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ДРЕВНИЙ МИР (Глубь времен). Открытия и откровения

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Аннотация. Целью данной статьи при всей компактности изложения является системный обзор ведущих тенденций мировой художественной культуры на стадии Древнего мира. основополагающие позиции предлагаемого рассмотрения формулируются следующим образом: сотворение мира, сотворение человека и сотворение искусства как такового. Материалом изучения становятся такие значительные явления, как представленные в огромной массе наскальные изображения и исходные опыты в скульптурной пластике, причём кардинальной проблемой оказывается движение от анималистических изображений к изображению человека. В древнем зодчестве определяющим моментом становится выдвигание геометризма как технической и эстетической категории. В словесности важнейшие эволюционные процессы были связаны с постепенным переходом от воспеваания богов к воссозданию образов людей. В ходе становления человеческого общества фундаментальной акцией явилось формирование ранних цивилизаций, что находило своё выражение в соответствующем уровне художественного мышления, в утверждении развитой эмоциональной сферы, в качественно ином характере отношения человека к природе.

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ANCIENT WORLD: The depth of time. Discoveries and revelations

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Abstract. The aim of the paper, despite its concise form of presentation, is to provide a systematic review of the leading trends in world art culture at the stage of the Ancient World. The fundamental positions of the proposed consideration are formulated as follows: the creation of the world, the creation of man, and the creation of art in general. Such significant phenomena as a large number of rock carvings and initial attempts at sculptural plastic arts serve as the research material, moreover, the movement from animalistic images to man's images turns out to be a crucial issue. In ancient architecture, the defining moment is the promotion of geometrism as a technical and aesthetic category. In literature, the most important evolutionary processes were associated with a gradual transition from glorifying the gods to recreating images of people. In the course of the establishment of human society, the fundamental action was the formation of early civilizations, which found its expression in the appropriate level of artistic thinking, in the assertion of a developed emotional sphere, in a qualitatively different character of man's attitude to nature.

If we proceed from the generally accepted chronological concepts of *Anno Domini* and *before Christ* (or *before the birth of Christ*), then the Antiquity began about a millennium before the birth of Christ and *the Ancient World* was before the Antiquity.

The above-mentioned division implies the Greco-Roman Antiquity as a starting point. In this regard, certain reservations are necessary. For example, even in the territories of early civilizations of the Middle East (Mesopotamia and Egypt), the traditions of the Antiquity continued to develop for much of the first millennium BC.

If we imagine the culture of pre-Columbian America, a similar situation was kept there at least until the beginning of the 16th century AD. And moreover, on the main part of the African continent (apart from the Northern regions), save for the dispersed centers of civilization, atavisms of primitiveness still existed almost until the 20th century. The same situation was observed in numerous tribes of Oceania and Australia.

In the next exposition, we will inevitably have to abstract away from such exceptional temporal uncertainty of the process of evolution and outline the artistic culture of the Ancient World not taking into consideration local features and details.

Let us start this exposition with an axiom: the main subject of art of all historical periods is *man*. The art of the Ancient World had its own turn of this theme – *the creation of man*. Moreover, the creation of man was for the art of those times often inextricably connected with *the creation of the world*.

In this case, we base ourselves upon *mythology*, as it is the original, the earliest form of verbal art. It is worthy of note that mythology reveals not only the origins of the world and the origin of the human race, it enters deeper, telling about what was *before* the creation of the world *at the beginning of time*. According to a number of pre-historic legends, all of creation comes to a single and all-inclusive *thing*.

Gradually some sort of matter called *chaos* emerges. It is a world abyss or primordial waters, an immense formless space. Dark blind chaos becomes the womb in which the world was born.

According to some myths, out of the chaos the gods came who created the sky and hosts of heaven, the earth and the landscape, people, animals and plants. It is astounding that according to many mythological sources, people appeared before plants and animals. If this is anything to go by, man put himself first in the world.

The origin of the world is most clearly represented at the beginning of the Bible – in **the Old Testament**, which is based on the oldest mythological ideas of the ancient Jews – the so-called seven days of creation.

