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Western Asia Before the Age of Empires

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TO THE BEST of our knowledge, the process of transition from hunting and gathering to food production took place independently in several places. Likewise, structures of higher civilization developed in various locations. Only for the Near East, however, are we in a position to trace with relative confidence the path leading from incipient food production to early advanced civilization. That will be the goal of this essay.

With this purpose in mind, the Near East can be viewed as a large zone of interaction comprising, generally speaking, the territories of the modern states of Turkey, Syria, Israel, Jordan, Iraq, and Iran, as well as the Persian Gulf region and the southern portion of the former Soviet Union. Egypt is sometimes an external partner but never an integral part of this zone. Topographic and climatic distinctions, on occasion sharp, link the parts into a net of complementary dependencies of varying intensity.

Although the quantity and quality of available information is better for the Near East than for other regions, it is nonetheless far from satisfactory. On the one hand this is due to the accidents of history, which have left greater tangible evidence in one region than in others. More important, though, it has to do with the differential intensity of research, which in the Near East concerned itself first of all with the great centers of the later civilizations, and only secondarily

and hesitantly with the earlier stages—even then largely within the same geographical areas. Only when researchers ceased to devote their efforts solely to the history of the central areas were regions opened to investigation that had previously been regarded as largely untouched by the developments that concern us here. For some of the important chronological and geographical connections, however, there is still a general absence of evidence.

EARLY HUMANS

Even though, strictly speaking, the Paleolithic stage lies outside the period under consideration, it should be noted for the sake of completeness that humans already lived in the Near East at this time. The evidence is still quite limited, but this is clearly the result of inadequate research. Remains of human occupation have been found in caves (Carmel, Beidhi, Hotu, and Shanidar). As elsewhere, these were used as short-term resting places or refuges rather than as permanent habitations. Nothing is known of the camps that in all probability existed in the open country.

The human remains found, as well as the tool kit, correspond exactly to those known from Europe, so the names coined for periods of Eu-

ropean prehistory, like Mousterian and Aurignacian, may be employed. The human skulls discovered at Shanidar can be assigned without difficulty to the Neanderthal stage of development. The correspondence is so great that nothing about them indicates that the Near East was later to go its own way.

Our material is far from adequate even to allow us to discern when the Near East diverged from the general development in Palestine, the attested stage of development in Palestine, the Natufian, appeared when separate development was already well under way. At a time when humans elsewhere were still exploiting wild plants and animals, here there was at least experimentation with processing grain, as can be seen from tools and grindstones. But it is unclear whether it involved wild grain or the products of proper cultivation.

As previously, our data are extremely scarce. Above all, the material for this stage is almost exclusively restricted to Palestine (Abu Matar, al-Bayda), while in the Taurus/Zagros area there are only a few sites that might represent this stage (perhaps Ganj Dareh). Nevertheless, this evidence is enough to suggest that the distinct development that paved the way for the eventual creation of new ways of life in the Near East was taking place here as well.

In any case, we can demonstrate that the entire Near East developed in a uniform manner only in the subsequent phase, when solidly built dwellings were constructed for the first time and when a portion of the diet came from herded animals and cultivated plants. As before, however, the greater part of subsistence was from hunting, fishing, and gathering. According to the availability of building materials, houses were of stone (Jericho, Munhatta, al-Bayda) or mud (Ali Kosh).

EARLY PERMANENT HABITATIONS

The Aceramic Neolithic

(circa 6000–6000 BCE)

An early high point of the development of a fully sedentary way of life was reached in that phase of the Neolithic which lies shortly before the

appearance of pottery. With larger settlements occupied throughout the year, an increased portion of the diet directly produced by humans rather than gathered and hunted, facilities for storage of provisions (Haji Firuz), vessels of a variety of materials (wood, stone, gypsum, and clay), and a selection of stone tools, nearly all aspects of fully sedentary life were present, combined with a manner of life and an economy that remained stable for a long period and changed only in details.

For the first time we have sufficient material to identify not just a uniform stage of development across wide areas of the Near East but also differences within this uniform stage that are probably regionally conditioned. This is most striking with respect to architecture. On one side are settlements like Cayöni (pronounced Chayonu) and Nevala Cori (pronounced Jori), with a large number of separate structures of approximately the same size, set side by side with space between them. Unfortunately only the fieldstone foundations are preserved, all to the same height, so almost nothing is known about the upper construction or the division of the interior space. As indicated in some cases, the upper portions of the walls may have been made of mud brick. Buildings organized differently in ground plan and displaying unusual features like benches or pillars certainly served cultic purposes, as suggested by the deposit of numerous human skulls (Cayöni) or by centrally placed stone stelae (Nevala Cori).

In contrast are sites in the southern Levant (al-Bayda, Basta, and Ayn Chazal—the building remains from Jericho are too limited to consider here), whose housing units exhibit entirely different ground plans that also differ among themselves. Primarily, though, the units are built close together. While in al-Bayda small units dovetail with each other, in Basta larger planned units are constructed in such a manner that they partly share the same exterior walls. In al-Bayda there is also a significantly different type of building that certainly did not function as a dwelling, though there is nothing to indicate its actual purpose.

Of the contemporary sites in the Zagros region (Jarmo, Tepe Guran, and Ali Kosh), too little is known to allow us to describe complete house plans, let alone the structure of settlements. The buildings were constructed of large mud bricks.

Building technology was as diverse as the ground plans of the stone buildings. For the structures in Cayöni and Nevala Cori, natural rubble or fieldstone was used, laid without mortar, while in al-Bayda and Basta techniques were applied that permitted the creation of relatively narrow stone walls stable to greater heights. In Basta blocks of limestone, which naturally occur in layers, were shaped on their edges in such a manner as to produce more or less regularly squared ashlars, which were then laid in lime mortar. The stability of the walls, which in places are preserved to a height of more than two meters (just over 2 yards), was increased by the driving of wedge stones into the joints. Passage between the rooms was achieved by means of windowlike openings about sixty to seventy centimeters (24 to 28 inches) high, whose door-sills lay about seventy centimeters (28 inches)

above floor level. Nothing is preserved of the roof construction (Fig. 1).

