

普通高等学校公共艺术教育系列教材
国家级双语示范课程教材

西方艺术史

Understanding
the Western Art

章 华◎编 著



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序

这是一本学习鉴赏西方绘画、雕塑和建筑历史的艺术书籍。全书用英文撰写，外加中文注解，阅读对象是任何爱好艺术并有一定英语基础的各界人士。本书尤其希望对中国高校的莘莘学子能大有裨益。在紧张的专业学习之余，一卷在手，既学到西方文化奠基性的东西，拓展知识面，提升艺术修养，又研习英语，弥补普通外语课本读物在文化艺术教育方面的欠缺。最为重要的是，艺术是想象力自由驰骋的天地，可以提供许多主观和客观、理性和感性、以及宗教和精神性的思维素材，使我们能够养成分析和批判性思维的习惯，带着更为深刻的情感和深邃的头脑去关注现实世界，拓展眼界和想象力，培养自己的创新意识和能力。

本书也是笔者负笈北美求学和教学的一个总结。在美国，几乎每一所大学都开设有艺术史专业和面向全体学生的艺术课程，所以艺术学习遍及每一位学生。可以想见，假如在学校的课程中排除艺术，其教育必将存有极大的缺憾。也就是说，一个没有艺术的教育就不可能是完整的教育。可以毫不夸张地说，我们的大学生和各类专业人才若没有一定的艺术知识和涵养，就很难跟别人坐在同一条板凳上。学习艺术可以享受赏析艺术品带来的乐趣，陶冶情操，使人生高雅完美，丰富多彩。我们如果能多多地接触世界各个时期的鸿篇巨制和经典遗存，熟悉那些在艺术领域里举足轻重的伟大人物，无疑将有助于提升自己的生活情趣和眼界，改善思维和创意。此外，在艺术的课堂里，学生可以学到在其他学科里所学不到的东西，实现素质教育和能力的培养，如观察判断能力、认知理解能力、交流表达能力及分析解决问题的能力。所以，艺术教育应该大加普及，并使之成为我们人文教育的重点与核心。

尤为重要的是，艺术体现了人性中极为深层次的东西，是人与人之间心灵交流的桥梁。人类历史通过艺术创作来传达生命中大量的重要信息，包括极度的悲哀和无限崇高的情感，对远古历史和当下生活的深刻思考，对创造的想象与冲动，以及对未来的理想和憧憬等。同时，鉴于人与人之间的巨大差异和宗教历史的渊源，我们也终于明白在这个星球上是很难实现理想上的大同世界的。美国也不再自豪地以为自己是一个多民族的大熔炉。它的整个社会其实也依然是一个马赛克般的构成，充满了裂痕、隔阂和鸿沟。毋庸置疑，不同的民族和种族之间越来越需要沟通，需要了解各自的文化差异，学会尊重和理解别人，实现和平共处，互利互惠。而在当今这样的“视图”社会里，艺术更是前所未有地渗透于人们的劳动生产和社会文化生活的各个层面，成为实现不同民族之间交流沟通和宽容理解的最有效语言和渠道。

然而，仅仅通过中文去学习西方的文化艺术会有很大的缺失。就《西方艺术史》本身而言，无论是研究的对象还是主流的理论与方法等都来自于西方，不但绝大多数文献都用英文撰就，前沿的研究成果也全部出自欧美各国。鉴于艺术的抽象性和主观性，又由于语言结构和表达方式上的差异，经过中文翻译后，西方文化艺术的很多概念和词语、诸种风格流派、艺术家的名号、作品名称、专业技术术语等，都会跟原文产生不小的距离和偏差，

从而造成理解和交流上的障碍甚至误导。因此，对西方艺术的学习和鉴赏，原文的研读是必不可少的。而且，当我们把外语作为一种工具或第二语言来使用时，就能有效地打破外语学习的许多障碍，这样既能修习英语，又能进入良好的艺术学习氛围和鉴赏空间，弥补艺术和素质教育方面的欠缺，更好地领会西方文化艺术中精髓性的东西。