It is a striking fact that with all variety of versions among many nations, the creation of the world is described approximately in the same way. In general, there are many coincidences on various episodes of the prehistoric past. One of these coincidences is **the myth about the Flood**, which existed in Mesopotamia, among the ancient Jews, in Greece and in other countries.

However, if the Flood happened to man (even if he is the only survivor of our ancestors), then in fact, a number of events of the Ancient World described in myths happened before his appearance on earth.

Here something mysterious, unexplainable starts. According to scientific hypotheses, our planet formed around 4.5 billion years ago as a result of gravitational condensation of gas-dust matter dispersed in the solar space. Over time, the Earth cooled and after around 2.5 billion years, the life was born. About 2 million years ago, there appeared humans and only about 40 thousand years ago, they gained their present form (*Homo sapiens*).

For comparison, we can quote the calculations of one of the leading modern authorities on the problem of evolution of life on Earth (Nobel laureate Ch. De Duve). The Earth formed 10 billion years ago, the first bacteria appeared 6.5 billion years ago, the first cells – 5.5 billion years ago, fungi appeared 4.5 billion years ago, the animal world began to form 600 million years ago, primates appeared 70 million years ago, chimpanzees – 6 million years ago, humans split from the chimpanzee 200 thousand years ago.

In any case, whichever version we would choose, there arises the question: how might this “infant” (in comparison with the age of the Earth and with the eternity of the Universe) be able to guess and represent in his myths something that existed for a long time before his appearance and before the origin of life itself?! If this is not divine providence, then one must admit that the Earth and the Universe have transmitted such transcendent memory to man – for he is ultimately their product.

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So the world was created and then man appeared. Further artistic monuments show incredibly long, difficult and complex process of *the creation of man* – man in the true meaning of this word.

The birth of art is considered one of the signs of humanization of people. It happened about 30-40 thousand years ago at the stage of the Late Paleolithic. The first traces of art can be found in the most archaic myths as well in the most ancient sculptures and rock paintings.

According to them, people did not distinguish themselves from the natural environment for a long time. The primitive man saw the world around him but he hardly noticed himself. His attention was predominantly focused on objects of hunting.

Therefore, at the initial stage of development of art, the proportion of human images is so negligible and the image of animals (bison, deer, mammoths, rhinos, cave lions and bears, wild horses, wild boars) reached such an exceptional level of mastery.

The most well-known rock paintings impress by the immediacy of vivid perception of nature, perfection of performance, accuracy of observation and presentation of the anatomic structure, the ability to show the uniqueness of the appearance and characteristic posture of an animal. An audacious energetic stroke and large spots of two or three colors – this is the minimum range of means that brought our ancestors amazing results.



Illustration 01. Female bison (the ceiling of Altamira Cave)

Some of these images may be misinterpreted as modern painting. It is no coincidence that such important positions were taken by primitivism in the 20th century. It is an artistic movement that restored at some historical turn certain features and principles of *primitivism* of ancient times (it is clear that primitivism is a purely conditional concept that characterizes the signs of the earliest stage of art development).

Coming from the primitive art, the cult of animals manifested itself many millennia later: in the days of the first civilizations and in the Antiquity and later in some regions (for example, the last rock paintings in Africa belong to the 17th century AD).

Among such phenomena, the so-called *animal style* is of great interest. In its most distinct form, it appeared in the art of Scythians in the 7th – 5th centuries BC. Their artistic creativity had applicable nature: decoration of weapons (often made of gold), clothing, utensils, horse harnesses. Figurines of animals were arranged in relation to the form of the thing that they decorated. Casting, engraving on metal, wood and bone carving were the techniques used.

Though these images had applicable nature, they were distinct in vivid imaginary and strong expression. They were distinguished by their exceptional laconism and by emphasized dynamism (muscular tension was shown and it often led to the illusion of rapid running).

