

Chapter 1, Part 2/2

Mesopotamia: Gods, Rulers,
and the Social Order
(ca. 3500–330 B.C.E.)

The Iron Age and Hebraic Culture (Fiero 29-43)

Objectives

- Discuss defining characteristics of the Iron Age
- Identify cultural contributions of the Hebrews
- Analyze selected readings from the Hebrew Bible
- Describe the Assyrian and Persian Empires of the Iron Age.

Mesopotamia



The Iron Age

- New technology: quality of life → population growth
- **Hittites** – intro'd iron tech; est. military superiority with advanced weaponry
- Benefits of Iron: cheaper and more durable than bronze
- Phoenicians – ABCDEF...
- Lydians – ¢
- → Hebrew theocracy

Hebrew Monotheism

- belief in a single, all-powerful creator-god: *Yahweh**
- **Covenant**
 - ethical and spiritual obligations in return for divine protection
 - Ten Commandments, delivered from God via Moses
- Distinguishing beliefs of the Hebraic faith
 - What sets it apart from preceding and contemporary Mesopotamian belief systems?

*too sacred to speak, usually abbreviated
YHWH

The Hebrew Bible

- Torah (“instruction”)-first 5 books
- “conflates centuries of fact and legend”
- questionable historical accuracy though regarded sacred by Jews, Christians, and Muslims
- Creation (Genesis 1, 2)
- Christianization via translation (green box p. 32)

Hebrew Laws: The Decalogue

- Ten Commandments from the Hebrew Bible (Exodus 20:1-21; 21:1-2, 18-27, 37; 23:1-9)
 - Why so negative?
 - Compare to Hammurabi's Law
 - Hammurabi's Code assigns harsher punishment for lower class, while Hebrew law does not distinguish among social classes
 - Hebrew women are considered intellectually inferior to men
- Humanitarian basis
- Unity of religious and moral life

The Hebrew State & the Social Order

- Discouraged 3-D representation of lifelike icons
- Synagogues embellished with symbols
 - the Ark
 - menorah
 - shofar
- Covenant established secular and patriarchal authority



The Ark of the Covenant and sanctuary implements, Hammath near Tiberias, fourth century. Mosaic. Zev Radovan.

The Hebrew Prophets

- Hebrew concept of **destiny** illustrated in Jeremiah's message.
- On what grounds does Jeremiah criticize the Hebrews?
 - ...for failing to obey/honor the covenant, worshipping and serving other gods.

The Book of Job

- Book of Job written in the years following the Hebrew exile
- considered *“wisdom literature”*
- Essential to an understanding of the Hebrew covenant, the role of faith
- Job asks the universal question: *Why do bad things happen to good people?*



A drawing of Babylon as it might have looked in the sixth century B.C.E.. Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon



Ishtar Gate, from Babylon, Iraq. C. 575 B.C. **Glazed brick**, height of gate originally 40' (12.2 m) with towers rising 100'
Restored/reconstructed version in Berlin, Germany



The Book of Psalms

- post-Babylonian Captivity, Jewish return to rebuild the temple of Solomon
- “apocalyptic hopes and the renewal of the covenant”
- 150 songs of praise, thanksgiving, confession and supplication
- Terms: cantors, liturgy, responsory, antiphonal
- Link the individual and the Hebrew community