目前，中国的艺术教育已经不再局限于专业技能训练，有了扩及大众的思考和举措。然而，在很大的程度上，要真正实现艺术教育的普及还有待于我们多方面的持久努力。在西方，艺术史和艺术鉴赏等课程早在19世纪就进入了大学的通识课堂，目的是为了实现在一种“高尚”的、贵族的和精英式的学习。到了20世纪，出身于劳动阶层的普通学生也逐渐开始受到艺术鉴赏和理论的熏陶，而不只是埋头于修习那些讲究实用的科目。非艺术类专业学生学习艺术课程和理论知识，其目的不在于为了掌握一些相关的谋生技能，而是为了接触和理解艺术，开启灵感，培养创造思维和能力。经过多年持之以恒的努力，艺术教育在西方大中小学已经形成循序渐进、由浅入深的教育体系，任何专业或非专业的学生都有机会修习各种各样的艺术类课程。

人文学科教育的目的之一就是为学生丰富的思想素材，使学生学会思考和鉴赏，养成优良的生活品位。而艺术也是人类不同价值观念的核心宝库，体现了不同的民族、不同的文化在不同时代的精神面貌和价值观。艺术课程的学习包括范围广阔的世界文化传统和艺术风格，同时又可以把政治、宗教、哲学、历史、社会学、经济学、心理学的知识和不同的文化习俗交织在一起，使学习的许多方面都得以融会贯通，起到举一反三的教育效果。比如说，通过学习艺术史，学生可以更有效地学到东西方各国创造的辉煌的文化艺术，其中也包括黑人、印第安人、阿拉伯人和其他少数民族的独特创造。中国人通过学习很自然就会产生对外国文化的欣赏和景仰。同样，西方学生在学习领会中国的文化艺术之后就更容易克服对中国人的偏见，从而唤起对中国文化的敬意。

最后，在这里本人也要由衷地感谢我的挚友奈尔逊先生和夫人以及我的博士导师、著名的哈佛大学研究学者卡洛琳·泰特教授的鼎力相助，确保了本书作为英文课本的语言质量和学术水准。此外，还要一并感谢国家教育部对西方艺术史双语课程的重视，浙江传媒学院的领导和同事的支持，以及哈佛大学文艺复兴研究中心对国内西方艺术史教学与研究的关注。没有他们的眼光和睿智，我也不可能有机会参与国内外多层面的学术活动和交流，并穷数年之功潜心完成这一著作，以期对艺术教育的普及推行尽己绵薄之力。

Introduction

Art history covers the entire past of humankind, from prehistoric times to the present. Whatever is your taste or point of view, you can find visual arts challenging your creative nerves and inspiring you to be conscious of beauty in natural and man-made forms. It is during modern times when art history became a school discipline that teaches students and broad masses how to evaluate and interpret works of art. It is true that art history has frequently been criticized for its subjectivity because the definition of what is beautiful varies from person to person. Nevertheless, by studying the historical development of art and its stylistic evolutions you may learn to appreciate art forms around you and develop your aesthetic understanding, new ways of thinking, and creative inspirations.

The concept of artistic style allows the art historian to group works into categories and it allows for the explanations or possible explanations for change or evolution. In their attempts to explain why art objects look the way they do, art historians have developed various theories. Herman Riegel (赫尔曼·里格尔), Heinrich Wölfflin (海因里希·沃尔夫林) and Wilhelm Worringer (沃尔海姆·沃林格尔) believed that every art style aimed at a faithful reproduction of nature and nothing else, but each cultural group had its own mode of representing nature. They developed the idea that human beings create abstract art when they feel uncomfortable with the world around them and more naturalistic art when they are more contented with their world. The materialistic or Marxist view of scholars like Arnold Hauser (阿诺德·豪泽尔), Frederick Antal (弗里德里希·安塔尔) and T. J. Clark (T. J. 克拉克) hold that styles change in response to social struggle, while formalists like Henri Focillon (亨利·福西永), explain stylistic change only in reference to the works themselves. James Ackerman (詹姆斯·阿克曼) explains the change in style as a manifestation of the artist responding to visual and intellectual challenges.

