

The Third Millennium B. C.

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More than four thousand years after their creation by Sumerian artists, a number of remarkable works of art made from stone, shell, and metal happily enhance our collections from the ancient Near East. Although reaching far back into antiquity, they demonstrate the lively imaginations and the skilled hands of craftsmen living in the third millennium B.C. in Sumer, now southern Iraq.

Among relatively recent acquisitions are pieces of major importance cut in stone and cast in metal. In stone there are a very old illustrated legal document and a statue of Gudea seated; in metal an early masterpiece, the superb realistic figure of a burden bearer, and a later more stylized statuette supposedly of a Sumerian king carrying on his head a basket of mortar for temple construction.

Finally, lest minor works of art be forgotten, a pair of small engraved objects, one in shell which perhaps served as a handle decoration, and the other a seated image incised on an alabaster inlay, deserve our attention. All six pieces are representative of the creations by both mind and hand of Sumerian artists of long ago.

A stone stela from the early third millennium is noteworthy both for its reliefs and for its extensive inscription. The text describes what the figures illustrate. A clear interpretation of what is written, however, is as difficult as the reliefs are crude, because of the formative stage of the Sumerian language at the early date—about 2850 B.C.—when the inscription was cut. At that time the order in which the signs were to be read was frequently not the arrangement in which they were written. Furthermore, certain grammatical elements in the form of prefixes, infixes, and suffixes which are decisive for a more precise understanding of the text either had not appeared or were only beginning to appear in the written language. A lengthy and detailed study of the limited number of comparative docu-

ments, most of which are later than the inscription of this piece, would be necessary to achieve clarity in the interpretation of this text. It is readily apparent, therefore, that only a provisional outline of the contents of the document can now be given. For a tentative analysis the writer is deeply indebted to Professor Thorkild Jacobsen of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. With this explanation of the difficulty, and with this acknowledgment to Professor Jacobsen, I shall suggest an interpretation of the inscription and reliefs of the stela. First, though, it is well to note that each actor in the reliefs bears either on or near his likeness his name and/or title and relationship to other persons either present or absent from the scene. Since the correct readings of the personal names is problematic, only the principal figure and the scribe who wrote the inscription are designated by proper names.

A certain official, Ushum-gal (Figure 5a), standing before the model of a building, has bequeathed to certain legatees property consisting of land, animals, and a dwelling. The house illustrated is one which Ushum-gal has built for his priestess daughter, who stands behind the façade of the structure (Figure 5b) ready to receive her father as a guest. In her right hand she holds a narrow-necked jar from which she is preparing to pour a drink for her father. He has either already been given a cup, which he clutches against his breast with his left wrist, or has thoughtfully brought it with him. At his daughter's feet is a container which holds either food or drink.

Behind Ushum-gal's daughter waits a second lady (Figure 5c) to whom a legacy has been given. Back of Ushum-gal himself stands an official (Figure 5d) whose duty it may well be to legalize the transfer of property not only to the two women depicted but also to the other two gentlemen (Figure 5d) whose actual relationship to



ines in the Shulgi boxes were uninscribed. Also among the contents of a box were frit beads, stone chips, mostly carnelian and agate, and disintegrated bits of wood. In fact, in one of the Shulgi boxes the wood was well enough preserved to show that the box had once contained a wooden statuette similar to the one cast in copper.

The box containing our figurine (Figure 9) and model brick was the first of the ten boxes to be found. The statuette presumably represents King Shulgi bearing on his head a basket of mortar for the construction of the new temple, an act of humility before Inanna, the goddess of love and war, to whom the temple was dedicated.

The seated figure of Gudea, a late third millennium governor of Lagash, is a superb example of Neo-Sumerian sculpture. Although found in southern Iraq about thirty-five years ago, the statue was in private possession in France until 1959. The piece is the only complete Gudea in this country and, in fact, one of the few complete Gudea figures anywhere. Almost all Gudea statues—and ours is no exception—were decapitated in antiquity, perhaps by a conqueror of Lagash. Few of the heads and bodies severed so long ago have been reunited in modern times. Fortunately our piece is one where the fit between the head and the body makes it certain that the two parts were originally one.

Our Gudea sits sedately on a low chair. The statue, intended to remain in the temple to represent Gudea continually in the presence of his god, conveys a sense of dutiful piety. The schematic turban, the carefully draped garment, the unnaturally clasped hands with their ex-

aggeratedly long fingers, the forward gaze of steady eyes, and the erect carriage all contribute to the feeling of conscious devotion. In contradiction to the careful neatness of the figure and the sensitive modeling of the face, the mouth, the firm chin, and the direct attachment of the head to the shoulders without neck suggest without equivocation that Gudea was a strong governor capable of dealing with political emergencies as well as with priestly piety.

The Louvre holds as one of the finest of its unrivaled wealth of Gudea statues a less perfectly preserved twin to our own figure.⁶ Both were perhaps cut from the same block of black diorite and differ only three-eighths of an inch in height. Both have lengthy inscriptions which vary only in a slightly altered arrangement of the lines, a small change in the form of an unidentified sign unique to these two statues, and in the verb form employed in the names of the pieces.

Most Gudea statues have their own peculiar name. Our figure is inscribed "It is of Gudea, the man who built the temple: may it make his life long." While the length of Gudea's earthly life is unknown, his request at least with regard to the continued preservation of his likeness has been amply granted.

1. H. Frankfort, *More Sculpture from the Diyala Region*, pls. 54-57, 95.
2. ———, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, pl. 20 (C).
3. *Ibid.*, p. 32 and pl. 33 (A).
4. H. Lenzen, XIV *Vorläufiger Bericht über die . . . Ausgrabungen in Uruk-Warka*. Winter 1955/56, pp. 21-28.
5. V. E. Crawford, *Archaeology*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (cover) and p. 78.
6. A. Parrot, *Tello*, p. 160 ff.

Fig. 11. Gold doe. Sumerian, about 2500 B.C. Length 1 ¾ inches Rogers Fund, 1954

