

not from the side but from behind; the calf is tied to its mother's neck to keep both quiet; on the other side is shown the churning, straining and storing of the butter, as still practiced to the present day.

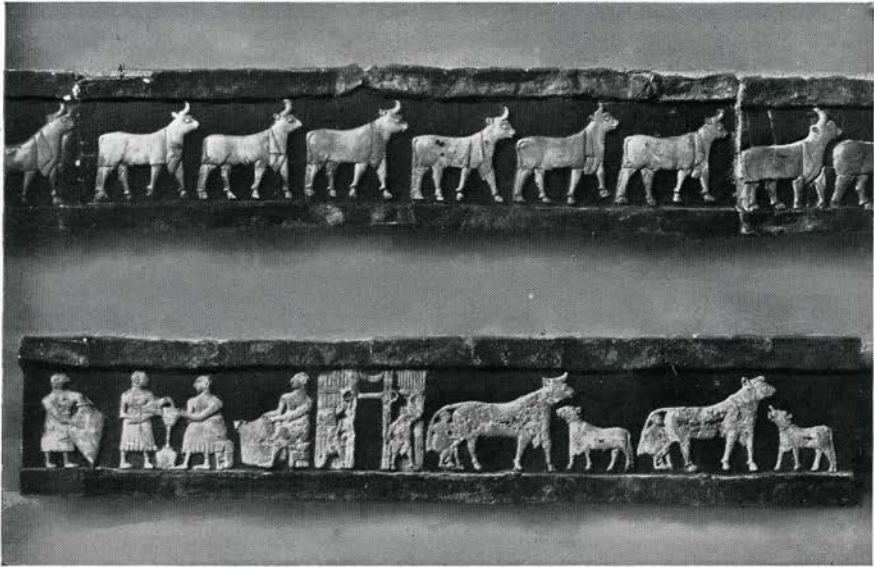


Figure 22. Frieze of cattle from First Dynasty temple, al-'Ubaid

Figure 23. Milking scene. Mosaic of cut figures on bitumen ground in copper frame from First Dynasty temple, al-'Ubaid, circa 2700 B.C.

The al - 'Ubaid Painted Pottery

Outside of the temple, the old al-'Ubaid cemetery, the graves of which rest on virgin soil, carries us back centuries towards the beginning of the fourth millennium. The graves were evidently those of the first settlers who occupied the land, and painted pottery was their most characteristic furniture. No remains of greater antiquity have ever been discovered in southern Mesopotamia. From this site they derive their name: the people of the painted pottery in the al-'Ubaid period. Together with the painted wares, a number of flint, obsidian, stone and

bone implements, hard clay scythes, shell ornaments and rare fragments of copper found in the tombs, show that the settlers did not reach Mesopotamia before the end of the neolithic, but probably at the beginning of the chalcolithic age. Al-'Ubaid was only one small station of their southern migration. From Susa in Elam to the mountains of Assyria, eastward to Anau in Turkestan, and westward along the Euphrates and the Chabur Rivers, far into Syria, similar wares and stone implements scattered over large areas establish the presence of the painted pottery people in the highlands long before southern Mesopotamia was ready to receive them.

It is not less significant that two of the most striking features which characterize the next stage of the development of the southern culture, the writing on clay tablets and the use of the cylinder seal, were unknown to the people of the al-'Ubaid period. They first appear in the following or Uruk period, so called from the site where the earliest pictographs and seal impressions were recovered by the Germans, above the al-'Ubaid level, in the deep trenches of Warka. According to a most ancient tradition—recorded by the Chaldaean priest Berossus in the third century B.C.—the higher knowledge, religion, art, civilization, and a new language, were brought into the land by invaders who came from the east, "out of the sea." They were the Sumerians, and their arrival coincides with the decline of the painted pottery, replaced for a time by plainer, red or black, highly polished or incised wares, and the appearance of a new type of construction, platforms shrines and towers with walls and terraces decorated with elaborate mosaic work.

