THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST
ca. 9000 to 2000 B.C.
Sites mentioned in the text

- BAGHDAD  Modern Cities
- Tepe Gawra  Ancient Sites

500 km
The Evolution of Wheat
Neolithic potsherd and flints (from Europe)
Jericho
Neolithic sites in the Near East.
This mound is part of the remains of the ancient city of Jericho. Located on an oasis in ancient times, it is the site of one of the earliest Neolithic settlements in the Near East. [© Zev Radovan, Jerusalem, Israel]
Map of Jericho
47 Mudbricks drying in the sun with a demonstration in the foreground showing how they are laid. These bricks, flat on one side and rounded on the other, are not unlike the Sumerian plano-convex bricks, and were still being made in a village near Mandali, north-east of Eshnunna, about AD 1966.
Mudbricks being made
Mudbricks drying in the sun
Modern Mudbrick Houses
Walls of Jericho
Tower of Jericho
Bitumen: Model of Boat
The motif of pairs of goats browsing in a tree, often on a hill, was common in Near Eastern art at most periods. Examples in the round have rarely survived (though see Fig. 49), but there are many carved on seals. On this small shell plaque the background has been cut away and filled with bitumen so that the design stands out. From Pu-abî’s grave in the Royal Cemetery at Ur (c. 2600 BC). Ht 4.4 cm.
Above Left: Neolithic skull from Jericho. The lower jaw has been removed and the face has been carefully remodelled in plaster, with shells for the eyes and red and black paint to represent hair and moustaches. About 6750–6250 BC.
Statues from Ain Ghazal
(ca. 6750-6250 BCE)
Neolithic sites in the Near East.
Çatal Hüyük
Map of Çatal Hüyük

- Shrine in level VIa. The walls were made of mud-bricks built around a timber framework. Men were buried beneath the northeast platform and women and children beneath the others.

- In level VIa the tightly packed houses shared their walls with their neighbors. About half the buildings have been classified as "shrines". Between the houses were open spaces, formed by the remains of derelict houses, that were used for the disposal of garbage.
  Typically, the design consisted of a roughly square living room that led into a long narrow store-room, either by a low door or through a porthole in the wall.

Right On the north the vulture shrine in the vultures and it has the scene of the corpse being repainted.
Çatal Hüyük: houses
Çatal Hüyük, a beehive city 8,000 years old

The strange, streetless city of Çatal Hüyük in southern Turkey marked a revolution in prehistoric building. The mud-brick dwellings, built more than 8,000 years ago, were clustered together like the cells of a beehive. They were lit by small windows built high in the walls and their only entrance was on the roof. The reconstruction of this remarkable city follows the painstaking work of the British archaeologist James Mellaart, who discovered Çatal Hüyük and excavated the site from 1961 to 1965.

The houses of Çatal Hüyük were all very much alike with main rooms [1] measuring about 20 ft. by 13 ft. The roof [2] was constructed from bundles of reeds covered by a thick layer of mud and resting on huge heavy beams and numerous joints. A ladder dropped through the embrasure and visitors stepped down into the room below. The kitchen took up almost one third of the living space. Along the walls were elevated platforms where the occupants sat and slept. Large platforms for women and children, smaller ones for men.

Beneath these platforms the people of Çatal Hüyük buried skeletons of their dead [3]. The bodies were first left out in the open to be stripped clean by vultures before being laid to rest inside the mud houses.

Some of the buildings of Çatal Hüyük were religious sanctuaries [4, 16] where ceremonies almost certainly took place. They were impressively ornamented with wall paintings and plaster relief [9, 10, 11, 15]. Such decorations, in dwellings as well as shrines, helped bring light within to supplement stone lamps placed in wall niches. Some purely decorative motifs are reflected today in the geometric patterns of Anatolian carpets [4]. Mellaart found on the walls many symbols of fertility. These took the form of a woman giving birth [13], of breasts or of a male god often associated with the bull [6, 7, 8, 14]. Other sanctuaries were dedicated to vital stages and were clearly linked with burial ceremonies [5, 12]. None had altars or sacrificial tables.

The people of Çatal Hüyük were most likely farmers or cattle herders who needed to keep close to the broad plain stretching to the north of the city. There was no local stone to build with and the crude mud bricks were unsuitable for fortifications. But the streetless city offered only a high and continuous wall to a would-be attacker.

