

An Artifact Speaks • Artifact Information Sheet

Artifact Name: Statue of Gudea

Time Period of the Original: ca. 2150–2125 BCE

Culture/Religion Group: Neo-Sumerian

Material of the Original: Diorite

Reproduction? Yes



Background Information:

During the Neo-Sumerian period, rulers controlled large, independent city-states in southern Mesopotamia. Lagash was ruled by Gudea ca. 2150–2125 BCE. Unlike the kings of the previous Akkadian period, who represented themselves as strong, active, military leaders, Gudea emphasized his religious activities. He is known to have rebuilt at least fifteen temples, often using timbers and stones brought from faraway lands to replace the mud bricks that were the common building components. The greatest of the temples, known as Eninnu, was for Ningirsu, the national god. Gudea said he had been instructed to build the temple in a dream by the god himself. Gudea's personal deity was Ningishzida, a fertility god called "Lord of the Tree of Life."

Found in excavations in the area of Lagash was a series of partial statues of Gudea. In some the king is standing; in others he is shown seated, as he is here. This statue was found at the site of Girsu, the ancient capital of Lagash, in two separate pieces at two different times. The head was found in 1877; the body was found in 1903. The two pieces, once it was found that they fit together, resulted in the only complete Gudea statue. The king is shown calm and smiling, resting on a low stool in the traditional pose of greeting, prayer, and attentiveness to divine command. He is wearing a royal turban and a typical draped robe of the period that exposes one of his shoulders and arms. The series of statues is carved from diorite, a stone known for its durability and, like the temple building materials, imported from a great distance.

The inscription on Gudea's robe translates as follows:

For Ningishzida, his god, Gudea—ruler of Lagash, builder of Ningirsu's temple Eninnu—fashioned a statue of himself. He named the statue "It befits the temple" for his sake, and he brought it to the god in his temple.

Sources on Gudea and Gudea Statues:

- "British Museum - Gudea, King of Lagash (around 2130 BC)." *British Museum - Gudea, King of Lagash (around 2130 BC)*. The British Museum. Web. 21 Mar. 2015.
- Nicolas, Benoit. "Work Gudea, Prince of Lagash, Seated Statue Dedicated to the God Ningishzida." *Gudea, Prince of Lagash, Seated Statue Dedicated to the God Ningishzida*. The Louvre. Web. 21 Mar. 2015.

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- “Ningizzida.” Encyclopedia Mythica from Encyclopedia Mythica Online. Web. 20 Mar. 2015.
- Pitard, Wayne, Spurlock Museum Mesopotamian exhibit labels.
- “Statue of Gudea | Neo-Sumerian | Neo-Sumerian.” *Statue of Gudea*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1 Jan. 2000. Web. 20 Mar. 2015. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/329072>.

Additional Background: Temples in Southern Mesopotamia

Large platforms called *ziggurats*, covering an acre of land and built of clay and sun-dried mud brick, served as the base structures for Mesopotamian temples. A high temple to the local god was placed at the top of these platforms. Lower temples at the base were for other gods important to the city. The platforms were solid structures, with no interior chambers or passageways.

Over time, heavy rains would penetrate the bricks, causing the walls to soften, bulge, and collapse. To delay this destruction, ziggurats had internal drainpipes to help drain the water from the building. Even with this extra care, a ziggurat often had to be rebuilt within a century. This gave kings many opportunities to show their devotion to the gods by rebuilding the structures.

Source:

- “Ziggurats.” *The Ancient Near East: An Encyclopedia for Students*. Ed. Ronald Wallenfels and Jack M. Sasson. Vol. 4. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2000. 174-176. *World History in Context*. Web. 20 Mar. 2015.

Additional Background: Mesopotamian Gods

Lists of Mesopotamian gods may be found at:

University of Pennsylvania
<http://oracc.iaas.upenn.edu/amgg/listofdeities/index.html>

Date Notes:

BCE (Before Current Era) = B.C.

CE (Current Era) = A.D.