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(THE CIVILIZATION OF MESOPOTAMIA AS A MODEL)

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# RELIGIOUS REFERENCE FOR ARTISTIC CREATIVITY IN THE CIVILIZATIONS OF THE ANCIENT EAST (THE CIVILIZATION OF MESOPOTAMIA AS A MODEL)

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## ABSTRACT

This research paper aims to highlight the presence of both "religion" and "art" in shaping the general civilizational framework of Mesopotamia and to explore the nature of the relationship between them through the material legacy left to us by the Mesopotamian civilization in these two vast knowledge fields.

"Religion," in all its aspects and components, occupied a prominent place in the lives of the peoples of Mesopotamian civilization, as it provided solutions to many of the problems threatening the existence and security of the human beings in this civilization. Thinkers of this civilization turned to religion to ensure security in all its forms in various areas of life. These religious beliefs were physically manifested in artistic forms, making "religion" a fundamental reference in shaping artistic work.

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## KEYWORDS

Religion, Art, Civilization, Metaphysics, Spirituality, Sensibility

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### 1. Introduction:

The formation of civilizations in human history was the result of the accumulation of many different factors that prevail in certain geographical regions more than others. The general and prevailing meaning of the concept of "civilization" refers to "a higher stage of human development, contrasted with the stage of barbarism and roughness, where civilization becomes a lifestyle characterized by progress, advancement, and prosperity in the scientific, cultural, literary, social, and political fields."

There is no dispute that the ancient Eastern civilizations were the cornerstone of the civilizational development known to humanity in general, as they laid the first foundations of human thought in all fields of knowledge within the limits of the human mind. Mesopotamian civilization, in particular, is one of the models deeply etched in the memory of history since the early signs of civilization as a concept, with most historians and scholars agreeing on this view. Since civilization is linked to progress and prosperity, Mesopotamian civilization reached a high degree of advancement and prosperity in all areas that formed its great civilizational structure, and in all the knowledge fields branching out from it. The fields of "religion" and "art" were among the most important knowledge domains that shaped the general civilizational framework of Mesopotamia.

Religion, in its general sense, is "a divine system that guides people toward goodness, or a collection of perceptions, beliefs, and actions arising from the soul's love for God, its worship of Him, and its obedience to His commands, as well as belief in absolute values." This comprehensive concept aligns with what was prevalent in the religious beliefs of the people of Mesopotamia. Similarly, the concept of "art" fits with the arts that manifested among them. If we define "art" as "a collection of means used by humans to evoke a sense of

beauty, such as painting, sculpture, engraving, decoration, architecture, poetry, music, and others," we find that it manifested in this specific way in Mesopotamian civilization. However, Mesopotamian art was intertwined with religion and was shaped by it. Religious beliefs laid the foundation for many areas related to the life of the people of Mesopotamia, including the field of "art," where we find no artistic work or creative endeavor, regardless of its type, without a religious basis or reference to prevailing religious beliefs. As a result, a complementary relationship formed between religion and art. Based on this, we pose the following questions: How did religious beliefs manifest in Mesopotamian civilization? What were the key areas where artistic work was embodied in Mesopotamia? How did these religious beliefs shape artistic creativity? Can we say that there was any artistic work outside the religious framework in Mesopotamian civilization?

## **2. Religious Beliefs in Mesopotamian Civilization:**

Religion has occupied a prominent place in the intellectual framework throughout the ages. While ancient religions, especially Islam, address the intellect in their call to reflection and liberation from all impurities, as well as addressing the human soul, many philosophical trends follow the same method, carrying high values and ideals. As a result, "religion" in any era always carries the seeds of "metaphysical" thinking, or, as Oswald Spengler expressed in his book *The Decline of the West*: "Religion is lived metaphysics," or as Emile Durkheim stated: "Philosophy always arises in the arms of religion or as a result of faith in religion."

It is unnecessary to emphasize that religion, in all its aspects and components, occupied a prominent place in the lives of the peoples of the Mesopotamian civilization, as is well known to scholars of this civilization. This is evidenced by the abundance of religious texts and records left behind, including "royal decrees" detailing the kings' activities in building various temples and performing various religious rituals, as well as numerous cuneiform texts in both Sumerian and Babylonian languages, which describe the multifaceted nature of religious life in Mesopotamia—topics that require their own separate research into the religion of Mesopotamian civilization, beyond the scope of this paper.