In the event of an assault, the people simply took away their ladders and retreated into their houses. Capture there would be possible only for a long, difficult and costly house by house conquest—a daunting prospect for any attacker. The defenses were probably effective, for no space has been found at Çatal Hüyük of any plunder or massacre during its nearly 1,000 years of existence as an occupied city.
Çatal Hüyük: leopard painted on plaster
Çatal Hüyük: bull fresco

The Great Red Bull, one of the most striking frescoes at the prehistoric city of Çatal Hüyük, dates from about 6000 BC. The painting measures roughly 15 by 5 ft and shows the bull surrounded by armed hunters. It was undoubtedly the chief decoration in a sanctuary, and probably symbolised a god.
Çatal Hüyük: bull fresco
Çatal Hüyük: bull shrine
Çatal Hüyük: bull shrine
Çatal Hüyük

statuette of birth
goddess seated on
leopard throne

Above Baked clay figure of a fat pregnant female in the act of giving birth. It has been identified as a “birth goddess” supported by two cat-like animals. The figure was found in one of the latest shrines at Chatal Huyuk. The head has been restored.
This statuette found at the site of Çatal Hüyük may have played a part in the fertility rites that were practised there. It represents a mother-goddess giving birth to a child on a leopard throne. The carving indicates the importance of agriculture and women in the society of the city.
Chapter Two

Figure 9. (a) Graphic reconstruction of part of the Neolithic settlement of Çatal Hüyük (Turkey), and (b) plan of the principal buildings at Umm Dabaghiyah (Iraq). After (a) J. Mellaart, “Excavations at Çatal Hüyük, 1962,” Anatolian Studies 13 (1963), fig. 6, and (b) D. Kirkbride, “Umm Dabaghiyah, 1974,” Iraq 37 (1975), pl. 1.
Figure 2.4 South Mesopotamia c. 3200–1600 BC to show sites and reconstructed third-millennium water courses. For location see Figure 1.1.
<table>
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<th>Eastern Neighbors</th>
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<td>7000 Permanent settlements in favorable locations</td>
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<td>6500 Settlements in dry farming areas; far-reaching trade</td>
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*Figure 1. Chronological chart. Author’s original.*
Early Ubaid Jar (from Tell Arpachiyah)
Bulls had religious significance as the embodiment of divine power and as fertility symbols. This clay bull figurine comes from the Ubaid period, before 4000 BC.
Temple at Warka
Figure 2:2 The Temple at Eridu. Reconstruction showing the development from the earliest Ubaid level (c. 5000 BC) to the Uruk period temple (c. 3000 BC). Levels VI–XVI were built one immediately above the other, but have been shown offset here. (After Heinrich and Seidl 1982, Abb. 60)
Indented Façade on early cylinder seal
Ubaid bowl

M1-62
9 The earliest Al ‘Ubaid pottery is found only in Sumer but by the mid-5th millennium this style occurs throughout Mesopotamia, northern Syria and even in Saudi Arabia. These examples come from Ur and the small site of Arpachiyah near Nineveh. After Woolley; Mallowan and Rose.
Clay incense burner in the form of a house
(from Al-Ubaid)
Bitumen Boat: votive offering

8 (Left) Bitumen boat model which was placed loaded with goods in a grave at Ur, to supply the dead person or possibly to lure away an evil demon. Boats of a similar design can still be seen in the marshes of south Mesopotamia (see below). About 2300 BC.
Lizard-headed Statuettes
Lizard-headed Statuette
Heads of Lizarded-headed statuettes
Anubis