Like almost all settlements of this time, Basta was situated on a slope. While in other places the terraces necessary for building were dug into the hillside, in Basta they were built out from the slope. Walls up to 1.2 meters high (1.3 yards) were constructed side by side in such a fashion that the interstices could be covered with large stones in order to create the desired terraces. In contrast to the house walls, no mortar was used in the subterranean walls, possibly to prevent the rise of dampness.

The technologies described thus far presuppose a rather long period of experience with solid buildings, such as can be expected only in permanent settlements. We are thus definitely not dealing with the earliest phase of permanent sedentarianism.

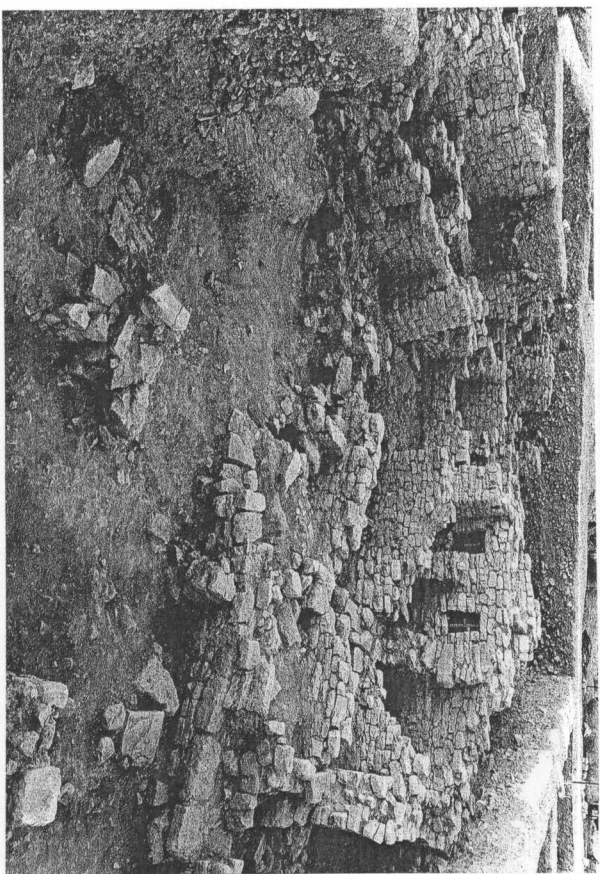


Fig. 1. View of Area B of Basta, Jordan, dating to the Aceramic Neolithic period. COURTESY OF HANS J. NISSEN

The empty spaces under the terraces at Basta were used to a certain extent for burials, as burials under the floors of houses are common in other places. But burials are also found outside the houses (Basta and Jericho), and no rules about the position or direction of the body may be recognized. Burials of complete bodies were the norm, but separate placement of skulls was also characteristic, sometimes in considerable numbers. This practice has been connected to certain forms of an ancestor cult, which found further expression in skulls modeled over with clay in order to achieve a lifelike appearance (Jericho), and above all in large clay figurines (Ayn Ghazal).

Artistic activity is also attested by a series of human representations, for the most part limited to heads (Nevala Cori, Jericho, Basta, and Nahal Hemar) or faces in the form of masks (Nahal Hemar and Basta). Unique are the rectangular pillars of Nevala Cori, three meters (3.3 yards) high and provided with human attributes. Numerous small animal figurines of stone or clay complete the picture.

Diet was obviously based in large part on agriculture and herding, but hunting and the gathering of fruits and plants continued to play a large role. The technologies of food production presumably were still so uncertain that it had to be possible to make up for misfortunes like bad harvests or epidemics among the herds through increased hunting and gathering. The settlements of this time are therefore all situated within areas having an optimum of naturally occurring foodstuffs in various types of environment.

The Ceramic Neolithic (*circa 6000–5000 BCE*)

Significant expressions of individuality accompanied the extensive similarity of economy and life-style. It even seems that everything had been reviewed for its usefulness. Pottery, the innovation that from this point on constituted an integral part of material culture, was discovered in this way. The plastic properties of clay were known in the Paleolithic but were exploited only for the production of animal figurines. At Basta, as elsewhere, clay was used along with other materials for the production of vessels

without this leading to pottery production in the later sense. What happened in order for this change to take place is unclear. Beginning at a certain point, however, it must have become clear to many that this type of vessel could be of use in various areas of economic activity. So it happened that within a relatively short time the production of pottery began in nearly all inhabited areas of the Near East.

When archaeologists declare that a new period begins with the introduction of pottery, they ascribe too much importance to this phenomenon that it did not really have. Easier production of vessels in increased quantities was certainly a major improvement for storage and ordinary housekeeping, but pottery solved no problems that had not been solved earlier—albeit at greater cost. Not even the possibility of decoration of varied types was new, because the possibilities for individualization had already been shown in wall painting and body painting.

When we see that decorative patterns differ not only among large regions but also from valley to valley, we can perhaps get an idea of just how great a need was felt by human groups for the expression of individuality, and that pottery, as a medium available everywhere and in great quantity, was drawn into this process. While the technical level of production appears to have been very much the same throughout the Near East—simple, open forms with thick sides of strongly tempered clay baked at low temperatures—principles of decoration were distinct from region to region, and individual patterns differed within smaller areas. This clear differentiation allows us to define finely calibrated units of space and time, so our ability to interpret archaeological finds increases with the appearance of pottery. (See "Western Iran in Pre-history" later in this volume, for an example.)

