers that have shields and spears and then inside that, to ensure that the lions don't even get that far, there's another row of soldiers with mastiffs. They're holding spears and those dogs will make sure that the lions don't pass.

*Beth:* And although these figures are represented one on top of one another, we're meant to understand them as being in rows in depth in space.

*Steven:* I love the representation of the dogs. You can see them straining against the leash.



*Ashurbanipal Hunting Lions, detail of mastiff, gypsum hall relief from the North Palace, Ninevah, c. 645–635 B.C.E., excavated by H. Rassam beginning in 1853 (British Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Beth:* We have to walk to the other end now to see how the lions have entered the arena. We see another double row of the king's guard and then we see a child releasing a very menacing looking lion into the lion hunt.



*Ashurbanipal Hunting Lions, detail of lion release, gypsum hall relief from the North Palace, Ninevah, c. 645–635 B.C.E., excavated by H. Rassam beginning in 1853 (British Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Steven:* So this is a completely fabricated hunt. It is controlled. We see the king on chariot. He's shooting an arrow. We see the arrow airborne and then, of course, we see the lions dying all around us.

*Beth:* Wounded, pierced, some on the ground, some leaping up, represented with such sympathy.



*Ashurbanipal Hunting Lions, detail of kill, gypsum hall relief from the North Palace, Ninevah, c. 645–635 B.C.E., excavated by H. Rassam beginning in 1853 (British Museum) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Steven:* The variety is incredible, the detail is incredible. You'll notice that the king is in some danger. There is a lion that was wounded, but is coming back to attack, but his assistants are taking up the rear.

*Beth:* This all speaks to the power, the authority of the king over nature and representing that power to his people.

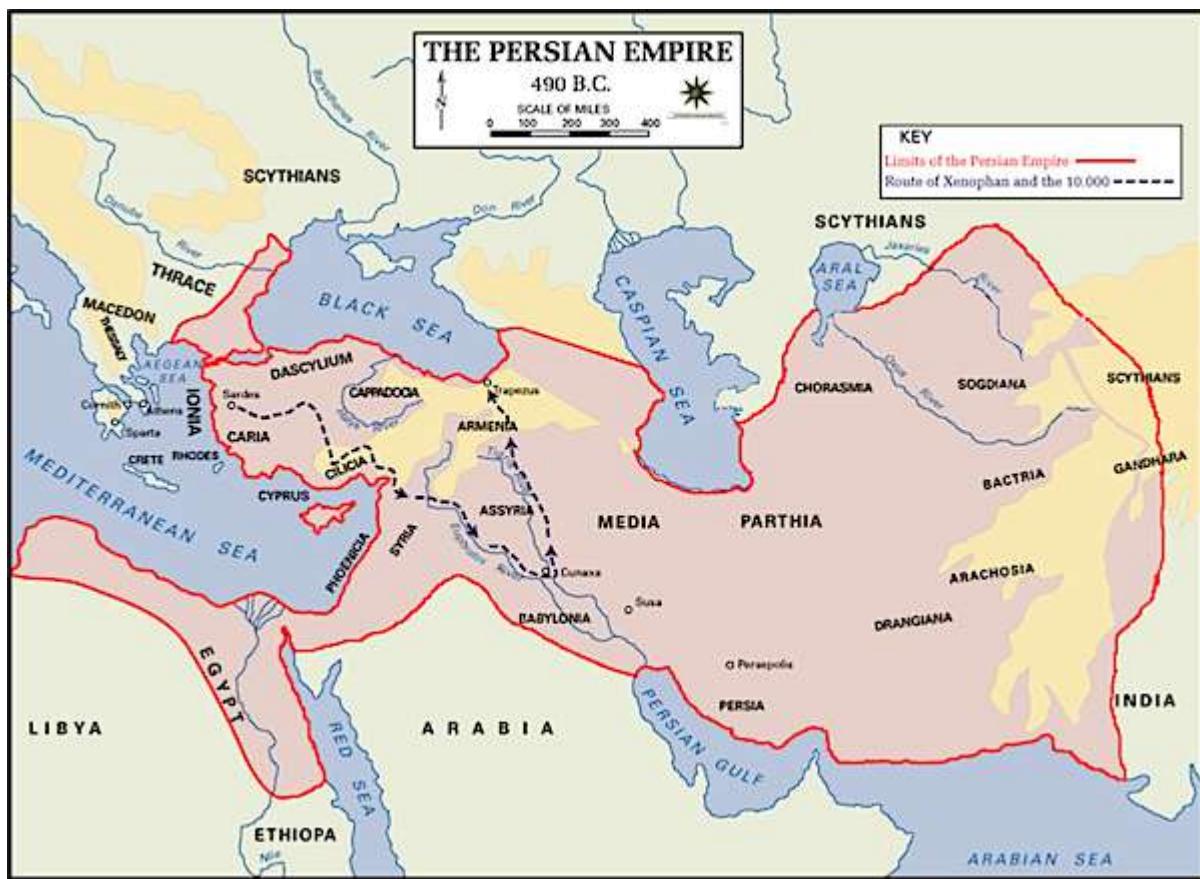
[Watch the video.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=J5iEY4hapMQ) <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=3&v=J5iEY4hapMQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=J5iEY4hapMQ)>