Egyptian deity of the dead
Early Hassuna Vase
14 Painted pottery: bowl and jar in the Samarra style.
From Samarra. About 5500 BC.
Samarra Bowl, with sheep circling
FIG. 5. Sir Max Mallowan supervising the excavation of a mud-brick pavement at Nimrud. (Photo courtesy of Joan Oates)
Figure 12. Pottery vessels of the Halaf period, from (a) Tell Halaf (Syria) and (b–f) Tell Arpachiyah (Iraq). After H. Schmidt, Tell Halaf (Berlin, 1943), frontispiece, and M. E. L. Mallowan, “Excavations at Tell Arpachiyah,” Iraq 2 (1935), figs. 62, 64–6. 76.
Halafian Pots
Figurines of terracotta or unbaked clay were made during the Halaf period, probably for magical or religious purposes. The women often have large breasts and hips, emphasizing motherhood. This example is decorated with black paint apparently representing bangles on the arms and legs, a loin-cloth, and painted or tattooed breasts. From Chagar Bazar. About 5000 BC.
Halafian female figurine
(from Tell Arpachiyah)
Halafian bowl
Halafian bowl
Halafian bowl
Figure 12:2 Tell Sifr, different kinds of copper digging-tools. The crescent-shaped blade, bottom left, preserves herringbone traces of the palm-mat wrapping. (Moorley, 1971, Plate XXI.a)
Ubaid bowl

M1-85
Years BC
5000–4000  Halaf/Ubaid
4000–3200  Uruk
3200–3000  Jemdet Nasr
3000–2750  Early Dynastic I
2750–2600  Early Dynastic II
2600–2350  Early Dynastic III
2350–2150  Dynasty of Akkad
            (Gutian interregnum)
2150–2000  3rd Dynasty of Ur
            (Amorite interregnum)
2000–1800  Isin–Larsa Dynasties
1800–1600  1st Dynasty of Babylon
            (Kassite interregnum)

Outline of archaeological and historical periods.
Aerial view of Uruk
Figure 11. Typology of settlement systems: (a) isolated settlements in narrow valleys; (b) simple settlement system on a small plain; (c) three-tiered and (d) four-tiered settlement systems on larger plains. Author’s original.
Uruk's legendary king, Uruk remained an important religious center and its shrines were embellished by many of the later rulers of Mesopotamia.
Clay tokens, the antecedents of true writing.
5 Above Cuneiform writing probably developed from an earlier recording system widespread in the ancient Near and Middle East. This archaic clay tablet bears numerals only, reflecting a stage intermediate between recording system and writing system.
2 Pictographic tablets from Tell Brak.
Early Cylinder Seal
Cylinder Seals
Drawing of an individual wearing a cylinder seal
Cylinder Seal

A cylinder seal and the impression of its design in clay. Termed the “brocade” style by art historians, this is typical of stamps and cylinders used to seal vessels or clay envelopes for texts during the Early Dynastic and later periods.

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Crystal lens used for magnification? (or a decorative inlay for furniture)
Cylinder Seal
with beasts having long, intertwined necks
Stone Jug

This libation jug of stone, with inlaid mosaic, was found at the site of Uruk. It dates from the Jemdet Nasr period, about 3200 BC.

THE IRAQ MUSEUM, BAGHDAD/SCALA
Reed House in modern Iraq
Early cylinder seals, like this of the Jamdat Nasr period, represent structures of reed construction, evidence for the reed hut as one of the earliest types of secular or religious building in south Mesopotamia.
Reed Huts in modern Iraq
Cylinder Seal, with reed houses
Reed bundles used in building reed houses
An archaic tablet from Ur, c. 2900–2600 BC; deliveries of barley and meal to a temple. BM 128897.
Uruk Vase

32 Alabaster vase from Uruk, 105 cm (41 in) high, about 3000 BC. The three friezes together represent a cult procession (see fig. 15). The procession is headed at the top of the vase by a man approaching a woman in a cloak, who is either the goddess Inin (Inanna) or a priestess representing her (see fig. 18). The man is her bridegroom in the Sacred Marriage.
Uruk Vase
Figure 42. Form and decoration of the "cult vase" from Uruk, dating to the Late Uruk–Jamdet Nasr period. From E. Heinrich, Kleinfunde aus den Archaischen Tempelschichten in Uruk, (Berlin, 1936), pls. 2, 38.
Symbols (pair of ring-topped standards) of the goddess Innin (Inanna) on the top register of the alabaster vase from Uruk (see figs 15, 32).
Drinking from a *bibru*
Figure 43. The "Lady of Uruk" and the "Little King," both from Uruk, dating to the Late Uruk–Jamdet Nasr period. From A Nöldeke, Uruk Vorbericht 11 (1940), pl. 1; H. J. Lenzen, Uruk Vorbericht 16 (1960), pl. 17a.