

## Chapter 2

# **The Art of the Ancient Near East**

**Bronze Age in the Ancient Near East**  
**3300-1200 BCE**

**Iron Age in the Ancient Near East**  
**1200 BCE – 600 BCE**

# The Fertile Crescent



# The Ancient Near East

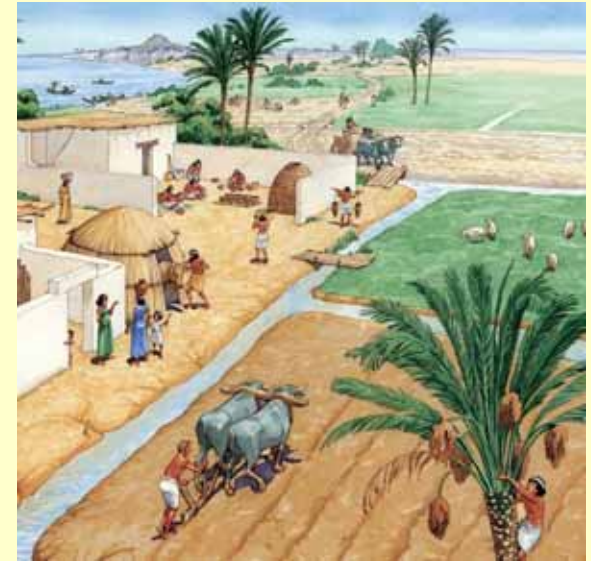


**Mesopotamia:** a Greek word meaning 'between the rivers'. An ancient region of southwest Asia between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in modern-day Iraq.



- The delta could only be made habitable by large-scale irrigation and flood control, which was managed first by a priestly class and then by godlike kings. Consequently the plentiful supply of food permitted the growth of large urban population.

- [Irrigation in Ancient Mesopotamia](#)
- <http://youtu.be/5RP2KfewiJA>



- Advances in the design of the plough boosted the productivity of the Sumerian peasant. By 3000 BC, the original wooden ploughshare, had given way in Sumer to a much sturdier bronze blade.

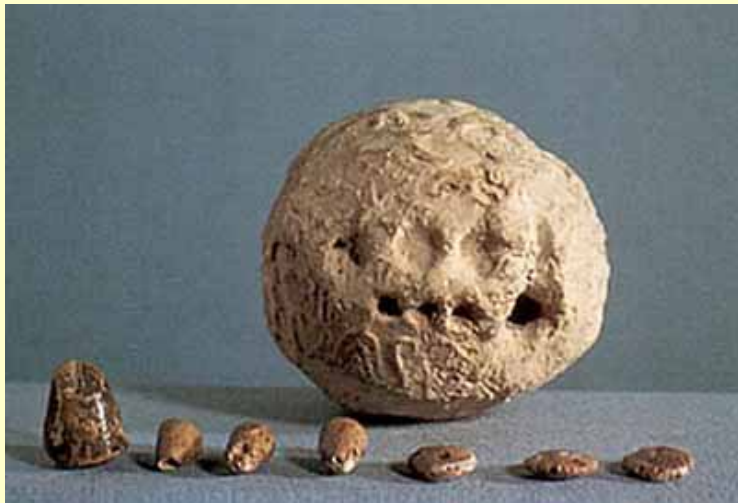
- Cylinder Seal Showing God of Agriculture and Two Others Plowing



## Sumerian Art:

3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE (31-20th. c. BCE)






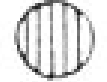










**Ancient Sumer was not a unified nation but made up of independent city-states. Rulers and priests directed the communal activities including canal construction, crop collection, and food distribution. Development of agriculture made it possible for some members to specialize in other activities such as manufacturing, trade and administration.**



**Sumerian Clay Tokens**  
**4<sup>th</sup> mill BCE**

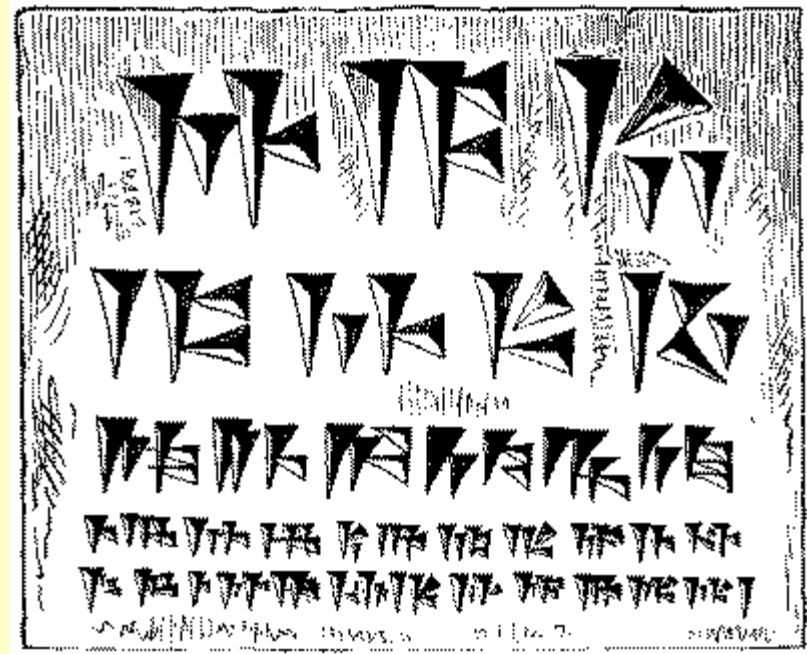
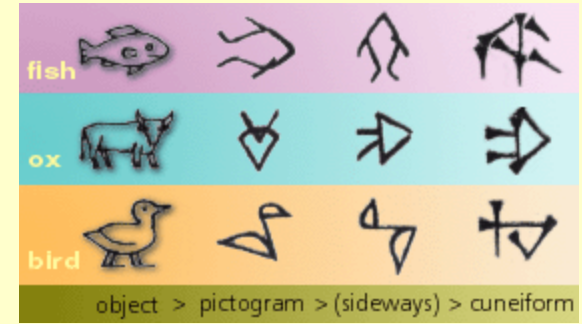
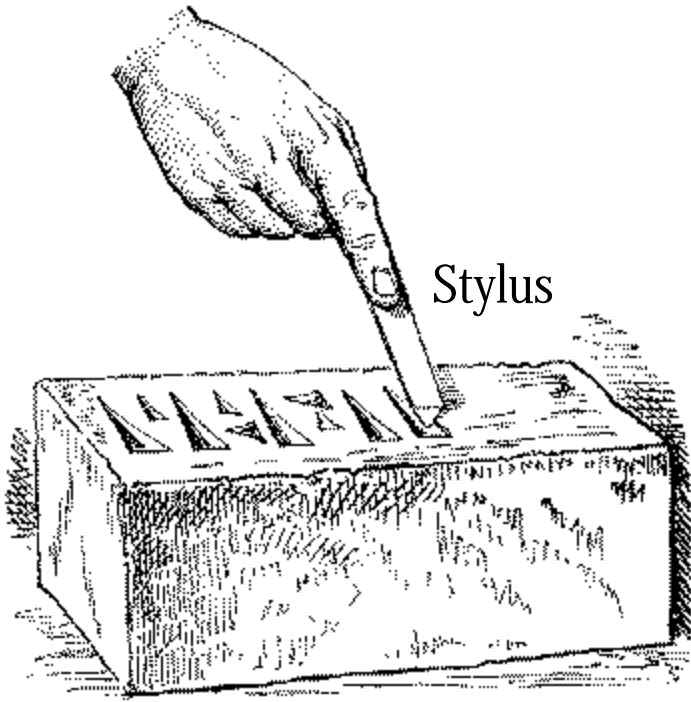


## Comparison of tokens and Sumerian characters

Tokens	Sumerian Pictographs	Tokens	Sumerian Pictographs
	 Bread		 Seat
	 Wool		 Place
	 Sheep		 Legal Decision
	 Metal		 Cloth



**Sumerian  
pictographic tablet.**  
c. 3100 BCE



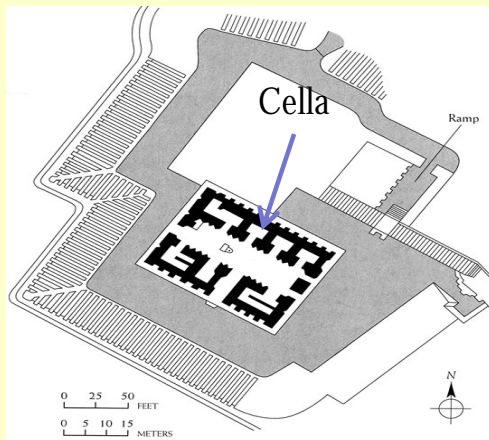
**Cuneiform (Latin - “Wedge Shaped”) Writing**  
Used by the Sumerians, Akkadians Assyrians  
Babylonians and Persians.