**PART VI**

# **Persian**

## 22. Ancient Persia, an introduction

Dr. Senta German



*The Persian Empire, 490 B.C.E.*

The heart of ancient Persia is in what is now southwest Iran, in the region called the Fars. In the second half of the 6th century B.C.E., the Persians (also called the Achaemenids) created an enormous empire reaching from the Indus Valley to Northern Greece and from Central Asia to Egypt.

### A tolerant empire

Although the surviving literary sources on the Persian empire were written by ancient Greeks who were the sworn enemies of the Persians and highly contemptuous of them, the Persians were in fact quite tolerant and ruled a multi-ethnic empire. Persia was the first

empire known to have acknowledged the different faiths, languages and political organizations of its subjects.

This tolerance for the cultures under Persian control carried over into administration. In the lands which they conquered, the Persians continued to use indigenous languages and administrative structures. For example, the Persians accepted hieroglyphic script written on papyrus in Egypt and traditional Babylonian record keeping in cuneiform in Mesopotamia. The Persians must have been very proud of this new approach to empire as can be seen in the representation of the many different peoples in the reliefs from Persepolis, a city founded by Darius the Great in the sixth century B.C.E.



*Gate of all Nations, Persepolis (photo: youngroby, CC BY-NC 2.0) <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gate\\_of\\_All\\_Nations,\\_Persepolis.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gate_of_All_Nations,_Persepolis.jpg)>*

### The Apadana

Persepolis included a massive columned hall used for receptions by the Kings, called the Apadana. This hall contained 72 columns and two monumental stairways.



*View of the eastern stairway and columns of the Apadana (Audience Hall) at Persepolis, Iran, 5th century B.C.E. (The Oriental Institute, University of Chicago)*



*Assyrians with Rams, Apadana, Persepolis (photo: CC BY-SA 3.0) <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Persepolis\\_24.11.2009\\_11-32-18.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Persepolis_24.11.2009_11-32-18.jpg)>*

The walls of the spaces and stairs leading up to the reception hall were carved with hundreds of figures, several of which illustrated subject peoples of various ethnicities, bringing tribute to the Persian king.



Frieze of Archers (Persia), c. 510 B.C.E., Apadana, west courtyard of the palace, Susa, Iran, glazed siliceous brick, 1.65 x 4.22 m, excavations led by Jacques de Morgan and Roland de Mecquenem, 1908-13 (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

### Conquered by Alexander the Great

The Persian Empire was, famously, conquered by Alexander the Great. Alexander no doubt was impressed by the Persian system of absorbing and retaining local language and traditions as he imitated this system himself in the vast lands he won in battle. Indeed, Alexander made a point of burying the last Persian emperor, Darius III, in a lavish and respectful way in the royal tombs near Persepolis. This enabled Alexander to claim title to the Persian throne and legitimize his control over the greatest empire of the Ancient Near East.

