Emerging social complexities in Mesopotamia: the Chalcolithic in the Near East.
February 20, 2008
Neolithic in the Near East: early sites of socialization

"neolithic revolution": domestication of wheat, barley, sheep, goat: early settled communities (ca 10,000 to 6000 BC)
Mudding the world: Clay, mud and the technologies of everyday life in the prehistoric Near East

- **Pottery**: associated with settled life: storage, serving, prestige pots, decorated and undecorated.

- **Figurines**: objects of everyday, magical and cultic use. Ubiquitous for prehistoric societies especially. In clay and in stone.

- **Mud-brick** as architectural material: Leads to more structured architectural constructions, perhaps more rectilinear spaces.

- **Tokens, hollow clay balls, tablets and early writing technologies**: related to development of trade, tools of urban administration, increasing social complexity.

- **Architectural models**: whose function is not quite obvious to us. Maybe apotropaic, maybe for sale purposes?
“All objects of pottery... figments of potter's will, fictions of his memory and imagination.”

What is culture in "culture history" (1920s-1960s)?

Archaeological culture = a bounded and binding ethnic/cultural unit
within a defined geography and temporal/spatial “horizons”,
uniformly and unambiguously represented in the material culture,
manifested by artifactual assemblage.

pots=people?

• “Do cultures actually exist as real, empirical units to be discovered?”
Late Neolithic - Early Chalcolithic "cultures" in the Near East
Roaf 1990: 43
Early Chalcolithic "cultures" in the Near East: Halaf, Early Ubaid and others (6000-5400 BC)
Roaf 1990: 49
Chalcolithic "cultures" in Mesopotamia: Late Ubaid (5400-4200 BC)
A regional dispersal from Mesopotamia to Armenia and the Persian gulf
Roaf 1990: 53
body and architecture  poetics of construction
prehistoric figurines : an intimate world
"THE CHANGING FACE OF CLAY"

Colonization of northern and central Mesopotamia and spread of settlement to metal and obsidian sources.
Fusion of male/female productive life; growth of male status groups engaged in trade.

HASSUNA-SAMARRA-HALAF (6500-5000 cal BC)

- Hoe cultivation (rain-fed zone)
- Small-scale irrigation (south of rain-fed zone)
- Storage of surplus grain
- Pastoralism: cattle, sheep, goats
- Movement beyond village
- Acquisition and processing of exotic materials (ornaments, metal)
- Male symbolism and ritual
- Controlled ownership and inheritance (use of flint)
- Female symbolism and labour
- Food processing
- Decorated ceramics, textiles
- Production within village
Tell Hassuna, Hassuna period pottery jar, mid-7th millennium BC: lightly fired and quite porous. Decorated with herringbone patterns of lines, incised with a sharp instrument.

Tell Hassuna, Samarra period pottery bowl, late-7th-early 6th millennium BC: well fired and painted with a chocolate brown color with unique swirling designs of abstracted animal imagery.
Tell es Sawwan, Samarra period finds from children's graves, late 7th-early 6th millennium BC: alabaster figurine and veined alabaster vessels. Figurine with inlaid eyes with bitumen.
Halaf house
Halaf period pottery jar, mid-late 6th millennium BC (6000-5400 BC): polychrome bowls.
## Pre-Sargonic Period

- **2950-2750** Early Dynastic I
- **2750-2600** Early Dynastic II
- **2600-2350** Early Dynastic III

## Protoliterate Period

- **4000-3500** Early Uruk period
- **3500-3100** Late Uruk period
- **3100-2900** Jemdet Nasr period

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LATE 'UBAID (5000-4300 cal.BC)

Tripartite 'house'
as extended metaphor

storage
administration

food processing
pottery production

weaving
nurturing infants

hearth/altar

ritual
hospitality
exchange

household : workshop : office : shrine
Ubaid jar, mid-late 6th millennium BC (5000-4000 BC)
pottery technologies: evolution of simplicity