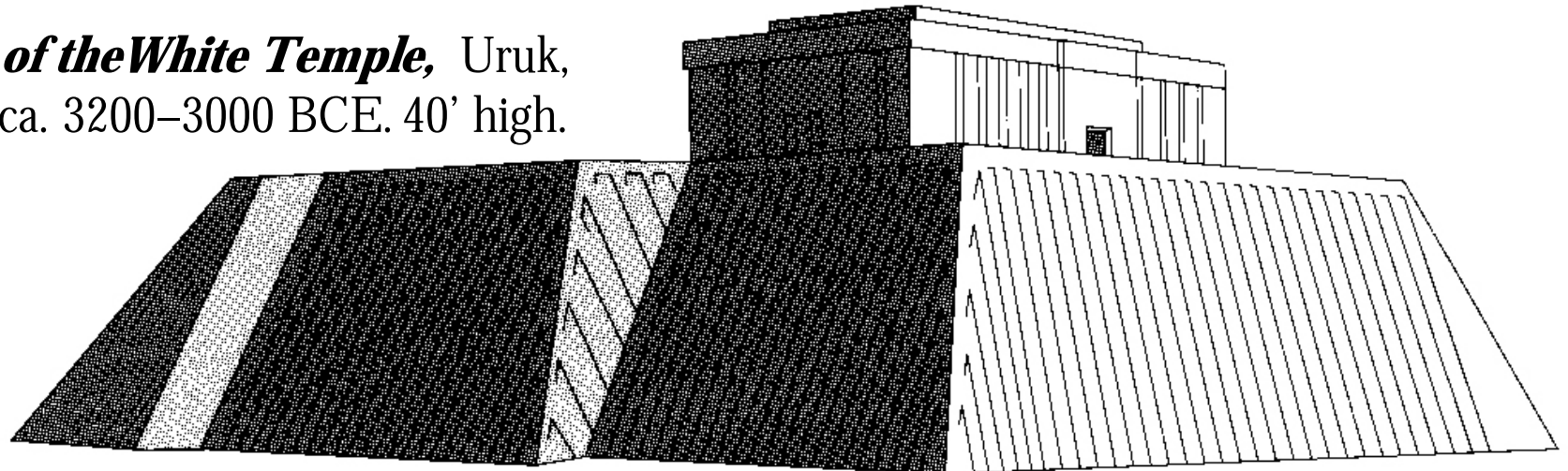
**Tablet & Envelope with Cuneiform**



**Cella:** (Also called “Holy of Holies”) the inner room of the temple, in which the statue of the god was situated



***Plan of the White Temple, Uruk, Iraq, ca. 3200–3000 BCE. 40' high.***

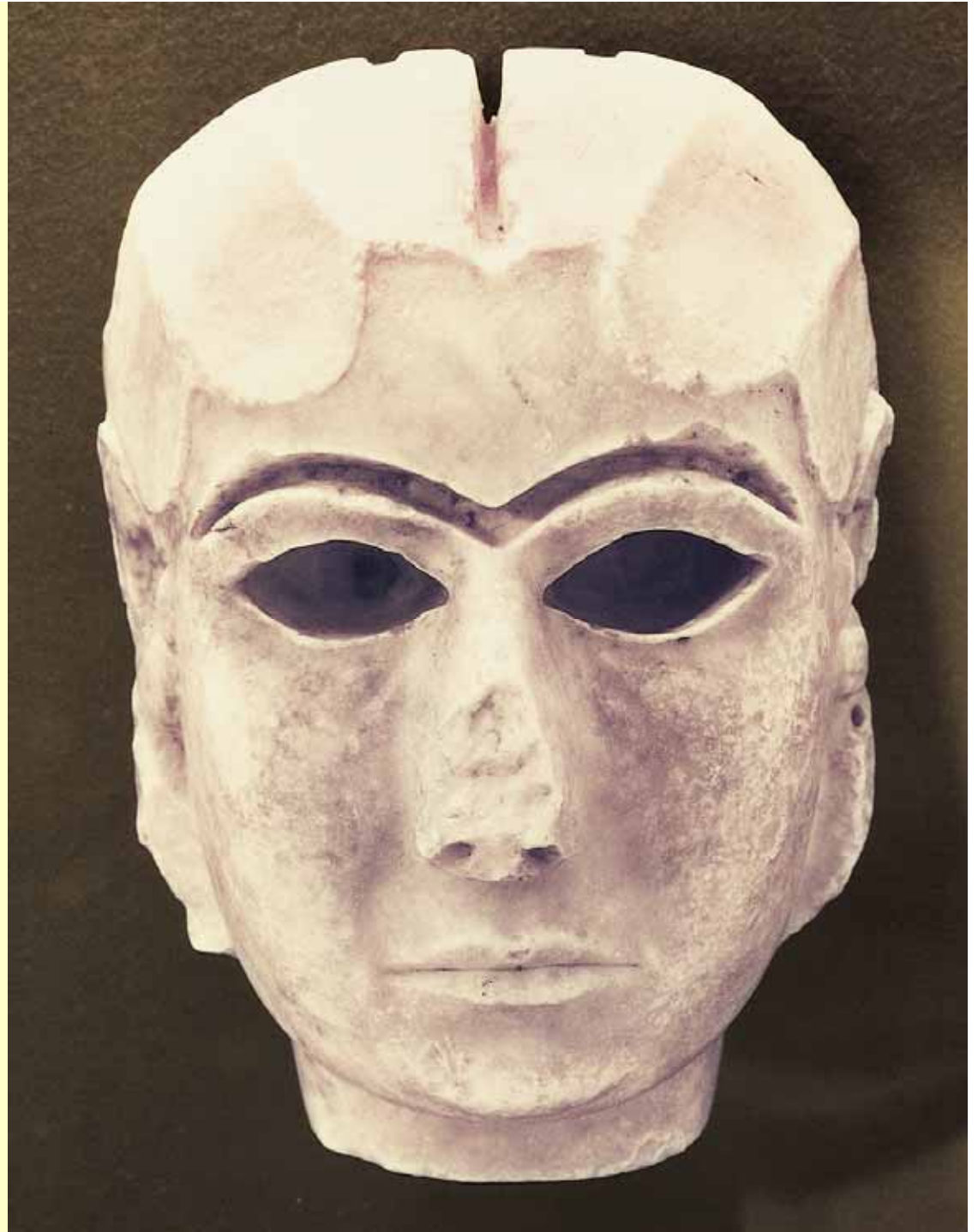


**White Temple and Ziggurat, Uruk, Iraq, ca. 3200–3000 BCE. 40' high.**

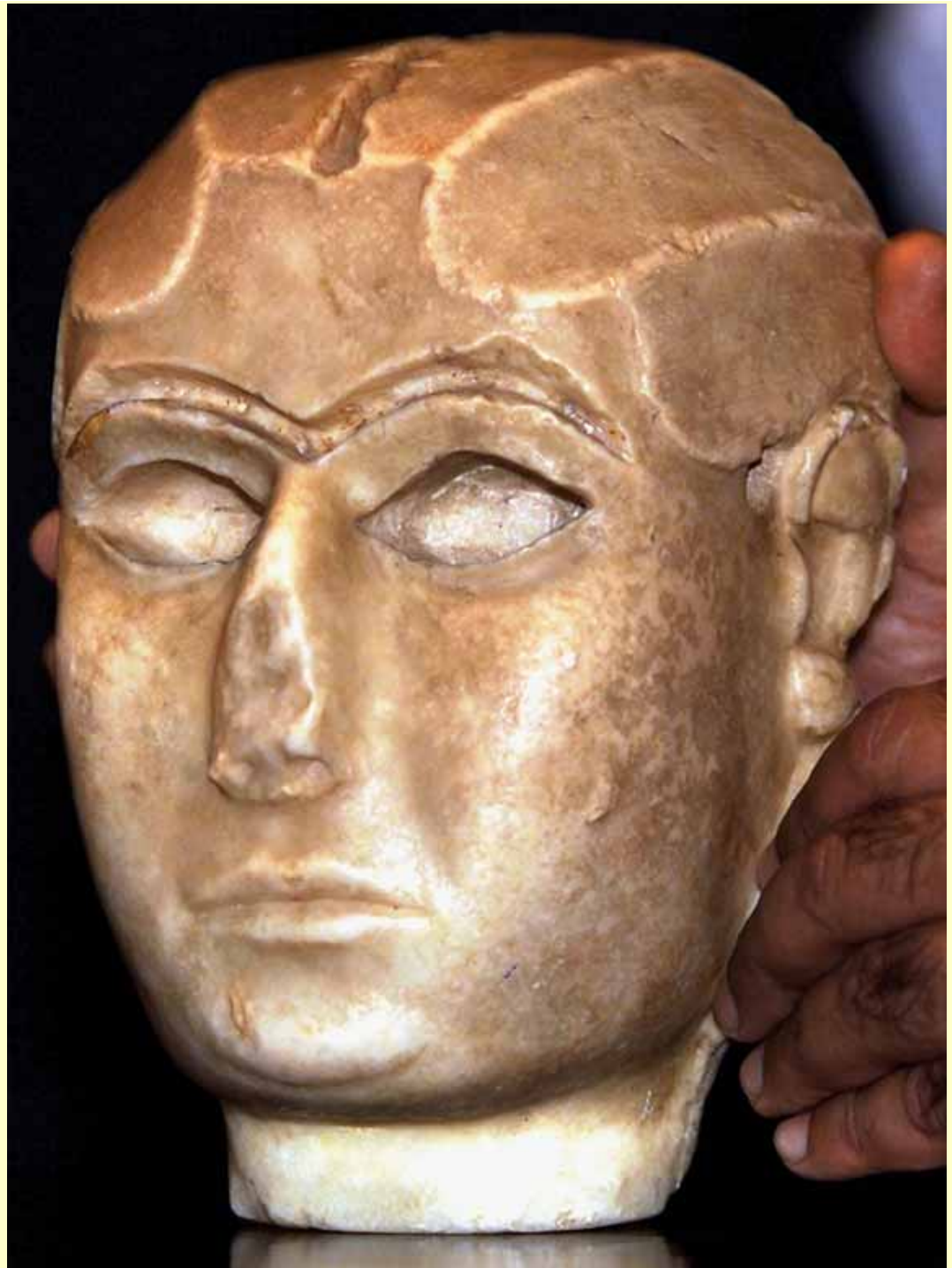


**Inanna:** The chief Sumerian goddess, associated with fertility, the natural world, and war. Later equated with the Babylonian Ishtar.

**Female head (Inanna?),**  
from Uruk, Iraq, ca. 3200–  
3000 BCE. Marble, approx. 8”  
high.  
Iraq Museum, Baghdad



**Female head (Inanna?),**  
from Uruk, Iraq, ca. 3200–  
3000 BCE. Marble, approx. 8”  
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Iraq Museum, Baghdad



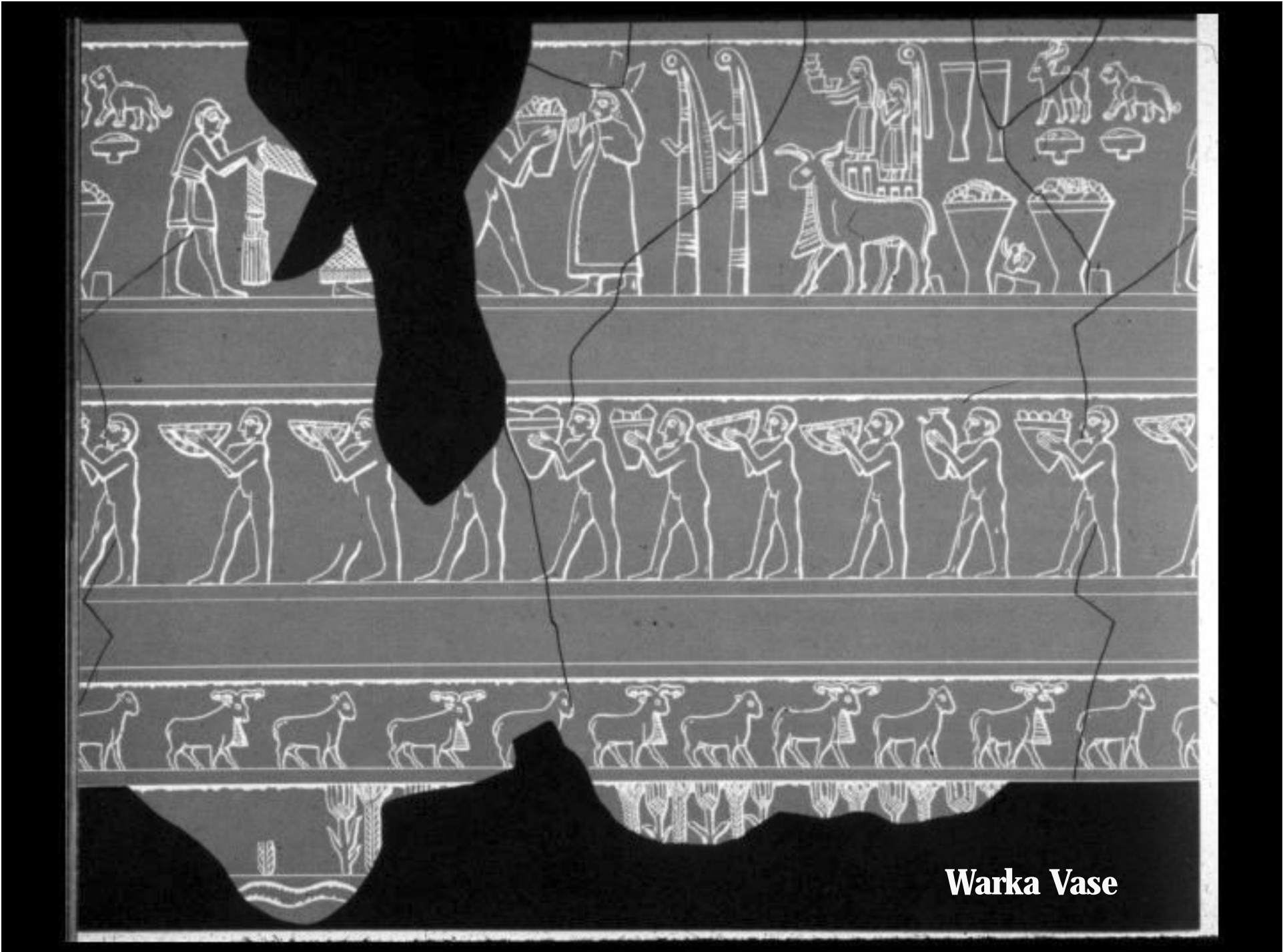
**Register:** One of a series of superimposed bands in a pictorial narrative, or the particular levels on which motifs are placed.

### **Warka Vase**

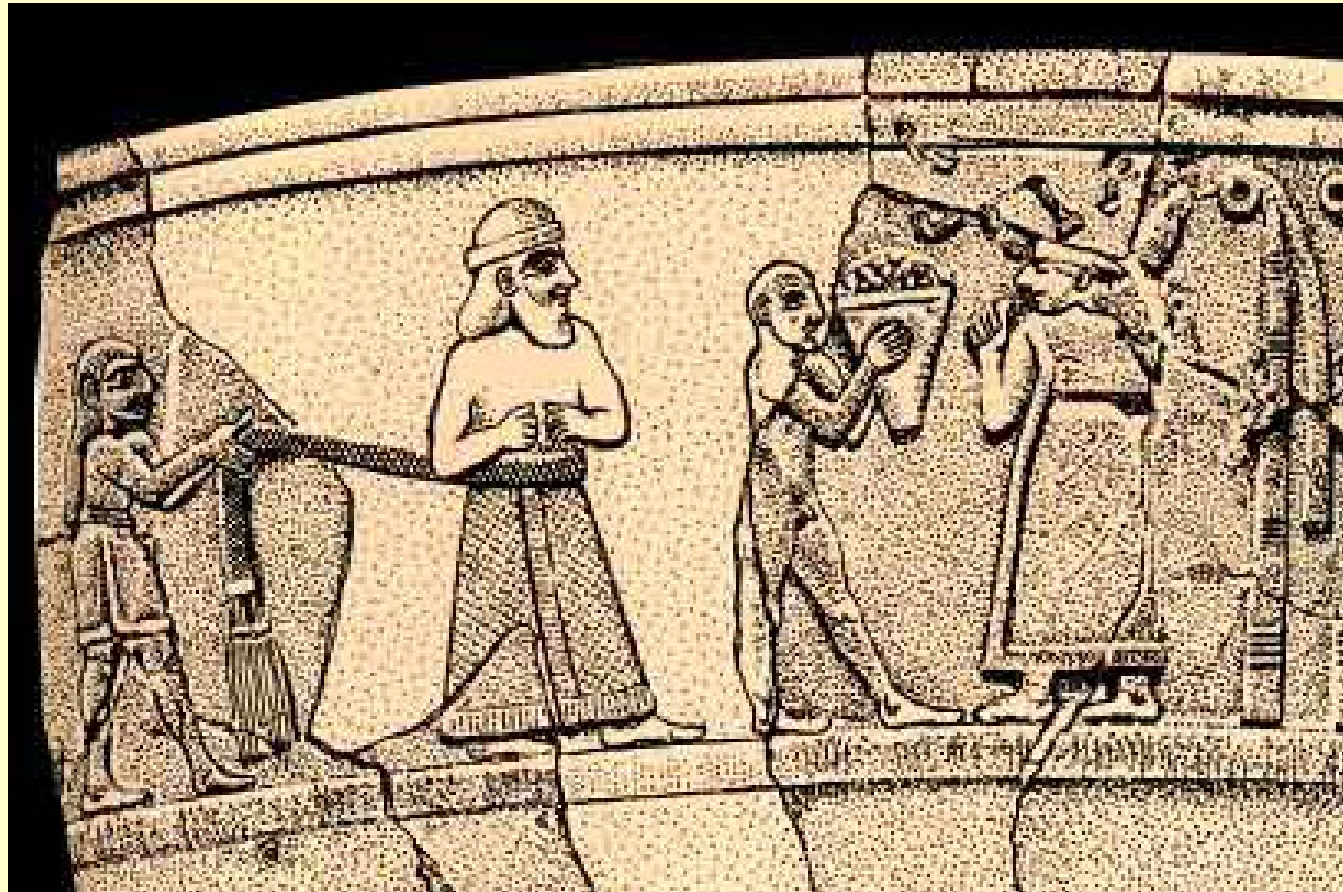
Presentation of offerings to Inanna  
from Uruk, Iraq,  
ca. 3200–3000 BCE. Alabaster, 3' 1/4" high.  
Iraq Museum, Baghdad







**Warka Vase**



**Warka Vase.** Detail. Innana and the “Priest-King”

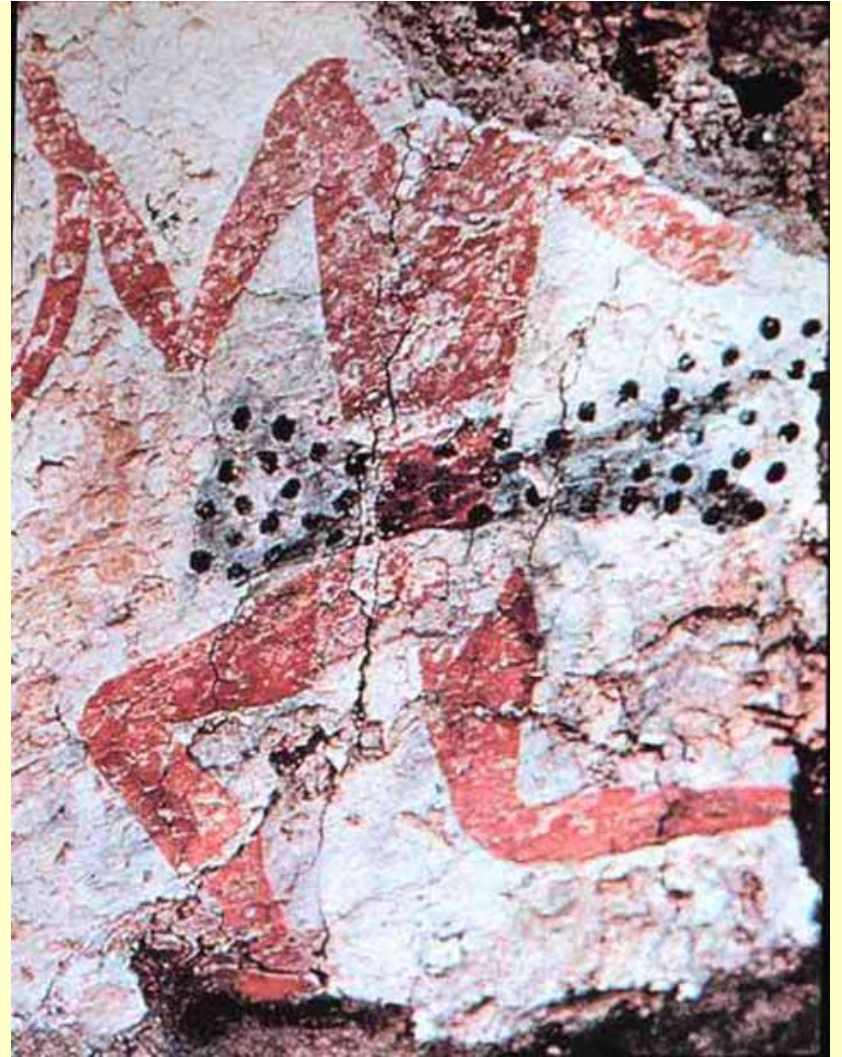
**Warka Vase Detail.**







**Warka Vase** Detail.



**Comparison:** Hunter. Çatal Höyük, Turkey. c.5750 BCE



Detail  
Warka Vase



## **Warka Vase**

Detail. Presentation of offerings to Inanna





## **Warka Vase**

Stolen in April 2003, returned to Iraq Museum: June 2003.





## The Courtship of Inanna & Dumuzi ( Circa 3000 BCE )

*Inanna spoke:*

"What I tell you  
Let the singer weave into song.  
What I tell you,  
Let it flow from ear to mouth,  
Let it pass from old to young:  
My vulva, the horn,  
The Boat of Heaven,  
Is full of eagerness like the young moon.  
My untilled land lies fallow.  
As for me, Inanna,  
Who will plow my vulva!  
Who will plow my high field!  
Who will plow my wet ground!  
As for me, the young woman,  
Who will plow my vulva!  
Who will station the ox there!  
Who will plow my vulva!"



Egyptian wall painting. Oxen pulling a plow. Tomb of Sennedjem

**Dumuzi replied:**

"Great Lady, the king will plow your vulva.  
I, Dumuzi the King, will plow your vulva."

“I will sing the song of the man of battle, the man of battle. I will sing the song of lord Gilgamesh, the man of battle, I will sing the song of the lord with the very black beard, the man of battle. I will sing the song of him with the well-proportioned limbs, the man of battle...”

From the Epic of Gilgamesh

## **Gilgamesh kills the heavenly bull**

3rd millennium BCE

Sumerian ceramic relief



**Votive offering** is an object left in a sacred place for ritual purposes.

### **Statuettes of two worshipers**

Votive figures from temple at Eshnunna, Iraq, ca. 2700 BCE.

Gypsum inlaid with shell and black limestone, tallest figure approx. 2' 6" high.