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#### Additional resources:

[Persepolis from the air \(video from The Oriental Institute, University of Chicago\)](https://youtu.be/uJf5bnHUIQw) <<https://youtu.be/uJf5bnHUIQw>>

[The Apadana from the University of Chicago](http://oi.uchicago.edu/museum/collections/pa/persepolis/apadana.html) <<http://oi.uchicago.edu/museum/collections/pa/persepolis/apadana.html>>

[Persepolis from the University of Chicago](http://oi.uchicago.edu/museum/collections/pa/persepolis/persepolis.html) <<http://oi.uchicago.edu/museum/collections/pa/persepolis/persepolis.html>>

[The Achaemenid Persian Empire on The Metropolitan Museum of](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/acha/aha.htm)

[Art's Timeline of Art Museum](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/acha/aha.htm) <<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/acha/aha.htm>>

[Persepolis \(video from Unesco\)](https://youtu.be/FFEE4cTCijs) <[http://youtu.be/FFEE4cTCijs](https://youtu.be/FFEE4cTCijs)>



Apadana, Persepolis (Fars, Iran), c. 520-465 B.C.E. (photo: Alan Cordova, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/acordova/13361330595>>

## 23. Capital of a column from the audience hall of the palace of Darius I, Susa

### A CONVERSATION

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

*This is the transcript of a conversation held in the Musée du Louvre, Paris.*

*Beth:* We're standing in the Louvre, looking at an enormous top of a column and capital formed of two bulls heads. This is such a strange motif to me. It's so different than capitals we see in ancient Egyptian or ancient Greek art.

*Steven:* And we're in a period when ancient Greece was, in fact, beginning to produce its most famous architecture. This was about 500 B.C.E. We're in the area that is currently Iran.

*Beth:* This is the Achaemenid Empire and they have ruled over a vast area of the Mediterranean in the Near East.



*Capital of a column from the audience hall of the palace of Darius I, Achaemenid Period, c. 510 B.C.E., Tell of the Apadana, Susa, Iran, excavations by Marcel and Jeanne Dieulafoy, 1884-86 (Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Steven:* They tried to rule over ancient Greece, but the Greeks would be successful, much to their surprise. And just from this bull capital, because of its massiveness and because you know that this is just one of dozens of such capitals, you get a sense of the scale of the royal architecture of this dynasty and the power of the Persians. And just how frightening that must have been to the ancient Greeks.



*Capital of a column from the audience hall of the palace of Darius I, Achaemenid Period, c. 510 B.C.E., Tell of the Apadana, Susa, Iran, excavations by Marcel and Jeanne Dieulafoy, 1884-86 (Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

*Beth:* This capital was one of 36 that topped enormous columns in the audience hall or 'apadana.'

*Steven:* So, we're in the ancient city of Susa. This capital comes from one of two major palaces that were built by the Persian king Darius. Look at the size of those bulls. I wouldn't stand as tall, even though it's crouching.

*Beth:* So, imagine this in a hypostyled or columned hall. This dense forest of columns. And this is where the king would receive visitors. So, this expression of power within an entire palace complex, built of precious materials, brought from all over Darius' empire.

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*Steven:* The large scrolling forms, which remind us a little bit of Ionic architecture from ancient Greece would themselves have only been a transitional layer, because below that would have been an additional capital, and then below that would have been the shaft of the column itself with a base. The bulls themselves would have been quite high up and would've probably have been much more dimly lit than we're seeing them now. You can see how the two bulls are actually connected into a single form, with only the heads and the front part of the bodies doubled.

