

Mesopotamia: Late Uruk

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- Late Uruk (3400- 3100 BC; 300 years long)
 - We know far more about the Late Uruk period than the preceding Middle and Early Uruk and the 'Ubaid
 - due mostly to extensive excavations at the site of Warka (Uruk) that have uncovered impressive monumental architecture of the Late Uruk period and not dug any further
 - since that would mean destroying some of the Late Uruk buildings to see what is underneath
 - this means that we have a better idea of the communal institutions (usually called temples) and city life of Warka than we do of towns in earlier periods
 - by this time the temples had piled up high enough to form tall platforms: early ziggurats
 - stone sculpture
 - sculpture was probably not new to this period, but some nice examples help us imagine some features of Uruk society
 - the elaboration of high-status life
 - the elaboration of religious ritual
 - the training, specialization, and support of craftspeople that must have been necessary to produce these kinds of objects
 - apparently most, if not all, of this production was connected to the temple/public institutions and/or high-status people related to it
 - that is, specialists worked in temple shops or were otherwise supported by the temple
 - most of these things were not, apparently, results of independent entrepreneurship
 - Warka vase, 1 m tall, with low reliefs around it showing
 - wheat at the base
 - cattle in the next row
 - nude men with shaved heads carrying offerings in baskets, jars, etc.
 - and at the top, a complex scene apparently of food offerings being presented to a goddess/priestess/image, by a well-dressed male figure (priest? king?)
 - Marble head (8 inches high)
 - originally with inlaid eyes and eyebrows, copper hair
 - probably from a composite wood and stone statue
 - back is flat, with mounting holes
 - very naturalistic
 - Statuette, Khafje, 4 inches high
 - Offering stand, Uruk. Stone ram with silver rod support for offering stand or incense burner
 - Cup holder, Tell Agrab
 - the figure holding the lions is a recurring theme in Sumerian art; may refer to a character named Enkidu who appears in the Gilgamesh stories
 - See the brief Gilgamesh story in the Reader

- Stela, Uruk (granite)
 - note the Africa-like environment that this scene implies!
- “Monster”, Uruk period
- also small-scale stonework apparently for personal use, like amulets
- Late Uruk period relief with a reed house (or barn)
 - from a temple frieze
 - virtually identical to recent Marsh Arab houses!
 - and like a modern southern Iraqi *mudhif*, or men’s meeting hall
 - this style of reed architecture apparently connoted tradition, respectability, even sacredness in Uruk times
 - and still today
 - like Greek temple architecture does for banks and government buildings here
- social status differences
 - implied by the monumental architecture (temples or assembly halls, according to Nissen), fancy goods that only a few would have access to, many specializations
 - but we cannot confirm it with burials, because very few have been found, and no particularly elaborate ones
 - Uruk burials are so scarce that some have suggested the Uruk people may have had some non-burial way of disposing of the dead
 - like floating them down the river?
- invention of writing (more on this later)
 - clearly was related to increasingly intense economic activities
 - production, collection, storage, redistribution, exchange
 - like the workshops and other economic features, writing was associated with the temple or other central, public institutions
- the city of Uruk was joined by four other competing city-states that were getting large
 - Ur, Nippur, Kish, and Eridu (continuing its importance from the 'Ubaid period)
 - although none was as big as Uruk (but Nissen suspects that they were similarly large)
- Example Uruk period city: Uruk itself
 - the modern placename of the site of Uruk is Warka
 - also mentioned as Erech in the Bible (Genesis 10:10)
 - a surprising amount of the Old Testament is derived from much, much earlier Mesopotamian traditions and/or written sources, including many details of the flood
 - Erech is one of the cities in the first kingdom mentioned in Genesis, ruled by Nimrod, a descendent of Noah, who “began to be a mighty one in the earth...and the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad...”
 - located by the Euphrates river
 - initially settled in 'Ubaid period
 - and continued to be occupied long after the end of Uruk period
 - Uruk was probably the biggest, most impressive city in Mesopotamia (i.e. on Earth) for 400 years or more (3200-2800+ BC)
 - New York should be so lucky
 - up to 80 ha (200 acres) during the Uruk period

