

2022-01-26 - Lecture 04

2.1 Cities of Mesopotamia; Mud, Gods, and the Beginnings of Urbanism The Primitive Hut; The beginnings of architecture as a theoretical abstraction

- 1) **The Primitive Hut** is a theoretical abstraction dating to **Vitruvius** (25 BC), and others, such as Marc-Antoine **Laugier** (1753). They're theoretical speculations on the genesis of architecture.
 - Vitruvius's book was called **The Ten Books of Architecture** (dedicated to Augustus)
 - Laugier's book was called **An Essay on Architecture**. He was a Jesuit Priest in Paris who, after discovering his true calling, left the priesthood and became a writer.
- 2) **Mesopotamia** - *meso* meaning *middle* - Mesopotamia is the area between the two rivers, the Euphrates to the west and south, and the Tigris to the east and north.
 - Also known as the **Fertile Crescent** (modern-day Iraq)
 - Major historical cultures: **Sumer** (SOO-mer) to the south — **Assyria** to the north
 - **5000 - 1500 BCE (Bronze Age)** time period for Mesopotamian architectural contributions.
 - **Important to remember** that the Persian Gulf at this time extended hundreds of miles farther north than it does today. The receding and shrinking water levels of the two rivers (circa 2000 BCE) resulted in cities that, previously on the waterfront, were later landlocked in dry areas.
- 3) A major architectural development in Mesopotamian cities was the **ziggurat**. The ziggurat was a symbolic representation of the link between heaven and earth (and therefore to be controlled and occupied by High Priests, not the common man). This symbolic connection is referred to as the **Axis Mundi**. The *Axis of the World*, literally. Interesting that it is a vertical axis. Also can be thought of as *Sacred Center of the World*.

How this temple form was manifest was as a series of connected and related spaces that were stepped up (stacked) almost as a pyramid is. As entry courts led to higher levels, with more courts, vestibules, entryways - continually rising - the procession was upward to a holier place, ultimately to the holiest place at the apex of the ziggurat.

- 4) Another major cultural advancement in Mesopotamia was the development of writing - in the form called **cuneiform**. Cuneiform was inscribed into clay cones and tablets. The cuneiform has come down through history leaving a *very precise record* of the Mesopotamian cultures, or at least, far more precise than any previous cultural record.

Ironically, the cuneiform tablets that survive are the ones that were *baked* in terra cotta (a much more permanent material than clay). Many times the cuneiform cones or tablets were baked, was due to the destruction of a city — and the resulting fires in such an act — in which the cones and tablets were inadvertently fired into their state of permanency.

- 5) The **temenos** (Greek word) was a sacred precinct. The **tell** is the mound a city was built upon, a result achieved not from some sort of initial design intention, but through the accretion of time, in which road and house and temple improvements were simply built upon the previous, raising the level of the entire city over the course of centuries. In a way, time accretes in the vertical direction or along a vertical axis.
- 6) Examples and details of Mesopotamian architecture that are important:
 - **Tell Erbil** (beginning 6500 BCE). An example of a **tell**.
 - **Oval Temple of Khafage** — 2650 BCE. *A new building type called the temple....*
An example of a sacred temple precinct called a **temenos** controlled by the High Priest. This example is not quite yet a ziggurat, but it is a raised and stepped compound, with some axial relationships, some non-axial, with entry courts leading higher and higher. The temple included mainly an **altar for sacrifices** and a special niche for the **God to make an epiphanous appearance**, in the form of a statue.
 - **Temple of Enki in the city of Eridu**. The oldest settlement in the region 5000 BCE. Nine temples rebuilt on top of each other, resulting in **Temple VII**. Preist entered from SE and God **Anu** entered (a statue) on the NW. Formally speaking (referring to the *form* of the architecture), the walls were alternating vertical bands of buttress and niche, called **pleated walls....** eventually covered over by gigantic ziggurat 1500 years later.

These Mesopotamian cultures were dominated by a theocratic political order controlled by the Priests.