[Watch the video.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjxCTApdX3Q) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjxCTApdX3Q>>



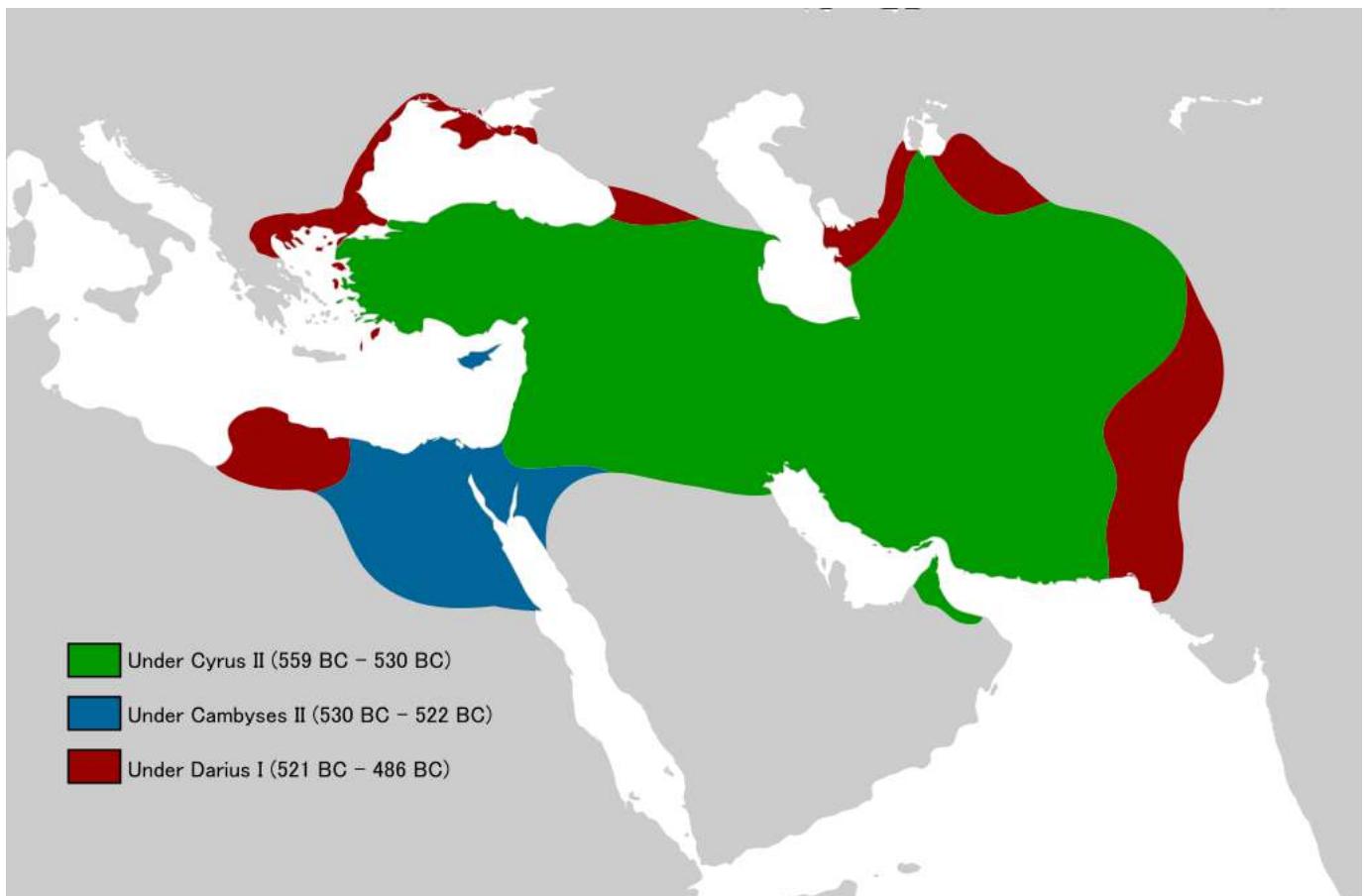
*Capital of a column (detail) from the audience hall of the palace of Darius I, Susa, c. 510 B.C.E., Achaemenid, Tell of the Apadana, Susa, Iran (Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*



*Capital of a column from the audience hall of the palace of Darius I, Susa, c. 510 B.C.E., Achaemenid, Tell of the Apadana, Susa, Iran (Louvre, Paris) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

