Exhibition Checklist

1. *Dagger,* Elamite, Diyala region, c. 1300 BC, bronze, 30.5 cm
2. *Arrowheads,* Mesopotamia, n.d., bronze, 2.5-3.0 cm
3. *Necklace,* Mesopotamian, c. 1800 BC, carnelian, 72 cm
4. *Bracelet,* Mesopotamian, n.d., bronze, 8.90 cm
5. *Child's bracelet,* Mesopotamian, n.d., bronze, 6.35 cm
6. *Bowl,* Sumerian?, Warka c. 2000 BC, alabaster, 12 x 5.7 cm
7. *Bowl,* Neolithic, Nippar, c. 7000 BC, alabaster, 8 x 3 cm
8. *Four vessels,* Roman, Assyria, 1st-4th century AD, glass, 3-20 x 1.5-7 cm
9. *Brick fragment from ziggurat of Al Untash-Napirisha,* Elamite, c. 1340-1300 BC, terracotta, 8.9 x 15.25 x 15.25 cm
10. *Three cylinder seals,* Mesopotamia, Regions unknown, c. 2500-1800 BC, steartite, alabaster, feldspar, 3 x 1.5, 2 x 1.75, 1.5 x 1.5 cm
11. *Rectangular measuring vessel,* Mesopotamian, Neolithic (?), c. 7000-4000 BC basalt, 17.8 x 11.4 x 5.7 cm
12. *Pouring vessel,* Mesopotamian, 5000-2000 BC, red stone, 15.8 x 6.35 cm
13. *Bowl,* Mesopotamian, Neolithic, c. 7000-5000 BC, granite, 15.24 x 8.25 cm
14. *Pestle,* Assyrian, Ashur, c. 1500 BC, basalt, 12.7 cm
15. *Two bowls,* Neolithic, Nippar, c. 7000 BC, granite, stone, 6.9-10.75 x 2.54-4.45 cm
16. *Three vessels,* Luristan, c.1200-700 BC, earthenware: red, yellow, white 7-13.35 x 6.3-10.70 cm
17. *Vessel,* Susa, Parthian, c. 300-0 BC, earthenware, 17.75 x 13 cm
18. *Two potter's tripods,* Mesopotamia, n.d., terracotta, 5.5-7.5 cm
19. *Spindle whorl,* Mesopotamian, c. 5000 BC, terracotta 5 x 1.4 cm

The artifacts in this exhibition are drawn from Dr. Donald K. McIntyre '35 and Mrs. Donald K. McIntyre collection at The Trout Gallery.

Further Reading

Aruz, Joan, ed. *Art of the First Cities: The Third Millenium B.C. from the Mediterranean to the Indus.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.

Meyers, Eric M. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East,* Vol. I-V. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Snell, Daniel C. *Life in the Ancient Near East, 3100-332 B.C.E.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997.

Van De Mieroop, Marc. *A History of the Ancient Near East ca. 3000-323 BC.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2004.

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Brochure design by Dottie Reed

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Lines in the Sand

Social Divisions in the Ancient Near East

Curated by Allison Cuneo

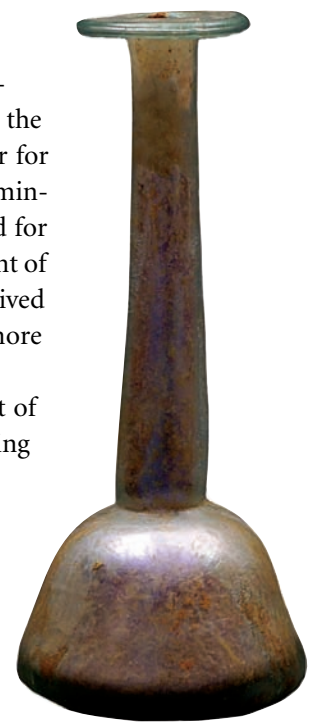
April 13–August 11, 2007

This exhibition displays how seemingly ordinary objects have the ability to reveal complex socioeconomic issues that stratified Ancient Near Eastern society for over ten millennia. When analyzed within an historical context, these artifacts from the archaeological record bring to light the differentiation between the lives of the privileged few and those of the masses. Ancient texts can acknowledge the separation between the "haves" and "have-nots," but these texts are not as revealing as the objects left behind by both groups. Throughout history, especially in ancient cultures, the privilege of literacy was monopolized by the elite and the story of the past was controlled by those who had the ability to write it. Comparatively, the rest of society lacked the power or the knowledge to write its view of history, to document its own story, thus leaving it largely voiceless and unrepresented. Modern perceptions of ancient society have been derived from biased textual evidence and prestige goods produced for an elite audience, and therefore the experience of the common individual is often overlooked or misunderstood. The objects in this exhibition provide tangible evidence of the legal and economic barriers imposed by the elite to maintain social hierarchy, and the effects these barriers had on Mesopotamian culture as a whole.