**Votive figures** from the temple at Eshnunna, Iraq, ca. 2700 BCE.





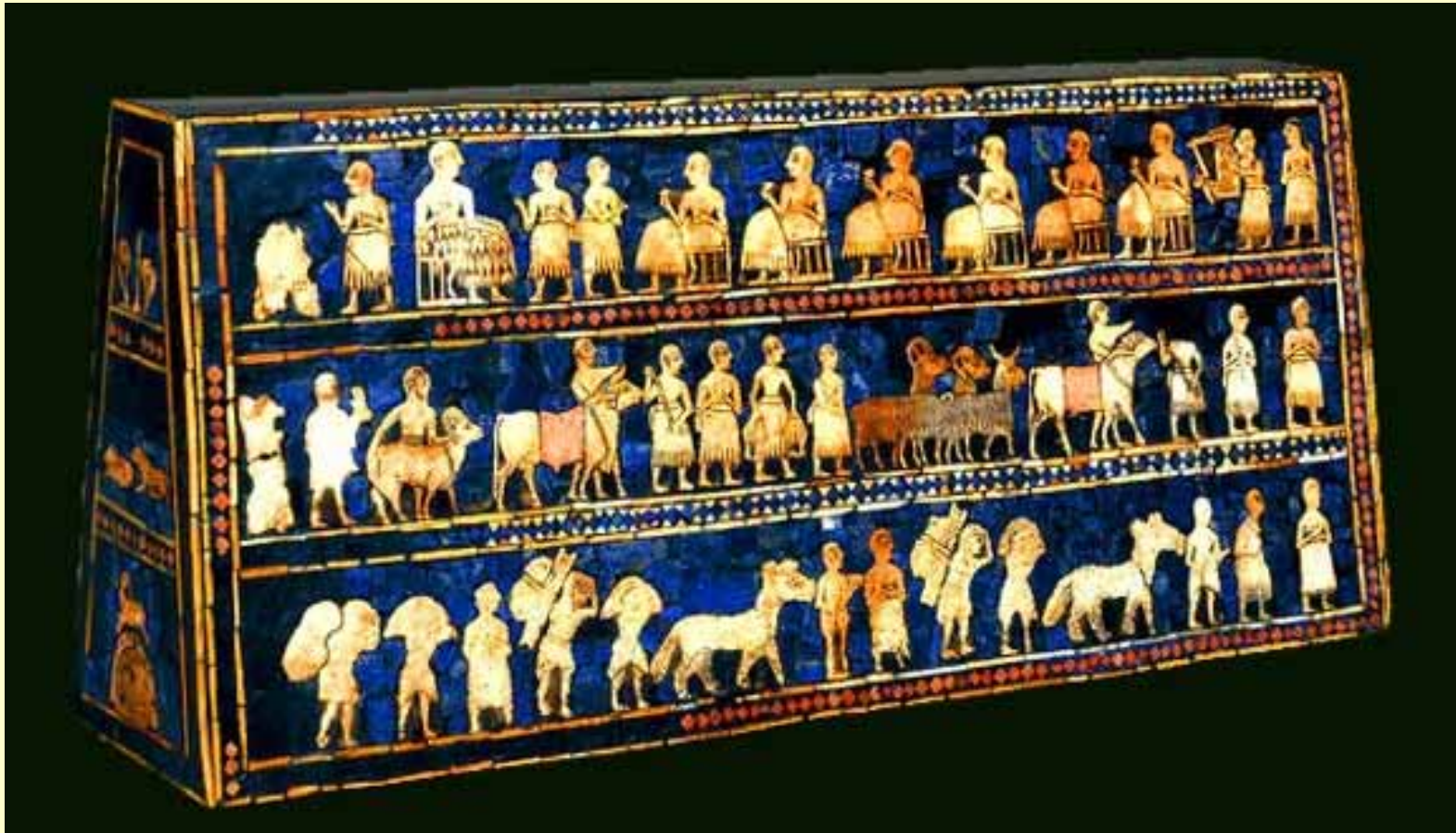


**Votive figures** from the temple at Eshnunna, Iraq, ca. 2700 BCE.



Leonard Woolley (right)  
and T. E. Lawrence  
at the Excavations at  
Carchemish, Syria, 1913

**Sir Leonard Woolley**, 1880-1960, British archaeologist who directed the joint British Museum and Univ. of Pennsylvania expedition at Ur in Mesopotamia (1922-34). Woolley oversaw the excavation of the cemetery at Ur, which included 16 royal tombs with treasures of gold and lapis lazuli and evidence of large-scale human sacrifice.



### **Standard of Ur, Peace side**

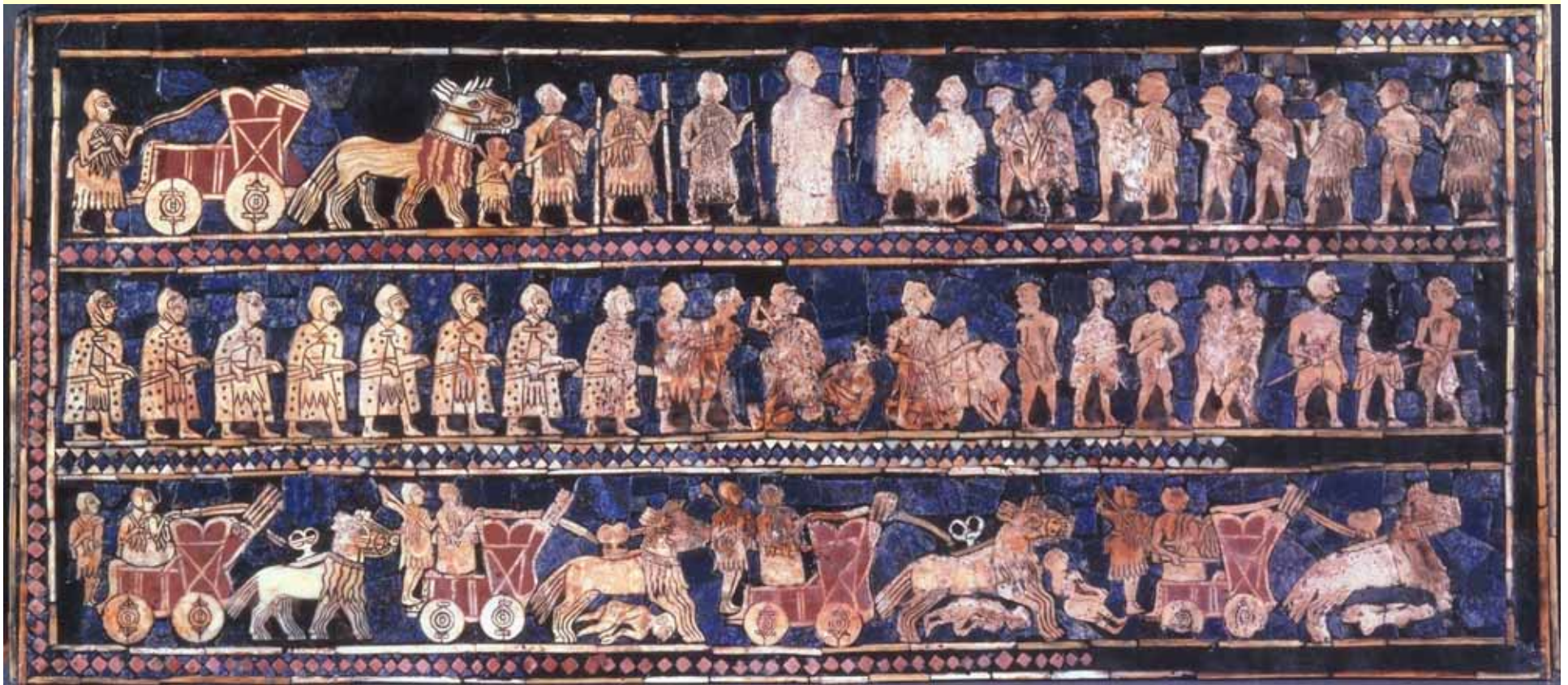
Royal Cemetery, Ur, Iraq, ca. 2600 BCE

Wood inlaid with shell, lapis lazuli (semiprecious blue stone from Afghanistan), red limestone, approx. 8" x 1' 7". British Museum. London



## Hierarchical Scale:

The representation of more important figures as larger than less important figures.



**Standard of Ur, War side**, Royal Cemetery, Ur, Iraq, ca. 2600 BCE  
Wood inlaid with shell, lapis lazuli, and red limestone, approx. 8" x 1' 7".









**Standard of Ur, Peace side**, Royal Cemetery, Ur, Iraq, ca. 2600 BCE  
Wood inlaid with shell, lapis lazuli, and red limestone, approx. 8" x 1' 7".



## **Standard of Ur**

Detail: lyre player





Sir Leonard Woolley with the triangular frame of an excavated Sumerian harp, 1920s. (Plaster cast.) Such a frame is an archetype for the more developed mediaeval and modern framed harps.



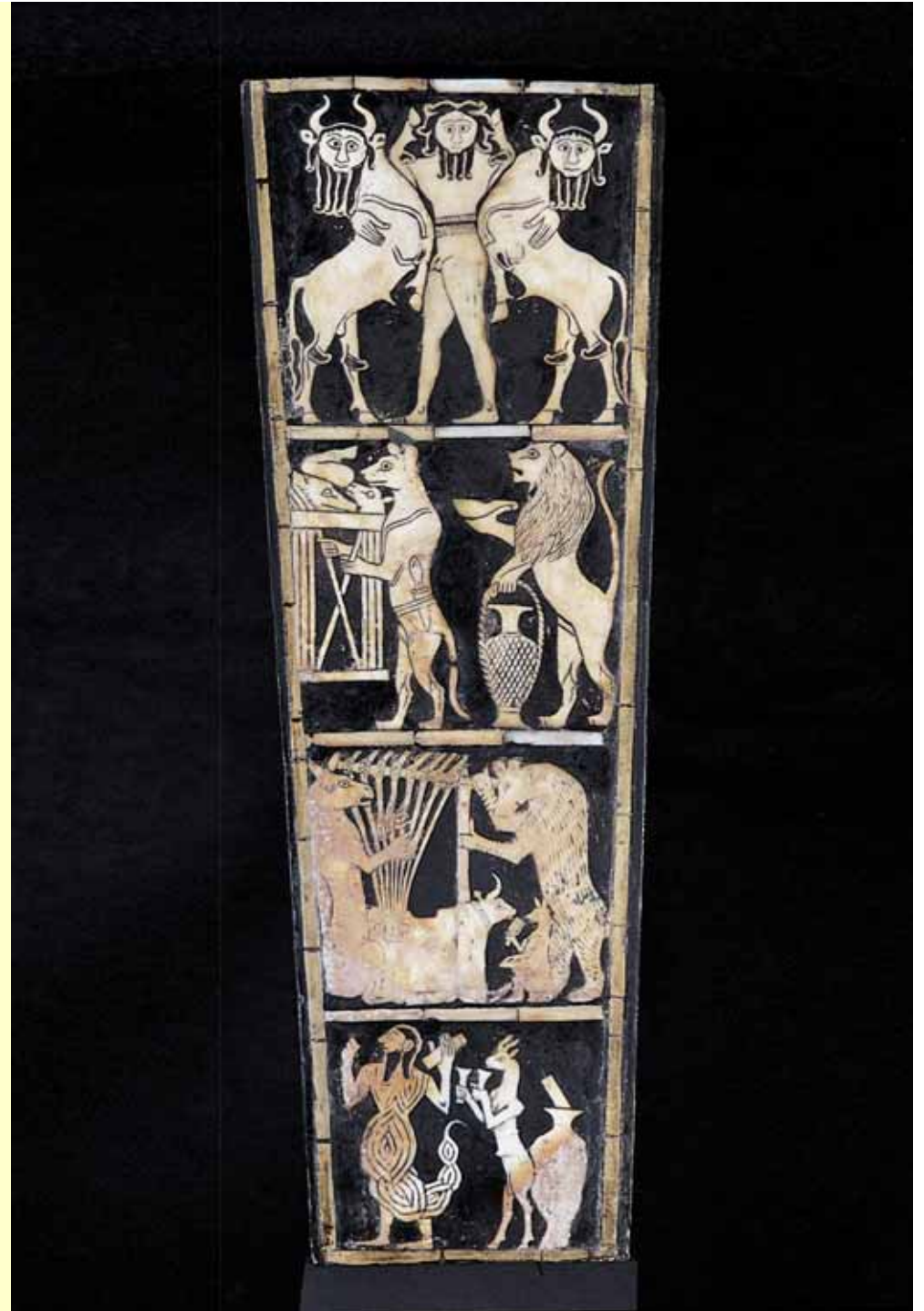
**Bull-headed lyre** (restored), Royal Cemetery, Ur, Iraq, ca. 2600 BCE. Gold leaf and lapis lazuli over a wooden core, approx. 5' 5" high University of Pennsylvania.

**Bull-headed lyre** (restored),  
Royal Cemetery, Ur, Iraq, ca. 2600 BCE.  
Gold leaf and lapis lazuli over a wooden  
core, approx. 5' 5" high  
University of Pennsylvania..



**Heraldic composition:** a composition that is symmetrical on either side of a central figure

**Soundbox of a lyre** from the Royal Cemetery, Ur, Iraq, ca. 2600 BCE. Wood with inlaid gold, lapis lazuli, and shell, approx. 1' 7" high.







**Ram Caught in a Thicket**, From Ur, southern Iraq, about 2600-2400 BCE . Gold, silver, lapis lazuli, copper, shell, red limestone, and bitumen  
H. 42.6 cm. Penn Museum



***Ram (or Goat) in a Thicket***

From Ur, southern  
Iraq, about 2600-  
2400 BCE. British  
Museum



## **Sacred tree on Sumerian seals**

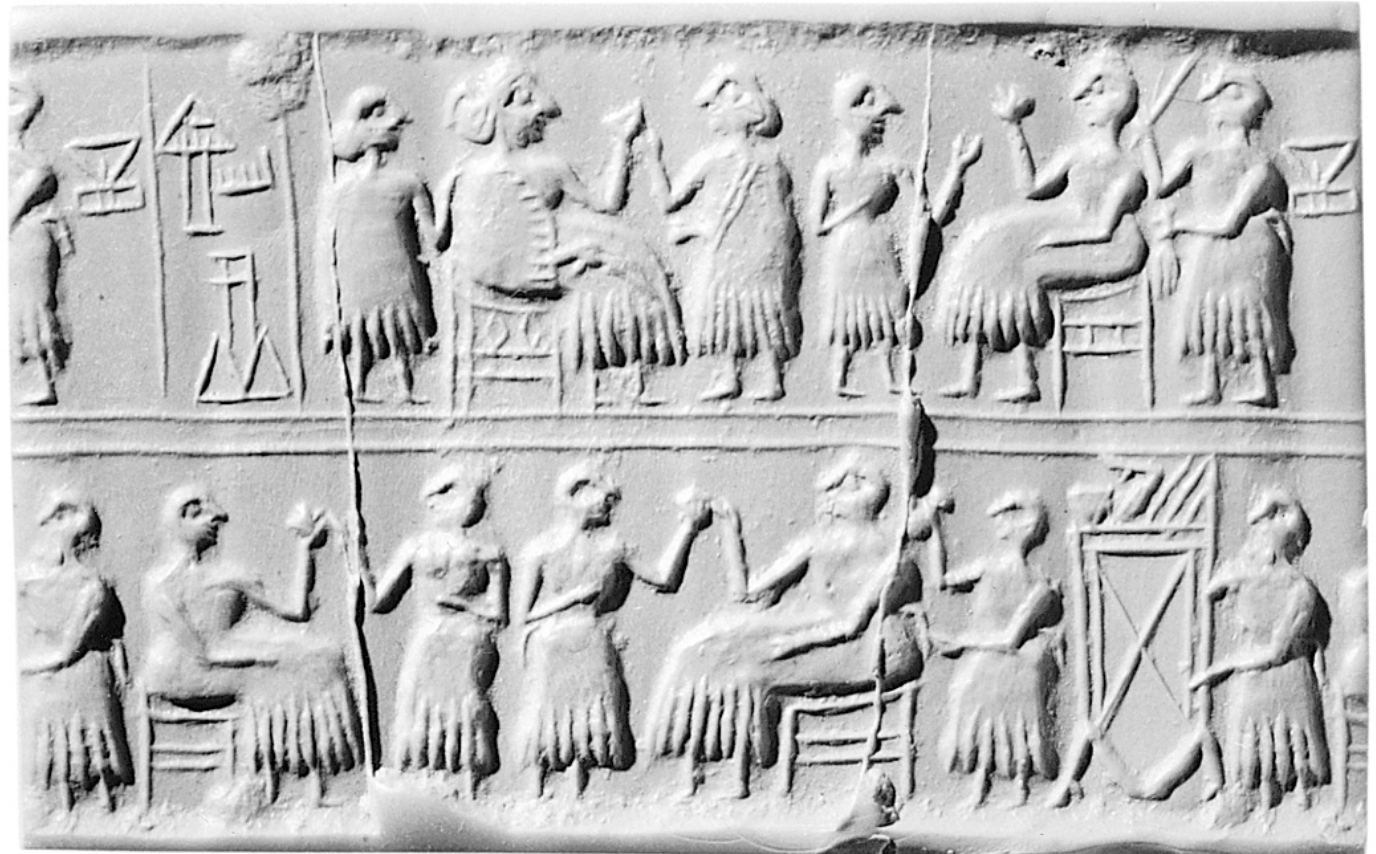
L.- c. 3000 BCE

B.-c. 2500 BCE





**Cylinder Seal:** A small stone cylinder incised with reversed designs so that when it was rolled over a soft surface the design appeared in relief. These seals were used to mark property and to legalize documents.