## 24. Persepolis: The Audience Hall of Darius and Xerxes

Dr. Jeffrey A. Becker



*Growth of the Achaemenid Empire under different kings <[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/76/Achaemenid\\_Empire\\_under\\_different\\_kings\\_%28flat\\_map%29.svg/1344px-Achaemenid\\_Empire\\_under\\_different\\_kings\\_%28flat\\_map%29.svg.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/76/Achaemenid_Empire_under_different_kings_%28flat_map%29.svg/1344px-Achaemenid_Empire_under_different_kings_%28flat_map%29.svg.png)>*

By the early fifth century B.C.E., the Achaemenid (Persian) Empire ruled an estimated 44 percent of the human population of planet Earth. Through regional administrators the Persian kings controlled a vast territory which they constantly sought to expand. Famous for monumental architecture, Persian kings established numerous monumental centers, among those is Persepolis (today, in Iran). The

great audience hall of the Persian kings Darius and Xerxes presents a visual microcosm of the Achaemenid empire—making clear, through sculptural decoration, that the Persian king ruled over all of the subjugated ambassadors and vassals (who are shown bringing tribute in an endless eternal procession).



*Kylix depicting a Greek hoplite slaying a Persian inside, by the Triptolemos painter, 5th century B.C.E. (National Museums of Scotland)*

The Achaemenid Empire (First Persian Empire) was an imperial state of Western Asia founded by Cyrus the Great and flourishing from c. 550-330 B.C.E. The empire's territory was vast, stretching from the Balkan peninsula in the west to the Indus River valley in the east. The Achaemenid Empire is notable for its strong, centralized bureaucracy that had, at its head, a king and relied upon regional satraps (regional governors).

A number of formerly independent states were made subject to the Persian Empire. These states covered a vast territory from central Asia and Afghanistan in the east to Asia Minor, Egypt, Libya, and Macedonia in the west. The Persians famously attempted to expand their empire further to include mainland Greece but they were ultimately defeated in this attempt. The Persian kings are noted for their penchant for monumental art and architecture. In creating monumental centers, including Persepolis, the Persian kings employed art and architecture to craft messages that helped to reinforce their claims to power and depict, iconographically, Persian rule.

Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Persian empire (c. 550-330 B.C.E.), lies some 60 km northeast of Shiraz, Iran. The earliest archaeological remains of the city date to c. 515 B.C.E. Persepolis, a Greek toponym meaning "city of the Persians", was known to the Persians as Pārsa and was an important city of the ancient world, renowned for its monumental art and architecture. The site was excavated by German archaeologists Ernst Herzfeld, Friedrich Kretschmer, and Erich Schmidt between 1931 and 1939. Its remains are striking even today, leading UNESCO to register the site as a World Heritage Site in 1979.



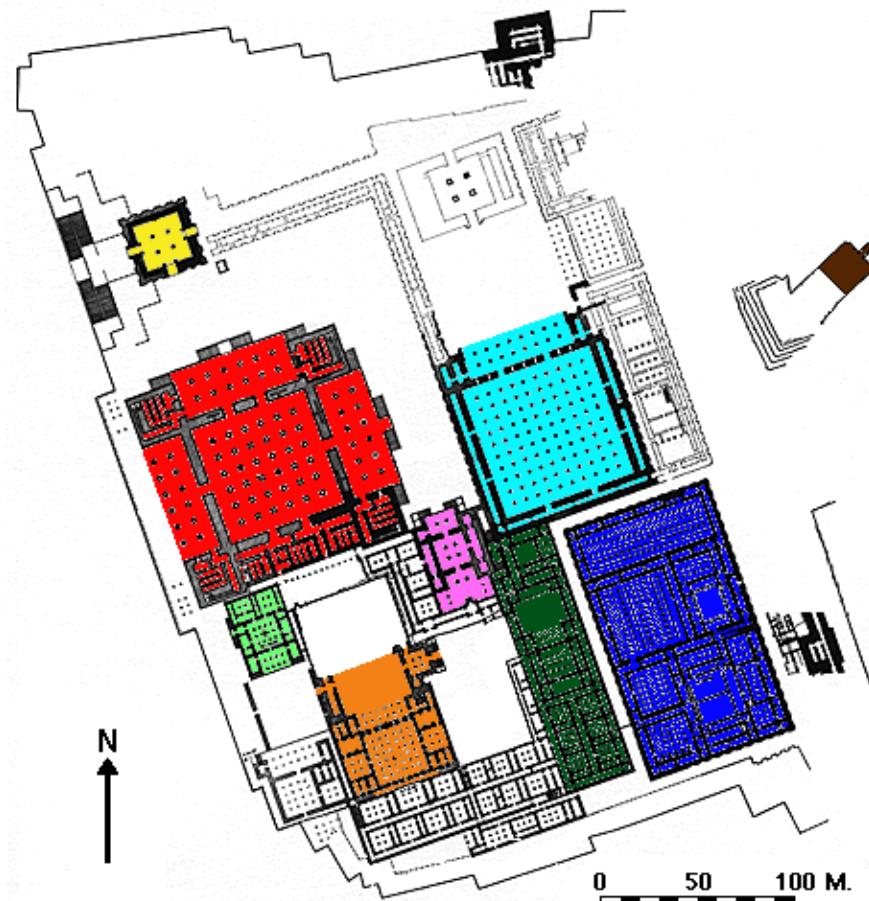
*Apādāna, Persepolis (Fars, Iran), c. 520-465 B.C.E. (photo: Alan Cordova, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/acordova/13361330595>>*