The term iconography (图像/画像/塑像研究) refers to what a work depicts and what it means (subject matter and symbolism), as opposed to its style. Both the meaning and the style of artworks can be related to their historical context. As noted earlier, Marxist theoreticians like Hauser and Clark believed that art style is totally determined by the historical, social, and economic setting of the time during which it was produced. The opposite view is represented by the followers of Carl Jung (卡尔·荣格), who believe that many artworks are, like myths, embodiments of archetypal images that arise from the collective unconscious. Art historians using the techniques of semiotics would attempt to recover the artist's psychological mindset as well as to utilize information from anth-

ropological and literary sources.

The artist provides an important dimension in the history of art. They have reached outward to describe truths about humanity and have reached inward to describe truths about themselves. Sometimes their pursuit has led them to beauty, at other times to shame and outrage. As we have noted, early histories of art were simply biographies of artists. Biography as one dimension is still important. We can learn much from the stylistic development within the career of the artist. We can also learn a great deal from historical accounts, documents, and the artist's own theoretical writings and literary remains. All of these are useful in understanding an artist's works. Relationships to predecessors, contemporaries, and followers can be described in terms of *influence* and *school*. It is likely that artists are influenced by their masters and fellow artists and other people, either in history or contemporary to them.

As you must have noticed, art history is concerned primarily with the plastic arts (造型艺术)—painting, sculpture, and architecture, etc. —which differ from the temporal arts (时间艺术)—music, dance, theatre, and poetry, etc. —in several very basic ways. The temporal arts require time for their performance or presentation. They are transitory (过渡性的) or ephemeral (短暂的) in the sense that, once performed, they cease to exist to the observer, except in memory. On the other hand, the plastic arts have physical bulk and a tangible, enduring existence in space. To describe and analyze a plastic work of art, we use categories and vocabularies that have become standard and that indispensable to an understanding of this book.

Art history requires you to study and describe what you see in terms of the design elements of line, shape, color, value, light, texture, rhythm, balance, proportion, unity, variety, etc. Space can be three dimensional, as in sculpture or architecture, or two dimensional, as in a painting. Artists may use devices like linear perspective to give the illusion of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface, or they may use the properties of color and line to create spatial movement on the surface plane. Once you form a response to one work of art, you can compare it to another. An alternative is to make comparisons and contrasts between artists and their artistic works with the mind eye. As you explore the fascinating world of art, a beautiful collection of thousands of years of human experience, you will want to travel farther from your home to see works of art in person.

Answering the questions that follow will help you to analyze how the artist used the formal elements of art to create the work of art you are considering. How does the artist use color? How does the artist handle light? Does the artist model the forms with light and dark? How does the artist handle space? Does the artist use linear perspective or some other devices to create the illusion of space? Does the artist use the linear approach, which emphasizes contours and the edges of things, or a painterly approach, which builds up the forms with brush strokes or patches? Does the artist emphasize vertical and horizontal lines or diagonal lines? How do the lines of the composition relate to each

other and to the entire composition? How does the artist organize the forms of the composition? If figures are used, does the scale of the figures seem appropriate in relation to the setting? How are the figures arranged in relation to each other? What connection do you see between the subject matter and the techniques the artist has used? What mood or interpretation has the artist tried to express through the use of those techniques? And so on and so forth.

Nevertheless, one of the questions everyone tends to ask more frequently about an artwork is, "Is it good art?" Judgments about the value or quality of a work often vary from one extreme to the other, ranging from vague reasons that "I like it" to specific reasons why the artwork is thought to be good or not. Some opinions are more informed than others and represent more authoritative people. However, value judgments may not be significant or essential. Disagreements about quality can enhance one's experience of a work of art, resulting in a deeper understanding. In addition, evaluation or criticism can be exercised without involving any judgment. We can thoroughly analyze any work of art, describing what it consists of and how all of the factors affect an audience and its response. We can spend a significant amount of time doing this and never pass a value judgment at all. We may not like the work we have analyzed, but we have understood something that we did not understand before.