**Banquet scene**, cylinder seal (left) and its modern impression (right), from the tomb of Puabi, Royal Cemetery, Ur, Iraq, ca. 2600 BCE. Lapis lazuli, approx. 2" high.



***Cylinder seal with Banquet Scene***, from tomb of Puabi, Royal Cemetery, Ur  
2600BCE. Lapis Lazuli, 2" high. British Museum, London

Akkadian Art: 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE  
(Bronze Age)





A map of the Akkadian Empire, its dependent territories, and conquests.

**Stele** - a carved stone slab used to mark graves or to commemorate historical events

**Victory Stele of Naram-Sin,**

From Susa, Iran (probably came originally from Sippar, an Akkadian city and brought by the Elamites to Susa), 2254–2218 BCE  
Pink sandstone, approx. 6' 7" high.  
Louvre, Paris.

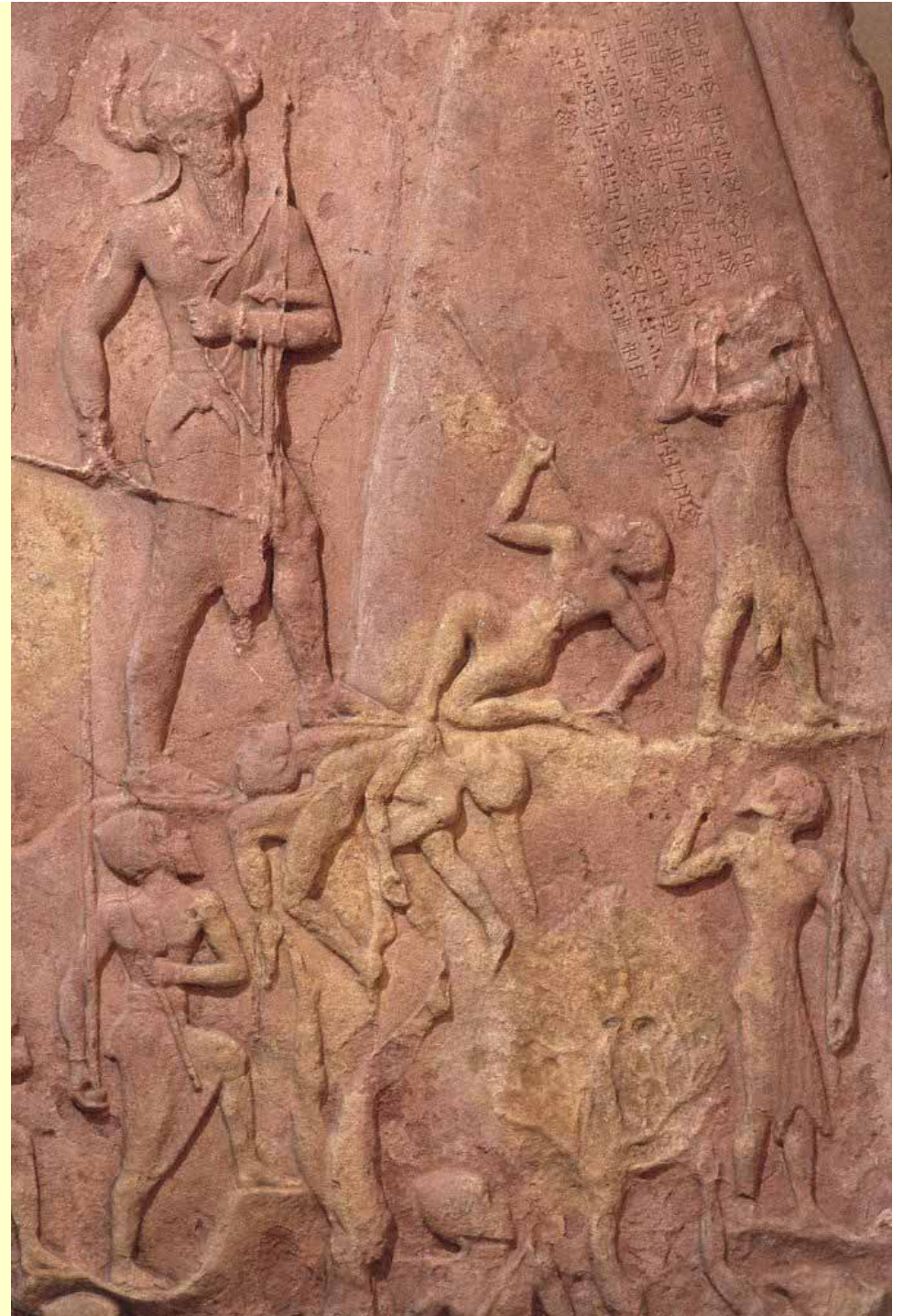






**Comparison:** Ishtar (Queen of heaven/morning and evening star) and Shamash (sun god). Akkadian cylinder seal

**Victory Stele of Naram-Sin.** Detail







**Victory Stele of Naram-Sin. Detail**



**Victory Stele of  
Naram-Sin.** Detail





## **Victory Stele of Naram-Sin,**

From Susa, Iran, 2254–2218 BCE  
Pink sandstone, approx. 6' 7" high.  
Louvre, Paris.

**Discussion Question 5: Compare the Sumerian style with the Akkadian style. Notice the themes; organization of the space; proportions of figures; order vs. chaos; level of realism etc.**



**Standard of Ur, War side**, Royal Cemetery, Ur, Iraq,  
ca. 2600 BCE

Wood inlaid with shell, lapis lazuli, and red limestone,  
approx. 8" x 1' 7".



**Head of an Akkadian ruler,**  
from Nineveh, Iraq,  
ca. 2250–2200 BCE. Copper,  
1' 2 3/8" high.



Neo Sumerian Art:  
Lagash & Third Dynasty of Ur

3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE  
(Bronze Age)

**Seated statue of Gudea holding temple plan**, Iraq, ca. 2100 BCE.  
Diorite, approx. 2' 5" high. Louvre, Paris.





## **Gudea of Lagash**

c. 2100 BCE, Diorite





**Gudea of Lagash.** c. 2120 BCE,  
Diorite. 73.7 cm. (29 inches) tall.  
Louvre, Paris.



**Comparison: Statuettes of two  
worshippers**

Votive figures, Iraq, ca. 2700 BCE.  
Gypsum inlaid with shell and black  
limestone, tallest figure approx. 2' 6" high.



**Ziggurat:** a monumental platform for a temple. The ziggurat was a pyramidal structure, built in receding tiers upon a rectangular or square platform, with a shrine at the summit.



**Nanna** (the moon god) **Ziggurat**, Ur (present day Muqaiyir) Iraq, ca. 2100 BCE. Mud bricks. 50' high.

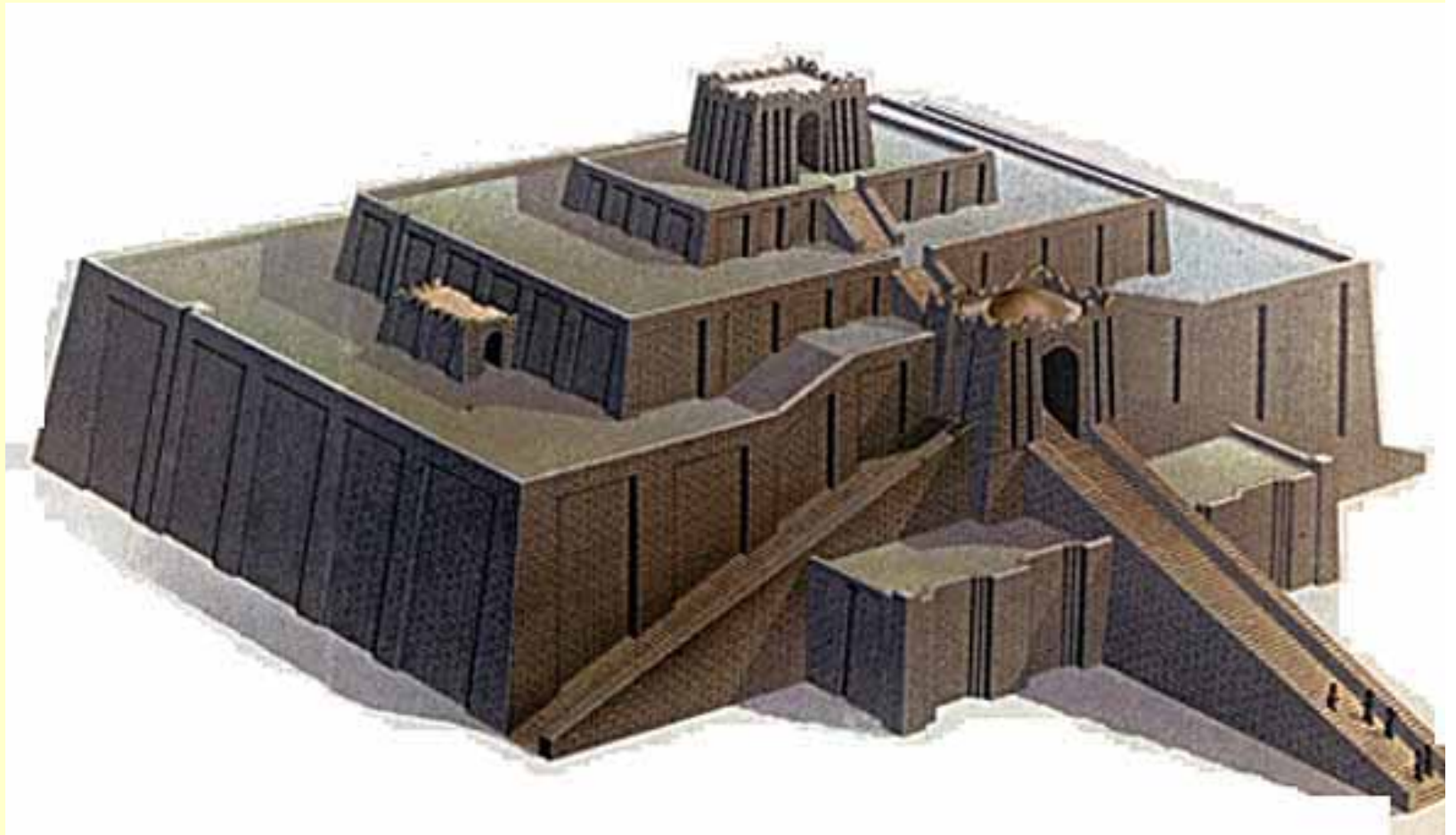
(Restored by the Neo-Babylonians, 6<sup>th</sup> BCE)



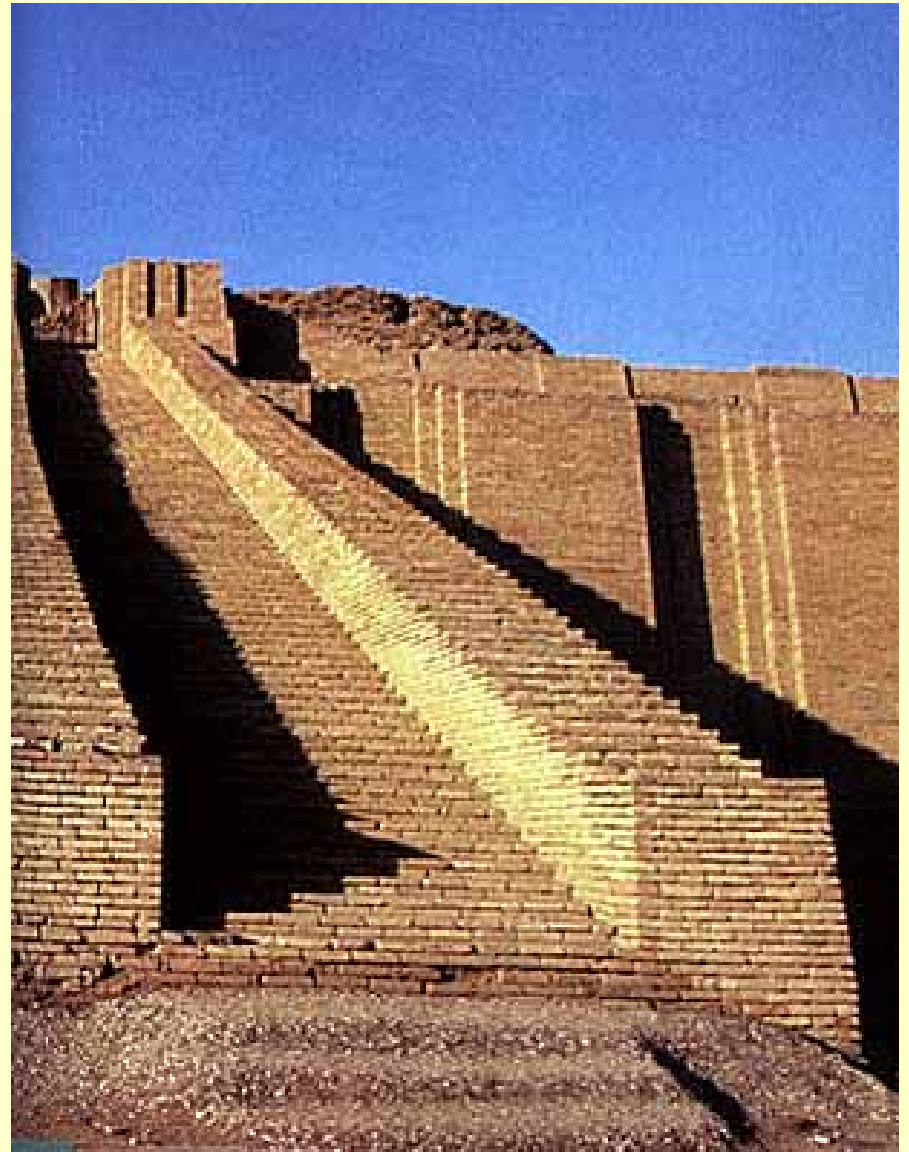
**Aerial view of  
the ziggurat**



**Model of the  
Ziggurat at Ur.**



**Ziggurat**, Ur, Iraq, ca. 2100 BCE. Mud bricks. 50' high.  
(Restored by the Neo-Babylonians, 6th BCE)



Babylonian Art: 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE  
(Bronze Age)



**Stele of Hammurabi**, from Susa,  
Iran, ca. 1780 BCE. Basalt, approx.  
7' 4" high. Louvre, Paris.





**Comparison:**

Shamash rises from Mount Mashu to bring the dawn. Babylonian cylinder seal.