Persepolis was intentionally founded in the Marvdašt Plain during the later part of the sixth century B.C.E. It was marked as a special site by Darius the Great (reigned 522-486 B.C.E.) in 518 B.C.E. when he indicated the location of a "Royal Hill" that would serve as a ceremonial center and citadel for the city. This was an action on Darius' part that was similar to the earlier king Cyrus the Great who had founded the city of Pasargadae. Darius the Great directed a massive building program at Persepolis that would continue under his successors Xerxes (r. 486-466 B.C.E.) and Artaxerxes I (r. 466-424 B.C.E.). Persepolis would remain an important site until it was sacked, looted, and burned under Alexander the Great of Macedon in 330 B.C.E.



*19th century reconstruction of the Apādāna, Persepolis (Fars, Iran) by Charles Chipiez*

<span style="color:red">■</span> Apadana	<span style="color:green">■</span> Palace of Darius	<span style="color:orange">■</span> Palace of Xerxes
<span style="color:cyan">■</span> Throne Hall	<span style="color:magenta">■</span> Council Hall	<span style="color:darkgreen">■</span> Harem of Xerxes
<span style="color:blue">■</span> Treasury	<span style="color:brown">■</span> Artaxerxes Tomb	<span style="color:yellow">■</span> Gate of Xerxes



Plan of Persepolis (photo: University of Chicago) <<https://oi.uchicago.edu/collections/photographic-archives/persepolis/plan-persepolis-terrace>>

Darius' program at Persepolis including the building of a massive terraced platform covering 125,000 square meters of the promontory. This platform supported four groups of structures: residential quarters, a treasury, ceremonial palaces, and fortifications. Scholars continue to debate the purpose and nature of the site. Primary sources indicate that Darius saw himself building an important stronghold. Some scholars suggest that the site has a sacred connection to the god Mithra (Mehr), as well as links to the Nowruz, the Persian New Year's festival. More general readings see Persepolis as an important administrative and economic center of the Persian empire.

The Apadana palace is a large ceremonial building, likely an audience hall with an associated portico. The audience hall itself is hypostyle in its plan, meaning that the roof of the structure is supported by columns. Apadana is the Persian term equivalent to the Greek hypostyle (Ancient Greek: ὑπόστυλος hypóstylos). The footprint of the Apadana is c. 1,000 square meters; originally 72 columns, each standing to a height of 24 meters, supported the roof (only 14 columns remain standing today). The column capitals assumed the form of either twin-headed bulls (above), eagles or lions, all animals represented royal authority and kingship.