Religion was the dominant force in every corner of human life. The perspective of Mesopotamia toward "literature, law, and art" was similar to that of the entire ancient Near East; they were viewed only within the context of religious motivations, and these motivations permeated every aspect of life, forming the essence of the deep nature of that life. This is perhaps the most distinctive feature of the ancient Near East: religion encapsulated human values. As a result, "ancient humans turned to these religious beliefs, whether 'natural' or 'divine,' when faced with many problems that threatened their existence and security, particularly when they could find no other way but to resort to 'religious thinking' to ensure their security in various forms (economic, political, psychological, doctrinal, and preventative security), among other inherited and acquired means of reassurance, with minor differences in the practices of these religions, until they developed clearly into the Abrahamic faiths (Hanifism, Judaism, and Christianity)." The characteristic of reconciliation between different things, which marks Mesopotamian civilization, is most evident in its religious systems. The supreme deities, largely derived from Sumerian gods, were accepted by the conquering invaders with some modification. This phenomenon repeated itself throughout history. Additionally, the Babylonian and Assyrian gods blended and interacted with each other as time passed and political circumstances in Mesopotamia changed. The Akkadian religion, with its abundant gods and characteristics similar to human traits, was similar to that of humans, except that these deities were more perfect and abstract. The gods' clothing resembled human attire but was more magnificent, with a brilliance that dazzled the eyes. The gods had "families" and "weapons," and their struggles resembled human conflicts, though on a much grander and more fearsome scale. The central idea in every religion was the belief in one or more transcendent beings to whom humanity owed certain duties. The Sumerians and Akkadians believed in a vast number of deities, all of whom were celestial beings. They attributed human virtues and emotions to their gods, ascribing to them the same way of life as humans, but elevating them above humanity by granting them "immortality" and believing them to be benevolent and merciful under all circumstances, even when they punished humans for their sins and mistakes. There was no "evil god"; rather, evil was caused by malevolent spirits that were perhaps higher than humans but still beneath the gods.

It is undoubtedly the case that behind this basic assumption of the Sumerians about "gods" lies a logical conclusion: since they did not see these human-like entities with their own eyes, they derived their initial image of these beings from the human society they knew. They deduced the unknown from the known. For example, they observed that "countries, cities, palaces, temples, fields, and farms" in general, all institutions and systems—are managed and overseen by living beings, humans, without whom these places would be destroyed, temples and palaces would collapse, and fields and farms would turn into deserts. Perhaps this view

of the gods is closer to the view expressed by Homer in his poetry than to the outlook of Semitic religions in general. From this, it became clear to them that everything in the universe, and all of its various phenomena, must also be governed by beings in human form. However, since the cosmic system is far greater than any human domain, these beings should be stronger and greater than ordinary humans, guiding existence and controlling it according to specific plans and laws. And as we mentioned earlier, these beings must be immortal, for if they were not, the cosmic system would descend into chaos and disorder upon their death, marking the end of the world—a scenario the Sumerians did not anticipate or even imagine. The Sumerians used the word "dinger," which translates to "god," for each of these invisible, human-like entities that were immortal and above humans.

Their worship centered around these deities, which passed through the "vital" and "totemic" stages before their complete development. Vitalism refers to the belief in powers or spirits inherent in natural phenomena, which were embodied as "gods," while totemism involved the representation of spirits in plants and idols, considered as gods with a significant influence on the course of public life. In the northern regions of Iraq, between 8000-5000 BCE, agricultural civilizations thrived that relied primarily on rainfall for irrigation, as the land was undulating, making irrigation systems ineffective, and therefore dependent on rainwater. The evidence left by these agricultural civilizations confirms that their inhabitants worshiped "fertility," and everything that contributed to abundant production in life. They symbolized this worship through "dolls" depicting the mother goddess. The reason for their worship of fertility was that it was the key factor controlling their lives; as long as the amount of rain was sufficient for crop growth, abundant production could only be achieved through fertility in the land. Furthermore, the natural transformations that occurred in Mesopotamia influenced their religious beliefs, especially regarding their understanding of the origin of existence and the natural world, particularly the flow of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. In this context, they spoke of the "chaos" in the creation myth. This myth, known among scholars as the Babylonian creation myth, is also referred to by its Babylonian title "Enuma Elish" or "When in the Heights." Some researchers have named it the "Seven Tablets of Creation" because it is recorded in Babylonian poetry on seven clay tablets, with each containing between 115 and 170 lines of poetry, totaling around a thousand verses. The myth discusses the origin of various beings, and at first glance, it suggests that the universe did not exist at the beginning. In the beginning, the universe was "chaos," and this chaos consisted only of the "primeval waters." Water, representing "moisture," was the origin of existence, and "moisture" was the active force in creation. At the beginning, everything was "water," with no land, no sky, and no gods. The first phase was one of chaos, represented by water in the "primordial sea."

This myth recorded in the history of Mesopotamian civilization is of significant importance in understanding the people's beliefs about the origin of existence, gods, and the creation of humans. It also portrays crucial aspects of their society, such as political and social conditions, their concept of governance and monarchy, and their geographical environment.

Thus, the lived social reality played a major role in shaping the religious doctrines of the people of Mesopotamia. We cannot judge their religious perceptions and beliefs on topics like the creation of the universe, humans, or the interpretation of natural phenomena as purely mythical or baseless. These beliefs had logical foundations based on observations of human reality.