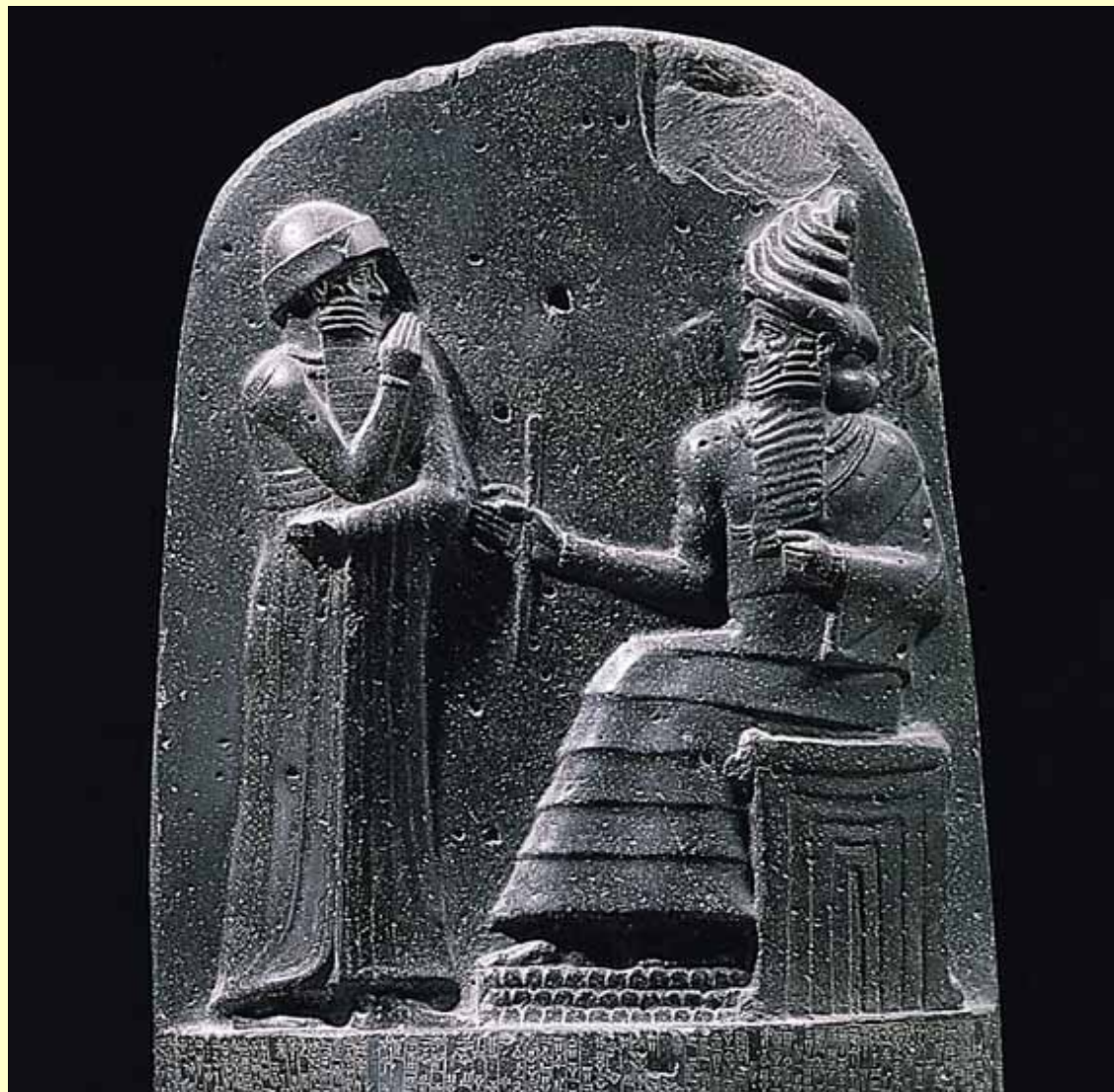
**Stele of Hammurabi**

from Susa, Iran,  
ca. 1780 BCE. Basalt,  
approx. 7' 4" high.





Compare the *Victory Stele of Naram Sin* with the stele depicting the Code of Hammurabi. Consider the type of stone used, the compositional format, relative size of figures, and treatment of divine figures or sacred ground. How do these images reinforce the authority of the leaders who are depicted?





Hittite Art: 2nd millennium BCE  
(Bronze Age)



**Lion Gate**, Boghazköy, Turkey, ca. 1400 BCE. Limestone, lions approx. 7' high.

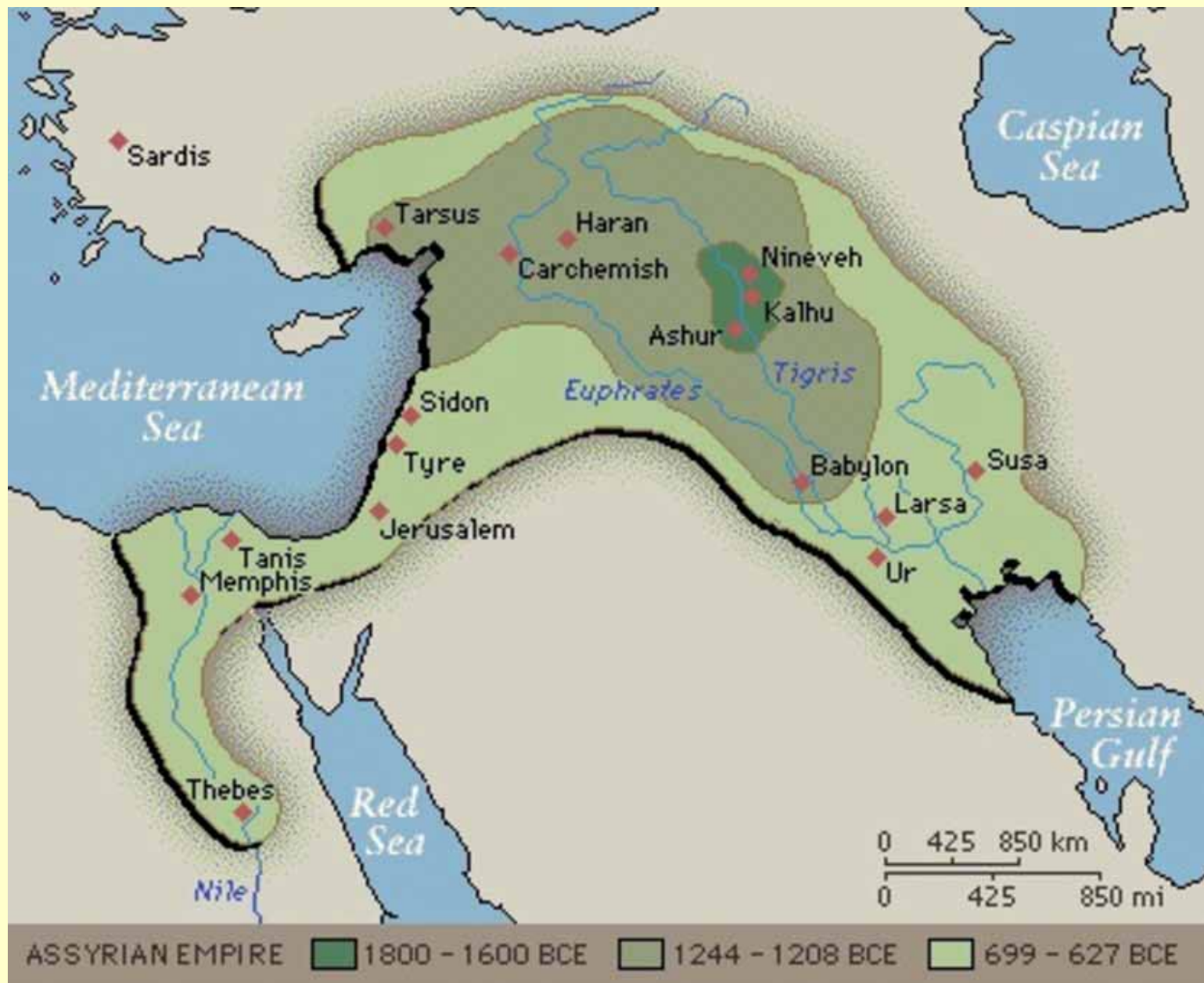


***Amulet Depicting Enthroned Hittite Sun Goddess.*** Gold. 2". Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 B.C.E.)





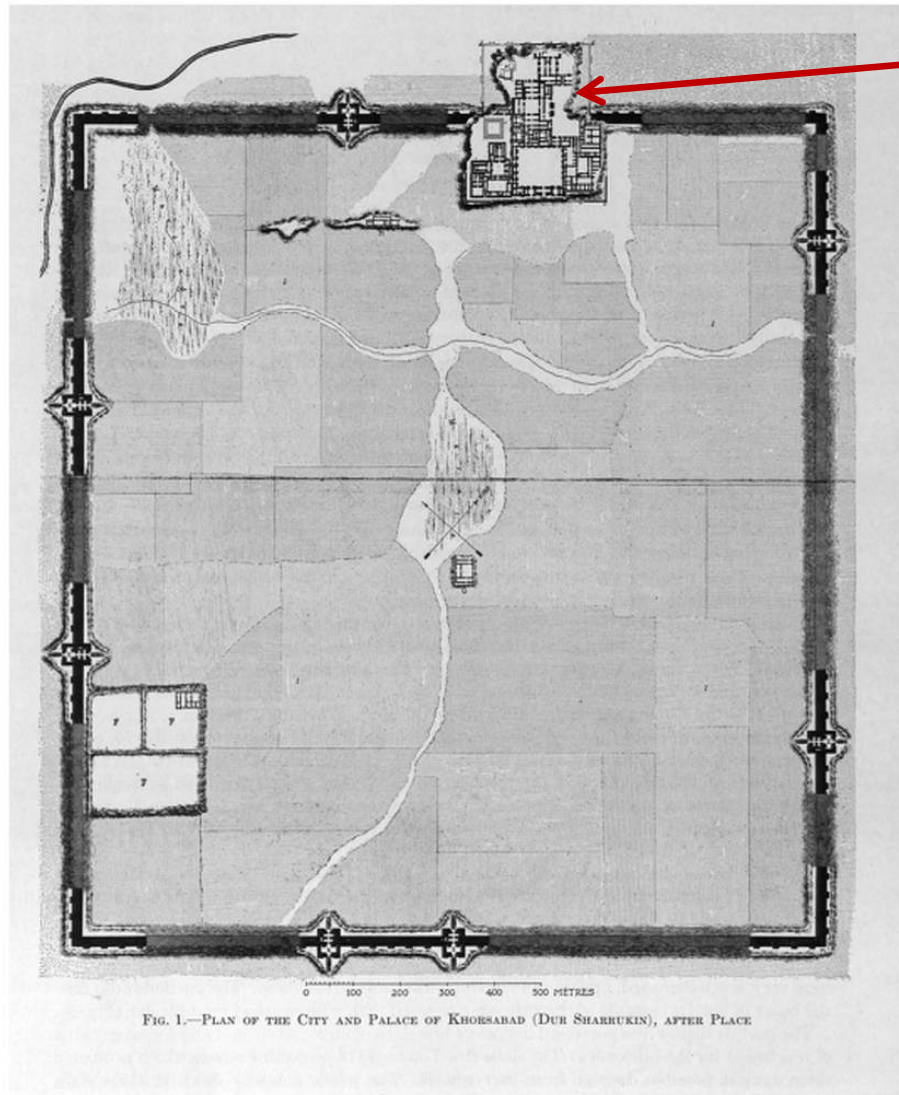
Assyrian Art: 9-7th c. BCE  
(Iron Age)



- **The city's fortification walls form an almost perfect square, covering a surface of about 3 sq km**

- **The citadel with palaces and temples towers above the lower town on an artificially erected platform.**

- **The length of the walls was 16280 Assyrian units, which corresponded to the numerical value of Sargon's name.**

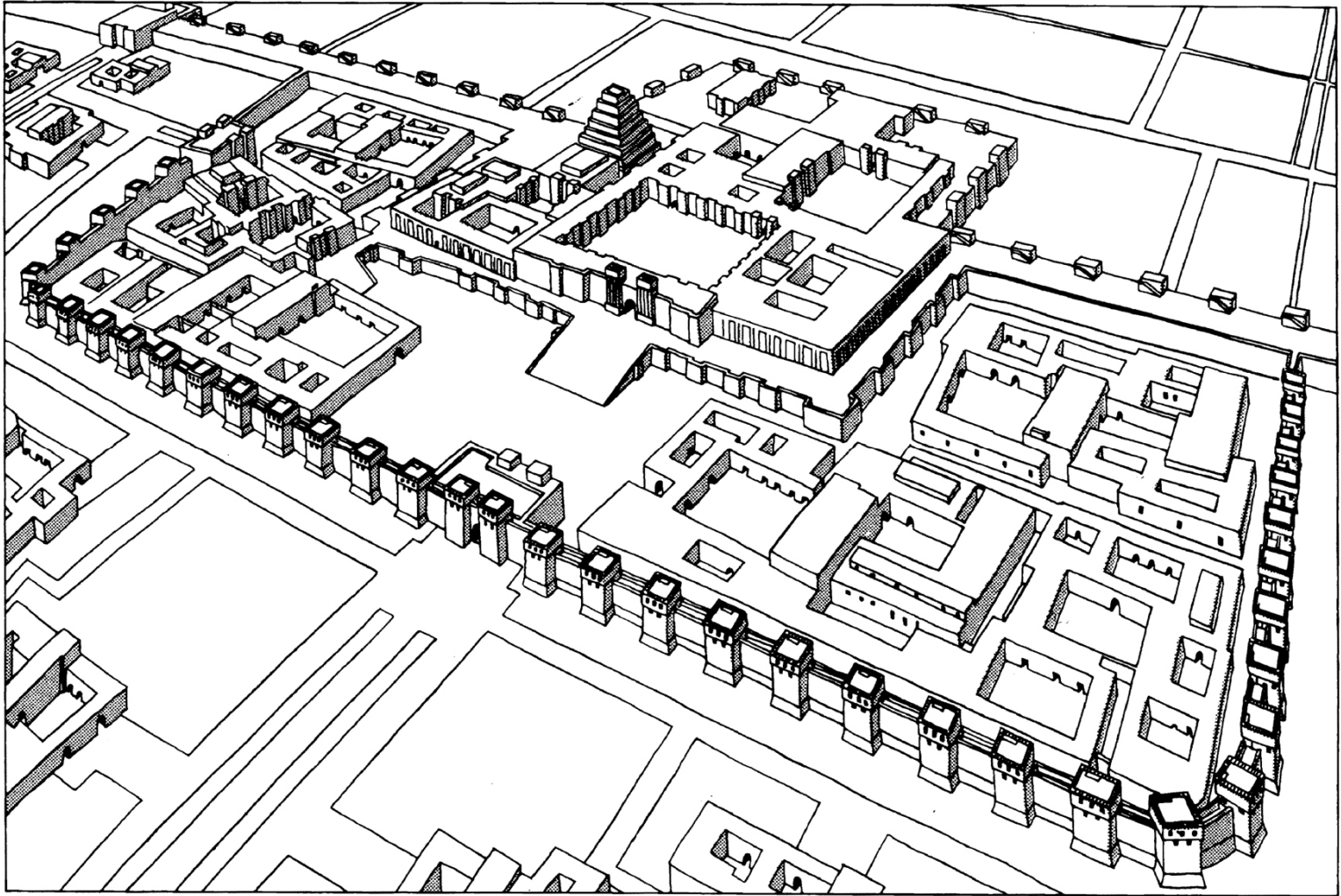


- **The Palace**

**Plan of Dur-Sharruken** by the French excavator Victor Place

•“Sargon, King of the World, has built a city, Dur Sharukin (citadel of Sargon) he had named it...”

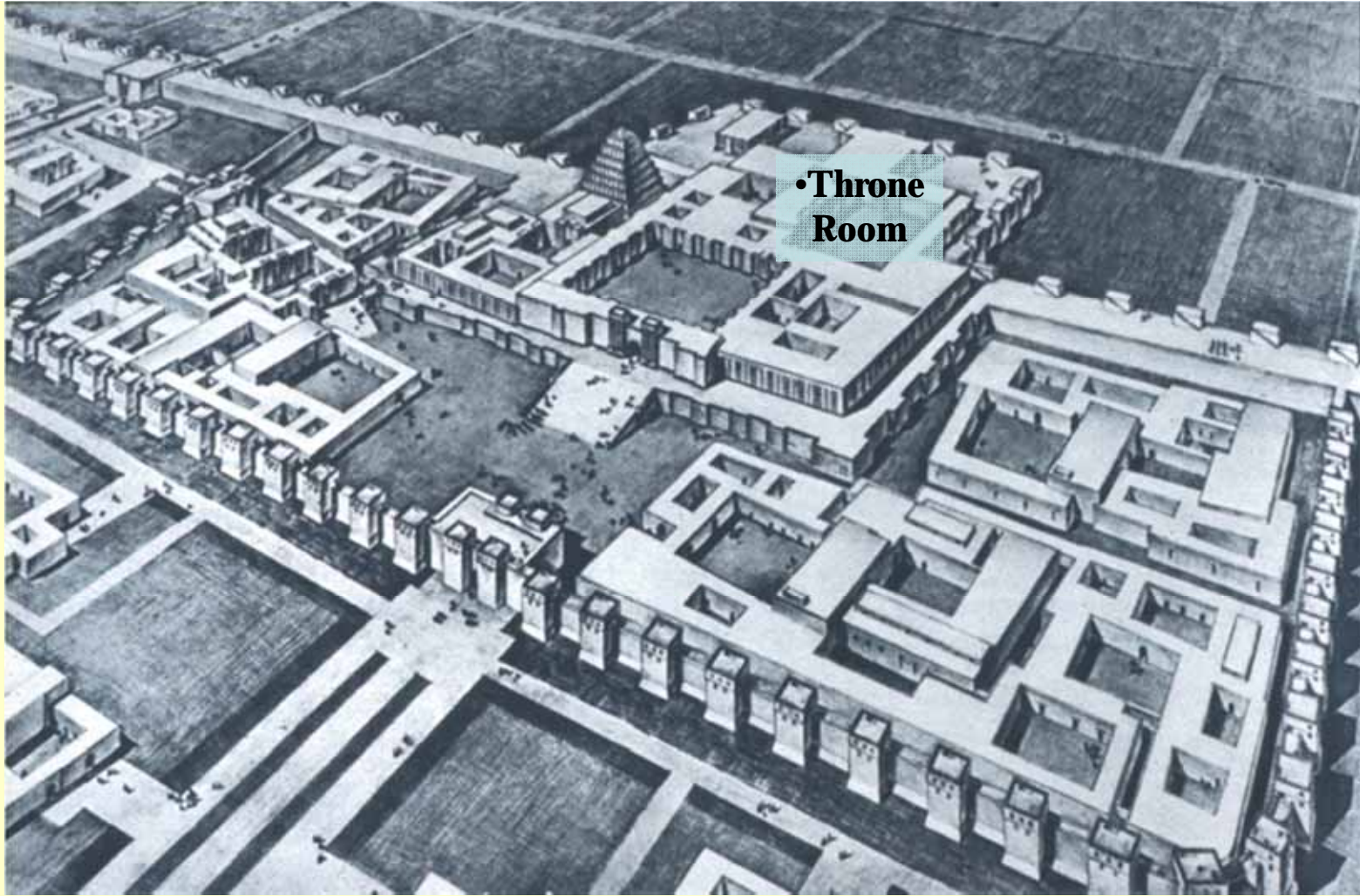




### **Reconstruction drawing of the citadel of Sargon II**

Khorsabad, Iraq, ca. 720–705 BCE. 25 acres; more than 200 courtyards and rooms; the length of the walls was 16280 Assyrian units, which corresponded to the numerical value of Sargon's name.