- **The White Temple of Anu in the City of Uruk** — **the first ziggurat** (proper)

3400 - 3000 BCE. Its gleaming white (pleated walls whitewashed in gypsum) stepped profile visible from nearby City of Eridu. The White Temple had orthogonal ramps leading upward and upward to the sacred holiest level where the God made its appearance and the High Priest conducted sacrifices.

- **Permanent cladding** emerged at this time — 3400 - 3000 BCE. It was in the form of modular building sheathing units (same concept as bricks, let's say), wherein the clay elements were glazed and fired and arranged in decorative patterns.
- **King Gudea of Lagash**, a King who ruled the **City of Lagash** from 2144 - 2124 BCE. His temple was dedicated to the **God Ningirsu**. Gudea left a detailed legacy thanks to the preservation of his many statues and his many cuneiform cones and tablets. Gudea also documented himself being chief builder of his temple as depicted in a statue of himself. Gudea wrote about the **environmental crisis** his culture experienced which led to the **end of the Sumerian culture about 2000 BCE**.
- **Sargon the Great — 2334 - 2279 BCE**. (these dates are specifically known, obviously, due to the cuneiform record). His empire was the **Akkadian Empire**, stretching through the Fertile Crescent from modern-day Syria to the Persian Gulf.
- Sargon seized power from City of Kish and took control of scores of cities. He founded his capital at **Akkad**. **The location of Akkad is not known today**, but it's thought have been (probably) south of modern-day Baghdad.
- Sargon's reign led to the development of a *new building type called the palace*. Akkadia is considered to be the first *empire* subjugating an entire region. This dynasty thought of themselves as the Kings of the *Four Quarters of the Earth*. With this thinking, they needed a place appropriate for a king and we see the emergence of the palace.
- **City of Ebla** is noteworthy because it suggests how Akkad may have looked. Ebla destroyed by Sargon. In modern-day Syria. Its **tell** rose 83 feet above the plain.
- **City of Mari** had a palace complex for **King Zimrilim**. It also was destroyed by Sargon about 2250 BCE. Mari was destroyed again by the Babylonians in 1759 BCE.

The importance of Zimrilim's palace is twofold: it shows a distinct development of a sophisticated relationship between a **public and private realm** within the coterie of the King. It also left the most extensive record of cuneiform of all.... including a *List of Kings*.

Zimrilim's palace shows no clear connection between public court (east) and private court (west). The private side contains a throne room, an extensive setting for family and private residence, including an extensive harem, frescos of the Goddess Ishtar. The palace temple and the public meeting chambers were south of the eastern main courtyard.

- **City of Ur — 2200 BCE**. The imperial power that emerged after the fall of Sargon. Ruler: **King Ur-Nammu - 2047 - 2030**. Ur's great feature was the **Great Ziggurat of Ur**, completed about 2000 BCE.

Ur's city block arrangements included suggestions of coordinated urban spaces, turning radii on street corners (suggestive of wheeled devices), courtyards leading to chambers of modest housing. Street was not a pleasant place, and therefore no windows to the street.

Sumerians most likely invented the wheel.

The Ziggurat of Ur had a clearly defined **temenos** dividing the *chaos* of the city from the *order* of the temple precinct. *Chaos versus Order* is a common theme in architectural history and social history.

- On top of the Ziggurat was the Temple of Nanna where High Priest conducted annual physical union with a High Priestess of his choosing to ensure fertility of the land.
- Other temples in the precinct including the E-Gi-Par serving the High Priestesses and the harem, as well as the E-Hur-Sag or the emperor's private temple.
- After a three-century-long drought (2200 - 1900 BCE), the period was over. The *Babylonians took over about 1800 BCE*.
- The Babylonians built a new ziggurat near Mosul.
- The Assyrians followed the Babylonians and created ziggurats in Assur.
- The Kassites followed the Assyrians (1500 BCE) and built one of the tallest ziggurats.
- The Elamites followed the Kassites (1300 BCE) building a seven-story ziggurat.
- The Neo-Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar restored the Great Ziggurat of Ur and modeled his own ziggurat at Entemenanki (tallest ever in region) on Ur.

- **Clay tablet of cuneiform at Nippur (1500 BCE)**
A sophisticated two-dimensional architectural representation in cuneiform.