On the other hand, contextual criticism seeks meaning by examining related information outside the artwork, such as the artist's life, his or her culture, social, and political conditions and philosophies, public and critical reactions to the work, and so on. When art seeks to bring about political change or to modify the behavior of large groups of people, it has political or social functions. These can all be researched and applied to the work in order to enhance perception and understanding. This approach tends to view the artwork as an artifact generated from particular contextual needs, conditions, and/or attitudes.

Finally, the literature about the history of Western art has become so abundant even in China that one feels somewhat guilty for adding one more volume. Whether there was any justification for doing so is a question whose answer will ultimately lie on the judgment of each reader. My only intention in writing this book is to let it serve the reader as a transition or basis for a more in-depth study of art in the original text. Nevertheless, this book itself is far-reaching and all-inclusive in the treatment of Western painting, sculpture, and architecture. We see that artists from diverse periods and cultures use the same language and elements of art to commemorate a great variety of their experiences, express their religious and secular values, persuade or impress their audiences, and even to praise or criticize the social order. It is my sincere wish that readers will learn a great deal from the *History of Western Art*, feel more deeply and think ever more profoundly.

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Chapter I

Art from the Prehistoric to Mesopotamia 从史前到两河文明的艺术

We tend to envision prehistoric people as barbaric, uncivilized, and unintelligent. With apparent difficulties in satisfying their needs beyond food, shelter, and reproduction, we could hardly imagine they would be interested in creating works of art and performing religious rituals as we do. What did the world art of remote antiquity look like? Thanks to the archeological discoveries in the past hundred or so years, the art of the Old Stone Age, or Paleolithic period (旧石器时代) is becoming more and more evident. It seems clear that artistic creativity of the human race begins with carving and painting figures of humans and animals in their cave dwellings. Examples of their works indicate to us that humans at the time were physically and mentally identical to modern men and women, and they had already a rich cultural tradition behind them.

The statement that art has no borders is probably very true with art of the primitive time. Comparable representational images appeared in Asia, Africa and Europe. Partly this is due to the primitive artist's similar understanding of nature and life. Their working tools and techniques are not much different, and their living conditions must also be similar, so were their creative motives. In their attempt at naturalism, prehistoric artists captured the images of the beasts by first outlining the contours of their bodies and then filled in these outlines with details. They also attempted to capture fertility by creating small sculptures called "venuses." The most famous of these in the west is perhaps the *Venus of Willendorf* (Fig. 1-1). The tiny figure is carved of stone and is just over 11.2 cm high. The female form is highly abstracted without facial features, and the emphasis is placed on the anatomical parts associated with fertility: the breasts, swollen abdomen, and enlarged hips. The other parts of the body are subordinated to those related to reproduction.

Let's compare the famous *Venus of Willendorf* with two other figures of the type from places far apart. The first is a Chinese version of the goddess, a nude female figure from an ancient ceremonial site of Hongshan Culture, Liaoning Province (Fig. 1-2). She bears a swollen belly—an apparent sign of pregnancy. The second is a seated female figurine from Mesopotamia, displaying a pair of protruding breasts (Fig. 1-3).



Fig. 1-1 *Venus of Willendorf*, c. 15000 BC—10000 BC (Paleolithic Age). Stone, 11.2 cm high. Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna.

All of them share similar formal qualities and they seem to have been made for a common purpose; the worshipping of the power of fertility or the goddess of birth. We may therefore conclude that in the remote past there were more things in common than in difference among different cultures. During the period of time, people were commonly concerned with survival. They created their images, and perhaps their religion, as a way of coping with these concerns.



Fig. 1-2 Baked clay figurine from Dongshanzui, the site of a ceremonial center, c. 4000 BC. Kazuo County, Liaoning Province (辽宁喀左东山嘴红山文化遗址).