“Sargon, King of the World, has built a city, Dur Sharukin (citadel of Sargon) he had named it...”



## **Reconstruction drawing of the citadel of Sargon II**

Khorsabad, Iraq, ca. 720–705 BCE.

- **Fortified walls enclose this complex, access to which came by a twisting path through a sequence of courtyards and smaller chambers.**
- **The seven stage ziggurat representing the cosmic order of the seven planets**



**Lamassu** (winged, human-headed bull), from the citadel of Sargon II, Khorsabad, Iraq, ca. 720–705 BCE. Limestone, approx. 13' 10" high. Louvre, Paris.





**Side view.**

**Lamassu** from the  
citadel of Sargon II,  
Khorsabad, Iraq,  
ca. 720–705 BCE.



**Detail.** Lamassu from the citadel of Sargon II, Khorsabad, Iraq, ca. 720–705 BCE.



**Detail. Lamassu** from the citadel of Sargon II, Khorsabad, Iraq, ca. 720–705 BCE.







**Comparison: Gilgamesh kills the heavenly bull**

3rd millennium BCE

Sumerian ceramic relief

**Hero  
(Izdubar/Gilgamesh?)  
Overpowering a Lion**

Citadel of Sargon II.

721-705 BC

Alabaster with traces of  
paint.

H. 5.52 m

Paris, Louvre







**Ashurbanipal hunting lions**, relief from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal, Nineveh, Iraq, ca. 645–640 BCE. Gypsum, 5' 4" high.





**Ashurbanipal hunting lions, Detail.** relief from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal, Nineveh, Iraq, ca. 645–640 BCE. Gypsum, 5' 4" high.





**Detail. Ashurbanipal hunting lions**, relief from the Palace of Ashurbanipal, Nineveh, Iraq





**Ashurbanipal hunting lions.** Detail. relief from the Palace of Ashurbanipal, Nineveh, Iraq





**Ashurbanipal hunting lions.** Detail. Relief from the Palace of Ashurbanipal, Nineveh, Iraq



**Comparison: Standard  
of Ur, War side**

Royal Cemetery, Ur, Iraq,  
ca. 2600 BCE

Wood inlaid with shell,  
lapis lazuli, and red  
limestone,  
approx. 8" x 1' 7".



**Ashurbanipal hunting lions**, relief from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal, Nineveh, Iraq, ca. 645–640 BCE. Gypsum, 5' 4" high.





**Assyrian archers pursuing enemies**, relief from the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II, Nimrud, Iraq, ca. 875–860 BCE. Gypsum, 2' 10 5/8" high. British Museum, London.



Traces of black, white, red, and blue paint were visible when the reliefs were first uncovered.

Hair, beards, sandals – painted black

Eyes - white with black pupils;

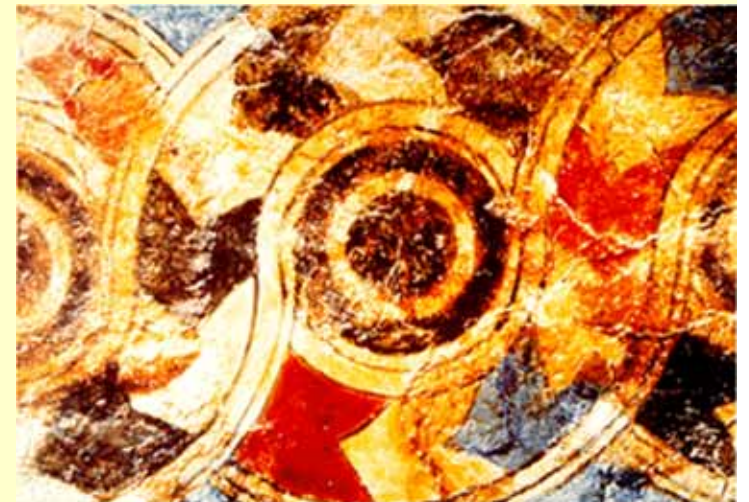
Daggers, bows, tongues of bird-headed divinities – red.

The mud-brick walls above the reliefs were plastered and painted with floral, geometric, and figural designs in the same four colors.



Reconstruction of Ashurnasirpal's throne room at Nimrud., published by Layard

Plaster fragment found in debris of the Throne Room of the Northwest Palace.





### **Eagle Headed Spirits by Sacred Tree**

c. 884-859 BCE. Palace of Ashurnasirpal II. Nimrud. Iraq





Two carved figures of Ashurnasirpal II, facing a stylized sacred tree, from Northwest palace at Nimrud.



**Comparison:  
Sacred tree on Sumerian seals**

L.- c. 3000 BCE

B.-c. 2500 BCE





<https://youtu.be/wGiY7ZDKZSE>

Isis video shows complete destruction of ancient city of Nimrud in Iraq

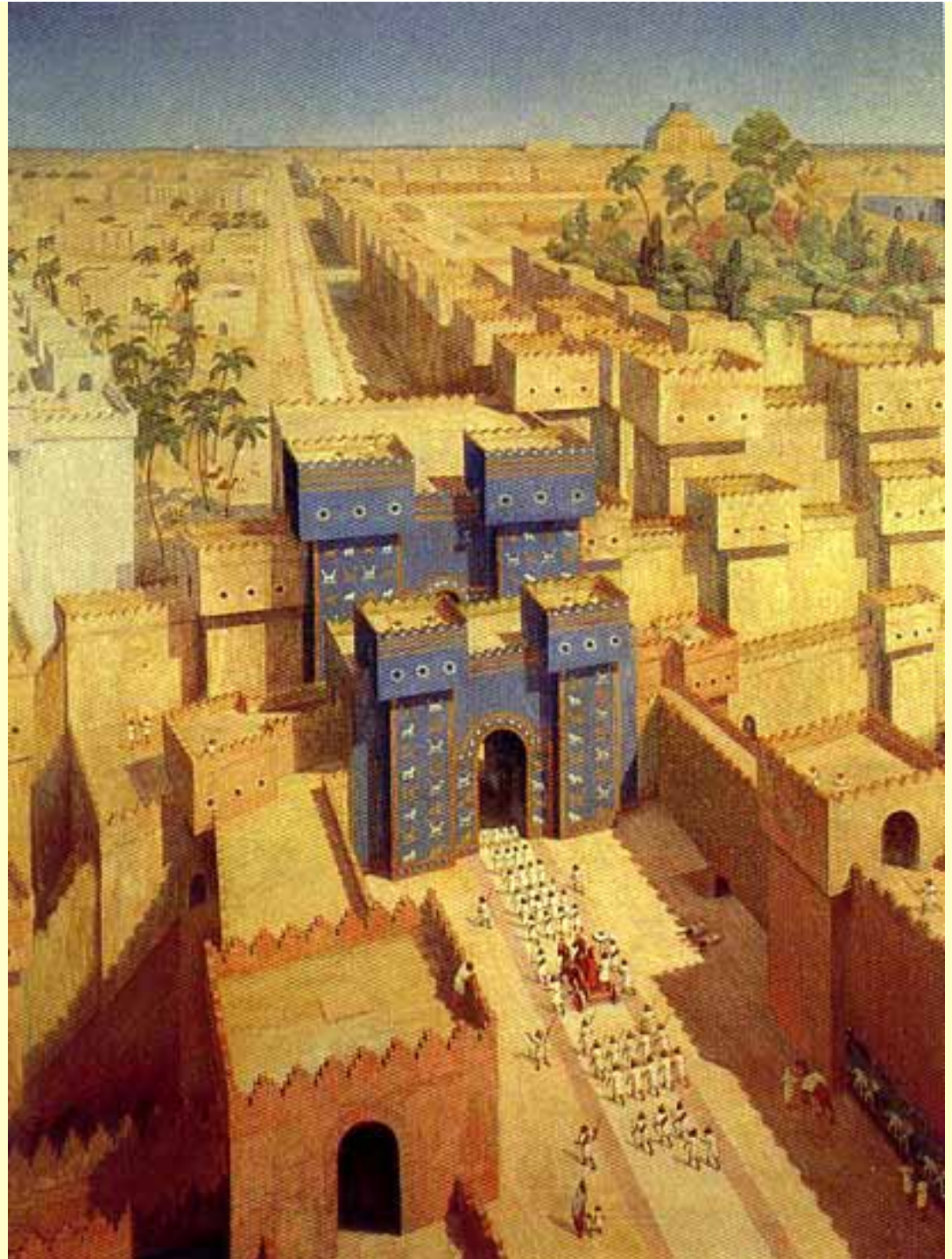
Neo-Babylonian: 7-6th c. BCE  
(Iron Age)



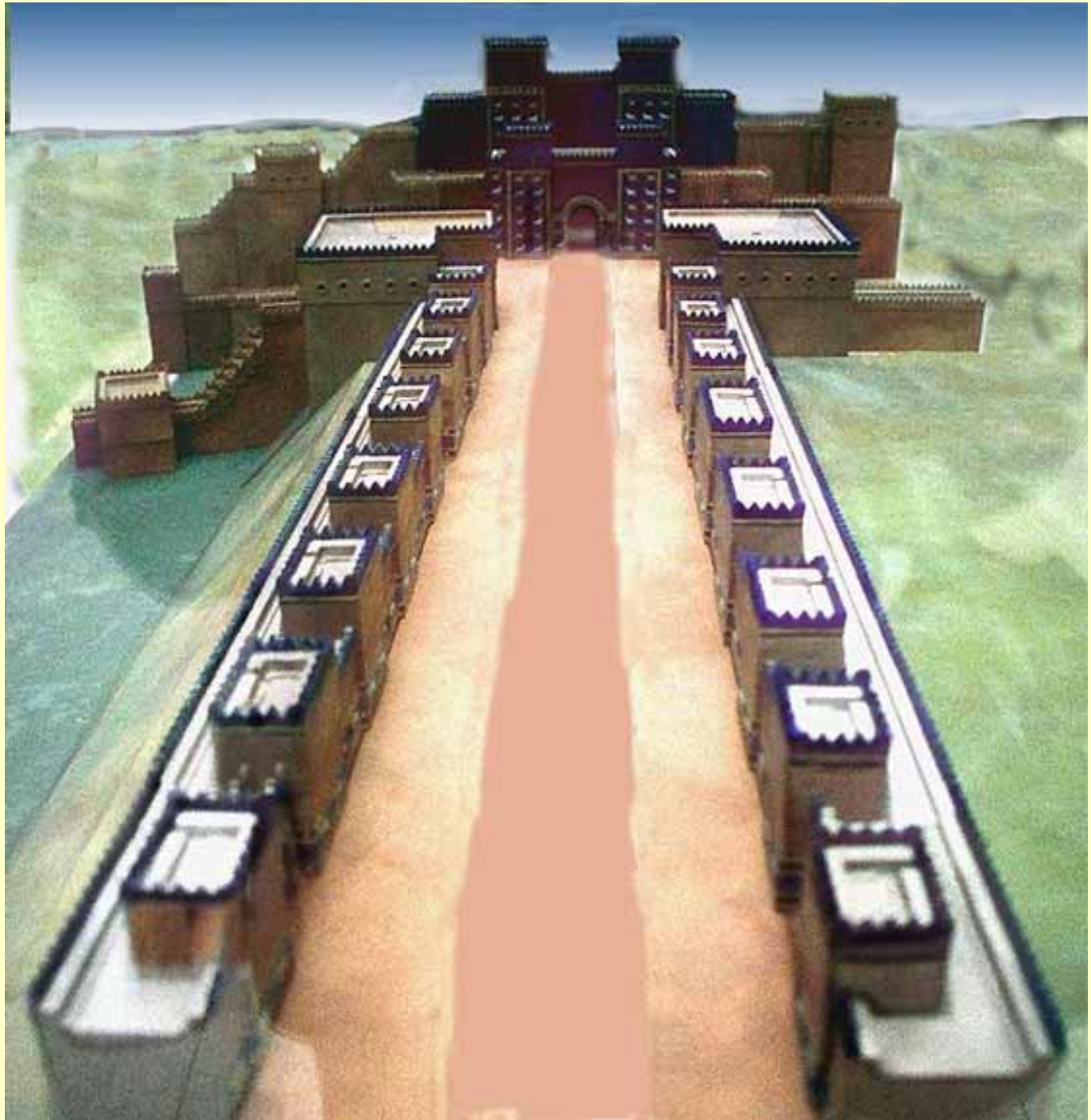
**Crenellation:** a parapet (short wall) with open spaces that surmounts a wall and is used for defense or decoration.

**Ishtar Gate, Processional Way, Hanging Gardens and Murduk Ziggurat.**

Reconstruction drawing of Babylon.



**Ishtar Gate &  
Processional Way**  
(also called – “May  
the Enemy not Have  
Victory.”)





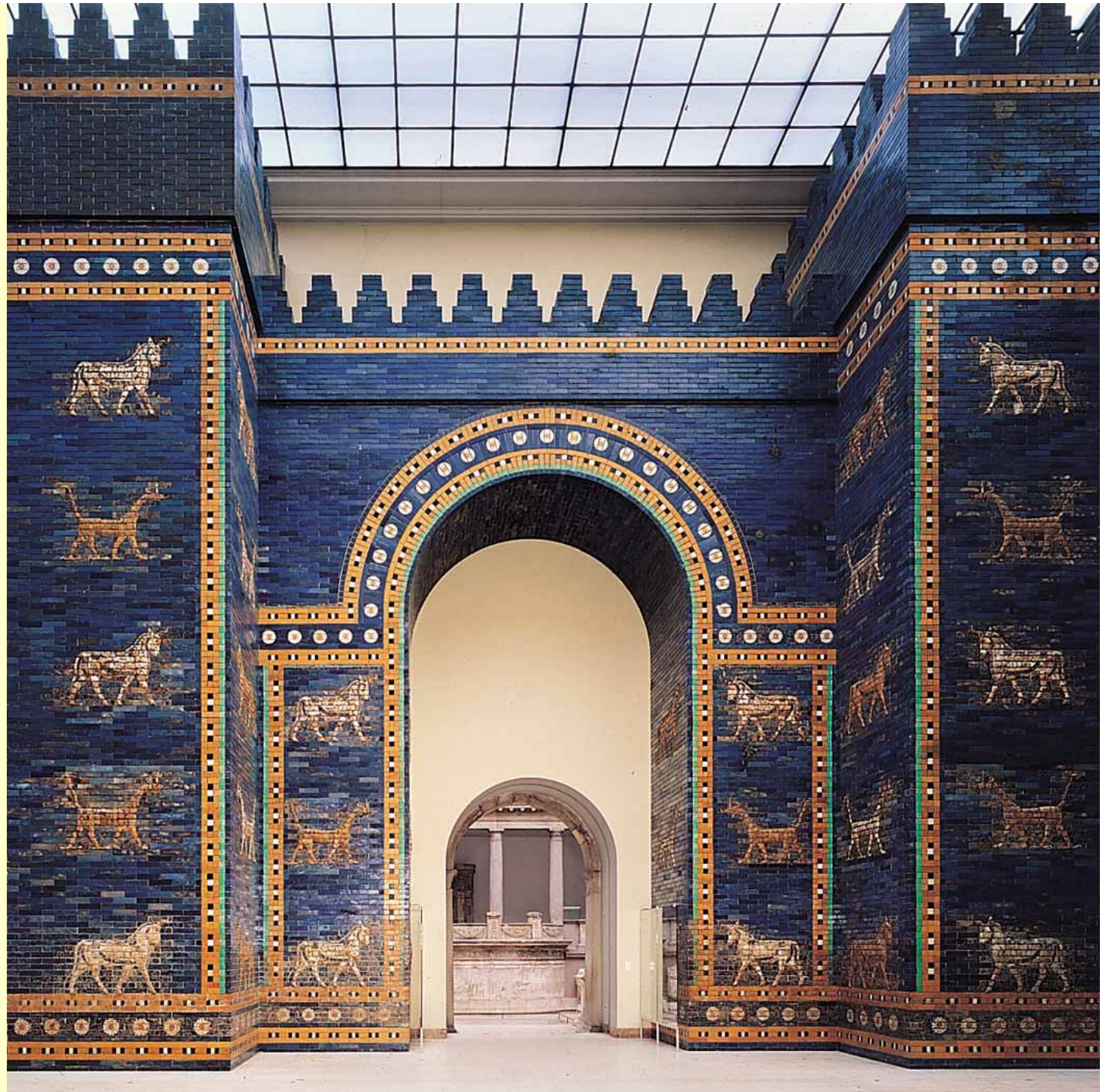


Model of Ishtar Gate . Staatliche Museen, Berlin.