Nevertheless, in other fields, such as architecture, layout of settlements, and securing the necessities of life, nothing fundamental changed, as is shown in the continuity of the Zagros settlements. In the west, by contrast, with very few exceptions (Jericho and Wadi Shu'ab), the settlements of the aceramic Neolithic were abandoned, and settlements of the ceramic Neolithic arose in other places (Çatal [pronounced Chatal] Hüyük and Jebel Abu Thawwab).

THE BEGINNINGS OF INTEGRATION

The Samarra-Halaf Horizon (*circa 4500–4000 BCE*)

Pottery, as the only medium before the development of larger forms of art that readily drew on individualized artistic expression, is the artifact that permits the best discrimination among intellectual traditions, and the similarities and differences that characterized them. We are generally not in a position to determine whether the various units are based on ethnic, political, or other connections. Unfortunately, the few known sites are too far apart for us to be able to draw conclusions about the character of their mutual relations, and thus the degree of their political integration, on the basis of their sizes and locations.

Aside from the fact that pottery now took on a uniform appearance within larger regions, so that ceramic groups can often be distinguished across an extensive spatial range, the most important change was that the broader plains of the Near East were now settled. This occurred because methods of agriculture and herding had become so reliable that it was no longer necessary to rely on the possibility of acquiring food through hunting and gathering in case of crop or herd failure. Thus the plains, on which the range of natural food occurrence was limited—so that survival without food production would probably be possible only for small groups—could also be settled.

Clearly distinct groups of pottery, named for the first place they are discovered, appeared on the great plains: the early Susiana ware on the plain of Khuzestan; Eridu (modern Abu Shahran) ware on the Babylonian plain (black-on-buff ware); Samarra ware (matte painting on buff ware) on the Assyrian plain, especially east of the Tigris; and Halaf ware (highly lustrous painting, named for Tell Halaf—ancient Gozan and Bit-Bakhtani) on the entire North Syrian plain as far as the Mediterranean (Amuq [Anti-och] plain) and into southeast Anatolia (Girk-i-Hacıyan [pronounced Hajiyán] and Tilki-Tepe). In a form lending itself to interpretation, architecture is known from sites with Samarra and Halaf ware. Most important, in the settlement of

Tell al-Sawwan (within the city area of early Islamic Samarra) we have a nearly complete town plan, which shows several isolated buildings of nearly the same size and style within an enclosing wall behind a moat. The size of the houses indicates an organization by extended families. No significant variations are observable. The same layout is found in the settlement of Choga Mami at the foot of the Zagros Mountains, which in other ways exhibits the same inventory.

Like the pottery, the architecture of the Halaf region follows different principles. Particularly characteristic are the *tholos* buildings, in which a long rectangular room is set before a round structure (Tell Arpachiyá). Larger settlement contexts, however, are not known.

COMPLEX SETTLEMENT SYSTEMS

The Ubaid Horizon (*circa 4000–3500 BCE*)

Toward the end, the ceramic groups changed in similar ways. Form and pattern of decoration become simpler, and concentric circular bands become the dominant element. Pottery with these pronounced features was found for the first time at Tell al-Ubaid in southern Babylonia, whence the name Ubaid ware. Soon afterward, a northern Ubaid group was identified at Tepe Gawra in Assyria, and Ubaid-like patterns became prevalent within the range of the earlier Halaf ware. The view that this distribution was due to wandering Ubaid groups was soon abandoned, as was the idea of itinerant Ubaid potters. One possible explanation proceeds from the fact that a number of the new visual elements are easy to apply to a rotated vessel, and that this type of decoration is possibly connected with the introduction of a new technical device in pottery production, the pivoted turntable. Traces left by the "turnette" are in fact characteristic of Ubaid and Ubaid-like wares. The style of decoration would thus have spread as part of a new technology.

However, the Ubaid phenomenon is to be explained, the strong uniformity over a broad area is remarkable, compared with the highly distinct

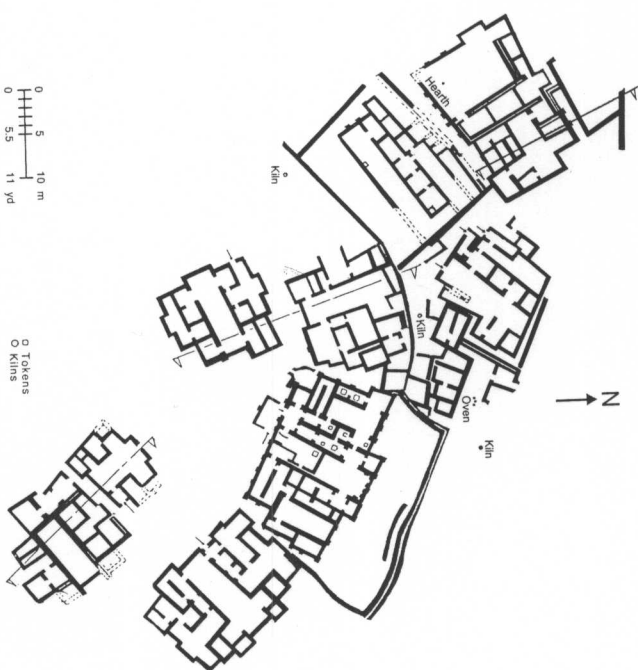


Fig. 2. Plan of the settlement (Level II) of Tell Abada, Ubaid period.

pottery groups of the preceding period, although regional differences are obviously not to be overlooked. This relatively strong uniformity over the greater part of the Near East is particularly noteworthy in view of the fact that with the next period there commenced a phase in which particular areas of the Near East experienced divergent development.

