

Lagash (Tello)

For over a century the Guti, hill-tribes of the eastern highland, dominated southern Mesopotamia after they had ruined the empire of Sargon. Long before Sargon, and again amidst the confusion caused in the land by the Guti invasion, a purely Sumerian city, Lagash (Tello), in close relation with Ur, Uruk, Adab, Fâra, acquired independence and power under its local rulers, *patesis* and kings, many of whom waged successful wars far afield. Strangely enough, Lagash is not included on the official lists among the royal cities of Sumer and Akkad. Nevertheless, the early rulers of Lagash before Sargon claimed the title of king and are known as the Dynasty of Urnina and his best-known successors, Eannatum, Entemena, Lugaland and Urukagina. Their artistic and monumental records belong to the older Sumerian school which follows the early dynastic period. The Stela of the Vultures (in the Louvre Museum) may compare with the Mosaic Standard of Ur. (There is a copy in the Babylonian Section of the University Museum.) On both, the Sumerian army is shown in battle array. But the technique is different. The mosaic work is the product of a more primitive art. The stela is a development of the small perforated plaques with reliefs on both sides. The registers are crowded with small and large figures, and full of minute, naturalistic and naïve details. The Semitic influence in the Sargonid period is characterized by simpler, clearly balanced compositions, vigorous relief and even a sense of perspective.

The revival of Sumerian art following Sargon is named the Gudea period after the *patesi* or high priest of Lagash, who restored the fortune of his city. His wonderful, life-size portrait statues, cut in the round in hard diorite, when discovered in 1877 by Ernest de Sarzec, French consul at Basra, established for the first time the antiquity and superiority of the Sumerian works of art, and they have provided the inspiration which led to many new expeditions at Nippur, Adab, Babylon, Uruk, Fâra, etc., before the First World War, and still more after. The pioneer work of Loftus (1849, 1853), Layard (1850-1), Fresnel and Oppert (1851), J. E. Taylor (1854) and Rawlinson (1854) failed to arouse public interest. It was reserved to the efforts and emulation of archaeologists in the last twenty years to discover the original Sumerian civilization of the fourth millennium.

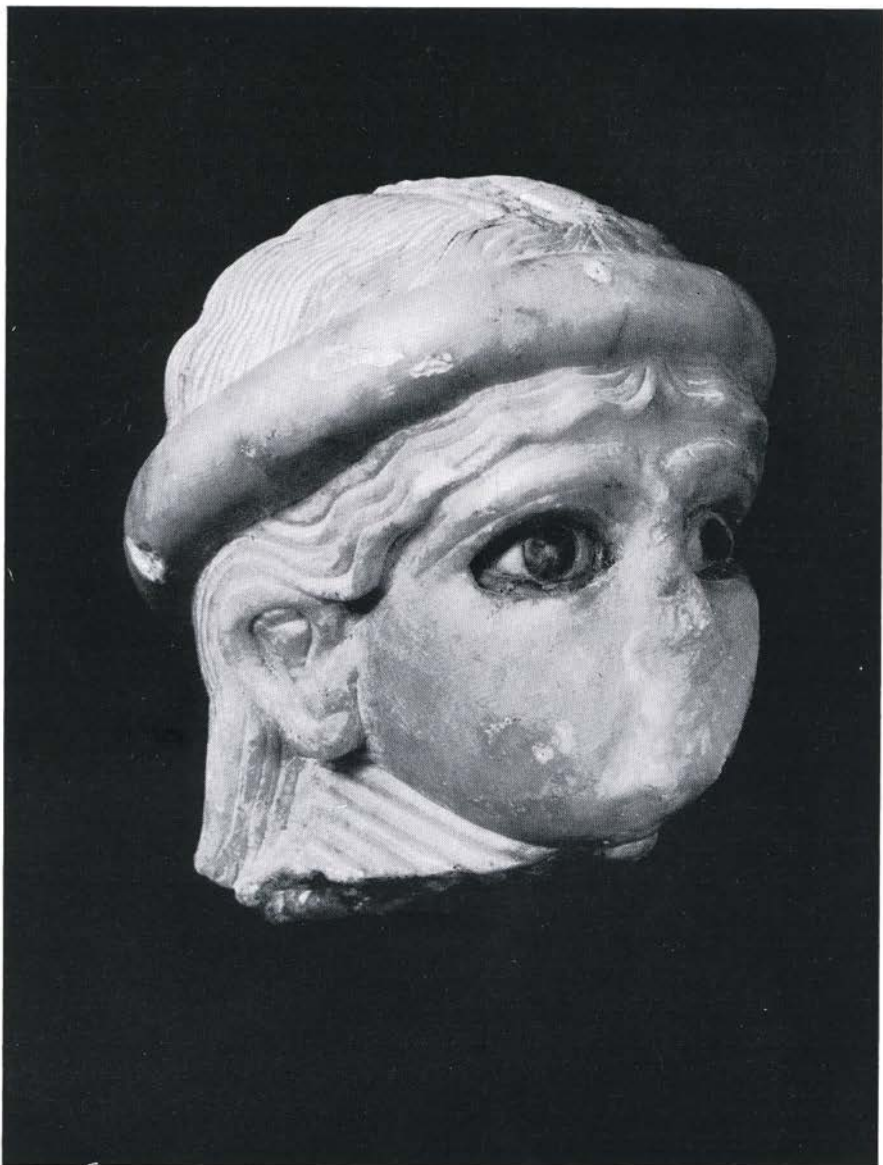


Figure 36. White marble head with inlaid eyes, Gudea Period, *circa* 2400 B.C.

The style of the Gudea period (*Figure 36*) is smooth and "classical" in contrast to the archaism of Urnina. Two small Gudea heads may be seen in the Babylonian Section. They are cut in grey-black diorite. The turbaned heads, with large open eyes, bushy eyebrows, straight nose, small mouth and round chin, are true to type. One was found at Nippur (*Figure 37*), the other comes from Lagash. The latter fits on a body now in the Baghdad Museum, which shows Gudea seated on a bench, in front of his god Ningishzida, according to the inscription engraved across his knees, and with hands clasped as becomes a worshipper. (cf. *Museum Journal*, September, 1927; *Bulletin*, May, 1937.) The Lagash head (*Figure 38*) was acquired by purchase. The Nippur head is a loan from the Philadelphia Museum of Art. (cf. L. Heuzey, *Découvertes en Chaldée*, 1884-1912.)



Figure 37. Head of Gudea found at Nippur. (Lent by the Philadelphia Museum of Art.)



Figure 38. Head of Gudea, patesi (prince) of Lagash. On the body, which is in the Baghdad Museum, is an inscription to his patron god