

## **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 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 apparently not 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
  - Plays a role in the brief Gilgamesh story we read a few classes from now
- 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:
    - monumental architecture (temples or assembly halls, according to Nissen)
    - fancy goods that only a few would have access to
    - many specializations with probably differing social status
  - but we cannot confirm it with burials, because very few have been found for this period, 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)
  - probably none was as big as Uruk (but Nissen suspects that they were in the same ballpark)
- 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/engineers, organizers/administrators, 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 these institutions (“temples”) 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