Who were the people of the painted pottery age, predecessors of the Sumerians in southern Mesopotamia? On the shelves of the Babylonian Section is a fair collection of their plates (*Figure 24*)—with almost modernistic decoration—their cups, bowls, small kraters with perforated lugs, or larger ones with spouts and handles (*Figure 25*). They are made of a thin, well-knit, hand-modelled, hard-baked clay, decorated with lines, geometrical or floral motives, animal or more rarely human figures in black and reddish brown, on whitish or greenish ground. Terracotta painted figurines of men and animals are also found in the same deep levels, and offer a great interest, as being the earliest effort of the original settlers at human representation. The nude women (*Figure 26*) with slender limbs and waists, square shoulders decorated with painted

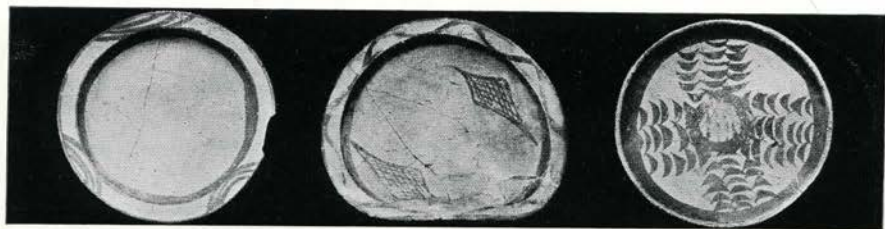


Figure 24. Typical al-'Ubaid painted plates

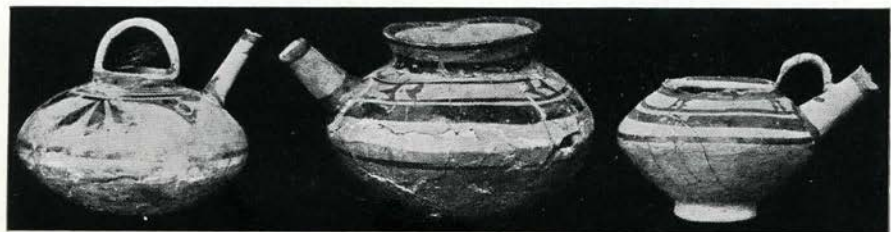


Figure 25. Typical al-'Ubaid painted pottery



Figure 26. Archaic feminine clay figurines of al-'Ubaid period, with bird-like heads and bitumen wigs

marks or tattoos, curious slanting eyes, elongated heads above which the hair is drawn up and tied to a point, strangely contrast with the fleshy rounded type of a later age. It has been variously proposed to see in them representations of a primitive Semitic Japhetite, Subaraean or simply pre-Sumerian population. A survey of geological conditions in southern Mesopotamia in prehistoric times may throw some light on the obscure subject.

Through centuries the delta at the head of the Persian Gulf, as a result of the annual floods of the Euphrates, the Tigris, the Kercha and Karun Rivers of Elam, and other now dried-up rivers of Arabia, has been continuously growing. There was a time when all entered the Gulf independently above Kurna, before heavy silt deposits began to fill the inland sea, leaving here and there great marshes and lagoons. Eridu, the first city where the Sumerians landed, was the southernmost harbour still opened to the sea and the other Sumerian cities like Ur, Uruk, Larsa, Umma, Lagash, Shuruppak—the home of the Sumerian Noah—Adab and Nippur, were located on the banks of the Euphrates or connected with it by canals, within easy reach of the southern—the lower—sea, on which the boat trade was considerable. The south was from the beginning the homeland of the Sumerians. From here their culture and influence, language and writing spread further north among mixed and in the majority Semitic populations, notably at Kish—the first royal city after the Deluge—in the fertile narrow plain between the Tigris and the Euphrates. Across centuries that bottleneck of Mesopotamia was always important for its strategic and historic position. Here the highways of the ancient world, from India, Elam, Persia, towards Assyria and Armenia, Syria and Asia Minor, Palestine and Egypt, met and crossed. Here also the most famous capitals rose and decayed in turn: Agade founded by the Akkadian king, Sargon (2650 B.C.); Babylon of the Amorite king, Hammurabi (1900 B.C.) which after eleven dynasties was to become under the rule of the Chaldaean Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus (604-539 B.C.) one of the marvels of the world; Seleucia of the Greek successors of Alexander (311-281 B.C.); Ctesiphon, the winter palace of the last of the Persians, the Sassanian kings (226-632 A.D.); and finally the fabulous Baghdad of Harun-ar-Rashid (786-809 A.D.). Here many invaders came from east and west, many battles were fought and many empires were made and lost.

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