Fig. 1-3 Clay figure of woman with traces of paint, c. 6000 BC. Mesopotamia or Syria, 5.11 × 4.5 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

But as time passes, there appear more differences than similarities among arts of different nations. One of the major factors is the omnipresent and persistent influence of geographical conditions. It renders a permanent character on a civilization. For example, Greece is a maritime country, more than 70% of Greece is mountainous and less than 25% of it can be cultivated. Thus it is a land of husbandry rather than of fields. With the land divided partly by the sea, it was all very natural and convenient for the Greeks to become seafarers and engage in sea transport, developing trade of all kinds with peoples far and near. Moreover, the land of Greece is the meeting-point of three continents: Asia Minor, Europe and North Africa. Trade and culture contacts had no doubt linked the Greeks closely with all those regions. The Greek civilization was thus conveniently built on the blending of various elements, especially Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Minoan cultures. Many other ancients were basically farmers who bend on their land year after year and more or less in isolation.

Prehistoric Painting and Sculpture(Paleolithic Age, before 8000 BC)

In the caves of southern France & northern Spain, we see the birth of art at the Stone Age. The first example of cave painting was discovered in 1879 in the Altamira caves (阿尔塔米拉洞窟) of northern Spain(Fig. 1-4). An amateur archeologist (Marcelino de Sautuola, 马尔塞利诺·德·绍图奥拉) took his young daughter with him to explore the caves located within their own property. He had found some odd-looking tools in the area, so he thought they could find

more inside the cave. Because the cave was so full of debris accumulated over thousands of years, the father was busy digging to uncover relics while his daughter was free to walk around. One day she entered a great hall of the cave and was surprised to see pictures of animals on the ceiling. The father was delightful, for he believed they were a very ancient art. But when he announced this amazing find to scientists, he was met with disbelief. What is more, at the Lisbon Congress on Pre-historic Archeology in 1880, archeologists officially dismissed these paintings as forgeries.



Fig. 1-4 *Bison*, c. 14000 BC—12000 BC. Detail of a painted ceiling in the Altamira cave, approx. 244 cm long. Santander, Northern Spain.

It was not until cave after cave of similar paintings were discovered elsewhere in northern Spain and southern France that archeologists began to reconsider. With careful examinations they noticed that some of these cave paintings were partially covered by calcium deposits (钙质沉淀物). Scientists knew that these deposits took thousands of years to grow, to accumulate over the painting. Eventually everyone realized that these paintings were the world's oldest known art, and that they probably had been made by people who lived at the end of the last glacial age. The discovery greatly influenced the development of Modern art. It is also a great impact on our ideas of world history, on our idea of art—what is art. The most recent discovery is the Chauvet Cave (法国萧韦岩洞) in southern France in 1994. We may expect more of them to be discovered and more secrets to be revealed.

So far the best cave paintings are those found in the caves at Lascaux (拉斯科洞窟壁画, Fig. 1-5) in southern France. It was discovered in 1940. They have survived more than 15000 years in a dry environment. As in the caves of Spain, the Lascaux cave paintings are almost exclusively of animals—bison, mammoths, reindeer, horses, cows, and bears. Humans are only rarely represented. The cave mouths are found to be living quarters of Stone Age humans. But the paintings were painted deep inside the caves. Some of them are very difficult to reach. So we can be sure that the paintings were generally not used as ornaments. Probably they were done for some magical or religious purposes.



Fig. 1-5 *Hall of Bulls*, c. 15000 BC—13000 BC. Paint on limestone, approximately life size. Lascaux caves, Southern France.

The figures are drawn naturalistically. Lifelike representations were preferred to abstract patterns (Fig. 1-6). Judging the quality of the work, we can say with confidence that the cave painting was done by professionals. Indeed, it is likely that art was the first of the human professions. However, they are not proportionately related. They are of different sizes and

often painted on top of one another. The arrangement on the cave walls shows little concern for any consistency of placement in relationship to each other or to the wall space. And there is no setting, no landscape. No intention is shown to achieve some unified composition nor to suggest the perspective effect. It seems that the painting of a single figure in itself fulfilled the purpose of the artist. The hunter-artists made frequent and skillful use of the naturally irregular surfaces of the walls, utilizing projections, recessions, fissures, and ridges to help give the illusion of real presence to their forms (Fig. 1-7).