Yet in most regions the number of finds is too small to allow us to conclude that there were structured relationships among the settlements. Only for Khuzestan is the information adequate to show that the larger and smaller settlements clearly stood in an orderly organizational relationship. Better-known settlements (Tell Abada and Deimien Tepe) reveal the existence of uniform principles of ground-plan arrangement, including the "central room house"; rooms irregu-

lar in shape are added on both sides of a long interior space (fig. 2). The same principle is found in the large buildings of the succeeding Uruk period. In spite of obvious alterations in the next period, a strong continuity is revealed.

HARBINGERS OF EARLY HIGH CIVILIZATION

The Early Uruk Period (circa 3500—3200 BCE)

In one part of the Near East there now arose the features that constitute the distinguishing marks of Babylonian civilization, whereupon the building blocks essential for later development became available. In a short time there arose an

urban culture with the necessary economic and social structure, with differentiated large buildings, with major art, and finally with writing. While each of these phenomena can without exception be traced to earlier stages, their transformation into a specifically urban form was a matter of a few hundred years—too long a period for us to speak of a "sudden" transformation, yet a very short time in light of the preceding slow and steady development. Our best information comes from the city of Uruk (modern Warka), hence the name "Uruk period." (See "The Development of Cities in Ancient Mesopotamia" in Part 3, Vol. I.)

We still lack, however, the historical background necessary for understanding the course of events, because even less material has been preserved for the early Uruk period than for some of the previous periods. Just enough is available for us to be aware of the existence of a stage of development between the end of the Ubaid period and the first fully urban phase.

Two observations can lead us to an indirect assessment: the pottery demonstrates that in the Early Uruk period a new technology prevailed, and the early texts of the fully urban phase reveal that the economic and social structures were then already so well established that a considerable preliminary period must be posited.

A deep sounding of limited scale in Uruk provides the best information. Levels containing the painted ware typical of the last phase of the Ubaid period are followed by levels in which a type of pottery that is unpainted and displays different forms appears, then quickly spreads. Both characteristics can probably be explained by the fact that most vessels were produced in a new way, on the potter's wheel.

That more vessels could be produced by individual potters with the help of the wheel presumably shows what problems were solved by this new tool. The wheel is, moreover, an implement characteristic of the advanced division of labor: work at the wheel calls for much experience, as does the preparation of the clay. In order to be worked on the wheel, the clay must be of a consistency that can be achieved only through protracted preparation. The wheel can thus serve as an indication of a well-developed division of labor, in regard to both filling a need and organizing work. The developments of the

Early Uruk period thus were presumably accompanied by, or even initiated, socioeconomic changes.

This assumption is supported by the early texts of the subsequent Late Uruk period. For the most part they are records of economic administration and, in lesser part, list-type enumerations of concepts that belong together by content. Both are significant here. Apparently the administrative procedures followed firmly established rules that are scarcely distinguishable from those which remained normative over the following centuries. Such uniformity can be attained only after a long period during which the most effective forms were developed through trial and error. The development of these forms must have taken place partly in the Early Uruk period.

One of the lists presents titles and names of professions in hierarchical order. A title later translated as "king" heads the list, followed by leaders of various administrative divisions, from groups of priests down to craftsmen. The list certainly reflects the social hierarchy as it had developed over a long period before the invention of writing. Here, too, the Early Uruk period definitely played a large part in the development.

Writing appears as a fully developed system. Aside from a certain initial uncertainty as to the sign forms, the system is fully functional from the beginning. The search for more primitive, earlier precursors of writing can be successful only when such forerunners are sought from the point of view of the possibilities of information storage. Various methods of recording numbers or quantities through the lining up of impressions in clay or the accumulation of counting stones or clay tokens, and of the preserving of information about individuals by means of seal impressions, reveal such older procedures for information storage. They are, however, limited in the kind of information that can be recorded and in their possibilities of use. Even the invention of procedures that employ both number indicators and seals does not greatly expand the limits, but clearly indicates that efforts were under way to develop more comprehensive methods of recordkeeping. With the development of writing, this effort so obviously reached a successful end that the completion of the sys-

tem could follow in a very short time, especially because the requirements to be placed on it had already been formulated. It is probable that part of the search for new possibilities of information storage falls in the Early Uruk period.

Again it can be assumed that a concrete challenge stood behind this search. When we see that writing primarily serves economic administration and seals serve principally to certify the clay fastenings for all kinds of containers, hardly any other conclusion is possible than that the impetus toward more comprehensive media for information storage proceeded from economics. It is clear that in this way the Early Uruk period brought about or paved the way for considerable alterations in the technical and socioeconomic realms, even though we are unable to examine the nature of the changes from original material but can draw only indirect conclusions.

The changes from the Ubaid to the Uruk period thus at first appear to lie on a line with the previous changes from one period to the next. There is, however, a considerable difference. While earlier alterations had in each case affected the entire Near East more or less comprehensively and simultaneously, the developments now under consideration occurred only in a limited area—the plains of Babylonia and Khuzestan. For the first time an area of the Near East split off from the common course of development and began to go its own way, though building on the common foundations; it accelerated the further expansion of the technology of civilization in comparison to the other regions.

It is difficult to identify the reasons for this divergence. The key role lies in Babylonia, as is underscored by the subsequent development: for a rather long period Babylonia was the only region in western Asia in which developments on all societal levels were driven forward in such a forceful and unchecked fashion that toward the end of the third millennium, external structures with immense internal and external power arose for the first time in the Near East.

The only environment of its type in the Near East, Babylonia was an enormous, nearly undifferentiated area with extremely fertile soil which, because of inadequate rainfall, could be cultivated only with the help of artificial irrigation. Then, however, the yields were higher than elsewhere, which meant that the expanse of

land surrounding a settlement necessary to feed it could be small, and that settlements could therefore be situated close together. In fact, in the Uruk period a density of settlement was reached in Babylonia that is hardly found at other times in other regions of the Near East.