It is extremely curious that the stylized features of the image in animal style anticipate in some way the cubism of the early 20th century: the “disintegration” of the figure into components, ribbed edges of casting.



Illustration 02. Gold plaque with a panther (Scythian art)

The preceding exposition leads to the following conclusion: the art of the Ancient World recorded a long stage of the mergence of the man with the animal world. This happened not only because animals were objects of hunting but most of all because the man still had very much from the animal.

He seemed to feel like he was in the form of a beast imitating it. It is no accident that many animals were considered sacred and were believed to be people's ancestors.

However, gradually people began to *divide themselves* from nature. There was a kind of growing of the human principle from natural forms. In the artistic imagination, there appears a curious phenomenon of *zoo-anthropomorphous beings*, i.e., fantastic hybrids of an animal (*zoo-*) and a man (*anthropo-*).

Such artistic experiments were carried out in primitive times. The most widespread image was one of an animal with a human head, which represented the mind, as if it was growing out of an animal body. The most famous example is the Egyptian Sphinx: a lion with a human head. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that most often it was not just a man's head in general but a portrait head of the Pharaoh.

In such images, one can feel the desire of our ancient ancestor to find something human, reasonable, but without losing the primordial natural force. This aspiration was fully presented in later statues of the Mesopotamian lamassu (shedū).

Lamassu is a fantastic winged bull with a human head, which was a kind of ideal of an ancient man. These huge stone figures embodied the supernatural abilities of a living being:

- the body of an animal as the embodiment of a powerful force;
- the wings of a bird as the ability to fly;
- the human head as the embodiment of the mind.

Over time, the man begins to *separate* from nature; sometimes he places himself in opposition to it. He overcomes the animal in his nature, and this is reflected in mythology as follows: the animal is now perceived as something evil, negative (all kinds of dragons, serpents and other monsters), and the human – as something good, positive. Myths about struggle between heroes and monsters appeared in those times.

Something similar can be found in pictorial arts. Hunting scenes where people confidently prevailed over any animal, no matter how terrible and strong it was, were shown more often. This tendency is most clearly represented in Assyrian reliefs.

It should be noted that the first of these subjects, marking the victory of man over nature, appeared in the era of rock paintings not during the Paleolithic period but in the Neolithic Era (about the 8th millennium BC when farming and cattle breeding emerged).

For example, in hunting scenes, confrontation between man and the animal world is clearly transmitted – in the composition, the idea of “confrontation” is embodied by a clear arrangement of two flanks: a herd of animals and figures of people with bows are turned in opposite directions.



Illustration 03. *Lamassu from the citadel of Sargon II (Assyria)*

Drawings of this kind belong to a much later time than those noted at the beginning. One thing immediately catches the eye: they compare poorly with the early cave paintings of prehistoric art in terms of stunning landscapes, they are clearly inferior to them in artistic power.

However, at heavy cost, some new qualities were acquired:

- first, in the rock paintings of the initial stage, only single, individual figures were almost always depicted, and now we see the desire to link several images, to create a multi-figure composition;
- secondly, there appeared a sense of motion, the newfound ability to show action, event, story;
- and, perhaps it is the most important thing – having lost the immediacy of the acceptance of living nature, art has acquired the ability to generalize, it gains such a quality of artistic imagery as convention.

Moving from picturesqueness to almost deliberate graphics, schematization of the image, the primitive artist mastered the concepts of straight and curved lines, circles, squares, triangles, and so on. Therefore, the art entered the necessary stage of geometrism, which meant the transition to abstract forms of thinking.

Geometrism (both technical and aesthetic category) with its clarity, orderliness, rationalism was opposed to the spontaneity and randomness of natural forms. With the greatest consistency, its principles declared themselves in the emergence of architecture. It began, of course, with the construction of dwellings.

The oldest houses (in the modern sense), which have become a permanent habitat, belong to the 7th millennium BC. The excavations in Jericho (the territory of modern Jordan) and Catal Huyuk (the territory of modern Turkey) provide evidence of this. They were built with air-dried clay bricks.