Cylinder seal, Mesopotamian, no. 10

As populations grew and the economy became increasingly complex throughout the fourth millennium BC, society changed its organizational structure from being a collection of cooperating households to a more centralized bureaucracy led by an administration of elites. This administration was comprised of the special few who had access to adequate production resources that were self-sustaining and not dependent upon the exchange of goods and services for survival. At the top of the social hierarchy were the priest-king leaders who served as both a government and religious authority, and who gained much of their authority by working closely with the temple priesthood. Religion had always been the most essential part of Near Eastern culture, with the temple or shrine being the foundation upon which the settled society was built. Thus, as political and religious authority was fused into identity of the civic leader, the ziggurat, which developed from the temple, became the center of urban culture. This central location served as both the house of the city's patron deity and as the economic center for the collection of taxes and redistribution of goods by the administration. As a part of this redistribution, those who worked for the temple were provided rations as payment, but the amount of allotment was determined by gender and rank—men received more than women, while superiors and craftsmen earned more than the laborers and unskilled workers.

The elite physically segregated themselves from the rest of society by living in separate sections of the city, embodying their social and economic disassociation from the masses. Such cities were often named after the ruler who built them, like the city of Al Untash-Napirisha, which is located in Tchogha Zanbil in present day Iran. The ziggurat there was built by the Elamite king Untash-Napirisha around 1300 BC and was decorated with a layer of inscribed bricks every ten layers. Although the bricks were meant to serve as decoration, the texts inscribed on them provide fascinating insights into the mindset of the elites and how they envisioned their place in society.



Glass vessel, Roman, no. 8

The brick in this exhibition from the ziggurat mentioned above has been inscribed with a dedication text, meant to consecrate the temple on the top of the ziggurat, called a kukunnum, in the name of Inshushinak, the god of Susa, with the hope that the erection of the temple would be pleasing to the god. What is also significant is that the brick mentions that Untash-Napirisha built the temple for his own life and to ensure his own spiritual well-being, clearly demonstrating that these monumental constructions were built not only to appease the gods but also for the personal gratification of the royal elite. Large scale building projects with elaborate decorations and designs projected an image of wealth that not only separated the elite from their own society but also served as a display of power and access to resources of other kingdoms. Impressing foreign ambassadors and gaining an advantage in the international power struggle was a driving incentive for the patronage of architecture.

The masses were not fortunate enough to have such comfortable and grand lifestyles; the majority of them struggled to survive. Those lower in the hierarchy were split into two categories—the palace dependents and freemen. Dependents who worked for the palace were not slaves per se, but they owned no land and were reliant upon the wages paid by the palace in exchange for labor or services. Even the lower level palace dependents were better off than the free members of society, whose income was inconsistent. Many freemen did not own property or have access to resources. If they did own land it was shared with multiple families, and the majority of freemen worked as hired craftsmen and laborers for the wealthy. Waged work was often agricultural in nature and arduous, and payment was given in grain rather than currency.

The archaeological evidence suggests that despite the lack of resources or wealth of the masses, great care was taken in the production of everyday household items. The vessels in this exhibition display signs of everyday wear and use, but were made to satisfy the need for function and form. The array of unique shapes and media attest to the importance of aesthetics and variety in daily life, while the special attention paid to symmetry and refinement point to the need for functional perfection. Although most of the vessels were made from common clay and stone, the attention paid to quality and detail is as meticulous as if they were made from alabaster or glass.

The life of a civilization can be cyclical in existence, rising up from meager beginnings to grow into large, hierarchical societies that further the development of science, art, and literature. Eventually, civilizations decline and all monumental buildings and works of art fade, crumble, and fall only to be swallowed up and lost within the sands of time. The small amount that survives is merely a fraction of what a given culture once represented, but even the most humble of artifacts can provide significant insight into the life of a collapsed civilization. Ancient artifacts are often the most revealing sources of the past, and can communicate more about a culture than historical documents alone because of their lack of authorial agenda. Narrative history may be written by those who control the pen, but archaeology reveals the physical reality of those who lived in these civilizations.

Allison Cuneo '07

Bowl, Mesopotamian, no. 13