Fig. 1-6 Detail of a Bull, c. 15000 BC—13000 BC. Paint on limestone, approximately life size. Lascaux caves, Southern France.



Fig. 1-7 Paintings from the so-called Axial gallery, c. 15000 BC—13000 BC. Paint on limestone, approximately life size. Lascaux caves, Southern France.

The images were drawn with chunks of red and yellow ocher that were mixed with something like animal fat as a medium. Many flat stones have been discovered that served as palettes for mixing colors. From these paintings we may see that color was already a particularly important element of art. Color was apparently enjoyed and appreciated by the stone-age people who seemed to have used six colors: chalk white, ocher earth, brown earth, red earth, violet earth, smoke black. The six pigments were diluted in animal fat, using bowls and palettes of stone and crude horse-hair brushes. Unfortunately, once the caves were opened these paintings started deteriorating rapidly with moisture and carbondioxide exhaled by visitors. So the caves have been closed to

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Fig. 1-8 *Bison with Turned Head*, from la Madeleine, Dordogne (多尔多涅), France, c. 12000 BC. Reindeer horn, 10.5 cm long. Musée des Antiquités Nationales.

the general public since 1963.

Stone-age artists also have left us sculptures in stone, ivory, bone, and antler. Roughly contemporary to Altamira and Lascaux cave paintings are also bone carvings and rock-cut reliefs found in a cave at La Magdelaine (拉马德莱纳) in France. The *Bison with Turned Head* (Fig. 1-8) is a piece of carved reindeer horn with striking vitality and simplicity. The style may be related to paintings in the same cave. It shows a mature sense of three-D forms. Another sculpture illustrated here is a woman in a reclining position showing her large breasts and pubic triangle while her right arm is holding a bison horn, probably as a drinking cup (Fig. 1-9). It represents the female figure composed of a cluster of almost ball-like shapes. The anatomical exaggeration suggests that this and other similar statuettes served as fertility fetishes. Obviously the aim was not to show the female of the species, but rather the idea of female fecundity. In a way, the artist depicted not the woman, but rather the human fertility.



Fig. 1-9 *Woman Holding a Bison Horn*, from Lauscel, Dordogne, France, c. 23000 BC—20000 BC. Painted limestone, approx. 44 cm high. Musee A'quitaine, Bordeaux.

In the Neolithic age, human beings began to settle down in places with organized community or lived in villages. The most famous structure they left over is *megaliths* (巨石). Thousands of them have been found in France and England. They were often arranged in parallel rows and run for several miles. Their purpose was evidently religious and may have had to do with a cult of the dead or the worship of the sun. The total number of the Carnac menhirs (卡尔纳克竖石) is almost three thousand, arranged in parallel rows nearly 4000 meters long (Fig. 1-10). A small village has grown up around the menhirs.^① They are unhewn (未雕凿的)



Fig. 1-10 Alignment of menhirs, c. 4000 BC. Stone, 183—457 cm high. Carnac, Brittany, France.

① The word “menhir” is formed by two Celtic words; *men* meaning “stone” and *hir* meaning “long”.



Fig. 1-11 *Stonehenge*, c. 2000 BC. 29.5 m in diameter. Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire, England.

seems to have been a kind of astronomical observatory for the sun and the moon.

Art of the Ancient Mesopotamia

When humans first gave up their uncertain life of the hunter and gatherer for the more predictable and stable life of the farmer and herder, the change in human society was so fundamental that it justly has been called the Neolithic Revolution. This revolutionary change in the nature of daily life first occurred in Mesopotamia—a Greek word that means “the land between the rivers”. It is a marshy region between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in what is now Iraq. The land became an oasis—and the presumed setting for the biblical Garden of Eden. At about the same time that Egyptian culture developed in Egypt, Mesopotamian society began to flourish between 4000 BC and 3000 BC. There humankind first learned how to use the wheel and the plow, how to control floods and construct irrigation canals. Unlike Egypt, which was protected on all sides by sea and desert, Mesopotamian society was constantly threatened by