The house became a symbol of the man who separated himself from nature, who found his place in the Universe. In the course of the development of ancient architecture based on further elaboration of dwelling design, there appeared such buildings as a palace and a temple.

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The idea of a temple as the home of gods, probably, first originated and was implemented in Mesopotamia (there, according to many scientists, at the turn of the 3rd millennium BC the oldest state on Earth – Sumer – appeared). This kind of a temple was called *the ziggurat*. Mesopotamian architects used a stepped design to make their deities higher.

The base of the temple was a rectangular platform. Several tiers rose above it, and a small temple lined with tiles crowned them. Stairs connected the tiers, and ramps led from the ground to the main entrance at the top.

Even in ruin, such temples make a great impression. They seem to grow from the desert soil, proudly rising above it, opposed to the natural environment with its solidity, the beauty of clear lines, forms.

The number of tiers in ziggurats varied from three to seven. The ziggurat built in Babylon had seven tiers (the legendary tower of Babel). They rose to a height of 90 meters, so that the top of the temple was visible from any point of the city.

In this multistage design, the principle of geometrism is clearly expressed: the gradually decreasing parallelepipeds put on each other is an architectural idea systematically sustained from the beginning to the end (by the way, in this form, the ziggurat anticipated mausoleums, which would be erected since Antiquity).

Apparently, the experience of the builders of Mesopotamian ziggurats had an impact on Egyptian architecture with its culmination in the famous pyramids. One only needs to look at the earliest of them: the pyramid of Pharaoh Djoser (the 28th century BC). Now it is almost a ruin, but at its time, the pyramid consisted of seven tiers.

With all the transitional nature (the evolution from the ziggurat to the pyramid), this architectural experience allowed us to formulate two important points:

- first, the main material of Egyptian architecture is now stone, and the pyramid of Djoser is the first *stone* building (before that they used wood, clay, bricks);
- secondly, from now on the building began to grow rapidly up, there appeared a concept of verticalism (the height of the pyramid was over 60 m).

The pyramid of Djoser opened the way to the creation of a perfect, complete type of such construction, which reached its highest point in the ensemble of the pyramids in Giza (now a suburb of Cairo) – the so-called Great Pyramids (the pyramid of Khufu and the pyramids of his successors Khafre and Menkaure, 27th – 26th centuries BC). An architectural ensemble surrounded each pyramid: the small pyramids of queens, mortuary temples, monumental gates, tombs of Pharaoh's relatives, chapels, Pharaoh's statues, sphinxes.

The most grandiose of the buildings of this type is the pyramid of Khufu; nowadays it is time-eaten. It is still the largest stone structure in the world (its height is about 150 meters; its length of one side of the base is 233 meters). The pyramid was built with limestone casing stones, each weighing from 2.5 to 30 tons. 2.5 million stones were used in the construction of the pyramid.

Since the pyramids functioned as tombs (the tomb of the Pharaoh is a dwelling intended for his posthumous life), they were tightly bricked, and due to this, they were completely closed solid buildings.

Thus, the tendency towards geometrism was clearly expressed in the construction of pyramids. Immaculate in form, based on a very precise and complex mathematical calculation (among other things, it gave a hard-to-explain effect of preservation of mummified remains), the pyramids became a unique creation of ancient man.

Their colossal mass of stone with a strictly rational design (as a kind of ideal of abstract thinking) majestically rose above the surrounding desert, clearly standing out against the sky. It embodied the aspiration up over *the chaos* and become a symbol of the exaltation of mind and labor over the elements of nature at the dawn of human history.

It was the greatest act of self-affirmation of *Homo sapiens*, and behind it, in the end, there was a grandiose all-human idea: Egypt, as the most powerful of the oldest civilizations, erected an incomparable monument to humanity at the historical moment of its exit from the primordial existence, at the dawn of its meaningful existence, as represented by the pyramids.



Illustration 04. *The pyramids of Giza (Egypt)*

And the last thing about the creation of man. For a long time, the divine was determinative for the art system of the Ancient World, but *images of people* are increasingly included in the world of art.