In addition to the theme of creation and the origin of existence, Mesopotamian literature, particularly Sumerian and Babylonian, in both poetry and prose, addressed many subjects that concerned the people in their public and private lives. These included human society and its problems, individual behavior and social values, spiritual and emotional life, the issue of death and the afterlife, immortality, the problem of good and evil, and divine justice (Théodicy) in the presence of evil. These subjects are abundant in Mesopotamian civilization in all its aspects—its vitality, stagnation, and crises. Most of these topics fall under the field of mythology, classified under two key categories: "Cosmogony" (the origin of the universe) and "Theogony" (the origin of the gods).

The major themes addressed in Mesopotamian literature include:

1. **Epic Literature:** Stories of heroes, gods, and demigods, often referred to as "epic literature."
2. **Flood Stories:** Narratives about deluge and catastrophic floods.
3. **Myths of the Afterlife:** Stories about the spirit world and the underworld (eschatology).
4. **Wisdom Literature:** This includes maxims, commandments, proverbs, and the theme of good and evil, along with divine justice (Théodicy).
5. **Disputation and Dialogue:** Literature focusing on debate and philosophical discourse.
6. **Satire and Humor:** Works of mockery, humor, and fables.

7. **Lamentation Literature:** Particularly mourning and lamenting the destruction of cities and centers of civilization.

8. **Love Literature:** Poetry and stories focusing on love and romance.

9. **Prayers and Hymns:** Includes religious prayers, hymns, and other forms of devotion.

10. **Incantations and Charms:** Some works also include magical spells and incantations.

These various genres reflect the complexity of Mesopotamian thought and society, highlighting their deep engagement with spiritual, philosophical, and everyday concerns.

In the following, we will briefly discuss the most prominent gods that were prevalent in the religious beliefs of the Mesopotamian civilization:

A) Main gods:

1. The god (Anu): He is the god of the sky and is ranked as the most important of the (Sumerian) gods.

2. The god (Enlil): He is the god of "air" and comes after the god (Anu), the god of the "sky," because he is one of his sons.

3. The god (Enki): He is the god of "earth" and the god of "subterranean waters," and his rank among the gods comes after the god (Enlil).

4. The god (Utu): He is the god of the "sun," and the cuneiform texts considered him the son of the moon god.

B) Gods that represented political power:

1. The god Ninkirsu: His name means "Lord of the city of Kirsu," which emphasizes that he was the chief god of the city of (Kirsu), one of the cities ruled by the "Larsa" dynasty. He was also a symbol of the ruling authority in that city, representing political power.

2. The god Marduk: He is the chief god of the city of (Babylon). His name in Sumerian means "Bull of the sun god," while his Babylonian name is "Mar-Duku," meaning the son of the god "Duku," whose meaning is "holy mound," which was considered the "council of the gods." A story about the beginning of creation suggests that (Marduk) defeated (Tiamat-the void), and the gods granted him the right to decide the destiny as a reward. Later, a festival was held in "Du-Azag" in (Babylon) during the New Year celebrations. (Anu) relinquished his authority to (Marduk), and his father (Ea) granted him the name (Ea Falisim), along with all wisdom.

3. The god Ashur: He is the national god of the Assyrians. The tasks of the god (Ashur) are many, as this god represents political authority. He is considered the god who decides destinies, the ruling god, the god of war, and the god of wisdom.

If we ask how this group of gods performed their functions, it seems reasonable in the view of the (Sumerians) to assume that the gods constituting this divine group were not equal in importance and rank. For example, the god entrusted with the "axe" and "brick mold" cannot be compared to the god entrusted with the "sun." Likewise, the god assigned to matters of "bridges, canals, and trenches" is not expected to be equal to the god entrusted with the entire "earth." Based on the political organization of the human state, it was natural to assume that the head of the divine group was a god recognized by the other gods as their king and ruler. Thus, the (Sumerians) imagined the divine group as performing its functions and working as a "community" or "assembly," with a king at its head. The most important members of this group were seven gods who "determine destinies." Then, there was a group consisting of fifty gods called the "great gods." The most important division made by the (Sumerian) theologians for the divine group was the distinction between "creator gods" and "non-creator gods." This idea stemmed from their views on the system of the universe and the origin of things. According to these views, the basic elements that make up the cosmic system were: "the sky, earth, sea, and air." Any other phenomenon in the universe could only exist within one of these basic elements. Thus, it was reasonable to conclude that the four gods controlling "the sky, earth, sea, and air" were the creator gods, following plans and laws that existed and evolved with them.

C) **Deified Rulers:** The cuneiform texts have shown that several kings of (ancient Iraq) used the cuneiform sign indicating divinity before their names. This usage clearly indicates that they considered themselves to be of divine status. Many of the rulers who left us official documents enjoyed divine privileges even during their lifetimes. Perhaps the list of names from the reign of "Manishtushu" serves as evidence of this, with the name "Shurukin Ily" ("Divine Sargon"). Evidence increases during the reign of "Naram-Sin," who is referred to in writings as "the god of the land" and "the god of his city." On the "Victory Stele," we see him wearing a crown with horns, which the Kassite king calls "Agum Kakzin" ("the band of sovereignty – the sign of divinity"). Later, religious institutions in (Larsa) arose to worship "Eishaku Gudea." The kings of (Ur) had their temple, and there was a month each year dedicated to "Dungi." Hymns were composed in their praise,



incense was burned before their statues, and sacrifices were made to them. Since the days of the kings of (Ur), people swore not only by the gods but also by the ruling king, and the oath was purely religious.

