Chapter 2: Mesopotamia and Persia

**Preview:** Chapter 2 illuminates the social, historical, and artistic developments between ca. 3500 BCE and 636 CE, in the so-called “Fertile Crescent,” the vast regions known as Mesopotamia and Persia, located in the area of present-day Iraq and Iran. Sumerian art (ca. 3500-2332 BCE) includes enormous built temple platforms called ziggurats and the development of coherent visual narrative devices. Rulers of the Akkadians (ca. 2332-2150) were the first to assume divine attributes in artistic representations, and artists of this period were innovators in bronze sculpture and landscape depictions. The Neo-Sumerian and Babylonian periods (ca. 2150-1600 BCE) witnessed the building of numerous temples and the enormous ziggurat at Ur, and Babylonian artists experimented with foreshortening. In the Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods (ca. 900-539 BCE), elaborate fortified buildings were constructed that included depictions of guardian figures, reflecting the power of the period’s kings. A huge palace complex at Persepolis marks the height of artistic achievement in the Achaemenid period (ca. 559-330 BCE), while the defeat of the Sasanians by the Arabs marked the end of the New Persian Empire (224-636 CE).

**Key Terms:**
- city-state
- cuneiform, pictographs
- cylinder seal, votive offering
- *Epic of Gilgamesh*
- heraldic composition, hierarchy of scale, registers or friezes, ground line, conceptual vs. optical representation
- bent-axis plan, cella, ziggurat, stele, arcuated, apadana, iwan, vault, blind arcade, façade
- lamassu, griffin, protome

**Key Place Names:** "Fertile Crescent," Mesopotamia, Ur, Uruk, Eshnunna, Girsu, Nineveh, Neo-Sumeria/Third Dynasty of Ur, Lagash, Babylon, Elam, Assyria, Neo-Babylonia, Persepolis, Persia

**Key Figures:** Sargon of Akkad, Narum-Sin, Gudea, Hammurabi, Napir-Asu, Enheduanna, Ashurnasirpal II, Ashurbanipal, Nebuchadnezzar II, Cyrus, Darius I, Xerxes, Alexander the Great, Shapur I, Sasanian Empire

**Key Deities:** Innana

**Lecture Notes:**

Introductory Notes:

**Mesopotamia:**

**Sumerian Art:** Dates _________

Key Locations:
Key Inventions and Developments:

**Sumerian Artworks:** (create index cards with reference card on top)
- White Temple and ziggurat, Uruk (modern Warka), Iraq, ca. 3200-3000 BCE
- Restored view of the White Temple and ziggurat, Uruk (modern Warka), Iraq, ca. 3200-3000
- Female head (Inanna?), from Uruk (modern Warka), Iraq, ca. 3200-3000 BCE.
- Presentation of offerings to Inanna (Warka Vase), from Uruk (modern Warka), Iraq, ca. 3200-3000 BCE.
- Statuettes of two worshipers, from the Square Temple at Eshnunna (modern Tell Asmar), Iraq, ca. 2700 BCE.
- Urnanshe, from Mari, ca. 2600-2500 BCE
- Battle scenes, fragment of the victory stele of Eannatum (Stele of the Vultures), from Girsu (modern Telloh), Iraq, ca. 2600-2500 BCE.
- *Standard of Ur*, from tomb 779, Royal Cemetery, Ur (modern Tell Muqayyar), Iraq, ca. 2600-2400 BCE (War side, Peace side)
- Bull-headed Harps:
  - Bull-headed harp with inlaid sound box, from the tomb of Pu-abi (tomb 800), Royal Cemetery, Ur (modern Tell Muqayyar), Iraq, ca. 2600-2400 BC; wood, gold, lapis lazuli, red limestone, and shell, 3’ 8.5” high
  - Sound box of the bull-headed harp from tomb 789 (“King’s Grave”), Royal Cemetery, Ur (modern Tell Muqayyar), Iraq, ca. 2600-2400 BCE; wood, lapis lazuli, and shell, 1’ 7” high.
- Mesopotamian Seals:
  - Banquet scene, cylinder seal, from the tomb of Pu-abi (tomb 800), Royal Cemetery, Ur (modern Tell Muqayyar), Iraq, ca. 2600-2400 BCE.

**Akkadian Art:** Dates____________

Key figures & developments:

Akkadian artworks: (create index cards with reference card on top)
- Head of an Akkadian ruler, from Nineveh (modern Kuyunjik), Iraq, ca. 2250-2200 BCE.
- Victory stele of Naram-Sin, from Susa, Iran, 2254-2218 BCE.
- Votive disk of Enheduanna, from Ur (modern Tell Muqayyar), Iraq, ca. 2300-2275 BCE.