It is conceivable that the development of instruments for avoidance and conciliation of conflicts within and between settlements—conflicts that were unavoidable, given the short distances separating settlements—exerted a strong impulse toward the alteration of societal relationships. The operation of an irrigation economy implies a more intensive organization of labor, even if in the Uruk period it did not result in a system of canals. Such became necessary only from the Early Dynastic period on, as a result of the decreased availability of water.

THE EARLY HIGH CIVILIZATION OF BABYLONIA

The Late Uruk Period (c. 3200–3000 BCE)

For reasons that escape us, societal pressure must have increased further toward the end of the Uruk period, whereupon the various developments culminated in what we call early high civilization. Again Uruk is by far our most productive source for knowledge of this period. The remains of the latest phase of the Late Uruk period (Archaic Level IV), excavated over a very large area, offer a "snapshot" of this earliest fully urban phase, which gains additional significance because it was presumably in this period that writing arose.

The city was about 250 hectares (625 acres) in extent and had, following the ordinary rule of thumb for the Near East of between one hundred and two hundred inhabitants per hectare of settled area, a population of 25,000 to 50,000 inhabitants. Two central districts occupy rather large areas within the city, and smaller ones may be concealed in the broad unexplored portions, in which residential districts were located as well.

The central areas were laid out differently but were characterized in both cases by buildings that we designate as temples, though this func-

tion is by no means certain in every case. In one instance a terrace seven meters (almost 8 yards) high forms the midpoint on which stands a building that is recognizable as a temple (the White Temple) by plan, altar, and pedestal. Nothing is known either about the deity to whom it was dedicated or about the area's extent or other details.

We are better informed about the eastern central district, called in later times Eanna, the sacred precinct of the city goddess of Uruk, Inanna (fig. 3). The excavated area of thirty-five thousand square meters (42,000 square yards) is probably one-third to one-half of the original extent. The area was surrounded by a gated wall separating it from the rest of the city area. The part that has been investigated contains larger and smaller buildings, courtyards, and open spaces. Neither in the buildings nor outside them were any articles found in their original context, such as would allow us to determine the function of the buildings or the course of events.

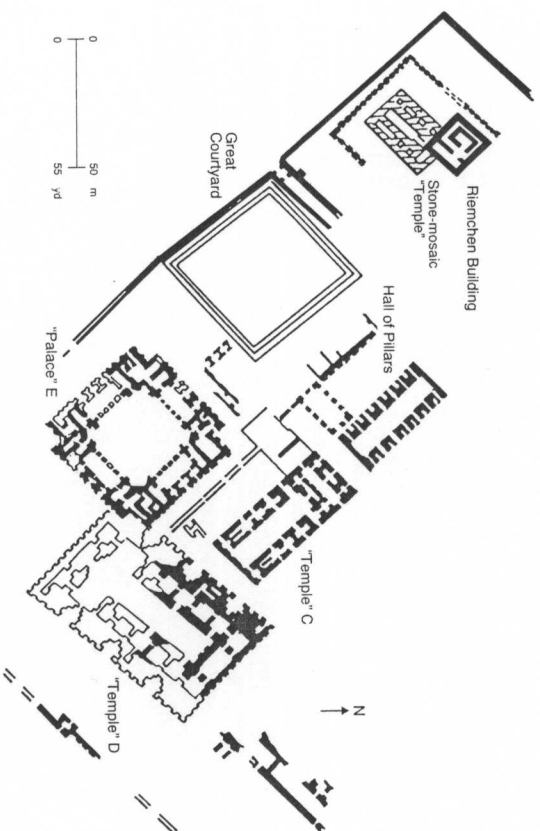


Fig. 3. Plan of Late Uruk buildings (Level IVa) of the precinct of Eanna, Uruk. COURTESY OF HANS J. NISSEN

Nor do the details of the ground plans of the large structures (Temple C: 53 by 24 meters—about 58 by 26 yards) bring us any further, for they obviously correspond to the main rooms of dwellings of the "central room" schema (Habuba al-Kabira).

The basis of the supposition that the city's economic center and its central cultic establishments were located in this area is the more than forty-five hundred inscribed tablets and fragments from the Late Uruk and immediately subsequent periods that were found here, as well as several thousand fragments of sealed clay fastenings. Unfortunately, they were all recovered from refuse layers. As has already been said, both types of record were integral parts of the economic administration of the time (see fig. 4). In particular they were employed in the operation of great storehouses, because with their use receipts and expenditures could be controlled. Of the corresponding warehouses nothing is known, but they were probably located in the unexcavated portions of Eanna.

I have already discussed the origin of writing, but something may be added concerning the contents of the early economic documents. From the situation of the city of Uruk at the center of an agrarian region, it was to be expected that a large proportion of the texts would have to do with the administration of agriculture. Thus we have numerous texts on the administration of herds, on the administration of fields, on the administration of grain and grain products, and on the employment of workers. More unexpected are the abundant texts concerning textiles and metalwork. From a later period we know that Babylonia was a center of textile production, and we may suppose that it was in part through this production that the imports necessary for this land poor in raw materials were bought. Metal is one such imported raw material. Perhaps these exchange mechanisms were already in operation in the early period.

The application of seal impressions is a practice, known from the Neolithic on (e.g., from Catal Hüyük), to indicate a particular relationship between the sealed object and the seal

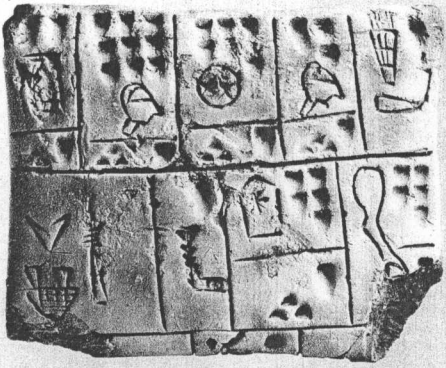


Fig. 4. Obverse of an economic tablet from Uruk, Late Uruk period. ARCHAEOLOGISCHES INSTITUT, AMTLEBUNG BACHMANN

owner. In the simplest terms, sealing designated something as property or possession, or attested to the presence of the seal's owner at a particular event. In the Uruk period appeared a new form, the cylinder seal, which became characteristic of Mesopotamian culture and spread beyond it. A negative pattern is engraved on the outer surface of a small stone cylinder, so that rolling it along a clay surface produces an endless band of relief. One reason for this innovation could be that it was possible in this way to seal, and thus protect, a larger surface than previously. But it is even more probable that the purpose must be sought in the function of the seal as bearer of information. (See "Cylinder Seals and Scarabs in the Ancient Near East" in Part 7, Vol. III.)