The interpretation proposed by Professor (Henry Frankfurt) regarding this matter gained the approval of most researchers at the time. His interpretation is as follows: "The kings who assume the character of the god (Tammuz) during the sacred marriage ritual are those who had the sign of divinity added to their names. The sacred marriage, also known as divine marriage, is a marriage between a god and a goddess of fertility, and the king or ruler would represent the god while one of the high-ranking priestesses would assume the role of the fertility goddess. It was believed that this sacred union brought fertility and good fortune to the land."

**D) Temples:** The emergence of the "temple" as a religious institution did not occur until the northern part of (Iraq), around the middle of the fifth millennium BCE, which corresponds to the beginning of settlement in the southern part of (Iraq). The emergence of the "temple" as a religious institution during this period confirms that the southern region, from the beginning of its settlement, contained a human group holding religious ideas that were fundamentally different from the ideas dominant in the northern regions. Therefore, the spread of these ideas necessitated the construction of temples. The emergence of the temple was linked to the success of the idea of venerating "natural elements." The essence of their worship was derived from their religious thought, based on what they felt and believed as religion in its primitive form, inspired by their surroundings and the accompanying natural and human changes. They committed to rituals that they believed would bring goodness, prosperity, and ward off misfortune. Their worship was divided into two types: the first was public, performed by the individual to achieve the purpose of creation, and the second was private, to ward off misfortunes. Their worship also varied depending on the type of ritual performed either at home or in the "temple."

Another truth is that the "temple" in the northern part of (Iraq) was always, without exception, the center of the (village) or (city), with other buildings—whether official or civil—constructed around it. Since the temple represented, from its inception, the center of the city, and since the cuneiform texts indicate that the governance in (ancient Iraq) during the fourth millennium BCE was also religious in nature, these two aspects confirm that the temple in its early stages was not used solely for religious purposes, but also for other functions necessary for religious governance and society. Therefore, cuneiform texts show that "temples" performed tasks such as "lending silver and barley." One of the main pieces of evidence for this is the "interest" on "silver," which was called: "the interest of the god Shamash," meaning the interest that the "temple of the god Shamash" charged those borrowing "silver." The temple was also used to resolve disputes among people, functioning as a "court." Cuneiform texts have provided us with many pieces of evidence that trials took place inside the "temples," including a document dating back to around (2100 BCE). Furthermore, the "temples" housed the earliest types of "schools" in history and continued to be interested in educational matters throughout all stages of (Iraqi civilization). However, this interest grew significantly from the middle of the third millennium BCE, which represents a period of transition of power from "religious authority" to "political authority." In order to maintain the dominance of both political and religious authority over society, the temples focused on education to spread their religious teachings and attract people. The god would dwell in the "temple" with his wife, children, and servants.

**E) High-ranking Clergy (Priests):** The daily life of the (Babylonians) and (Assyrians) was always overshadowed by the fear of demons. These demons were strange creatures that could take any form, pass through any body, and move everywhere without being seen by anyone. They preferred abandoned, dark places, ruins, graves, and any other place that evoked fear. They would announce their presence with animal-like sounds that caused intense panic in lonely places. Demons were often believed to be evil spirits that rose from the depths of the earth, some being the souls of the dead who had not been buried in tombs. They wandered from place to place, never at rest, seeking vengeance for their miserable fate by attacking humans and amplifying disasters. What distinguishes the religious psychology of the land of (Mesopotamia) in relation to demons is the belief that humans had no escape from them. Even a person living a pure life, not offending any of the gods, could still fall victim to the schemes of an evil sorcerer or come into unintentional contact with a demon or impure being. Humans could be innocent victims of evil forces. However, "sin" was the easiest way for the demon to enter the human body. "Sin" had many forms: neglecting religious rituals, theft, and murder, which were all considered the same due to the dominant role religion played in the daily life system. When a person sinned, they would be abandoned by the god who had protected them, opening the door for demons to enter. Their presence would soon become apparent through various unpleasant phenomena: strange sounds in the house, gusts of wind, and terrifying visions.

However, disease was the most common manifestation of a demon inhabiting the human body. It was then necessary to expel the demon, which was done by a priest specialized in this matter, using incantations

and magical rites appropriate for the situation. At times, they would rely on the priest to slaughter "sacrificial offerings" and perform prayers or incense burning. Other times, rituals would be performed by the worshiper themselves, without the priest's mediation, such as prayers, repentance, and seeking forgiveness. One of their most important religious rituals was "communing with the gods" followed by "performing prayers and festivals." The act of communing with the gods was born out of the metaphorical concept of deities, and the offering of various "sacrifices" and "victims" reflected their belief in "divine control over all things."