Empires of the Iron Age

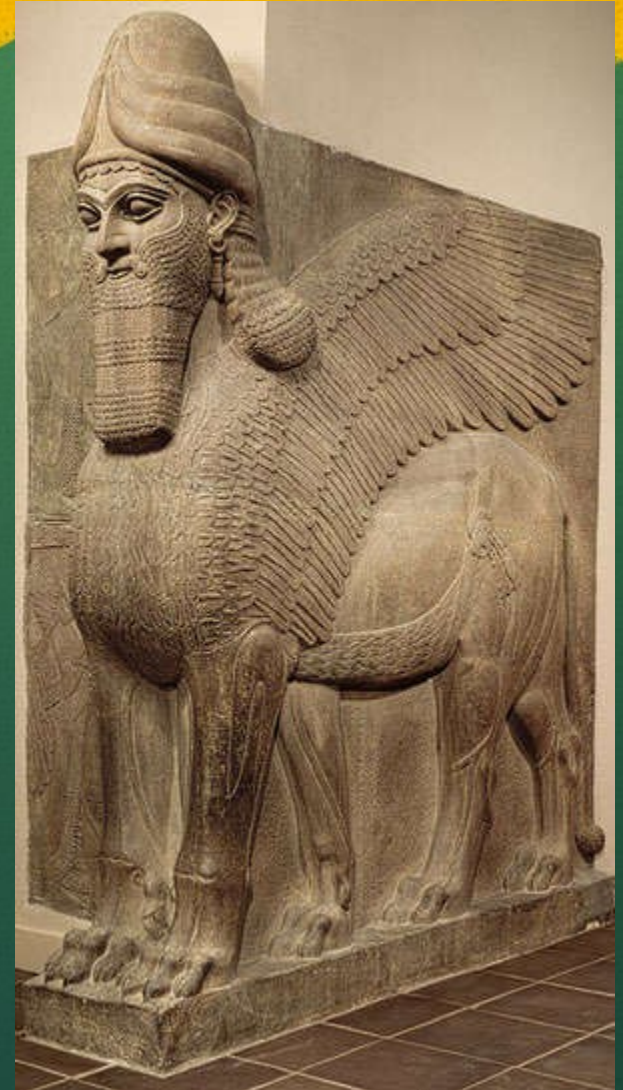
The Assyrian Empire
The Persian Empire

The Assyrian Empire

“visual propaganda”



King Assurnasirpal II hunting lions (*Lion Hunt*), from Nimrud, Iraq, c. 883-859 B.C.E. Alabaster relief, 3' 3" x 8' 4".

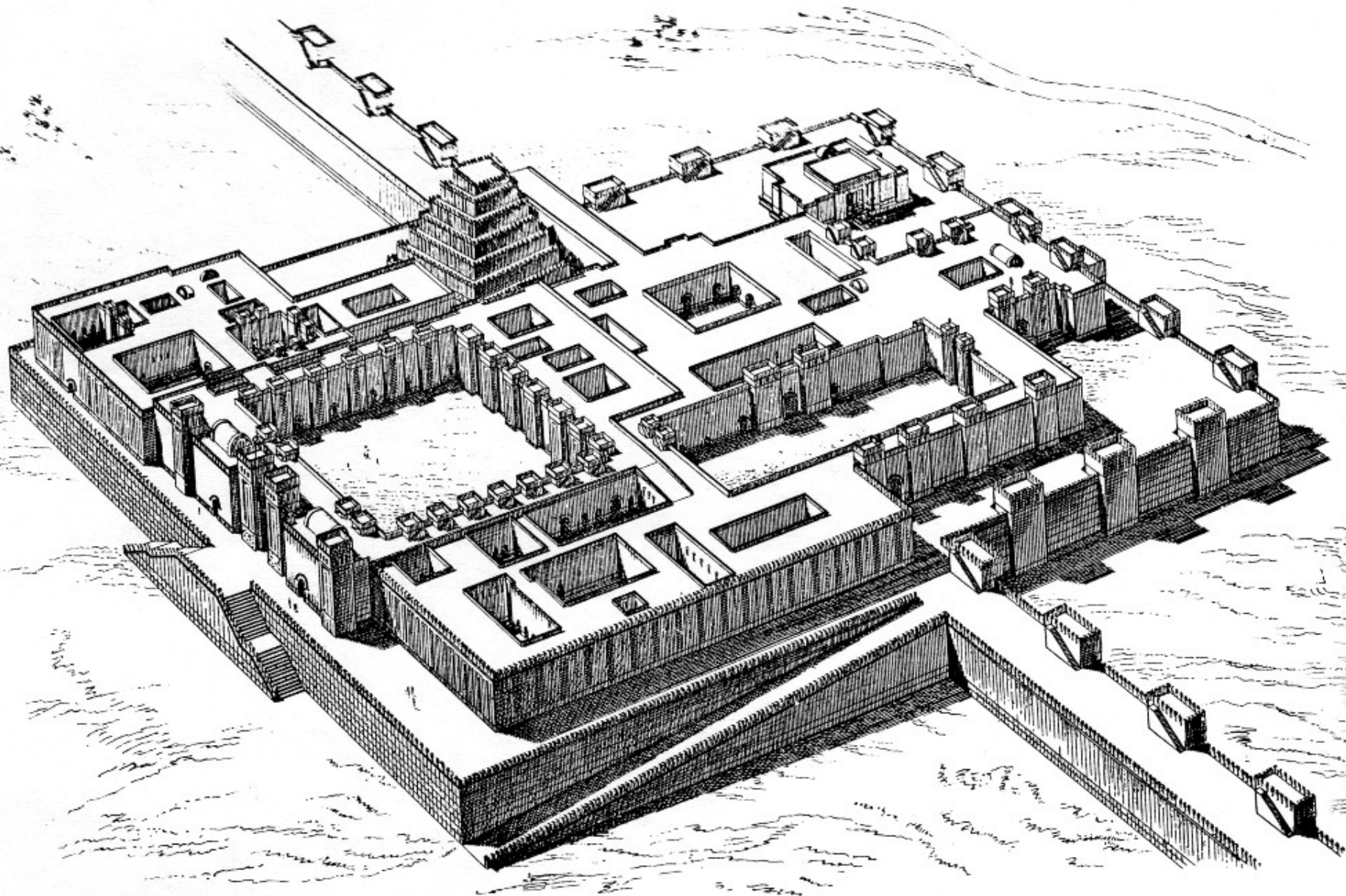


What do you see?