- about 90% of the entire SSU campus, from the residence halls to the stadium (~1130m x 780 m; = 87 ha)
- population at the end of the Uruk period (about 3100 BC) estimated from 10,000 to 50,000 or more, and it grew even larger in the following centuries
- surrounded by city walls
- mostly the monumental “temple” precincts have been excavated
- one of the important temples was the “Anu ziggurat”
 - as at Eridu, they built over and over again on the same site
 - after 6 rebuildings over a span of 500 years, the accumulated stack of buildings and rubble stood 16 meters (over 50 feet) above the ground surface
 - about 11 meter platform plus the building on top perhaps 5 meters tall
 - total similar to a 5-story modern building
 - on this platform was built the “white temple” (just one temple in the sequence of rebuildings)
 - white color
 - on a high platform with steps and ramps
 - offering of a leopard and a lion in lowest course of bricks
 - similar plan to late ‘Ubaid temples
 - central cella
 - freestanding rectangular pedestal with a semi-circular step with evidence of burning
 - high platform at one end of cella with steps leading up to it: base of a statue?
 - many interior niches
 - many exterior buttresses
 - called “Anu” temple because it is close to later temples that can be historically linked to Anu, the Sumerian sky god
 - it may or may not be correct to project the connection to Anu back into the Uruk period
 - estimated 7,500 person-years to build Anu ziggurat (i.e. monumental architecture)
- the Anu ziggurat was just one of several monumental complexes at Uruk
- Eanna ceremonial precinct at Uruk
 - the ceremonial precinct alone covered 9 ha, over twice the entire site of Jericho; 2/3 the size of all of Çatal Hüyük
 - near historical temple to the goddess Inanna, Uruk’s principal patron deity
- Limestone Building (“temple”?)
 - built on foundation of shaped limestone blocks from Arabian plateau 60 km away
 - 30 X 76 m (about the same width as Darwin Hall, but only 3/4 as long)
 - Carefully laid out, symmetrical plan, elaborate niches and buttresses
- Pillar Hall (“temple”?)
 - contemporary with Limestone temple
 - several buildings
 - freestanding large round pillars, 2.6 m diameter (over 8 feet)
 - made of mud bricks stacked radially, thickly plastered with clay
 - into the wet clay were pushed clay cones with painted ends in red, white, and black, forming geometric designs

- also done on flat walls: "clay wall cone mosaics"
- Later rebuildings were twice as wide as the Limestone Building; as wide as Stevenson Hall and over 3/4 as long (60 X 80 m)
- Stone mosaic "temple"
 - possibly first built a bit earlier than the others
 - walls decorated with cone mosaics, but in this case, the cones are different colored stone
- These "temple" compounds were elaborate, decorated, large, elevated on platforms, probably at least partially public
 - but mostly not quite the standard "temple" forms like the White Temple on the Anu Ziggurat
 - Nissen prefers to leave their precise function open, calling the "assembly halls" that might have had ritual ("cultic") functions, but not necessarily
 - what is certain is that in addition to their ceremonial or public functions, they also had major economic functions
 - large complexes of storage rooms, apparently for agricultural produce
 - apparently used to support hundreds of laborers and craft specialists associated with the temple
 - "kilns" for firing pottery or working metals
 - vast quantities of broken sealings (the clay globs on which stamp or cylinder seals were pressed to mark ownership, receipt, etc.)
 - presumably implying transactions with sealed goods
 - the first examples of writing (pre-cuneiform) are from the Eanna precinct
 - they clearly have to do with accounting of goods in storage, payments, lists of workers and contributors, and so on
 - much less work has been done outside the Eanna precinct, but tablets are found in limited quantities elsewhere
 - writing was used extensively in the Eanna precinct, but probably not exclusively there
- implications of temples, ziggurats, etc.
 - these are really big, elaborate, expensive buildings
 - even by today's standards
 - required a huge labor force to build
 - required skill in planning the building and organizing logistics
 - all suggest:
 - an institutionalized, stable hierarchy
 - that is, not just one successful, charismatic leader, but a society organized around powerful institutions (like the temple) with leaders
 - that kept working in about the same way for generation after generation
 - analogous to the Vatican
 - mobilization of large economic resources
 - organization of many laborers and craftspeople
 - legitimation of institutions through association with impressive monuments and ceremonies
 - presence of architects, specialized planner-organizers, ritual experts: a "knowledge" class

- that is, people with “esoteric” knowledge
- possibly with formal training or apprenticeship
- probably with control of access to knowledge and skills
- the buildings and the institutions would have lent a permanence and legitimacy to this class
- the storage, production, recordkeeping, and other administrative features suggest that the temple (or other wealthy, public institution) had a major role in
 - the flow of agricultural produce
 - the direction of at least some of the labor of much of the population
 - the training and support of specialized craftspeople
 - the training and support of specialized administrators, eventually including scribes
- all together, the “temple” seems to have been the institution(s) around and through which a complex social hierarchy and real political and economic power finally developed
- even so, settlement patterns seem to suggest that each big city only controlled the production of the small hamlets in its immediate vicinity
 - that is, at this point there was no larger-scale integration between cities
 - Uruk society was organized into city-states (more or less)
 - walled
 - often competing or even fighting, sometimes allied or coexisting
- success sowed the seeds of destruction:
 - beginning of salinization
 - salinization is the accumulation of salts in the soil due to evaporation of water from the surface of poorly drained, soggy soil
 - as the soil gets saltier, it becomes less fertile for farming
 - late Uruk records show that wheat and barley were grown in equal amounts; 1000 years later, Early Dynastic records show 6 times as much barley as wheat
 - Barley is more salt-tolerant than wheat
 - this is an indication that poor drainage from intensive farming was already beginning the process of salinizing the landscape
 - which would eventually convert much of Sumer into desert and scrubland fit only for grazing animals