From this point of view, the change of characters that took place at a certain stage in the mythology of many peoples is curious. At the initial stage of myth-creation, gods were in the center. They often appeared in the form of various natural phenomena: sun, water, wind, earth, stars, etc.

Later people begin to create myths about demigods, i.e., creatures born of gods and mortals. Then there appeared legends about people – first of all, about heroes or about those people who were unusually skillful at anything.

The same thing happened in other genres of art. For example, hymns to gods dominated in literature for a long time. Gods embodied all-powerful force; hence the delight of worship, the undivided devotion of worshippers, their strong faith. Although the best hymns to gods are excellent, over time, hymns addressed to the man outdo them both quantitatively and qualitatively.

This process was even more intense in visual arts (primarily in sculpture). On the one hand, sculptors sometimes strived to liken kings to deities, on the other hand, they gave gods human features.

With time the royals, too, were portrayed “austere” as common people, imbued with vividness and ease.

In this regard, the Egyptian sculptural portrait formed the whole era in fine arts. Masters of this tradition set themselves the task to achieve complete authenticity, maximum similarity with the model.

This was achieved, among other things, by incrustation of the eyes with the help of incorporation of various materials, which gave the statue's face a special vitality. Sometimes we find physiologically accurate modeling of a real human face, extreme clarity in identifying the individual appearance of the model. In general, the sharpness and tangibility of the transfer of portrait similarity was so impressive that it was possible to achieve the effect of “living” sculpture.

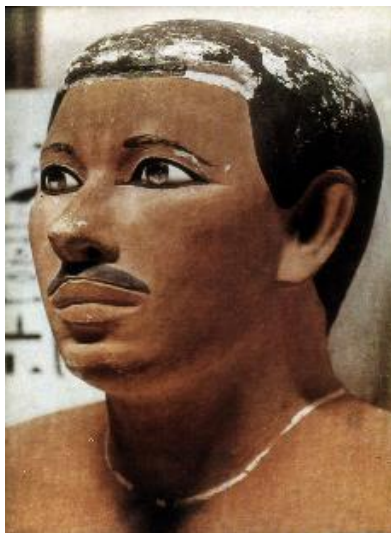


Illustration 05. *Rahotep and his wife – fragment*

Consequently, gradually, but steadily man, as he appeared in the images of art, became man. This happened together with the creation of civilization.

So, in ancient times, the world was created and man was created. In addition, in those days, *the civilization* was also created, its foundation was laid. It happened in the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC in separate, very small areas, which we call the centers of civilization.

Apparently, it was first in Mesopotamia. There was a chain of successive states: Sumer, Akkad, Babylonia, Assyria. A little later or almost simultaneously it was formed in Egypt and then in the Indus River basin (present India) and in the Huang He basin (present China).

Analyzing the differences of these civilizations from the primitive forms of existence, it makes sense to note that at that time, there was a leap in the productive sphere associated with the transition to the melting and processing of metals, which played a big role for art – mainly for architecture and sculpture, which received qualitatively new technical capabilities.

For example, in Egypt, the grinding and laying of stone blocks in pyramids was carried out so carefully that even nowadays (after almost five millennia) it is impossible to insert a razor blade between many of these blocks. This detail without any comments indicates the level of construction skills.

Civilization differed from the prehistoric element primarily in the introduction of *order* in all spheres of life, which was associated with the principles of *centralization* and strict *hierarchy*, that is, with a clear division into higher and lower stages in their subordination to each other. In its direct form, these principles have found expression in the emergence of early class society and in the formation of the state.

These social changes were reflected in mythology. The Pantheon of gods was formed as a model of ordered relations, subordination and “specializations”.

