

World Civilizations

Sources, Images, and Interpretations

Fourth Edition · Volume I

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God, and the LORD called him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him. And all the people answered together and said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do." And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD.

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20. And God spoke all these words saying, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

"You shall have no other gods before me.

"You shall not make yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

"You shall not kill.

"You shall not commit adultery.

"You shall not steal.

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his

maidservant; or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's."

Now when all the people perceived the thunderings and the lightnings and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled; and they stood afar off, and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die." And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to prove you, and that the fear of him may be before your eyes, that you may not sin."

The Aton Hymn and Psalm 104: The Egyptians and the Hebrews

Despite characteristics that made them unique in the area, Hebrews were connected to and influenced by the Egyptians in many ways. Geographically, Palestine served as a buffer zone between Egypt and the large kingdoms of Mesopotamia. Historically, the formative ordeal of Moses and the Exodus stemmed from Egypt. Less apparent but of great importance were connections between Hebrew and Egyptian religious concepts and forms of expression. The following comparison of selections from the Egyptian Aton Hymn, composed in the 14th century B.C.E. during the rule of Akhenaton (who attempted to change some traditional religious views), and Psalm 104 from the Old Testament, written six or seven centuries later, illustrates striking parallels between the two documents.

CONSIDER: How the similarities between these two excerpts might be explained.

THE ATON HYMN

When thou settest in
the western horizon,

The land is in darkness
like death . . .

Every lion comes forth
from his den;

All creeping things,
they sting.

At daybreak, when thou
arise in the horizon . . .

Thou drivest away the
darkness . . .

Men awake and stand
upon their feet . . .

PSALM 104

Thou makest darkness
and it is night,

Wherein all the beasts of
the forest creep forth.

The young lions roar
after their prey.

The sun ariseth, they get
them away . . .

SOURCE: Reprinted from *The Burden of Egypt* by John A. Wilson by permission of The University of Chicago Press. Copyright © 1951, p. 227.

All the world, they do
their labor.

How manifold are
thy works!

They are hidden from
man's sight.

Man goeth forth unto
his work,

And to his labor until
the evening.

O Jahweh, how manifold
are thy works!

O sole god, like whom
there is no other,

Thou hast made the
earth according to
thy desire.

In wisdom has thou
made them all;

The earth is full of
thy riches.

VISUAL SOURCES

Using Visual Sources: The "Royal Standard" of Ur

Visual sources are briefly defined and discussed in the Preface. What follows is a more specific guide to the use of visual sources, focusing on our first visual source, *The "Royal Standard" of Ur*, which immediately follows as an example.

1. Try to look at visual sources as if they were written, primary documents. As with primary documents, assume that you are a historian who knows very little about the history of Sumer and discovers this visual source, *The "Royal Standard" of Ur*. Your goal is to try to "read" it as evidence to support some conclusions about Sumerian civilization.

Without some guidance, "reading" a visual source as historical evidence is more difficult than using a written source. The reproduction makes the details harder to see and most people are not used to looking at a picture in this analytical way. Therefore, in the first paragraph of the headnote to *The "Royal Standard" of Ur* there is a description that puts into words what appears in the visual source. In the second paragraph there is an analysis of the evidence drawn from the photo. Here, as with most visual sources, it is useful to go back and forth between the photo and the written description and analysis that accompany the illustration.

2. As with primary documents, think of questions as you look at the visual source and as you read the

Sumer: The "Royal Standard" of Ur

This piece of art—made of shell, lapis lazuli, and red stone inlaid on the sides of a wooden box and found in a grave dating around 2700 B.C.E.—illustrates two aspects of Sumerian life: war and peace. In the bottom line of the first panel, reading from left to right, a wooden chariot charges the enemy and

written guide to it. The general question to keep in mind is, "What does this tell me about this civilization, about how people behaved, how they thought, or what they believed?" Other questions are suggested in the "consider" points, such as what information the artist might have been attempting to convey to the viewer.

3. Here the first panel shows the Sumerians at war. The headnote alerts us to "read" this three-line panel from bottom to top, for that is how the Sumerian artist intended it to be viewed. With the aid of the headnote we can see the chariot charging the enemy, then the infantry, and finally the captives being led to the victorious king.

The second panel shows the Sumerians at peace. Again reading from bottom to top, we can see this society organizing in preparation for a banquet and then the banquet itself.

The second paragraph suggests some of the ways the information derived from *The "Royal Standard" of Ur* can be used as historical evidence that Ur in Sumer was a well-organized society with centralized political control, a society that at least by 2700 B.C.E. had mastered the use of various domesticated animals, tools, and instruments.

4. Now pull back and consider the source as a whole. Why might the artist have chosen to depict these scenes? What might be made of the lack of individualized differences in the figures? In what ways might a similar sort of decoration be made today and what might such a set of scenes depict?

knocks him over. In the second line the infantry, with protective cloaks, helmets, and short spears, captures and leads off the enemy. In the third line soldiers on the right lead captives to the king in the center. The king, who has just alighted from his attended chariot on the left, towers over the rest. In the second panel the fruits of victory or of peace are enjoyed, at