**Neo-Sumerian period/Third Dynasty of Ur:** Dates________

Key figures & developments:

Neo-Sumerian artworks: (create index cards with reference card on top)
- Ziggurat, Ur (modern Tell Muqayyar), Iraq, ca. 2100 BCE
- Gudea seated, holding the plan of a temple, from Girsu (modern Telloh), Iraq, ca. 2100 BCE
- Gudea standing, holding an overflowing water jar, from the Temple of Geshtinanna, Girsu (modern Telloh), Iraq, ca. 2100 BCE.
- Investiture of Zimri-Lim, Mari, ca. 1775-1760 BCE

**Babylon:** Dates ________

Key figures and developments:

**Babylon artworks:** (create index cards with reference card on top)
- Stele with the laws of Hammurabi, from Susa, Iran, ca. 1760 BCE

**Elam:** Dates ________

Key figures and developments:

**Elam artworks:** (create index cards with reference card on top)
- Lion Gate, Hattusa, ca. 1400 BCE
- Beaker with animal decoration, Susa, ca. 4000 BCE
- Statue of Queen Napir-Asu, from Susa, Iran, ca. 1350-1300 BCE.

**Assyria:** Dates ________

Key figures and developments:

Significant structures:

**Assyria artworks:** (create index cards with reference card on top)
- Reconstruction of Citadel of Sargon II, Dur Sharrukin, ca. 720-705 BCE
- Lamassu (man-headed winged bull), from the citadel of Sargon II, Dur Sharrukin (modern Khorsabad), Iraq, ca. 720-705 BCE
- Ashurnasirpal II with attendants and soldier, from the northwest palace of Ashurnasirpal II, Kalhu (modern Nimrud), Iraq, ca. 875-860 BCE
- Assyrian archers pursuing enemies, relief from the northwest palace of Ashurnasirpal II, Kalhu (modern Nimrud), Iraq, ca. 875-860 BCE
- Ashurbanipa hunting lions, relief from the north palace of Ashurbanipal, Nineveh (modern Kuyunjik), Iraq, ca. 645-640 BCE.

**Neo-Babylonia:** Dates ________

Key figures and developments:

**Neo-Babylonia artworks:** (create index cards with reference card on top)
- Ishtar Gate, Babylon, Iraq, ca. 575 BCE
**Persia**: Dates ________

Key figures and developments:

**Achaemenid Empire**: Dates ________

Key figures and developments:

Achaemenid Empire artworks: (create index cards with reference card on top)
- Palace/citadel of Persepolis, Iran, ca. 521-465 BCE
- Gold rhyton, Hamadan, fifth to third century BCE
- Persians and Medes, detail of the processional frieze on the east side of the terrace of the apadana of the palace, Persepolis, Iran, ca. 521-465 BCE

**Sasanian Empire**: Dates ______

Key figures and developments:

Sasanian Empire: (create index cards with reference card on top)
- Palace of Shapur I, Ctesiphon, Iraq, ca. 250 CE
- Triumph of Shapur I, Bishapur, ca. 260 CE

Concluding notes:

**Exercises for Study**:

1. Enter the approximate dates for these periods:

   Sumerian Art:
   Akkadian Art:
   Neo-Sumerian and Babylonian Art:
   Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Art:
   Achaemenid and Sasanian Art:
2. What are the most significant social and historical developments witnessed in these periods?

3. Summarize significant stylistic developments revealed in the artworks produced in Mesopotamia and Persia. Identify specific examples that represent innovation in formal and narrative representations.

4. Identify three works in this chapter in which animals are prominently featured. In each work, what animals are represented? What is their function in the artwork?

5. Compare and contrast the following pairs of artworks, using the points of comparison as a guide.

A. Standard of Ur, from tomb 779, Royal Cemetery, Ur (Fig. 2-8); Victory stele of Naram-Sin, from Susa, Iran (Fig. 2-13):
   - Periods
   - Subjects
   - Stylistic features & composition

B. Presentation of offerings to Inanna (Warka Vase), from Uruk (modern Warka), Iraq (Fig. 2-5); Persians and Medes, detail of the processional frieze on the east side of the terrace of the apadana of the palace, Persepolis, Iran (Fig. 2-27):
   - Periods
   - Subjects
   - Stylistic features & composition