



Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
Preußischer Kulturbesitz

URUK

5 000 Jahre

MEGACITY

Berlin, den 15.11.2012

PRESS RELEASE

**Museumsinsel Berlin | Pergamonmuseum
Vorderasiatisches Museum – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin**

Venue: Pergamonmuseum, Vorderasiatisches Museum
Entrance: Am Kupfergraben, 10117 Berlin

Exhibition

“URUK – 5000 Years of the Megacity”

25 April 2013 to 8 September 2013, Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin
20 October 2013 to 21 April 2014, Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen, Mannheim

An exhibition presented by the Vorderasiatisches Museum – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, in conjunction with the Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen's Curt Engelhorn Foundation, the Orient Department of the German Archaeological Institute, and the German Oriental Society.

“URUK – 5000 Years of the Megacity”

Uruk is the first known city in human history. Its fame does not rest there: several enduring achievements of human civilization are associated with it.

The site of Uruk, now Warka, contains one of the largest city ruins in what was once southern Mesopotamia, now modern-day Iraq. The city that grew rapidly in the 4th millennium BCE had, by the start of the 3rd millennium, reached around 40,000 inhabitants and covered an area of 5.5 square kilometres. This effectively means that Uruk was the largest city in the entire ancient world for more than two thousand years. It was only surpassed in size in the 6th century BCE by Babylon.

Nowadays, Uruk is primarily known thanks to the Epic of Gilgamesh. The epic poem stands as one of the oldest in human history to have been preserved in manuscript form. Its main protagonist is Gilgamesh, king of Uruk. Not only does Gilgamesh venture forth into the world and embark on a series of adventures with his 'savage' companion, Enkidu, he even embarks on the quest for eternal life. The starting point for all his adventures is the city of Uruk itself, and Gilgamesh's name is forever inscribed in the annals of history for the wall he is said to have built around it.

The fact that the myths surrounding Uruk and its legendary king have endured over the millennia is an indication of the city's seminal importance for the ancient Near East as a whole. But we only gained a true insight into the real conditions that prevailed in the ancient Near-Eastern city when excavations, overseen by the German Oriental Society, commenced in Uruk-Warka in the winter of 1912/13.

In 1928 the precursor to today's German Research Foundation, the 'Notgemeinschaft der Deutschen Wissenschaften', resumed field research in Uruk. Since 1954, research at the site has been headed by the German Archaeological Institute (DAI). It aimed to make the site the centre of one of the key long-term archaeological endeavours in the Near East to be led by a German team.

Staff at the Vorderasiatisches Museum have been involved in research at the site virtually from the start. The presentation of finds and scholars'

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findings as already featured in the Vorderasiatisches Museum's permanent exhibition at the Pergamonmuseum is a testament of the enduring close collaboration between excavators on the ground and the 'museum archaeologists' here in Berlin.

One of the most striking aspects of their research is the fact that an urban culture evolved in Uruk as long ago as the late 4th millennium BCE, making it the first recorded in history. The city bore the hallmarks of ancient Near-Eastern culture, with evidence of architectural, religious, social, and cultural practices that came to define the next 3000 years of culture in Mesopotamia and the world beyond.

For instance, traces of a sophisticated commercial and administrative system have been found in Uruk. One of the most momentous innovations to have taken place in the city is without a doubt the development of the first form of writing known to humankind, the use of which spread from Uruk, a centre of supraregional significance, and became prevalent over a wide area.

The exhibition

This show, organized by the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin, and the Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen, Mannheim, is the first major exhibition to study the genesis and flourishing of the first city in the history of the world since excavations commenced in Uruk-Warka one hundred years ago.

The exhibition takes the Gilgamesh myth as its starting point. But it is not merely contented with depicting the origins of urban life in the city and the developments associated with it. The exhibition in fact goes one step further and uses a series of architectural structures and themed exhibition 'chapters' to illustrate how the origins of urban life subsequently evolved over the course of the next three millennia.

For the fact remains that even after the loss of political supremacy in the early 3rd millennium BCE, Uruk remained intact as a city—a city which was subsequently regarded and maintained as a valuable cultural and religious centre by most of the rulers that ruled over it from the surrounding Near-Eastern city states and empires.

Even in the Hellenistic world, the knowledge of Uruk's religious and cultural importance was not lost among the successors to Alexander the Great. As a result, under Seleucid rule, new monuments were erected in honour of the gods of the city Inanna/Ishtar and Anu, god of the heavens. In terms of their style and structure, these new monuments deliberately drew from architectural forms typical of ancient Near-Eastern temples.

The loans in the exhibition are spectacular. The Vorderasiatisches Museum and the Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen's Curt Engelhorn Foundation have joined forces with the Orient Department of the DAI, and the German Oriental Society. This close collaboration means that for the first time it is possible to unveil a comprehensive exhibition on the city, which reunites the excavation finds from Uruk-Warka that made their way to Germany after they were split up in a procedure that was customary at the time. These artefacts are not only preserved at Berlin's Vorderasiatisches Museum, many have since formed part of the DAI's Uruk-Warka collection, which is maintained by the University of Heidelberg.

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In addition, to further enhance the presentation of topics covered in the show, numerous important and valuable loans will also go on display, sent from major European museums, such as the Musée du Louvre in Paris, the British Museum in London and the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology in Oxford.

The show will also be enhanced by impressive digital reconstructions of both the ancient city's layout and several of its key monuments. These reconstructions have been produced by the DAI in collaboration with the German Aerospace Centre and the private firm :Artefacts, and are based on the archaeological findings from the site, geophysical surveys, and satellite images. The planned exhibition *Uruk – 5000 Years of the Megacity* gives visitors a once-in-a-lifetime chance to experience both the architecture and lived reality of inhabitants of the first city in the ancient Near East and to trace its development over the course of several millennia. In the process, the exhibition also lays bare all essential innovations for which Mesopotamia was renowned, many of which remain of great importance even today.

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