As a result, it was necessary for every aspect of daily life, whether ancient or modern, to have an institution managing its basic affairs. The (priests) were the institutions that managed the affairs of "temples" in (ancient Iraq). Management of any institution requires various working positions, and for each position, there was a person or more who would operate it. Based on this fact, we should understand in advance that (priests) were also ranked according to their position and the nature of their work.

**F) Priestesses (Women):** The religion of (Sumerians and Akkadians) did not restrict sacred roles to men. Women could also be priestesses, witches, seers, and singers. The mother of (Sargon of Akkad) was a priestess according to a specific tradition, and the mother of the priestess (Gilgamesh) interpreted dreams and was the one who told the hero about the existence of "Enkidu." At the public library in (Paris), there is a large cylindrical seal belonging to the high priestess of the god "Adad." The appointment of the high priestess was made through "divination," as was the case with the high priests. Some of the most prominent priests in (Mesopotamia) were: "En" (Ennum and Entum), Naditum, Shukuyitum, Qadishtum, Kulamashitum, Shankum, Ashibum, Lomakhum, Kudayishum, Nishakum, Pashishum, Narum, and Kalum Barum. There were other priests as well, but their work was not significantly different from the priests mentioned above.

**G) Fear of the Gods (Prayer and Sacrifice):** The first duty in "religion" was the fear of the deity. (Hammurabi) feared the gods, and (Nebuchadnezzar II) wholeheartedly loved and feared his gods, trembling before their power. The second duty in "religion" was (prayer or supplication and sacrifice):

**"Submit yourself every day to your god,**

**Let your heart be pure before your Lord.**

**This is what pleases the deity...**

**For He will grant you all treasures**

**And your days will prosper through the grace of your god... prayer cleanses from sin."**

The act of prayer to the gods depended on the type of occasion for which the prayer was performed, to exalt this or that god. The worshiper would present themselves to the gods, bow before them, kiss their feet, then raise their hands in supplication. Sometimes the left hand would be raised upwards, and the other placed on the chest, or one hand would be raised in prayer. Their prayers were performed in the morning. Prayer was often inseparable from other religious rites, as it was accompanied by offerings and incense burning. The worshiper believed that the gods heard and felt their prayers, addressing them with great love to keep them pleased. Their most important collective prayers called for the removal of (disasters and their consequences), bringing good, and repelling evil, accompanied by religious hymns, music, and singers. A guild was established to manage and teach the singers, many of whom were captives. Their "prayers" were connected to the lunar calendar, divided into twelve months, with occasional months added to balance with the solar year. Each month consisted of thirty or twenty-nine days, and the first month began with the appearance of the new moon, which was considered a holiday accompanied by prayer. Their prayers were also connected to all their festivals, such as the sacred marriage between the gods or between the priest and the priestess, and the New Year festival.

**H) Life and Death:** Through the epics concerning the creation of humans, it is clear that the gods decided from the outset that death would be the fate of humans, as the experiences humanity went through had not seen or heard of a living being who could escape death. Therefore, the gods' decision in the creation epics that death would belong to humans was seen as a normal matter, consistent with the nature of life itself. Despite the undeniable truth of death witnessed by humans throughout all stages, death did not manage to end life on Earth. Life remained in constant renewal, and its renewal rate was higher than the rate of death. This truth led ancient humans to believe that death was merely a temporary disappearance from life, after which the deceased

would return to life. This belief led the ancient peoples, especially those of (Mesopotamia), to see a dialectical relationship between "life" and "death." By this relationship, they believed that there could be no life without death, nor could there be death without life. The ancients symbolized this relationship with the color "red," which we still use today to symbolize "love" (continuity of life) and "danger" (death). In fact, ancient humans clearly perceived the relationship between "death" and "life," but they could not precisely comprehend how "death" transforms into "life." Therefore, cuneiform writings do not offer a unified image but present different pictures, all of which fall within the same framework.

In the view of the people of (Mesopotamia), "death" was the process of the separation of the "soul" from the "body," and it was the "soul" that continued the afterlife, not the body. However, the soul retained features similar to the deceased person before death. The "soul" of a person after death was called in Sumerian "Kidem," and in Akkadian "Etimo." This "soul" bore the good or bad deeds of the deceased, and its dwelling place was the underworld. As for those who died unnaturally or whose bodies were left unburied, their souls would suffer, transform into demonic forces, and ascend from the underworld to the upper world, disturbing the peace of the living on Earth.

