

ART 5 EXAM #1: PALEOLITHIC TO AEGEAN KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF ERAS/CULTURES

PALEOLITHIC (ca. 40,000-10,000 BCE)

- Pre-historic era—no written language exists
- Visual objects linked to observation of natural world (representational & naturalistic forms)
- Cave sites—preserve first paintings & drawings done by humans; most likely used for ritual purposes not sites of habitation.
- Cave imagery—primarily naturalistic depictions of animals with attention to anatomical details, spatial & size relationships. Non-objective forms appear (i.e. grids, circles, dots) whose meaning cannot be concretely discerned
- Visual evidence suggests humans created imagery not merely for aesthetic reasons or to record known world but to communicate social/religious concepts
- Caves & their imagery may have been linked to totemistic ceremonies or increase ceremonies that symbolically aided people's clan ties or survival.
- Three-dimensional objects found—first sculptures left by humans; media consists of stone, bone and clay; techniques are carving & modeling
- Sculpture is mostly three-dimensional, small-scale and portable—suitable for nomadic life of peoples
- Depictions of animal-human forms—anthropomorphic beings--may have been associated with shamanistic powers, the spirit world, notions of transformation
- Depiction of human figures mostly female; not specific portraits. Exaggerated proportions emphasize child-bearing/fertility powers of women and suggests symbolic meaning.

NEOLITHIC (ca. 6000-2000 BCE)

- Pre-historic era—no written language
- Development of permanent architecture suggests less nomadic life—beginning of agriculture and domestication of animals
- Emergence of megalithic, post-and-lintel architecture defines era
- Main architectural forms that remain are burial sites (dolmens, cairns, passage graves) and ritual spaces (cromlechs, alignments)
- Burial sites suggest belief in afterlife and honoring certain members of society
- Development of megalithic architecture suggests organized society and desire to create sense of order and permanence in nature. Geometric forms predominate—circles, rows of stones, grids.
- Geographical location of sites point to concept of nature as embodying sacred power (geomancy)
- Some architecture may be linked to cyclical change in nature and astronomical phenomena (i.e. summer solstice, winter solstice)
- Development of first known settlements—Jericho & Çatal Hüyük—with protective walls and spaces that were used for religious purposes
- Small-scale sculpture of human figures may be associated with ancestors, deities or rituals.

SUMERIAN (ca. 3500-2000 BCE)

- First regional power to rise in the ancient Near East (Mesopotamia); comprises several urban centers/city-states (Ur, Uruk, Eridu).
- Development of agriculture and economy based on trade of goods
- Key architectural form—the *ziggurat* (“holy mountain”). Symbolic form links power of the gods to the city that builds it. Economic as well as religious center.
- Key cultural development—written language: *cuneiform*. Suggests need for record keeping related to property rights, religious beliefs and cultural and historical narratives.
- Key technological development—use of bronze to make tools and a variety of non-utilitarian objects.
- Architecture & objects found in gravesites suggest society built upon class divisions (ex: royal burial objects, shrines)
- Sculptural forms—votive figures. Depictions of male/female forms found in temples that suggest ritual usage and honoring the dead.

LAGASH (ca. 2200-2110 BCE)

- Independent Sumerian city that survived the Akkadian overthrow of Sumer
- Ruins of temple found with some 26 stone statues of early ruler—Gudea. Statues are specific portraits of ruler dressed in priestly clothing with cuneiform writing & temple plans: suggests link between political and religious power.
- Figural statues (Gudea) are somewhat abstracted and idealized; lack accurate body proportions and are stiffly rendered forms. Status of ruler implied.

AKKADIAN (ca. 2350-2150 BCE)

- 2nd empire to arise in Mesopotamia
- Founder was Sargon—left a dynasty of 5 rulers.
- Adopted the use of cuneiform writing—found on the *Stele of Naram-sin*.
- Visual objects suggest use by rulers to consolidate power and link their right to rule the gods. Portraiture of rulers is representational & idealized (see *Stele of Naram-sin*) while images of deities are abstract forms.
- Low relief carving technique used on *Stele of Naram-sin*. Use of visual narrative, careful composition, hieratic scale, and symbolic shape.
- High achievement in bronze casting: *Head of a Ruler*. May be Sargon or Naram-sin. Pictorial naturalism and accurate detail are key visual characteristics.

