

If you enjoyed **Archaeology Uncovered: A Lagash Tavern**, keep an eye out for upcoming editions!

Archaeology of Identities in the
Mediterranean and Beyond, Spring
2023

Archaeology

Uncovered: A

Lagash Tavern

A Beginners Introduction to

The Ancient World

Julia Noriega

Long before our modern societies and even before the ancient societies of Greece, Egypt, the Maya, and others, Sumer emerged as the world's earliest known civilization consisting of social stratification, law, art, and religion.

Nestled in southern Mesopotamia, Sumer, located in modern day Iraq, emerged in the early Bronze Ages between the sixth and fifth millennium BC.

Ancient
Sumer



Modern
Iraq, Iran,
and Saudi
Arabia



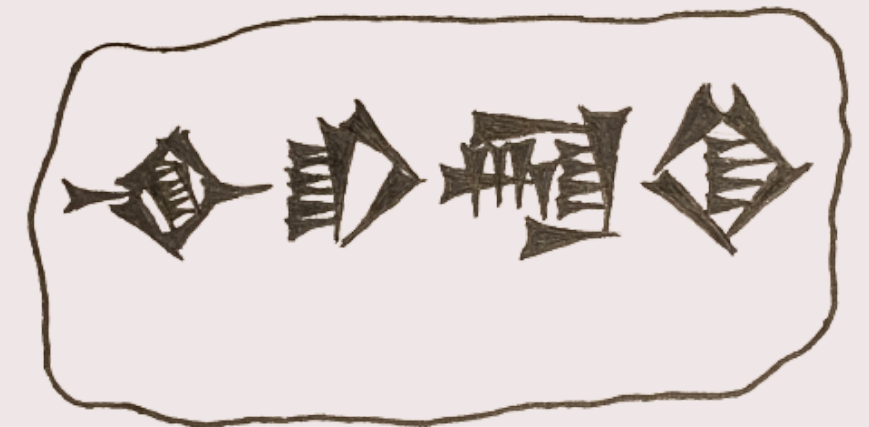
Like many ancient societies, Sumer is of great interest to archaeologists and other scholars who have uncovered a diverse array of artifacts that give us clues into the ancient culture.

Some of these archaeological clues include, giant temples called ziggurats, the first writing system - Cuneiform, and the Code of Hammurabi, which is one of our first examples of written law.