**I) Astrology:** "Astrology" was another form of prophecy. The movements of celestial bodies, their alignments, and their colors were all used as a basis for predicting future events, which in the minds of the people of Mesopotamia were linked to celestial phenomena. The observation of "astronomy" led to significant advancements in astronomical knowledge in (Mesopotamia), particularly during the (Chaldean) period. We have several records of astronomical data, proving a broad understanding of celestial events. The (Babylonians) had real observatories from ancient times, built on the "tops of temple towers." They measured the orbits of stars with water clocks and recorded the movements of the sun and the moon accurately, so that by the 7th century BC, they were able to predict lunar "eclipses" or "occultations." They named various star groups, and the (Greeks) later adopted these names, so the (Greeks) owe much of their astronomical knowledge to (Babylon). "Astronomy" was the foundation upon which the calendar was built, consisting of twelve lunar months. The measurements of the apparent distances between "stars" and other complex astronomical calculations point to the advanced state of mathematical knowledge. The people of (Mesopotamia) knew both the sexagesimal and decimal systems and were able to perform addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, powers, roots, and solve complex equations. In geometry, they could "measure areas and volumes." This collection of astronomical and mathematical knowledge was undoubtedly one of the greatest contributions of the people of (Mesopotamia), especially the (Babylonians), to the history of civilization. Their development of these sciences was closely tied to their religion, particularly the art of "divination."

**J) Divination:** "Divination" dealt with all possible and impossible phenomena. In the selected collections used by astrologers, they would not carefully document the events following one phenomenon or another, believing that these events would recur under the same conditions. Even more than that, certain hypotheses were invented, and with various images of thought flow, they deduced what was supposed to happen. The gods, if humanity failed in their mission, would impose terrifying punishments such as floods that would turn humanity into mud and clay, famine, drought, and epidemics. In all these disasters, the god (Ea) would always appear as compassionate, striving to save humanity.

According to the prevailing religious beliefs of the ancient Iraqis, the society of the gods was a reflection of human society based on the idea that human "material and spiritual" traits were transferred to the gods. This myth also depicts, in a mythical style, the "political and social" conditions of (ancient Iraq) in its early stages of civilization, where a type of governance could be called "primitive democracy." The myth portrays the universe as a state ruled by the gods, where decisions were made in "council meetings" through voting, as seen when (Marduk) was elected as king of the gods. This could be the origin of monarchy and royal systems.

**K) Man and His God:** Every individual relied on a specific "god" as their guardian angel, and they would refer to themselves as the child of that "god." The rulers of (Lagash), from the (Urnina) dynasty, were under the protection of one god, "Dunukus." As for (Urukagina), he claimed his descent from (Ninetsubur). In the period of the (Amorite dynasties) in (Isin) and (Babylon), there are references to this religious belief in lists of names. There are names composed of "Eli" (my god), such as "Eli Duri" (my god, my fortress), "Eli Anam" (be merciful, my god), "Eli Amrani" (my god, look upon me), "Eli Jamalani" (my god, forgive me), "Eli Ashmini" (my god, hear my supplication), etc. Women's names also provide evidence of the same religious belief, such as "Eli Amadi" (my god, my support) and "Eli Ivelim Rabi" (god of man, the great). The god cared for the individual as their guardian. He served as an intermediary between the person and the other deities.



### **L) Creation of the Universe and Man:**

The ancient Iraqis did not leave any aspect of life untouched, discussing it thoroughly in a way that matched their stage of civilization. When it comes to "the creation of the universe and man," the myths and epics related to the subject revealed some differences in perspectives, especially regarding the creation of humanity and the creator god. Some believed that the god (Enlil) was the creator of the universe and man, others considered the god (Enki) as the creator of humanity, while a third group believed that the god (Marduk) was the creator of both the universe and man. These differences in the views of myths and epics have helped us understand the earliest origins of these beliefs and the developmental stages they went through.

The gods, when humanity failed in its task, would impose terrifying punishments, such as "floods turning humanity into mud and clay, famine, drought, and epidemics." In the face of these disasters, the god (Ea) would always appear compassionate, seeking to save humanity.

Based on the prevailing religious beliefs of the ancient Iraqis that the society of gods mirrored human society, as seen in the transfer of human "material and spiritual" traits to the gods, the reader can draw other important conclusions. This myth also portrays the "political and social" conditions in ancient Iraq during the early stages of its civilization, where a form of governance can be called "primitive democracy." The myth presents the universe as a state ruled by the gods, where decisions were made in "council meetings" through voting, as seen in the election of (Marduk) as the king of the gods. This could be the origin of the system of kingship and monarchy.

### **M) Establishment of Artistic Work Through Religious Beliefs:**

The general influence of Mesopotamian art was commemorative and celebratory. It was not aimed at expressing the personal, spontaneous feelings of the individual artist, but rather intended to officially celebrate major events and display the highest ideals related to the people as a whole. Therefore, the dominant themes in Mesopotamian art focused on glorifying the gods of the people, depicting their wars, and mentioning their victories. This general characteristic of art in Mesopotamian civilization is reflected in numerous achievements: such as "temples, architecture, statues, cylinder seals, clothing, and furniture." Let's look at these artistic manifestations individually:

1. **Temples:** The "temples of Babylon" were among the most admired works worldwide. Excavations have revealed some of them, such as the "E-Mah" temple dedicated to the goddess (Nin-Mah), and the "Gibberish" temple dedicated to the goddess (Ishtar), known as "Ishtar Akkad-Agada." To the south of that, there were ruins of the "Gola" temple, known as the "Great Heap," dedicated to (Gola), the goddess of medicine. Among all these "temples," the temple of (Baal-Marduk) in (Palis) was the most awe-inspiring for ancient visitors, covering an area of 550 square meters by 450 meters. In "Tell Amran" south of the palace, rises the grand temple of Babylon, "Esagil," meaning "temple of the highest peak" or "temple with a raised surface," with its ziggurat (the tiered tower) famously known as "Etemenanki," meaning "temple of the foundation of the heavens and the earth." This was one of the most important buildings in the capital, where religious celebrations took place.