BABYLONIANS (ca. 1900-1595 BCE)

- Conquered Akkadian Empire; dynasty of kings ruled from city of Babylon.
- Key ruler--Hammurabi, conquered other regions and established order in empire.
- Key object from first Babylonian empire: *Stele of Hammurabi*—cuneiform code of laws that laid out rules of social behavior and punishments visually.
- Use of stone, both relief and free-standing as main media of public artworks
- On *Stele of Hammurabi* image of ruler linked to power of main god Shamash. Depiction of ruler and god appear naturalistic and representational. Symbolic dress, gestures and accoutrements add to meaning of law code inscribed on bottom part of stele. Low relief carving done in symbolic shape.

ASSYRIANS (ca. 1900-609 BCE)

- Powerful empire that defeated the Babylonians in 1120 BCE.
- Founding city was Assur, but other cities arose with more prominence—Ninevah and Nimrud.
- Key visual objects that remain are stone sculptures located in royal palaces: large-scale Winged Bull figures (*Lamassus*) and low relief carving on the walls depicting royal lion hunt (*visual narrative*)
- Visual objects meant to proclaim the strength and power of the ruler and intimidate visitors to the palaces through scale and actions depicted in relief.
- Assyrian artists create visual illusion and sense of reality with high attention to anatomical detail of figures and animals, suggestion of movement, and arrangement of objects in space.
- Assyrian art presents the most active forms (i.e. sense of movement, texture, space, creation of narrative) in all of ancient Near East.

NEO-BABYLONIAN (ca. 627-514 BCE)

- Rebuilding of city of Babylon and empire begun under Nebudchadnezzar II.
- Period of flourishing cultural and scholarly developments.
- Key architectural remains: *Processional Way* and the *Ishtar Gate*—main paved road and entrance to the city. *Ishtar Gate* represents high ceramics-making skill (use of glazed tiles with blue pigment) as well as symbol of wealth of empire.
- Animal and plant imagery on gate may refer to deities and to concept of paradise/oasis built by Babylonian rulers.

PERSIANS (ca. 648-330 BCE)

- Greatest empire of the Ancient Near East—conquered Mesopotamia, the Anatolian peninsula (modern-Turkey), invaded Egypt and mainland Greece.
- Defining visual objects are remains of royal cities—Susa and Persepolis
- Culture of assimilation—took forms and objects from other cultures as well as artisans. Examples: columns, capitals, relief carvings, treatment of animals and humans in realistic manner.
- Key site: *Apadana* (Royal Audience Hall) at Persepolis. Images meant to suggest proper behavior of visitors to palace and show power of the Persian kings over vast empire. Creation of visual narrative.
- Figures, though representational and highly detailed, are more stiff and orderly than those found in Assyrian palaces.

OLD KINGDOM EGYPTIAN (ca. 2735-2174 BCE)

- Establishment of rule of pharaohs and unification of Upper and Lower Egypt.
- Egyptian culture longest lasting, most stable in ancient world—artistic forms are also stable & iconic over a 3000-year period.
- Concept of universe as a series of eternal cycles and opposing forces
- Most visual objects relate to the image of the pharaoh and Egyptian deities
- Key architectural form: pyramids. Funerary function, located on west side of Nile River in area known as a necropolis. Meant to replicate city of the living and provide site for ruler to exist in next life.

OLD KINGDOM EGYPTIAN, cont'd.