What does this scene suggest about Assyrian culture?



Ashurbanipal besieging an Egyptian city, 667 B.C.E. Alabaster relief. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



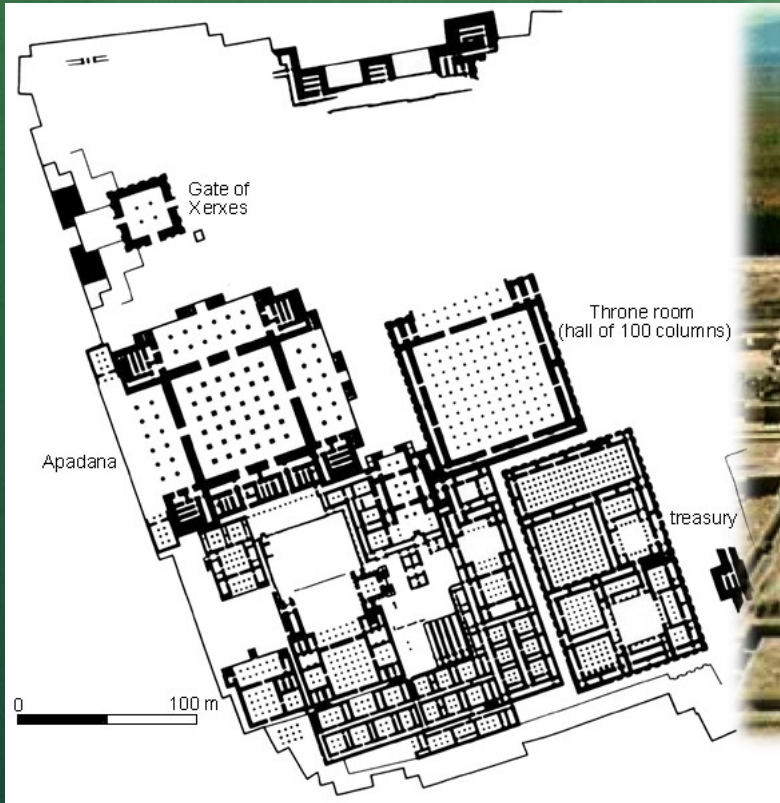
Reconstruction of the walled citadel at Khorsabad, Assyria (Iraq), ca. 720 B.C.E.

The Persian Empire

- Last and largest Mesopotamian empire
- Multicultural civilization
- Cyrus “the Great” II (r. 559-529 BCE)
 - Brought peace
 - Built Persepolis, Herodotus/USPS
- ◆ **Religion: Zoroastrianism**
 - Prophet Zoroaster, c. 628-551 BCE
 - Monotheistic, Ahura-Mazda (“Wise Lord”)
 - Cosmic struggle b/n opposing forces good/evil, light/dark
 - *pairidaeza*
 - Influenced Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Persian Architecture

- Palace at Persepolis





Royal Guards, relief on the stairway to the Audience Hall of Darius, Persepolis, c. 500 B.C.E.

Persian Metalwork

- Decorative jewelry
- Weapons
- Containers
- Animal Style: use of decorative animal motifs
- *Ibex* handle →
 - Lively pose
 - Love of animals (paradox?)
- Gardens/“paradises”



Vase handle in the form of a winged ibex, from Persia, 4th century BCE, silver, partly gilded, height 10.5" Louvre, Paris

Persian Luxury



Persian Jewelry: Gold bracelet,
ca. 500 BCE



Rhyta, drinking vessel, for wine



Achaemenid drinking vessel, Persian,
5th century B.C.E. Gold, 6 1/2" x 9".
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Fletcher Fund, 1954 (54.3.3).
Photograph © 1982 The Metropolitan
Museum of Art.

Study Questions

- What were the major effects of Iron Age technology in Mesopotamia?
- Distinguish between polytheistic and monotheistic religions.
- Why is the Book of Job considered “wisdom literature”?
- What aspects of Assyrian life are depicted in the arts of its palaces?

Study Questions (Sept. 6)

- How does the Babylonian creation myth compare with those in the Introduction?
- What types of activities were regulated by Hammurabi's Code? What does it tell us about the role of women in ancient Babylon?
- Who was Gilgamesh? What was he searching for and why? How does the epic reflect the ideals of Mesopotamian culture?
- What was the function of the Mesopotamian ziggurat?

Study Questions (Sept. 1)

1. Compare/contrast: Paleolithic & Neolithic cultures
2. Purpose/function of early forms of sacrifice and ritual?
3. Distinguishing feature of Homo sapiens?
4. What is the Rosetta Stone and the importance of its discovery ?
5. What makes the Neolithic Age “revolutionary”?
6. What is *sympathetic magic*?