2. **Architecture:** The first dwellings of the people of (Sumer and Akkad) were tents or reed huts, as there were no stones in the area. The buildings were covered with a layer of "clay" (a mixture of mud and straw). It was soon noticed that "clay" gained hardness from the sun's heat in the summer, which led to shaping it into "bricks" that would dry. They used "sun-dried mud bricks" to build small homes, with roofs made from "reed covered with clay" supported by "palm wood beams." The invention of "bricks," which marked a new advancement, was a result of chance: "sun-dried bricks" became stronger in a furnace than when left to dry in the sun. Eventually, they learned how to produce "bricks" in a closed furnace (kiln). Homes were sometimes entirely made of "bricks," or at times, some rows of it would be used. (Babylon) used "decorated bricks" more than other areas, and large decorative designs and symbolic animal motifs, such as those on the "Ishtar Gate," were common in the floor decorations.

3. **Metal Images (Statues):** Mining in ancient Iraq allowed individuals to create tools from "metals," marking the beginning of the "Metal Age" around the early fourth millennium BCE. This period is also referred to as the "Late Uruk Civilization." Scholars categorize the stages of metal use in ancient civilizations in Iraq, particularly in the order of their common usage: the "Copper Age," followed by the "Bronze Age," and then the "Iron Age." Other metals contemporary to these, such as tin, lead, gold, and silver, were also used. Babylon did not rely solely on stone for creating statues and engravings of gods, humans, and animals. Since ancient times, they mastered the use of "metals," particularly "copper." The art of "sculpture" in the Sumerian-Akkadian period progressed until the reign of "Gudea" and the kings of "Ur," but it eventually declined with the rise of the "First Dynasty" of Babylon, giving way to the new "Mesopotamian" art style during the Kassite

period. The Sumerians and Akkadians sought to represent nature in their large statues made of "diorite," with smaller ones often carved from "softer stones" like "limestone," "marble," or "onyx." The carving of "shells" dates back to an ancient era, and some metallic "shells" were used for making sacred chips. The use of "cylinder seals" may have evolved from the use of "shells."

**4. Cylinder Seals:** The craft of "seals" in Mesopotamia deserves special mention, as the writing system left little room for distinctive personal lines. Signing documents with seals became common, and the "cylinder" shape was the dominant form of seals. A hole was drilled along the axis of the cylinder, through which a string was inserted, allowing the seal to be worn around the neck. The designs on the cylinder seals were mostly religious in nature, and inscriptions typically included the seal owner's name and a dedication to the god. The craft of "seal making" was essentially a branch of the art of "engraving raised images," where the prevailing ideas in the first art style were miniature versions of those in the second. Excavations at the village of (Jarmo) in northern Iraq revealed that the villagers used "stoneware" and "non-stoneware" vessels before learning the craft of pottery. Pottery had many uses, including cooking food, cooling water, transporting liquids like oils, storing grains, and was used in religious rituals and burial practices, often placed with the deceased. Carving on stone dates back to the "ancient period," and examples of large carved stones have been preserved at the ruins of (Nippur) and (Lagash). The development of engraving was further advanced in the use of "cylinder seals," which continued to be used until the "Persian period" for documenting legal matters. Thousands of these seals are preserved in museums.

**5. Clothing:** The gods in Mesopotamian art are depicted with a distinctive headpiece that consists of a "crown" adorned with horns, the tips of which meet at the front. Excluding some rare exceptions concerning secondary deities, their depictions were purely human-like, with their identities being distinguished by the weapons they held, the specific symbols on their shoulders, or the animals they trampled underfoot. For instance, (Anu), the lord of the gods, was symbolized by a "horned crown," a purely divine symbol placed on his throne. (Marduk) acquired authority after his battle with (Tiamat), and his symbol is often a "spear." (Nabu), the god of writing, was symbolized by a "pen" or "bird." (Shamash), the sun god, was often surrounded by flames, while (Nisaba), the goddess of agriculture, was depicted in the midst of "reeds." The hero (Gilgamesh) was shown with his body tied in a belt, with its end resting along his leg. During the (Akkadian) period, some gods or spirits were depicted wearing a piece of fabric wrapped around their legs and fastened with a belt. The earliest clothing of the Sumerians and Akkadians consisted of a rectangular "shawl" wrapped around the waist like a skirt or tunic, falling down to the knees, typically in a single color, with fringes resembling threads or spider webs arranged in regular rows. This was the attire of the gods in the earliest depictions, and it was also worn by (Ur-Nina), the elderly king of (Lagash). A piece of cloth was added over the left shoulder, resembling the attire of King (Ayanatoum) in the "Eagle Tablet." The priests of the Neo-Babylonian period wore artificial hair adorned with a crown.