Fig. 1-12 Mesopotamian Administrative tablet with cylinder seal impression of a male figure, hunting dogs, and boars, 3100 BC—2900 BC. Clay, 5.3 cm high. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

or slightly shaped single stones (monoliths), indicating probably an important Neolithic religious center in what is now northern France. Sometimes they are arranged in a circle, such as the famous *Stonehenge* (巨石阵/索尔兹伯里石环, Fig. 1-11) located in the English county of Wiltshire (英国威尔特郡), which has been one of the most mysterious places on earth. Constructed anywhere from 3000 BC to 2000 BC, the stone monument

invasion. Perhaps this explains why stories told in much of its art are about the fighting.

Mesopotamians are credited also with the invention of writing in about 3300 BC. They developed schools, libraries, and written law. By about 5000 years ago, the Sumerian people (苏美尔人) of this region had developed a system of writing called *cuneiform* (楔形文字, Fig. 1-12), or wedge-shaped writing (write with a reed stylus on clay). Early writing was used primarily as a means of recording important events and storing economic information. In the city of Uruk (苏美尔时期的古城乌鲁克), the earliest inscribed clay tablets have been found in abundance. The tablet illustrated here most likely documents grain

distributed by a large temple, although the absence of verbs in early texts makes them difficult to interpret with certainty.

Apart from clay tablets, the writing also survived on stone cylinder seals (Fig. 1-13). The seals were rolled onto the clay as a signature. It consisted of a cylindrical piece of stone, usually about an inch or so in height, pierced for the attachment of a cord. Made of various colored stones, both hard and soft, such as rock crystal (水晶), agate (玛瑙), jasper (碧玉), lapis lazuli (天青石), marble (大理石), and alabaster (雪花膏石), seals were engraved with a design in intaglio (凹雕的



Fig. 1-13 Cylinder seal and impression: Hunting scene, 2250 BC—2150 BC, the Akkadian period. Chert (黑硅石), 2.8 cm high. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

图形), so that a raised pattern was left when the seal was rolled over soft clay. With this device, the Sumerians sealed, signed, and identified their letters and documents, which were written on clay tablets. Cylinder seals are important for the study of ancient Near Eastern art because many examples survive from all periods. They serve as a visual chronicle of changes in style and iconography. The seal impression illustrated here depicts an elderly male hunting an ibex (阿尔卑斯山的野山羊) in a mountain forest. The imagery is an early attempt to represent a landscape with a mythological and narrative subject unknown in Mesopotamian art.

The age and beard of the man with a crown suggest that he is probably the god of hunt and warrior Ninurta (尼努尔塔神) by his Akkadian name (阿卡得人之名). The Mesopotamian religion is the oldest recorded religion in history. It originated with the Sumerians, who later passed on their traditions to the Akkadians.^① This transmission of beliefs continued into the Babylonian age and beyond. Like the Greek pantheon that postdates them, the Sumerian gods and goddess took human forms, experiencing human emotions and holding their own family and social lives. With a polytheistic belief system, the Sumerians had incorporating vast numbers of gods and goddesses into their pantheon. Although they had human flaws, they were superior to humans in that they rested above them, controlling their lives at whim.

Understandably, at the heart of the Mesopotamian city was the temple or *ziggurat* (塔庙). Each city-state had its own patron god to whom a *ziggurat* was devoted for the worship and glorification. It was believed that this god owned the city and its inhabitants. And the god would rule over its domain according to the offerings and ceremonies committed to it. Among the greatest *ziggurats*

^① Historically, the Sumerians are the most energetic about their worship and the origination of their many gods. Unfortunately for today's scholars, the naming of the gods was so fluid and changing that the archaeological record is rather unclear on the details of the entire Mesopotamian pantheon. Often times three or four names were given to represent one figure. This increases the record of names, though not the number of gods, making the determination of specifics rather confusing. While they had hundreds of gods for the various intricacies of life, they had a powerful main pantheon of about 11 gods they relied upon for their objects of worship.