By the application of a seal impression the holder of the seal let everyone know who had performed a particular (administrative) act. In order to safeguard this identification, the possibility had to be created for everyone who exercised a particular function to use an unmistakable seal. With the increasing number of such people, the point must have been reached when the small surface of the stamp seal no longer sufficed for the incorporation of the necessary number of variations. The cylinder seal, with its much larger area, allowed not just a richer variety of patterns but also the use of pictorial compositions whose breadth of variation was inexpressible.

Cylinder seals are, moreover, an invaluable source of knowledge of the spiritual background of this period, for the compositions represented on them in large part show scenes that can be assigned to particular clear-cut themes. Many can be specified as cultic, another large group is taken to represent the ruler before captives, and the depiction of wild and domestic animals in ever new combinations forms a further focal point.

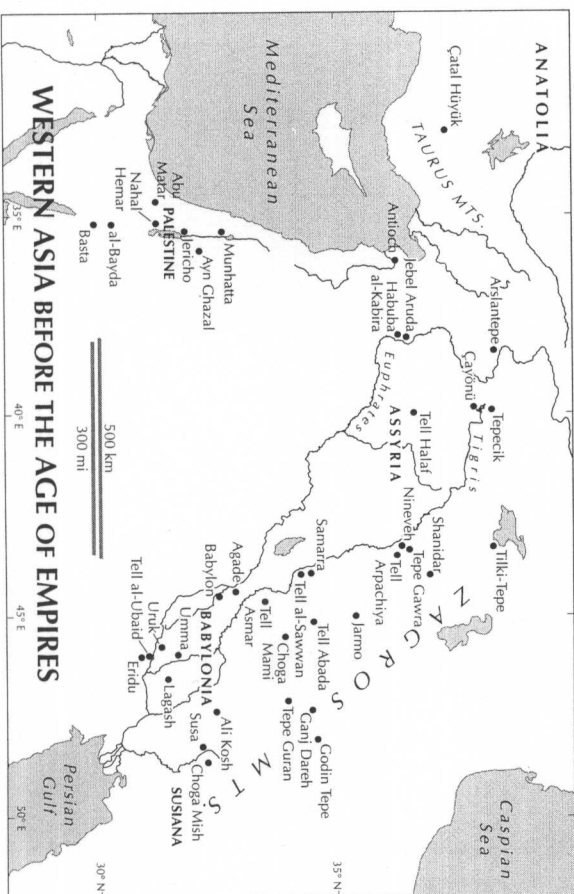
For the first time we find examples of major public art, artistic activity in the earlier periods having been limited, as far as we know, to small clay figurines of people and animals. Remains of a life-size human head, the upper part of a male statue with the same attire as the ruler on the cylinder seals, and a stela with a representation of a lion hunt show a broadening in what could be represented, and allow us to realize how much has not come down to us. A large stone vessel decorated with reliefs, the so-called cult

vase, should especially be mentioned, because the hierarchically organized representation in four superposed bands of plants, animals, humans, and cultic events enables the strong hierarchical order of society that can be read out from other sources to be transposed into pictorial form. (See "Furniture in Ancient Western Asia" in Part 7 and "Theologues, Priests, and Worship in Ancient Mesopotamia" in Part 8, both in Vol. III, for detailed examples.)

In contrast to Uruk at the center, we are scarcely informed about the numerous settlements in the surrounding areas. We can determine from their size and their relation to one another and to Uruk that they obviously belonged to a settlement system organized on several levels that was oriented to Uruk as the center, but about the kind of relations we know nothing precise; again only indirect conclusions are possible. If we deduce from the early texts that, for instance, large quantities of grain were allocated to specific officials, we can draw the conclusion that obviously in specific places (storehouses) such quantities were brought to-

gether, and that thereby people were supplied who were not involved in grain production. These are the great and small officials and administrative bureaucrats named in the texts; the portion of the population of Uruk not active in primary production must have been quite large. Probably, therefore, the settlements of the environs that were requisitioned for the supply of Uruk at the center were fully integrated into the large redistribution system. The surrounding settlements, and the smallest villages as well, therefore had to produce a surplus and could not limit themselves to production for their own survival.

To be sure, nearly all the information for the preceding discussion comes from Uruk. Excavations elsewhere, however, support the assumption that the reconstructed picture is more or less valid for all of Babylonia: a socially strongly differentiated or stratified society with a complex economic structure, producing the surplus necessary to support a large bureaucratic and priestly apparatus as well as central institutions, and importing raw materials that



certainly served above all the prestige requirements of the upper classes and thus helped to consolidate their power.

THE NEIGHBORS OF THE EARLY HIGH CIVILIZATION OF BABYLONIA

So much for Babylonia. But what of the other regions of the Near East? Unfortunately the state of research does not permit us to draw as complete a picture in regard to any other area except Susiana. Here we find quite similar phenomena. After the Ubaid-like Susa A period, the Early and Late Uruk periods followed with almost the same characteristics as in Babylonia: large settlements (Susa and Choga Mish), the potter's wheel, the development of means of storing information. It appears that the development of a script occurred somewhat later than in Babylonia, and was thus stimulated from there; but the possibilities for exact chronological correlation are too limited to draw a final conclusion. In general, the writing system follows the same principles, except for the forms of the signs and the arrangement in lines instead of in cases. A different language probably underlies it. The presence of numbers varying in magnitude as in the administrative texts of Uruk shows all of these texts to be administrative in nature; no lists are attested. Even though the texts have not yet yielded much information, it may nonetheless be assumed that they were part of an economic system as complex as that of Babylonia, suggesting that in other aspects as well the societal situation was similar. We will see, however, that this commonality soon dissolved.