#### **6. Music:**

The images of "drums" and "trumpets" – the "instruments" found by the excavators – indicate that the ancient Iraqis were familiar with "music" and used it in their religious and social affairs. For example, there is an image of a musician playing the "lyre" in a temple dating back to the time of (Gudiya), and another image painted on a "shard of a vase" depicting a priest beating a drum, dating slightly after the time of (Gudiya). In temples, there was a group of "priests" who were singers and chanters who performed religious hymns, with drumming and the use of "brass instruments" accompanying the singing and chanting. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, there were "female priests" who were singers and musicians in the "temple's" musical space.

#### **7. Furniture:**

The "furniture" consisted of beds, various chairs, and household items. The lists show the existence of a large number of "seats" with different forms, and the illustrated artifacts provide enough details for us to recognize some of them, starting from the simple "seat" that (Gudiya) sits on, to the "throne" carved for the deity on a "column" (Hashamer) contemporary with (Bournesen) the king of (Ur). These artifacts depict: "cubical seats" with a frame from the time of (Agade), others covered with "kaonaks" from the time of (Dungi), as well as "seats" and "chairs" with arms in varying styles.

#### **8. Educational Content of Art:**

The "arts" in their various forms in (Mesopotamia) represented an important field in "learning" and "teaching." Every artifact found shows that it was created by a "talented artist" who learned to engrave, sculpt, paint, play music, build, or make this or that form of art indicated by some of the crafts.

### 9. Social Aspect of Art:

The "artist" did not aim to express his personal vision or present things as he saw them, but rather he depicted them accurately within the framework of traditional artistic methods. It is probably more accurate to say that he was not an artist in the modern sense of the word, but rather a skilled craftsman. In such "art," there was little room for emotions, feelings, or movements of the human soul. The figures he depicted were stiff and calm, and their features were traditional, lacking a personal touch. The representational or lyrical spirit was absent. The pursuit of "proportion" and "harmony of shapes" led to the establishment of fixed rules and the use of repetition. For example, in the "seals," we find the figure depicted on one side faithfully mirrored on the other. The "conceptual" understanding replaced "sensory perception," and depicting visual elements in their various dimensions had no subject. Every part of the whole, or every part of the human body, was placed in its designated position within the general image, in contrast to other parts, without regard to the overall appearance as it seemed to the eye. In such cases, it is hard to talk about "artistic development" in the true sense of the term. Although time brought changes in "taste" and "subject matter selection," only in rare cases do we find traces of conscious renewal. The "artist" seemed content to obscure his personality behind traditional patterns. The traditional nature of Mesopotamian art led to the widespread use of "symbolism," where a distinctive part was used to represent the whole. For example, "mountains" were symbolized by stones stacked on top of one another, and "water" was symbolized by undulating lines interrupted here and there by small swirls or fish images.

Thus, it becomes clear how much religious beliefs or "religion" influenced the establishment of artistic works that evoke all that is beautiful in the human soul. The artist in Mesopotamian civilization did not deviate from what was prevalent in his society, with its "customs, traditions, and norms" in general, and specifically in the religious field. We often know that the artistic work of any artist tends to express a sort of rebellion against the general framework of society, either by directly rejecting it in a realistic style or by escaping into fantasy and expressing this rejection indirectly. However, this was not found in Mesopotamian art, as everything related to artistic work had a religious reference – as we have seen – which leads us to say that "religion" established the framework for "art" in Mesopotamian civilization. Therefore, there is no purely artistic subject, but rather a religious theme expressed in the form of an artistic work.

### Conclusions

From what we have discussed, we can conclude that the fields of "religion" and "art" are two sides of the same coin, as they are among the main features that formed the general civilizational framework of Mesopotamian civilization. On one hand, this relationship is clear and somewhat settled, or even absolutely settled. It becomes evident from our discussion that everything artistic in Mesopotamian civilization originated from a religious foundation. This forces us to say that the relationship between the two was a necessary complementary one, where what is artistic is based on what is religious, and it does not move beyond its framework.

This may seem contrary to the essence of "art" as a distinct field of knowledge, since art springs from the personal, lived experience of the artist, and is not subject to any other constraints that could limit its aesthetic value. In the language of "art," this removes the characteristic of "artistic creativity."

In general, the civilization of Mesopotamia was a living stage in the history of philosophical thought, showing the presence of both "religion" and "art," regardless of the nature of their relationship. If we were to judge the nature of their relationship in terms of harmony or contradiction, we would find that "religion" and "art" were in harmony in Mesopotamia, even though they contradicted each other in essence and concept.

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