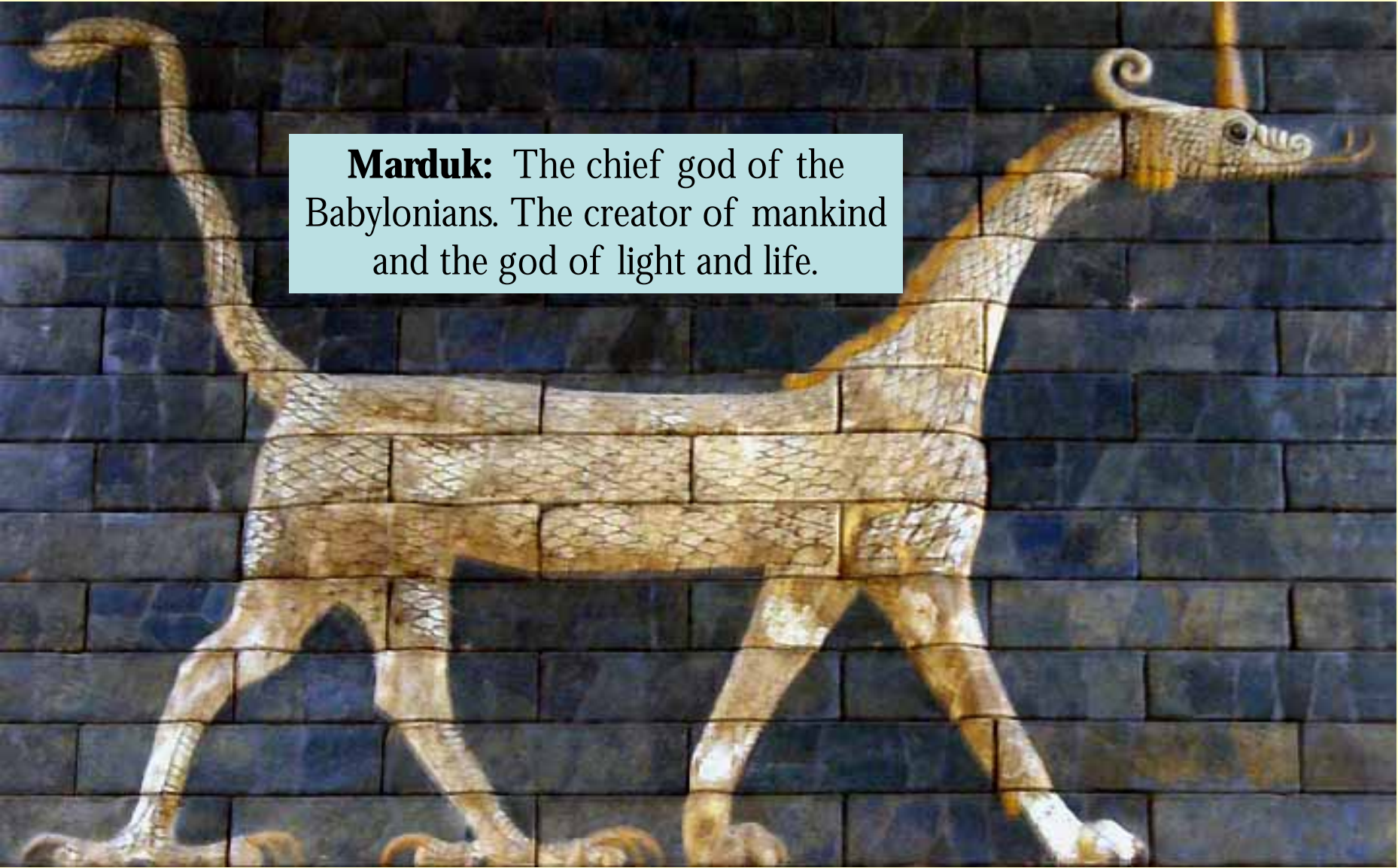


## **Ishtar Gate**

(restored), Babylon,  
Iraq, ca. 575 BCE.  
Glazed brick. 47'  
high 32' wide  
Staatliche Museen,  
Berlin.







**Marduk:** The chief god of the Babylonians. The creator of mankind and the god of light and life.

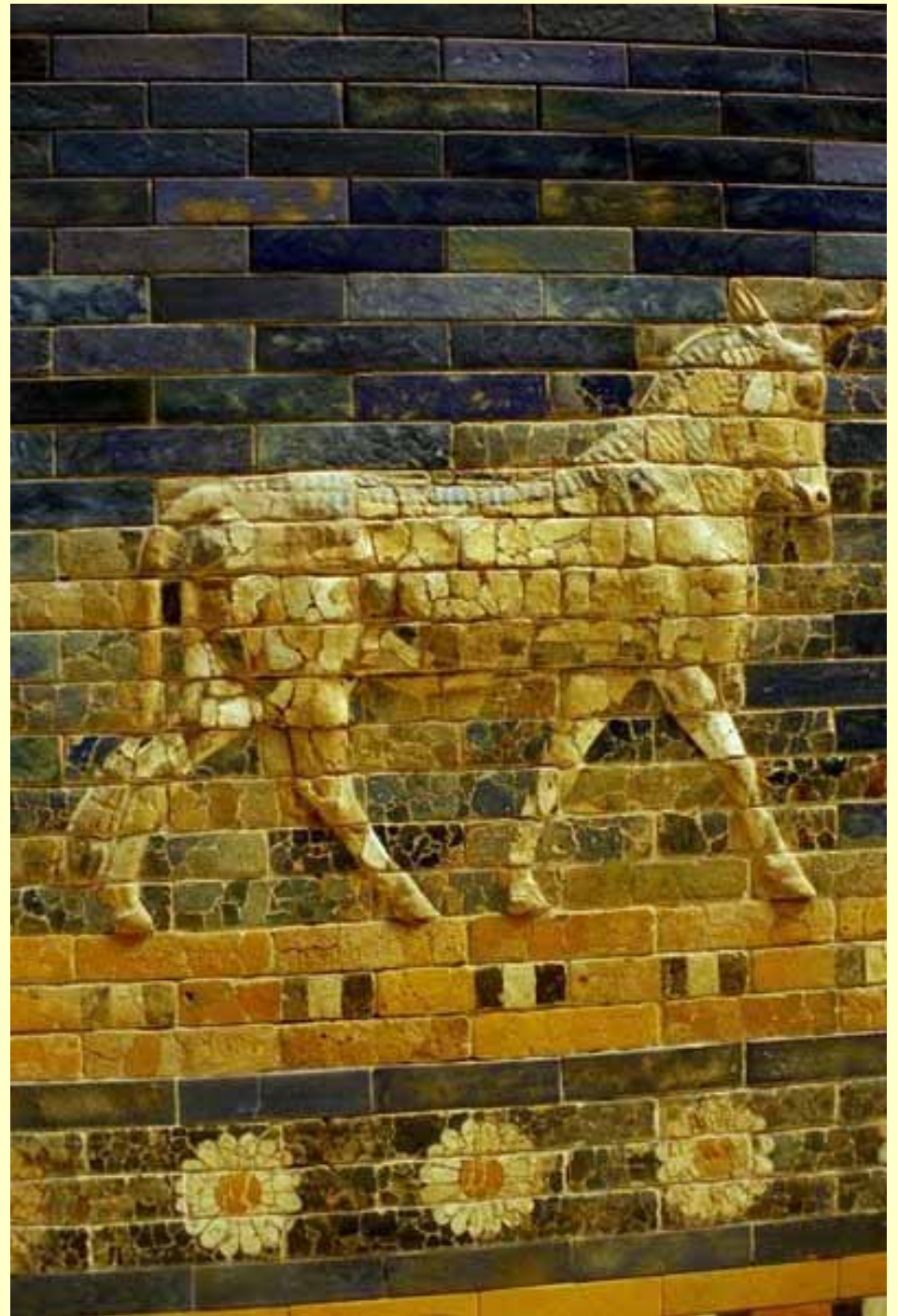
**Dragon** (Associated with the chief god Marduk) from Ishtar Gate  
Babylon, Iraq, ca. 575 BCE. Glazed brick.







**Bull** (Associated with the storm god Adad)  
from Ishtar Gate  
Babylon, Iraq, ca. 575 BCE. Glazed brick.



**Throne Room Wall** (restored).

Babylon

ca. 575 BCE. Glazed brick. Staatliche  
Museum, Berlin.







**Lion from the Processional Way** (Associated with the goddess Ishtar). c. 575 BCE.  
Molded and glazed brick. Babylon. Iraq.

**Ishtar.** 300 BCE -100  
BCE. Alabaster



**Comparison: Woman holding a bison horn**

from Laussel, Dordogne, France,  
ca. 25,000–20,000 BCE. Painted  
limestone 1' 6" high





Persian: Achaemenid Period  
6-4th c. BCE  
(Iron Age)

**The Persians** are an Iranian people who speak the Persian language and share a common culture and history.

**Cyrus the Great** (ca. 576 or 590 BCE — 529 BCE): The founder of the Persian Empire under the Achaemenid dynasty. As leader of the Persian people, he conquered the Medes and unified the two separate Iranian kingdoms.

**Darius the Great** (ca. 549 BCE– 486/485 BCE): Divided the Persian Empire into twenty provinces, each under the supervision of a governor or satrap. The satrap position was autonomous, allowing each province its own distinct laws, traditions, and elite class. Every province, however, was responsible for paying a gold or silver tribute to the emperor. Many building projects were initiated during the reign of Darius, with the largest being the building of the new capital of Persepolis.

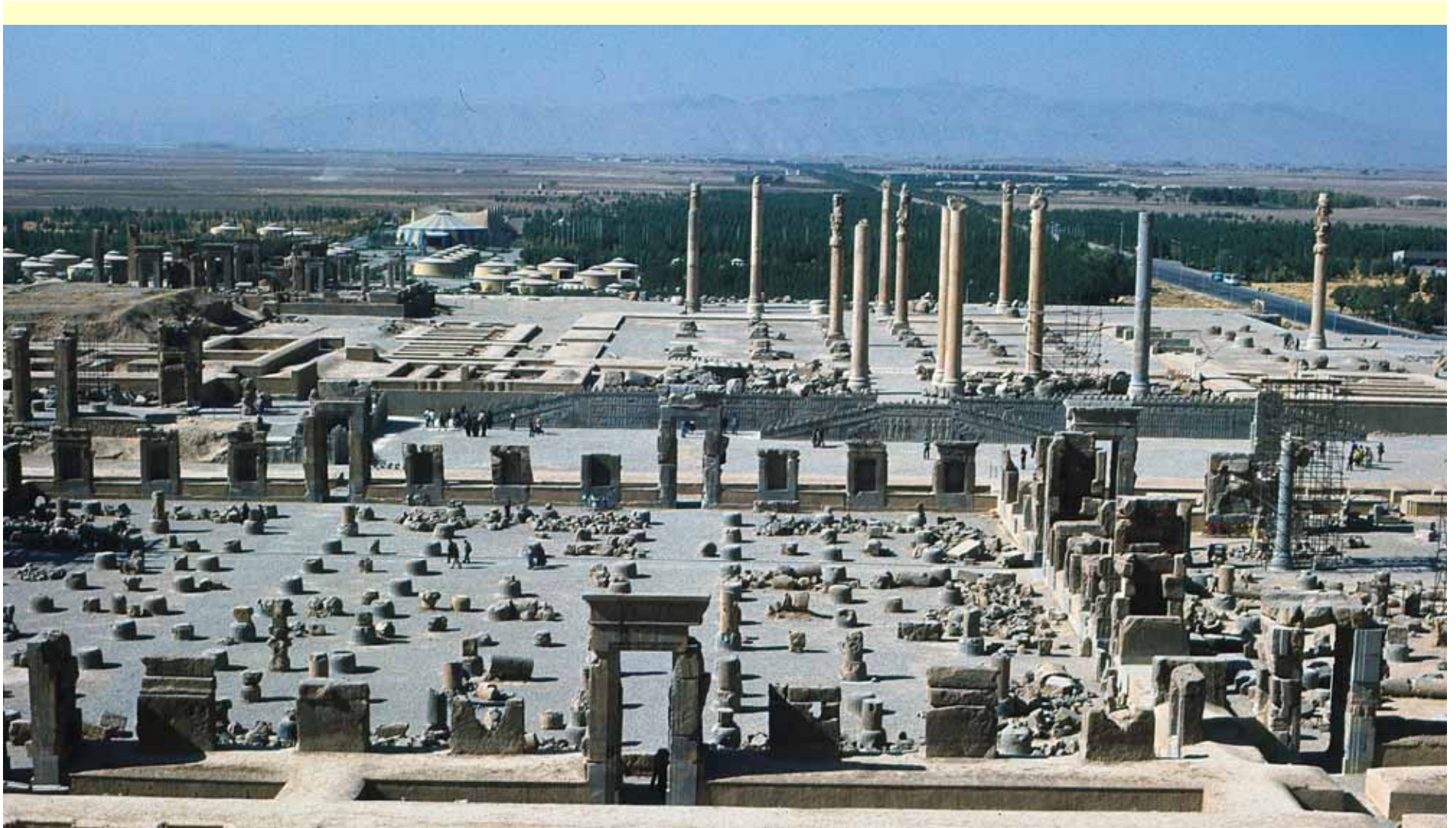


# The Persian Empire



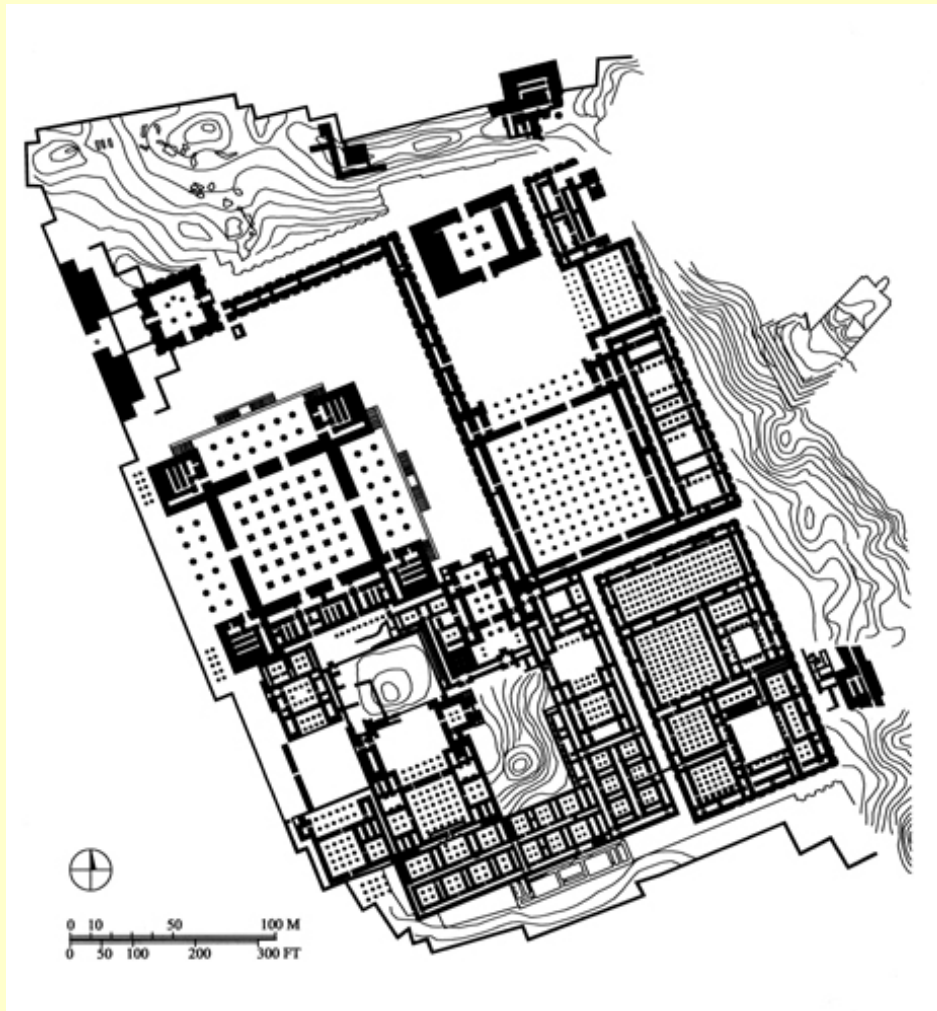
**“I am Darius, great King, King of Kings, King of countries, King of this earth.”**





**Persepolis** (royal audience hall in the background), Iran, ca. 521–465 BCE.





- **This great complex was created by at least three Persian monarchs as one of the capitals of the Persian empire.**
- **Its ruins reveal architectural influences from other cultures in Mesopotamia, notably the Hittites and Assyrians, as well as the Egyptians.**

• **Plan of the palace at Persepolis, begun ca. 518 B.C.E.**

- The Apadana had seventy-two columns, each is 19 m high. They carried the weight of the vast and heavy ceiling.