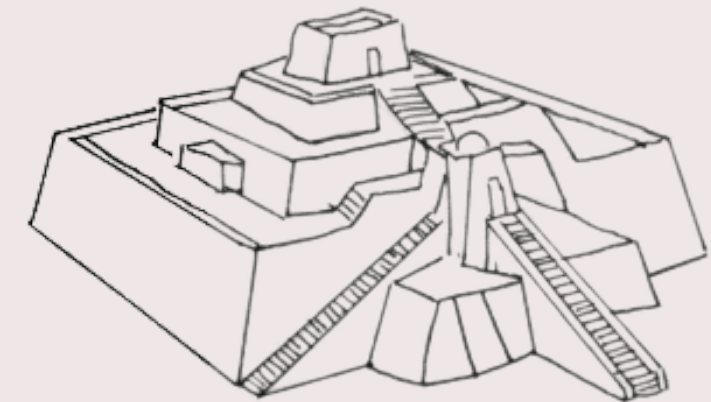
The Code of Hammurabi



**Cunefiorm Tablet
"Lagash"**

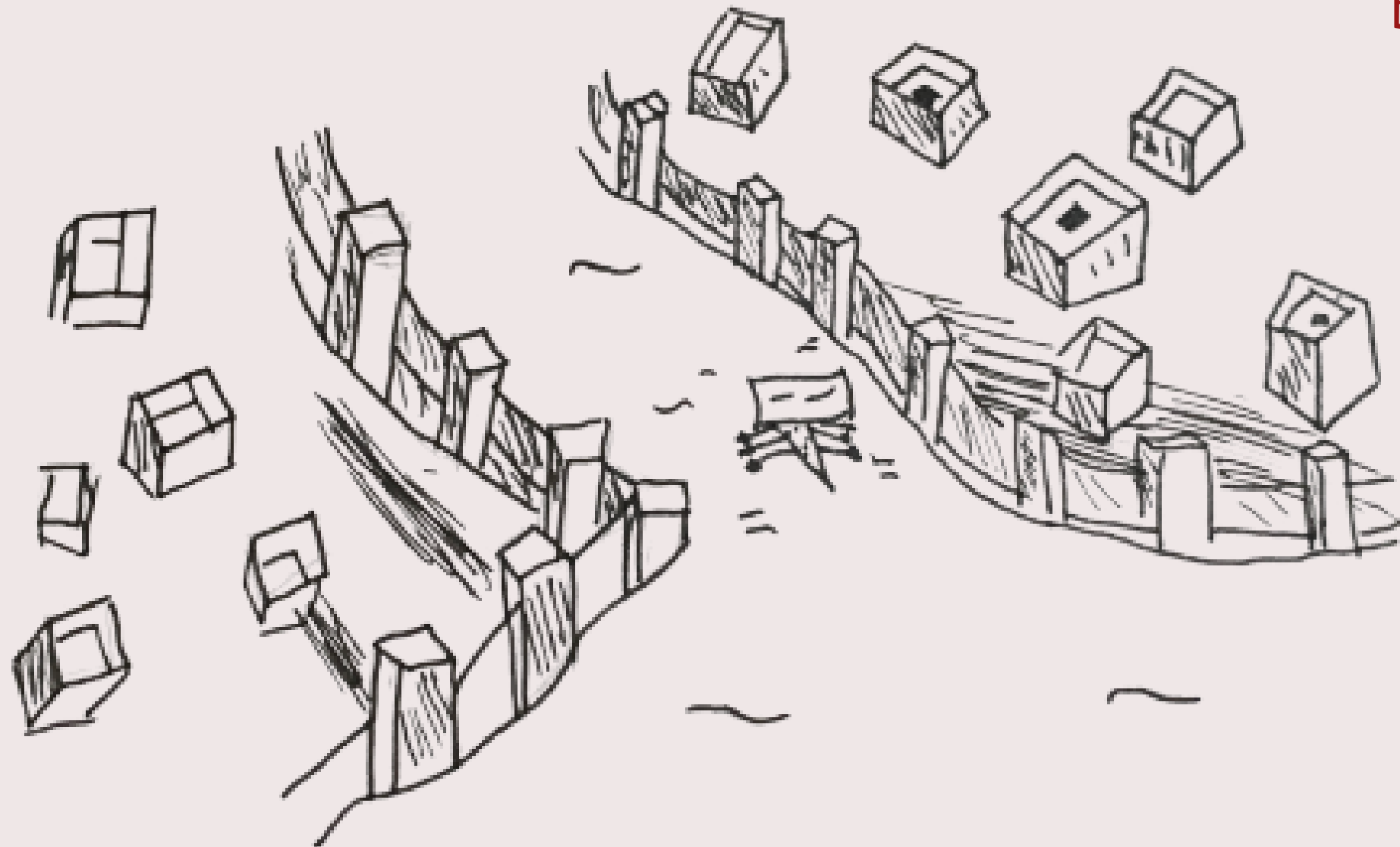


Ziggurat



Even with all of these interesting finds, Archaeologists are continuously curious about Sumer, especially as they have uncovered hubs of activity like the city state of Lagash.

Lagash is located in what is now modern Tall al Hiba, to the west of the Tigris river. At its height in the bronze age, despite now being a desert, the city state was once surrounded by a marsh and accessible by boat.



Like with many other sites of archaeological interest, there is a long standing legacy of excavation at Lagash with the first digs beginning in 1968.

This research was pursued in a joint effort by New York University and The Metropolitan Museum of Art and much of their excavation and interpretive efforts focused on elites and religious architecture.

Excavations with this goal lasted until 1990, when Holly Pitman, the site's current project director, joined the team. However, at this time, the Gulf War quickly ended excavation of the site.

Almost 20 years later, excavation at Lagash has been revitalized. Working together, the Penn Museum, Cambridge University, and the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage in Bagdad, along with a team of excavators began in 2019 to uncover ever more of the ancient city.

In the past four years of excavating, the new team has shifted their focus away from elites and is now interested in “investigating the urban social fabric [of] Lagash during the early dynastic period.”
(University of Pennsylvania)



From the early excavations...

