

From around 3400 B.C. settlements grew in size throughout southern Mesopotamia. The largest was the site of Uruk (called Unug in antiquity). At the center of the city, raised high on platforms, stood two areas of monumental mud-brick buildings. To the east lay the "White Temple." This area was later dedicated to the heaven god, Anu. To the west lay a complex of buildings. This region was later known as *E-anna*, "the house of heaven," where the fertility goddess, Inanna, was worshipped. Clay tablets had been thrown away in the foundation rubble of some monumental buildings. Pictographs and impressions drawn in the damp clay record the management of goods and the allocation of rations to workers and represent some of the world's earliest writing. During the early third millennium B.C., Uruk was surrounded by a massive wall. According to later tradition the wall was built on the orders of king Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh may have been an actual king of Uruk around 2700 B.C. He became the hero of many later stories and epics. From 1912, Uruk was excavated by German archaeologists

The technique of ornamenting facades with cone mosaics was known from the middle of the fourth millennium B.C., and by the end of the millennium had become a characteristic feature of monumental cult and palace architecture of the E-anna Precinct. Cones of baked clay or gypsum roughly ten centimeters long were pressed tightly together into a wall coated with a thick layer of wet plaster. The tops of the cones were usually painted black, red, or white. Larger unpainted clay or stone cones were also sometimes used. The decorative patterns produced consist of lozenges, triangles, straight, and zigzag bands. It is possible that these designs were based on wickerwork and textile patterns. The dominant decorative element in the mosaic fragment shown here is a pattern of stacked black triangles. This type of work was not simply decorative. Sheathing mud-brick outer walls and pillars with mosaics made of harder materials helped to minimize weathering from wind and water. Facades adorned with cone mosaics are found not only in Uruk in the Late Uruk period, but were common in other southern Mesopotamian cities, such as Ur and Eridu, as well as in Habuba Kabira on the central Euphrates.

Together with other artifacts, a large number of animal figures were discovered at Uruk and display considerable artistry and exquisite craftsmanship. Among them are figures of sheep, goats, cattle, lions, gazelles, fish, and birds. Apparently the statuettes were votive offerings to the goddess Inanna to ensure her continuing goodwill. Notable in this sculpture of a recumbent ram is the exquisite engraving of the coiled horns and the head. The silver pin projecting from its back supported an ornament, perhaps some symbol wrought in a precious metal. Animal figures could also be worn as amulets or used as handles on cylinder seals