

The Parkville Frame Gallery

Newsletter

2023 Newsletter #23-5 (Sep/Oct)

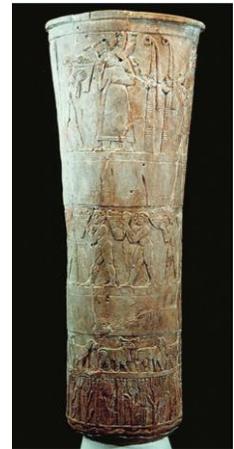
Note: Be sure to see our latest “**Top Picks**”

Subject: Art from the Six Cradles of Civilization

It is generally agreed among scholars that there are six so-called [Cradles of Civilization](#). These are regions of the world where civilizations are said to have originated beginning between approximately 4,000 and 3,000 BCE. In each of the six civilizations a source of water, such as the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Mesopotamia, the Nile River in Egypt, and the Yangtze River in China, was necessary to enable sufficient agriculture to support large numbers of people. In this newsletter we will take a brief look at the art of these six cradles of civilization. We will begin in ancient Mesopotamia.

Mesopotamia

Today we call much of Mesopotamia, Iraq. As noted above, it was located along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. In the late fourth millennium BCE, the first settlements that qualify as city-states emerged in Sumer (southern Mesopotamia). Preeminent among these cities was Uruk, which by 3,000 BCE had grown into a walled city of over two square miles, with around one-hundred thousand inhabitants. Mesopotamia produced some very sophisticated art. Something called the [Uruk Vase](#), pictured here, is one example. The vase consists of six “registers” that depict the importance of water, agriculture, animal husbandry, and fertility, to the survival of any great civilization. [More Here](#)



Egypt

Next we travel to Mesopotamia’s neighbor, Egypt, the second of the six cradles of civilization. Ancient Egypt was located on the Nile River and is well known for its many artistic depictions of an “afterlife”. The depictions are seen as carvings in stone, or images painted on walls. These carvings and paintings tell a story of an individual’s (usually a member of the elite class) passing from the world of the “profanes” (Latin: secular, familiar, profane) to the “sacer” (Latin: sacred, divine or holy). We will see the importance of profanes and sacer again when we travel to Mesoamerica and meet the Maya and Aztec civilizations. [More Here](#)



Indus Valley

The ancient Indus Valley civilization (circa 3,300–1,700 BCE), also known as the [Harappan civilization](#), was one of the earliest urban civilizations, roughly contemporaneous with those of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China. It was located in what is now Pakistan and northwest India, on the flood plain of the Indus River.

The popular art of the Harappans was often in the form of terra-cotta figurines. The majority were of standing females, often heavily laden with jewelry, but standing males, some with beards, were also present.



[More Here](#)

China

When we think of ancient China – or modern-day China for that matter -- we may think of bronzeware and jade objects. Bronzeware in ancient China was an integral part, not



only of everyday life, but was also used by the elite. Some of the vessels from the [Shang and Zhou Dynasties](#) are marked with inscriptions that denote for whom the object was made and when it was made. Inscriptions on a vessel, and an object's known "provenance" greatly increase the objects' value for collectors today.



[More Here](#)

For 7,000 years, jade to the Chinese had always meant creamy, tender nephrite jade with its quiet beauty; however, when jadeite arrived in its dazzling emerald green it captured the hearts of modern Chinese and is still popular in China today.

Mesoamerica

[More Here](#)

The fifth cradle of civilization is Mesoamerica. Mesoamerica refers to the diverse civilizations that shared similar cultural characteristics in the geographic areas



comprising the modern-day countries of Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. The ancient [Olmec](#) people produced very large stone "heads" carved from volcanic basalt rock. The Maya occupied large city-states such as Teotihuacan (pronounced *tay o tee wah can*), Palenque (pronounced *pal en kay*), and Yaxchilan (pronounced *yex tee lan*). The [Maya](#) created architecture, much of which is covered with stone carvings showing the ritual of blood-letting in detail.

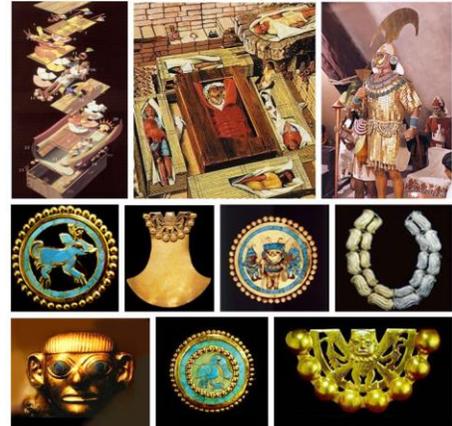
Peru

Peru is the sixth location that we will visit on our tour of the six cradles of civilization. In 1987 tombs surprisingly untouched by thieves were discovered near the town of [Sipán](#) in Northern Peru. The artifacts found in those tombs give us a glimpse of the art of the ancient peoples of that region. We see gold, silver, ceramics, and objects called “ear spools” dating from 100 to 600 CE which were worn by the [Moche](#) elite.



Ideas were expressed in elaborate textiles made from wool and cotton, both native to

Peru. Textiles were used as a display of wealth, more than gold, and were usually limited to the ruling class. Weaving was a sophisticated and difficult craft. So-called “[Mummy Bundles](#)” have been discovered buried in graves of the elite. One mummy bundle, as seen below, could take 5,000 to 29,000 hours to create.



Contrast the practice of making mummy bundles in Peru with the elaborate measures that the ancient Egyptians and Chinese took when they prepared and buried the remains of their rulers for an afterlife. For example, in 1974, near what is now the modern-day Chinese city of Xi'an (the 3,000 year

old ancient city once known as [Chang'an](#), and the starting point of the ancient Silk Road), one of the most spectacular archaeological discoveries ever, found over 8,000 life-size terracotta soldiers, horses, and chariots



buried in the tomb of [Ying Zheng](#) (aka Qin Shi Huang), the founder of the Qin dynasty (221 BC – 207BC), and the first emperor of a [unified China](#).