In the most recent excavating venture, the new team has employed a variety of archaeological methods including....

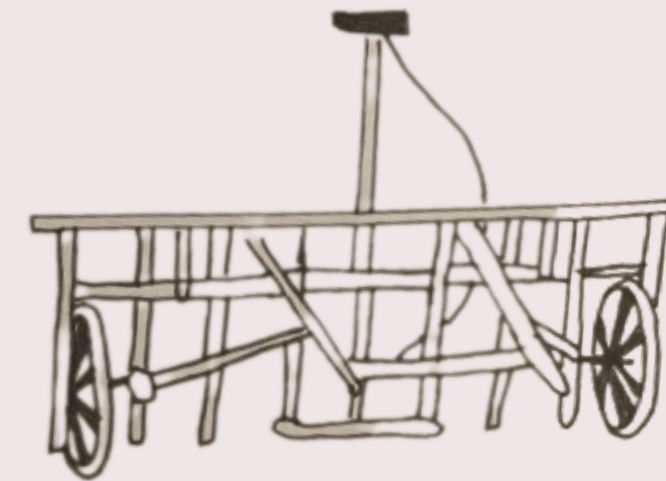
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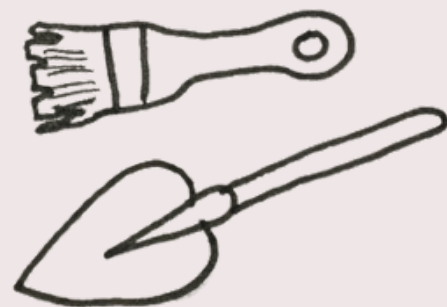
Mapping