- The capitals were made from animal sculptures such as two headed bulls, lions and eagles. The columns were joined to each other with the help of oak and cedar beams, which were brought from Lebanon.



**Double griffin** (lion and eagle together)

**Capital:** Decorative element at the upper part of a column or pier.



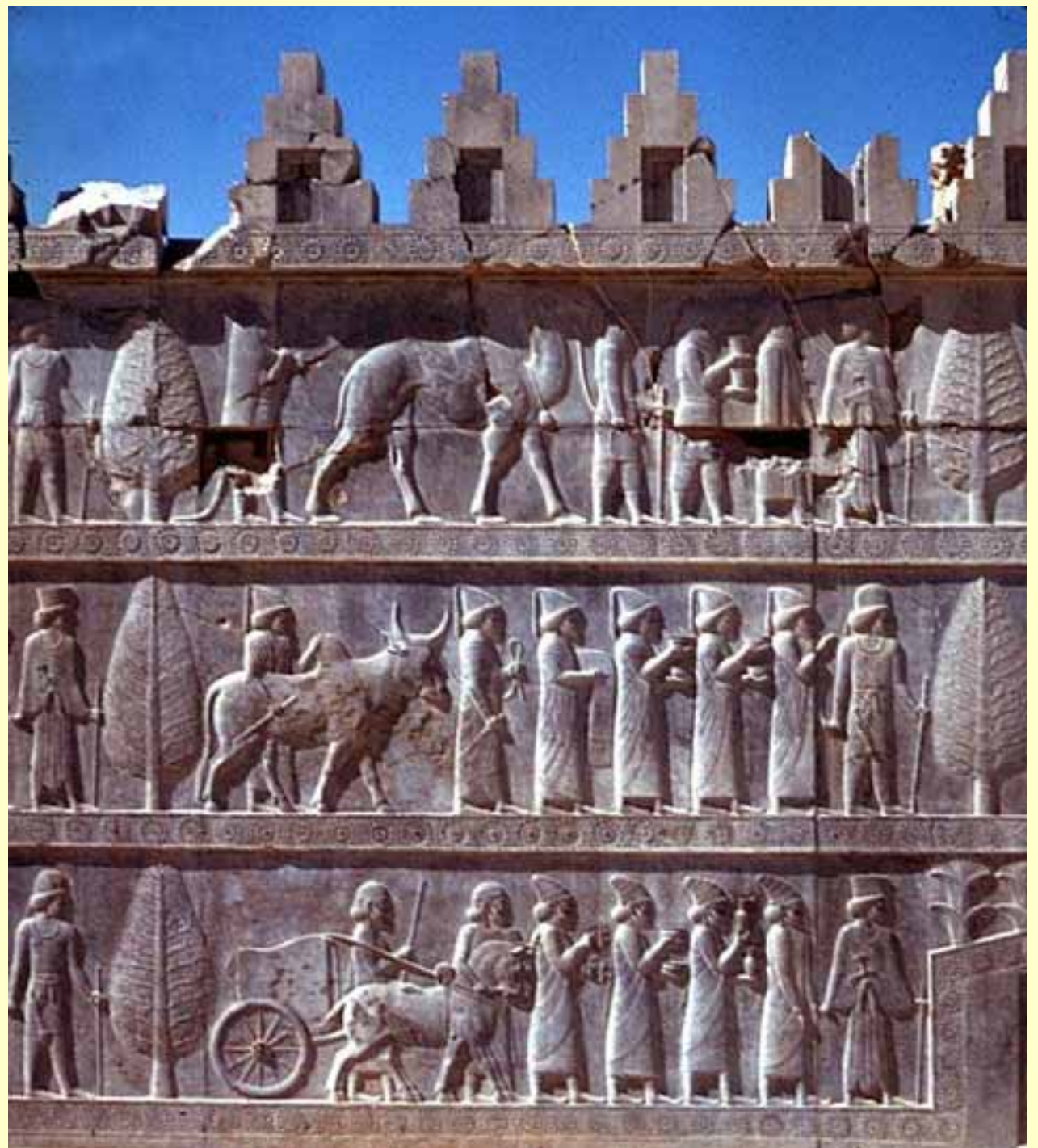
**Capital of a column of the Audience hall (Apadana) at Louvre, Paris**





**Processional frieze.** Detail. On the terrace of the royal audience hall (apadana), Persepolis, Iran, ca. 521–465 BCE.









**Processional frieze.** Detail. On the terrace of the royal audience hall (apadana), Persepolis, Iran, ca. 521–465 BCE.

**Comparison: Kore**, from the Acropolis, Athens, Greece, ca. 520–510 BCE. Marble, approx. 1' 9 1/2" high. Acropolis Museum, Athens.









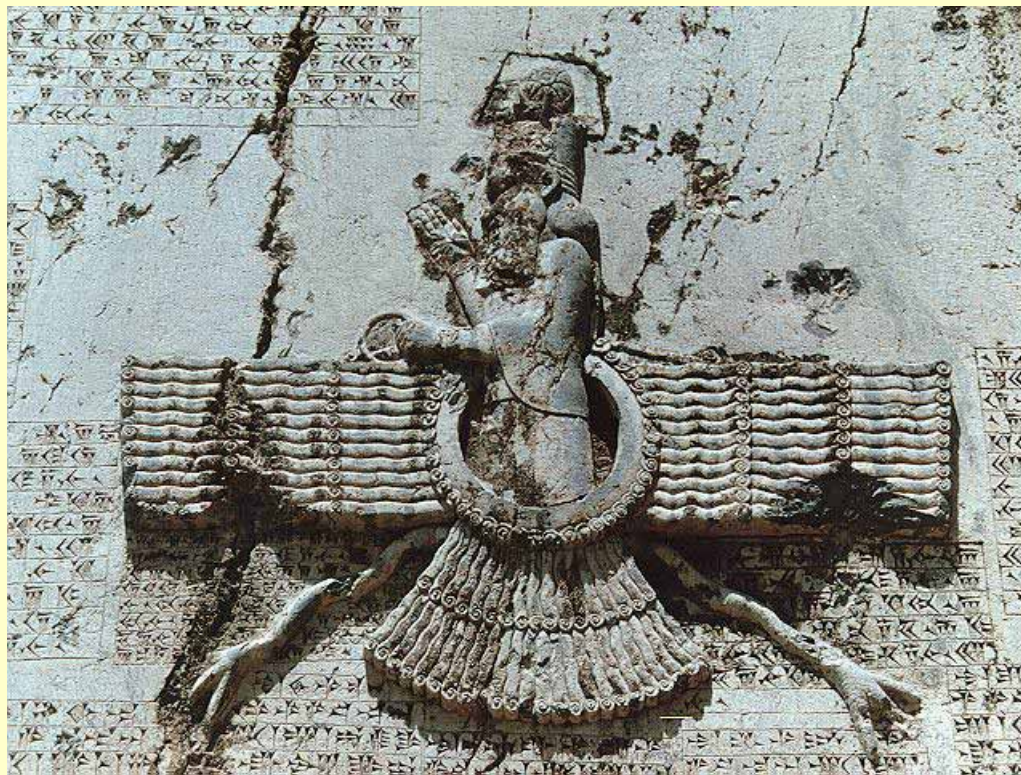
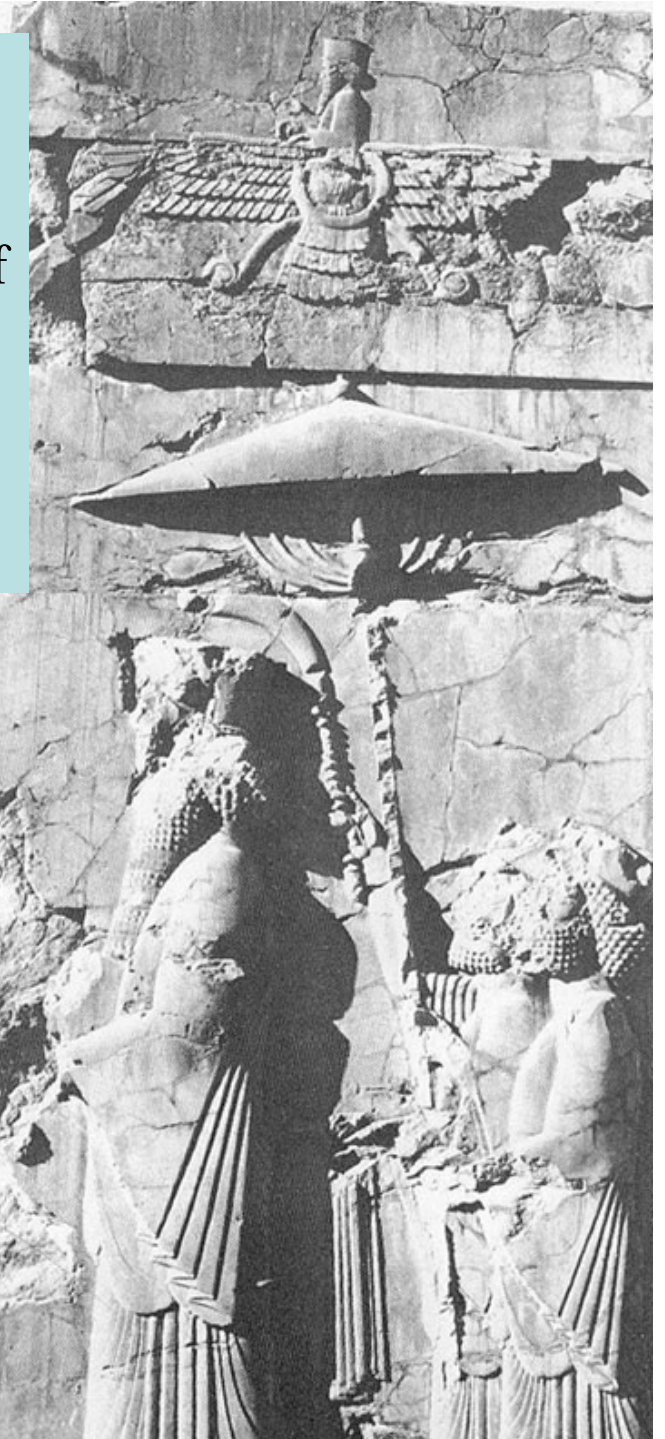


Darius celebrating victory over enemies. 521-465 BCE. Persepolis. Iran.



**Ahura Mazda (“Wise Lord”):** The chief deity of Zoroastrianism, the creator of the world, the source of light, and the embodiment of good. Ahura Mazda is not omnipotent, but will ultimately prevail. Until then, the role of mankind is to maintain the order - by resisting chaos - through good thoughts, words and actions.

**Ahriman (Angra Mainyu):** Ahura Mazda's adversary, the chief spirit of darkness and evil in Zoroastrianism.



**Ahura Mazda.** Reliefs from Persepolis. Iran. 521-465 BCE.





**Comparison:** Two carved figures of Ashurnasirpal II, facing a stylized sacred tree, from Northwest palace at Nimrud.

**Comparison: Victory Stele of Naram-Sin,** From Susa, Iran (probably came originally from Sippar, an Akkadian city and brought by the Elamites to Susa), 2254–2218 BCE Pink sandstone, approx. 6' 7" high. Louvre, Paris.



Darius celebrating victory over enemies. 521-465 BCE. Persepolis. Iran.







Scene from Persian mythology in Apadana Hall: Angra Mainyu (Ahriman) kills the primeval bull, whose seed is rescued by Mah, the moon, as the source for all other animals.



**Lamassi**  
from Persepolis







**Comparison:**  
**Lamassu** from the  
citadel of Sargon II,  
Khorsabad, Iraq,  
ca. 720–705 BCE.  
Alabaster. Louvre,  
Paris



**Winged sphinx** from the palace of Darius at Susa.





**Royal Guard.** Detail. East gate of the palace of Darius at Susa. 6<sup>th</sup> c. BCE  
London, British Museum



**Marduk's Dragon.** Ishtar Gate,  
Babylon, Iraq, ca. 575 BCE. Glazed  
brick.

Persian: Sassanian



**Head of a Sasanian king**

(Shapur II?), ca. 350 CE. Silver with mercury gilding, 1' 3 3/4" high. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.





**Shapur I Triumphant Over the Emperors Philippus the Arab and Valerian**  
rock-cut relief, Bishapur, Iran, ca. 260 CE.









**Sumerian: Standard of Ur, War side, ca. 2600 BCE**

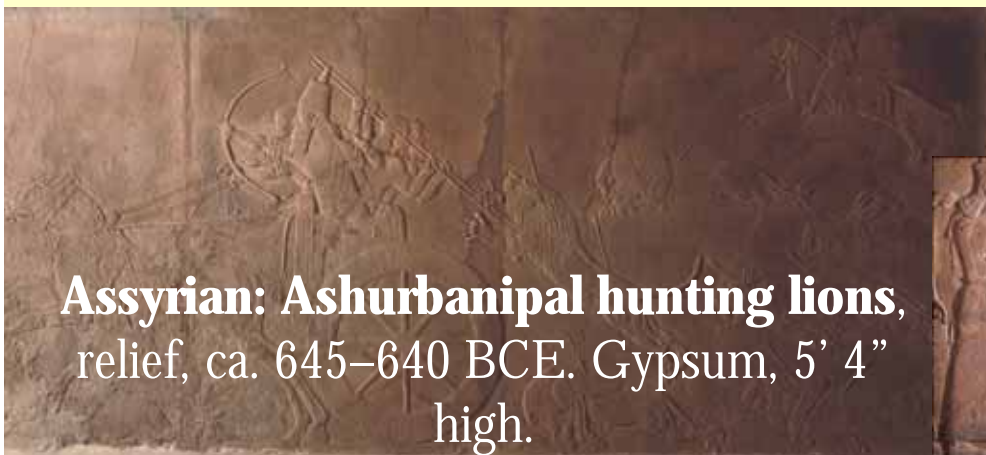
**Akkadian: Victory Stele of Naram-Sin, 2254-2218 BCE**



**Babylonian: Stele of Hammurabi, ca. 1780 BCE. Basalt, approx. 7' 4" high**

### **Discussion Question 6:**

Rulers used art for propaganda since the early days of civilization. Examine the depictions of rulers in the art of the Ancient Near East. Notice the messages that are being conveyed and the relationships between rulers and gods. Discuss Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian and Persian art and give specific examples.



**Assyrian: Ashurbanipal hunting lions, relief, ca. 645-640 BCE. Gypsum, 5' 4" high.**



**Persian: Darius celebrating victory over enemies, 521-465 BCE. Persepolis, Iran.**  
**Assyrian: Two figures of Ashurnasirpal II with sacred tree**