- Pyramid form developed out of mastabas. Symbolic form linked to function—emphasis on geometric order, orientation on points of compass, permanent marker of burial site of ruler. Also, links role of pharaoh as god on earth to power of the sun god, Amun-Ra.
- Depiction of human figures in sculpture and painting follows artistic rules—*canon of proportions*. Body treated according to a grid system; figures are oriented horizontally. On 2-D surfaces figures are presented with profile face, frontal torso, profile legs. Each area of the body is carefully defined.
- Use of clothing, gestures and objects identifies the role and social status of figures in painting and sculpture. Idealized portraits of upper-class individuals common; figures of lower social status are depicted in more naturalistic manner.
- Stone is medium of choice for depictions of rulers—conveys idea of permanence. Idealization of ruler done to present best image to gods & convey god-like status.
- Egyptians paintings and relief images appear flat spatially; no attempt to create illusion of three-dimensional space (unlike Assyrians).
- Deities appear in both animal and human form. Use of *hieroglyphic* writing and careful attention to details make specific gods and humans identifiable.

NEW KINGDOM EGYPTIAN (ca. 1570-1070 BCE)

- New type of architecture emerges—temple/funerary complexes that contain burial sites for rulers and temples to gods (see *Funerary Temple of Hatshepsut*). Funerary sites are located in Valley of Kings in Upper Egypt. Structures not as immense as Old Kingdom pyramids.
- Main architectural form is post and lintel—use of columns, colonnades & emergence of hypostyle hall (*Temple of Amon*, Karnak). Structures built to suggest passage from everyday world to sacred space and to recreate the daily cycle of the sun.
- Some architectural sites often built into existing landscape and placed in sites far from established cities (see *Funerary Temple of Hatshepsut* & *Temple of Rameses II*) for protection and also to establish link to natural environment.
- Surfaces of buildings covered with hieroglyphic writing and relief carving that depicts deeds of ruler and links him to gods—emphasis on creating a permanent written record. Use of visual imagery for political propaganda as well as to express religious beliefs.
- Canon of proportion and depiction of figures remains similar to Old Kingdom except for *Amarna Period*. Under Akhenaten, new religious beliefs result in distortion of the human form to emphasize the spirituality of the ruler.
- Lavish burial remains of minor king Tutankhamen suggest the importance of preserving the ruler's body for the afterlife and the belief that rulers had divine status. Images of rulers found in many forms—tomb paintings, three-dimensional sculptures, relief carving.

CYCLADIC (ca. 3000-1600 BCE)

- Neolithic to Bronze Age culture based on islands of Naxos and Paros; no written records
- Typical artwork found: marble sculptures of abstract, stylized figures
- Wide size range: from 4 inches to over 5 feet tall; may have been painted
- Some discovered in gravesites—possibly votives, ritual objects used in home shrines; however, original function not conclusively determined
- Primarily female figures; male sculptures presented in more active poses (musicians, farmers)
- Canon of proportions used; emphasis on geometric forms & reduction of specific details

MINOAN (ca. 3000-1375 BCE)

- Bronze-age culture based on Island of Crete
- Establishment of administrative centers (“palaces”) such as Knossos built of stone and wood
- Knossos “palace” structure has labyrinthine (maze-like) layout. Features numerous rooms, inverted columns (painted red), plazas and fresco paintings on stone walls
- Linked by archeologist Sir Arthur Evans to Greek myths of King Minos and the Minotaur due to layout and imagery
- Fresco scenes done in lively, animated style with little detail; focus on imagery from nature (naturalistic style)
- Presence of animal imagery (bulls) in frescoes, sculpture and other objects suggest association of animal with ritual practices
- Representation of figures are general types rather than specific individuals—no portraits of rulers, identifiable deities found
- Sculptural works are small and in a variety of media: ceramic, stone and metal (particularly gold)

MYCENAEN (ca. 1500-1100 BCE)

- Bronze-Age Helladic culture located in mainland Greece; established trade throughout entire Mediterranean area
- Schliemann links culture to period of Trojan War—historically inaccurate
- Aggressive, war-like culture suggested by the remains of their citadels with massive, cyclopean walls (Mycenae, Tiryns)
- Use of keystone and corbel vaulting in architecture
- Evidence of social hierarchy found in burial remains—pit tombs with grave objects like golden masks, weapons, jewelry
- Key architectural contribution: developed the use of the dome in tholos tombs--*Treasury of Atreus* (misnamed by Heinrich Schliemann)
- Adopted use of frescoes and columns from Minoan culture, which the Mycenaens take over