For the remaining areas of the Near East we must be satisfied with individual pieces of information, which are sometimes suggestive. When interpreting them we must distinguish between finds that signal a further development of local traditions and obvious imports or influences from Babylonia. The latter are unambiguously distinct from local traditions, for they correspond entirely or partly to the inventory characteristic of the Uruk period of Babylonia.

The different manners in which these appear in the other regions is interesting. There are settlements that so closely resemble the normal inventory of Uruk-period Babylonia in all respects that we must assume that they were founded directly from Babylonia (Habuba al-Kabira South, Jebel Aruda, perhaps also Nuneveh, and Basmsian). Or within a long-established settlement only the installation on the citadel may exhibit such an Uruk-period inventory, while the finds in the other parts of the settlement remain within the local tradition (Godin Tepe, see figs. 5a, 5b). The opposite case occurs when a suburb whose finds display Babylonian features is attached to an established settlement in the local tradition (Tepecik pronounced Tepejik). Finally, the variant in which the local tradition transforms itself under Uruk influence must be mentioned (Malatya [ancient Melitene]).

We are ignorant of the cause of these differences, in part because at this stage of research we know much less about the respective local areas. Until now the investigation of the unusual—of Babylonian finds turning up far from their region of origin—has attracted more interest than the study of the local traditions.

Thus, for the time being it is not possible to state the reasons for this Babylonian expansion. That they had to do with the safeguarding of the supply of raw materials needed in Babylonia is no more than a plausible speculation. One conclusion, however, is beyond doubt: at this time Babylonia was unquestionably the most highly developed region of the Near East. Except for Susiana, no other region appears to have produced or participated in the economic and social developments that characterize Babylonian early high civilization.

Although we must always guard against drawing far-reaching conclusions on the basis of incommensurate research, the differences here are too obvious. The particular circumstances of Babylonia in the Uruk period appear to have speeded up the development of the incipient technologies of civilization. The more effective economic and social organizational structures bound up with this development certainly made Babylonia, and for a time Susiana, the decisive regions of the Near East in the realm of power politics.

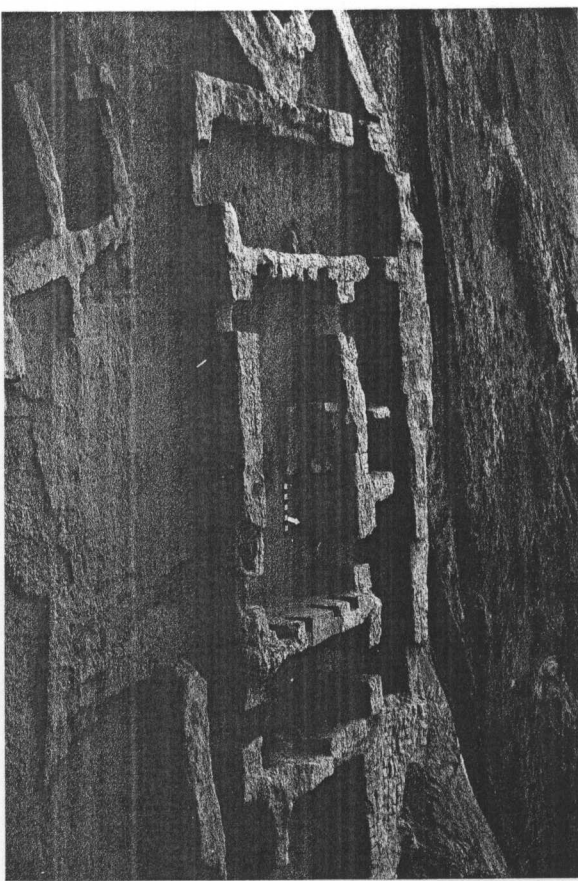


Fig. 5a. The citadel at Godin Tepe, Iran, period V, which was excavated in 1973. A plan of the excavations at Godin Tepe, period V, appears in "Western Iran in Prehistory" below. ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM, TORONTO

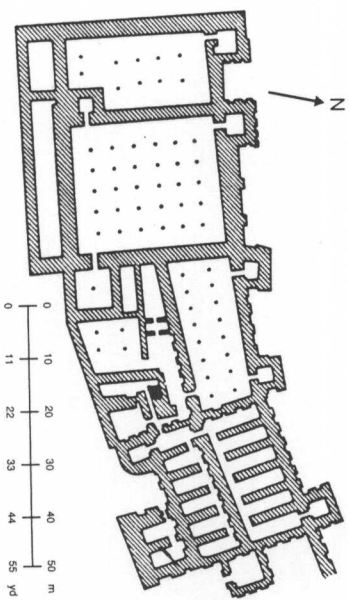


Fig. 5b. Plan of the citadel at Godin Tepe. ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM, TORONTO

PROSPECT

A long time passed between the full development of the urban culture of Babylonia and the formation of the first empires. But there is a question of definition involved: can we designate the political structures of the Akkad and Ur III dynasties as "empires," or is this concept appropriate only for the "empires" of the first millennium? However that may be, with the formation of early high civilization the course was set. What followed were decisive changes in the direction of the development of generally valid rules of urban and state life, but these were more in the way of individual answers to individual challenges, without the range of choice available in the Uruk period, whose exploitation had produced a result as favorable as the early high civilization. Only the Akkadian dynasty appeared to make decisions actively, not merely to react.