Bull Capital from Persepolis, Apadana, Persepolis (Fars, Iran), c. 520-465 B.C.E. (National Museum of Iran) (photo: slingshot) <[flickr.kr/p/x4CL23](https://flickr.kr/p/x4CL23)>

The king of the Achaemenid Persian empire is presumed to have received guests and tribute in this soaring, imposing space. To that end a sculptural program decorates monumental stairways on the north and east. The theme of that program is one that pays tribute to the Persian king himself as it depicts representatives of 23 subject nations bearing gifts to the king.

The monumental stairways that approach the Apādāna from the north and the east were adorned with registers of relief sculpture that depicted representatives of the twenty-three subject nations of the Persian empire bringing valuable gifts as tribute to the king. The sculptures form a processional scene, leading some scholars to conclude that the reliefs capture the scene of actual, annual tribute processions—perhaps on the occasion of the Persian New Year—that took place at Persepolis. The relief program of the northern stairway was perhaps completed c. 500-490 B.C.E. The two sets of stairway reliefs mirror and complement each other. Each program has a central scene of the enthroned king flanked by his attendants and guards.



An Armenian tribute bearer carrying a metal vessel with Homa (griffin) handles, relief from the eastern stairs of the Apādāna in Persepolis (Fars, Iran), c. 520-465 B.C.E. (photo: *Aryamahasattva*, CC BY-SA 3.0) <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hay\\_pers.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hay_pers.jpg)>



East stairway, Apādāna, Persepolis (Fars, Iran), c. 520-465 B.C.E.

Noblemen wearing elite outfits and military apparel are also present. The representatives of the twenty-three nations, each led by an attendant, bring tribute while dressed in costumes suggestive of their land of origin. Margaret Root interprets the central scenes of the enthroned king as the focal point of the overall composition, perhaps even reflecting events that took place within the Apādāna itself.

The relief program of the Apādāna serves to reinforce and underscore the power of the Persian king and the breadth of his dominion. The motif of subjugated peoples contributing their wealth to the empire's central authority serves to visually cement this political dominance. These processional scenes may have exerted influence beyond the Persian sphere, as some scholars have discussed the possibility that Persian relief sculpture from Persepolis may have influenced Athenian sculptors of the fifth century B.C.E. who were tasked with creating the Ionic frieze of the Parthenon in Athens. In any case, the Apādāna, both as a building and as an ideological tableau, make clear and strong statements about the authority of the Persian king and present a visually unified idea of the immense Achaemenid empire.

#### Additional resources:

[UNESCO video on Persepolis](http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/114/video) <<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/114/video>>  
[Persepolis on Livius.org](http://www.livius.org/pen-pg/persepolis_persepolis_apadana.html) <[http://www.livius.org/pen-pg/persepolis\\_persepolis\\_apadana.html](http://www.livius.org/pen-pg/persepolis_persepolis_apadana.html)>

[Persepolis relief in the British Museum](https://culturalinstitute.britishmuseum.org/asset-viewer/stone-relief-from-the-apadana-audience-hall-at-persepolis/aQFzJDMOCxRXA?hl=en) <<https://culturalinstitute.britishmuseum.org/asset-viewer/stone-relief-from-the-apadana-audience-hall-at-persepolis/aQFzJDMOCxRXA?hl=en>>

[Persepolis from the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago](https://oi.uchicago.edu/collections/photographic-archives/persepolis/apadana) <<https://oi.uchicago.edu/collections/photographic-archives/persepolis/apadana>>

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Margaret Cool Root, "The Parthenon Frieze and the Apadana Reliefs at Persepolis: Reassessing a Programmatic Relationship," *American Journal of Archaeology* 89.1 (1985) pp. 103-122.

Erich Friedrich Schmidt, *Persepolis* 3 v. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953-1970).

R. Schmitt, "Achaemenid Dynasty," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I/4, pp. 414-426 <<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/achaemenid-dynasty>>

A. S. Shahbazi, "The Persepolis 'Treasury Reliefs' Once More," *AMI* 9 (1976) pp. 151-56.

Robert E. Mortimer Wheeler, *Flames over Persepolis: Turning Point in History* (London, 1968).

## **Acknowledgments**

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