Magnetometer



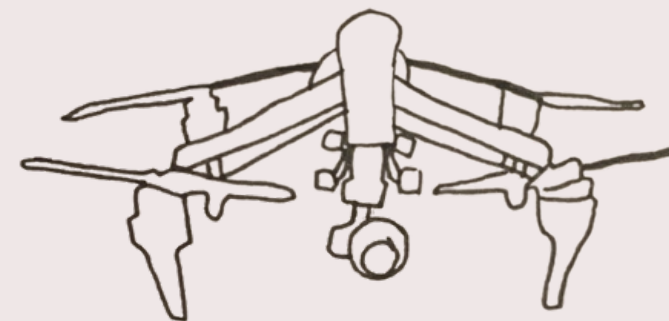
Excavating



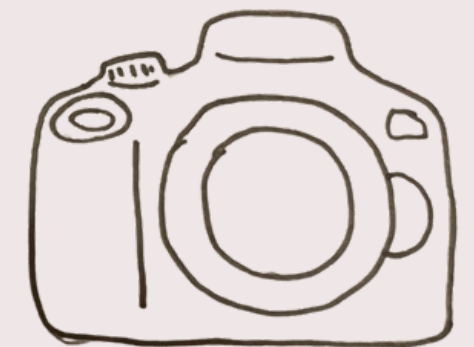
Coring



Drone

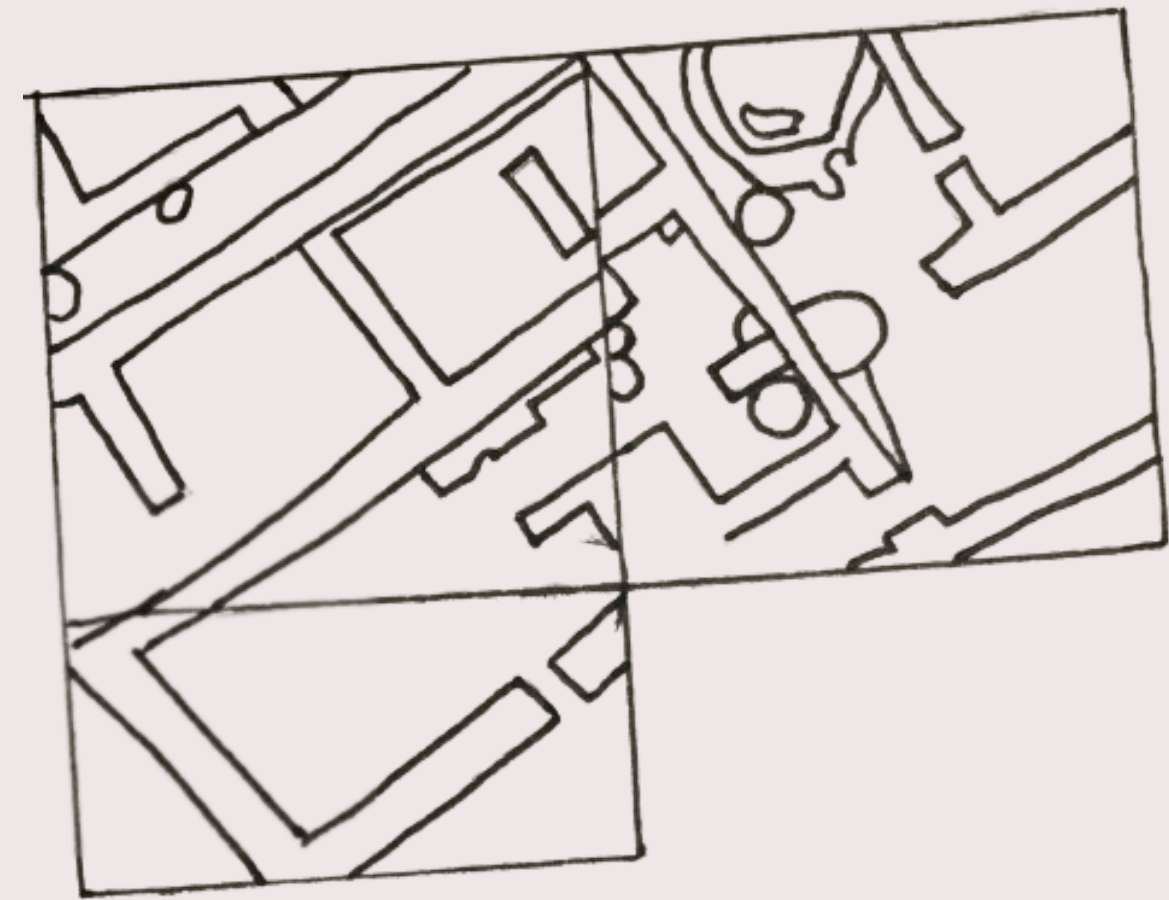


Photography



Using all of these archaeological techniques and with their goal of investigating urban Lagash, the team made an exciting discovery in the Fall of 2022!

After uncovering an interesting architectural structure in the prior seasons, archaeologists open trench 3 to excavate more of the structure. Despite continuing to excavate various other trenches, what they found in trench 3 has begun to dominate the news about the site.



Excavating in horizontal sections, layer by layer, the team quickly uncovered what seems to be a 7 room tavern or eatery.

As the team excavated these 7 rooms, they uncovered a variety of artifacts and structures that even we could commonly associate with a modern day restaurant.

These exciting discoveries included a massive mud brick oven, an ancient refrigerating system called a Zeer, as well as benches and hundreds of ceramic bowls and beakers still with their original contents of "food and drink with plentiful animal bones and organic residue."

(UPenn, 2022)



The Zeer is an ancient technology that utilizes a pot in a pot system to keep food and beverages cool. By placing clay, sand, and water in the space between the two pots, the materials in the interior pot are kept cool as the water evaporates in the warm air.



While this brick oven isn't an exact replica of what was found at the site, it is a cooking system that is incredibly familiar to us and is one of the features that assures archaeologists and the public that this was a place of cooking.



Strangely enough, these food bowls were found laying on the floor of the tavern. While it is likely that they ended up there after the degradation of the shelving or similar event, some believe that their being on the floor and the presence of food waste suggests that a sudden storm in the area might have led to them and to the rest of the site to be abandoned.

The presence of various kilns (found in other trenches) along with abundant pottery shards and ceramic material, has suggested to archaeologists that the tavern was situated in or around a pottery making district of Lagash. From this, they suspect that the craftsman and pottery makers surrounding the tavern would have been those most likely to enjoy its services.

However, because the tavern is such a recent discovery, it is hard to say for sure who would have visited.

With the opportunity to perform in depth analysis of the site, future archaeologists will be able to provide ever more detailed information about how the people of Lagash interacted with the tavern and about the socio-economic structuring of Lagash and Sumer as a whole.

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