

AHAR7007



Getting Started

Art and Representation

- Looking at how people represented their world – physical & metaphysical:
 - From Mesopotamia to Minoan Crete
- Key themes:
 - Theoretical approaches to ancient art
 - Imagining the body in pre-urban & urban communities (portable art and wall paintings)
 - Animals & mythical beasts
 - Imagined landscapes
 - Iconographies of power
- We will be considering what we mean by art & how meaningful these concepts are analysing ancient “artworks”



Telloh, ancient Girsu 2150 BC

Aims

- To engage with a comparative analysis of art works from the ancient Near East & Aegean from the Neolithic, through the Bronze Age & into the Early Iron Age
- To develop a sophisticated understanding of the anthropology of art & its application
- To be able to critically analyse, evaluate, compare & interpret a wide range of ancient art works from the ancient Near East and Aegean, within the framework of anthropological theories of art



Figurines from Sha'ar Hagolan

Learning Outcomes

- Upon the successful completion of this module, you should be able to:
 - critically evaluate how ancient societies perceived of & presented themselves & their environment in a variety of art forms & how these images are received & represented in the modern world;
 - draw upon and critically assess a wide range of art forms (visual images, portable objects) & to engage critically with modern scholarship;
 - demonstrate a sophisticated understanding & application of the anthropological definitions & interpretations of ancient art & theoretical approaches to materiality.



Combat agate seal, Mycenae

Assessment: Portfolio

- **Assessment 1:** Develop a research portfolio on a specific ancient art object/image or representation of your choice from the ancient Near East or Aegean.
 - 2000-word paper **due 10/3/23**. A theoretically informed analysis of your chosen representation/art object/image, drawing upon the approaches covered in the module (25%)
 - 15-minute presentation (PowerPoint) of your chosen art object/image or representation **on 8/5/23** (25%)
 - either its use, value and life history (biography) within its ancient context/setting
 - or its reception and itinerary within the modern world.
- **Assessment 2:** 3500-word discussion paper due: 24/4/23 (50%)
 - Outline and discuss in detail one of the anthropological perspectives on art covered in the module. Consider its potential use for examining and interpreting ancient art from the Near East/Aegean. Discuss with reference to various specific archaeological examples:
 - Aesthetic
 - (Symbolic) communication
 - Enchantment
 - Art and Agency

Thinking About Ancient Art

- Art Historical approaches:
 - Empirical descriptive development of art styles
- Archaeology & interpretation:
 - What does art mean?
- To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world – in order to set up a shadow world of meanings
 - (Susan Sontag: *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*)



Natufian “art”, ‘Ain Sakhri

A Cautionary Tale(Bloch)

- Bloch cautions against attempting to interpret “art” and infer meaning
- “It made the wood beautiful”
- Also highlights how art is culturally constituted
- Anthropological exploration:
 - How art is socially embedded



Malagasy wooden house carving

How Do We “See” Ancient Art?



- Engaging with ancient art (in following slides)
 - Describe the image/object – what do **you** see?
 - Think about what the image/object tells you about ancient crafting, craftsmanship, technical skills...
 - Think about why you chose this object...
 - ...how does it speak to you, make you feel?
- Being **right** is not important!
 - At this point it does not matter what the object is, where it comes from etc. We are developing skills of observation, description & reflection....

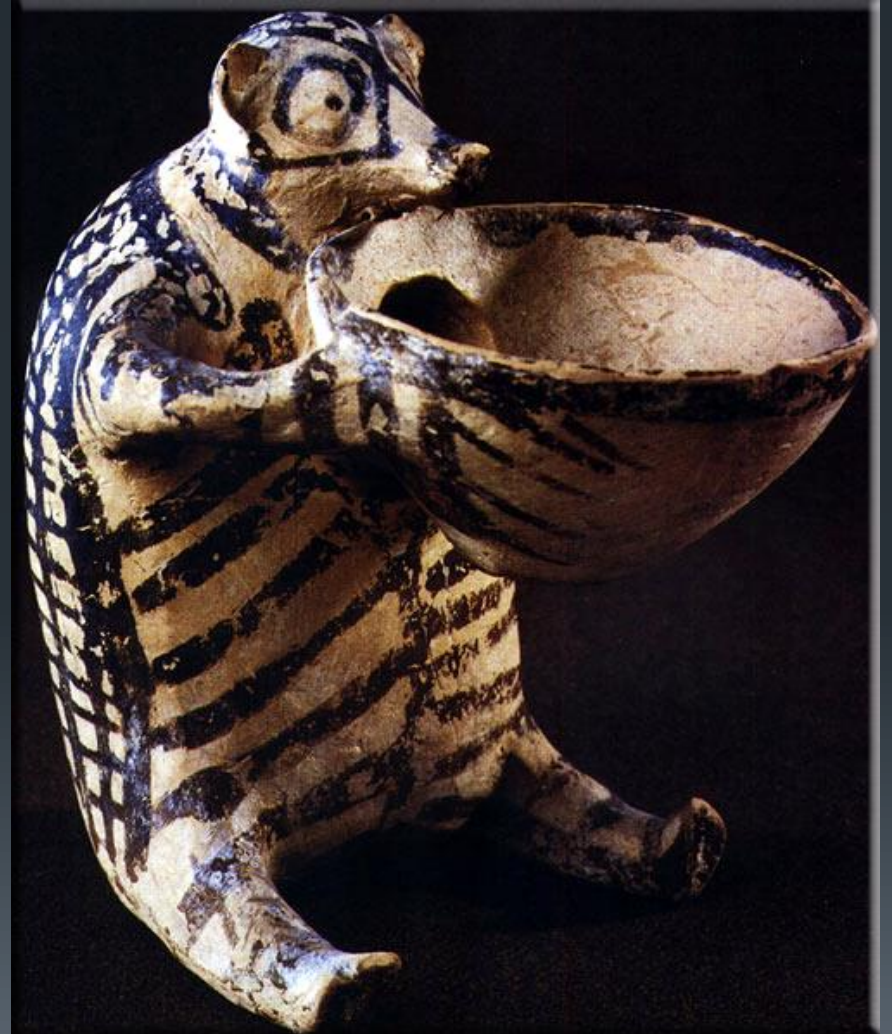
Neolithic Near East



Neolithic Near East



Bronze Age Aegean



Bronze Age Aegean



Bronze Age Near East



Bronze Age Near East