When the entire Near East is considered, our dilemma emerges especially strongly and in two forms for the time following the Uruk period. The primacy of Babylonia in regard to civilization, deduced principally from archaeological data but also from the emergence of writing, is now fully evident, because aside from a brief episode in Khuzestan, only in Babylonia was writing used comprehensively and developed further; the other regions remained mute for a long time. This prominence, however, led research, especially in the past, to focus on Babylonia, and to some extent on Assyria to the north, so that even today, after archaeological investigation has been directed to the other regions, the areas neighboring Babylonia still cannot be discussed adequately. In particular, the data are insufficient to enable us to follow the independent development of each of these regions in such a way as to gain an impression of who the economic and political partners of Babylonia really were. There can be no doubt that the reciprocal connections were very close. So finally, in spite of the best intentions, it is possible only to sketch the further development of the region in which the first states later arose.

The formation of economic and administrative structures during the Uruk period should probably be seen as the fundamental prerequisite

site that made possible not just overcoming the challenges of the subsequent centuries but also further development. Only twice did the developments result in a dead end that could be escaped only by a switch to a totally different alternative: the rigid form of the "temple city" at the end of the Early Dynastic period, and the overcentralized regional state of the Third Dynasty of Ur.

By and large we must deduce the character of the fundamental challenge from the responses to it, namely, the construction and improvement of the system of canals for artificial irrigation and the gradual abandonment of those areas of Babylonia not situated near rivers or canals. Both are explained by a diminution of the water available for irrigation. Water that had earlier been supplied naturally by the Euphrates River and its branches now had to be brought to farmland by man-made canals. But as this was possible only for an ever smaller portion of the arable land, ever more areas were abandoned.

As was the case for the cities, which since at least the Early Dynastic I period were enclosed within walls, and where as a result only conflict-laden internal expansion could take place, so also was the arable land of Babylonia entirely surrounded by a boundary—the boundary between arable and nonarable land, between sedentary and nonsedentary populations. When we see that in the centuries after the Uruk period the size of settlements increased, indicating a growth of population, while at the same time the irrigable land decreased—that is, the boundaries constricted—it becomes clear how conflicts must have multiplied and become more intense on the supra-city level.

A common trend after the Uruk period was therefore that of conflict management. Whether it was the development of rules of "private law" (Old Sumerian legal documents) or "public law" (arbitration of King Mesalim in the dispute between the cities of Umma [modern Tell Jokhal] and Lagash [modern Tell al-Hibal], and the "treaty" between Entemena of Lagash and Lugalkiginedudu [Lugalkisheshedudu] of level of decision making higher than that of the

city in the form of a regional state (that of Sargon of Akkad following previous halting attempts), all were the results of endeavors to regulate conflicts that had not existed previously in this form and with which the old rules therefore could not cope. Thus these steps, which were extremely important for the future course of development, were in the final analysis the outcomes of the escalation of conflicts during the Early Dynastic period.

An additional factor in the increase of population density must have been the immigration of Semitic groups ("pre-Akkadians"). These groups emerged in the course of the Early Dynastic period in Babylonia—at least we can first identify Semitic words and personal names in the texts of this time, while they are not yet detectable in the records of the Late Uruk period and the subsequent phase.

It goes without saying that important developments took place not just in the areas that have been discussed but equally, for example, in art and literature. The emergence of the religious concept of a personal protective deity, upon whom one could call as an intermediary between oneself and the higher gods, probably gave rise to the production of statues of the adorning type, which for a long time dominated plastic art. A stone statue was set up in a temple in order to be present there in place of the donor over a long period, a possibility that was apparently open to others than members of the upper classes. (Noteworthy is the statue hoard of Tell Asmar [Eshnunna], which was found in a small shrine in a modest residential district.) Because stone had to be imported, the large number of private statues should probably be interpreted as a sign of quite general prosperity. Furthermore, the wealth of the upper classes is well attested by the finds from the so-called Royal Cemetery of Ur.

In literature the effects were even more far-reaching. There must have been myths, epics, and religious poetry in earlier times, passed on orally. Apparently it was not thought necessary to use the script that already existed at that time to write them down. For five to six hundred years this script was employed almost exclusively to inscribe economic records. We do not know why literature began to be written down in the middle of the third millennium. It

is in any case clear that to that end the writing system had to be developed further in a direction that the original application of the script had not required. Because it had dealt only with memoranda, there had been no need to write the particles, prepositions, and so on that were present in normal speech, and for whose representation signs would have had to be used with their phonetic values. This possibility, which probably existed in the oldest texts for writing personal names, was systematically developed only in the middle of the third millennium. Only then did there arise the possibility of recording language in its full extent, including special forms like poetry, which depends very much on exact rendition.

It is conceivable that a role was played here by the immigration of Semitic groups, who perceived the need to write their language, too. This, however, was feasible only through an increase in the possibilities for phonetic use of the signs. For unlike the agglutinative Sumerian, which by its very nature can be represented by strings of signs, the Semitic tongue of the "pre-Akkadians" was an inflected language, in which grammatical differences were expressed by sound alterations within the word stem. It is not possible to write such a language without the extensive use of phonetic signs. One of the great and lasting creations of Babylonian culture—literature—was thereby made possible.

This has necessarily been a very abbreviated sketch. The intention, however, was not to detail the further development but, looking back from that further development, to substantiate the opinion stated above: that with the evolution of early high civilization the course had irreversibly been set.

Thanks to circumstances, especially the fact that in times of great challenges the organizational capabilities to manage them were already present, the Near East as a whole first followed the paths of civilization that were to set it apart from neighboring regions. This course of events later repeated itself, as for the same reasons Babylonia ultimately set itself apart from other areas of the Near East.

Translated from the German by Peter T. Daniels and Gary M. Beckman