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AP Art History 2B

Essay 2

### Ancient Near East and Ancient Egypt

The Ancient Near East and Ancient Egypt utilized narrative in their art to present a specific message. The Judgment before Osiris (1,300 BCE) and the Standard of Ur (2,500 BCE) are two great examples from both of these time periods to compare and contrast the use of narrative and the specific message that they were trying to convey.

The Standard of Ur has two sides: one representing peace, and the other representing war. Both sides are divided by a band to show a narrative that is taking place. The War Side shows the Sumerians trampling over their enemies as they march with their war chariots. There are numerous soldiers that are capturing and destroying their enemies as they pass. They utilized narrative to show how powerful they are in conquering and controlling their enemies and anyone else standing in their way.

On the other hand, the Peace Side shows people carrying food and animals to a banquet. The food is being brought to a king-like figure which is easily depicted as the biggest person in contrast to everyone else. The War Side has a similar person as well that is bigger in size where the head breaks the border. The use of hierarchical scale points out the most important person and defines them as the one who holds great power compared to everyone else that is underneath them. The king-like figure radiates power for being bigger than everyone else and also because he is able to have so many resources at hand.

Lapis lazuli, an intense and rare blue crystal, covers the background for both sides of the Standard of Ur. This intense blue crystal was indeed rare to find, yet the Sumerians were able to obtain a great amount of it in order to cover the entire background of this art piece. To have lapis lazuli at their disposal indicates that their kingdom was indeed a powerful one. Not only were they able to find lapis lazuli, but they were able to obtain such a great amount of it. The Standard of Ur gives off the impression that the Sumerian people were powerful enough to have access to their resources. The Standard of Ur shows how powerful the Sumerians were as they conquered their enemies with the valuable resources that they had.

The Ancient Egyptians, however, did not focus on power, but the afterlife. The Judgment before Osiris is part of the book of dead which contains spells and charms to guide the deceased through countless trials to obtain eternal life in the afterworld. Osiris, the god of the Underworld, is depicted as being green to show that he is dead. He sits on his throne as a judge, awaiting those who pass the trials to grant them the eternal life that they seek.

One of the trials that everyone must face is the scale that weighs one's heart with the feather of truth. If the heart weighs more than the feather, the hybrid animal Ammit would devour the heart and one would cease to exist. If the heart balanced the feather of truth, one would pass the test. By living a truthful and honest life, one's heart would be balanced with the feather, and would then be able to pass the test. It was important to live life as a good person so that when death came and the people had to face the scale, their heart would be balanced with the feather and they would then be granted to live eternity in the afterlife.

The Judgment before Osiris shows a man being lead by a human-animal hybrid through trials that will determine whether or not he is worthy of being in the afterlife. The man is repeated twice to show that this is a narrative and also to indicate that he passed the trial. By

doing so, he is led to Osiris who then grants him eternity in the afterworld. The way one lived their life before death determines if they are worthy of meeting Osiris. One's actions determined their fate after death in the afterlife.

The Ancient Near East used narrative to relay the message of the power that they possessed as their army defeated and conquered their enemies. On the other, Ancient Egypt did not utilize narrative for the purpose of conveying how powerful they were as a kingdom. They used it as a guide that would help them prepare for the trials in the afterlife that awaited them after death.