It may be recalled that the family of Olympian gods in Greek mythology consisted of the following gods:

- Zeus – the king of the gods, the Lord of the Universe;
- his wife Hera – the queen of the gods, the goddess of heaven, the patroness of marriage;
- their son Apollo – the god of light and sun, he is the god of knowledge, the patron of sciences and arts;
- their daughter Athena – the goddess of war and victory, the protectress of cities;
- Hephaestus – the god of fire and crafts, Aphrodite – the goddess of love and beauty, Dionysus – the god of viticulture and wine, etc.

That is, every Olympic deity had his or her own well-defined functions, powers, and “department”.

The city became the strongest factor of civilization. It attracted material and spiritual resources of its territorial environment. However, due to the concentration of intellectual and physical strength, it was the center of progress in various aspects of life and in particular the center of the most intensive development of the artistic culture.

Of course, the architecture of the Ancient World began to develop rapidly in cities. According to archaeology, the largest cities of that time were built in the valley of the Indus River – from the middle of the 3rd millennium BC, on the territory of modern Pakistan.

They were excavated near the villages of Moenjodaro and Harappa, and therefore, they received their names. Both cities had a strict layout in the form of a rectangular network of wide streets.

In Moenjodaro, there was a citadel on a hill, fortified with strong walls. Two- and three-storied buildings were built of flame brick, plastered with clay and alabaster. Much attention was paid to the environment improvement, there was a well-functioning water supply system and sewerage system (water supply system was even on the upper floors).

Sculptural finds demonstrate the level of culture of these cities, among which there are examples of excellent sculpting of the body in its material palpability, in a complete sense of the beauty of human forms.

The success of urban architecture of the Ancient World was amazing. Large houses and palaces were built, which consisted of many rooms for various purposes. There were columns, arches, vaults.

The foundation of urban planning was laid. The main street is singled out, a breakdown of the city into geometrically correct quarters is introduced, zoned construction is carried out on a social and property basis: areas intended for the wealthy part of the population and places reserved for the poor – a kind of projection of the above-mentioned principles of order and hierarchy.

Babylon, one of the main centers of Mesopotamia, can be considered as a certain result and the center of development for the architecture of the ancient city. Its ruins give some idea of the former power of this city. At that time, protected by the waters of the Euphrates and a thick wall with many towers, it was impregnable. Reconstruction allows restoring the appearance of Babylon, which was famous for the clarity of the plan, splendor and power of buildings.

Another sign of civilization is the crystallization of the system of *moral norms and institutions*. In numerous examples of didactic literature, we find a completely clear, conscious understanding of good and evil, permissible and undesirable in relations between people.

If we, for example, open the Egyptian *The Book of the Dead* (it was something like a guide for the deceased in the hereafter), we will find, in essence, an already completely established system of moral commandments-taboos, which (after a millennium) would be perceived and re-formulated in the Bible.

Civilization is an appropriate *level of thinking*, including artistic thinking. By the 2nd millennium BC, we meet samples of a very developed art style in abundance in all areas of art.

Over time, such an aesthetically developed style appeared in mythology. In particular, this is reflected in the fact that individual myths formed some cycles of legends about the fate of gods and heroes.

The cycle of myths about Heracles is the most extensive and vivid in Greek mythology. It details the story of his birth from Zeus and a mortal woman, childhood, first acts and adventures, then the famous twelve labors and events of later life, at the end of which he rises to Olympus.

The image of the legendary hero is revealed from different sides, the presentation is full of colorful episodes. They clearly characterize not only the strength, courage, will of Heracles, but also, for example, his artfulness, in which he, perhaps, is not inferior to Odysseus (see episodes with the Augean stables or with the apples of Hesperides).

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Turning to literature, to begin with, we note an extremely remarkable fact – *the creation of writing*. First, it originated in Mesopotamia and Egypt at the turn of the 3rd millennium BC.

Writing is the most important sign of civilization. Its creation made it possible to move from oral verbal creativity to written literature, i.e., to literature in the full meaning of the word. After all, the term *literature* comes from the Latin word *littera* (*letter*) and means *written*.

In the course of the long evolution, from the first coherent texts on, multi-episode narratives appear more often, and the manner of presentation becomes more flexible and colorful.

A common genre of ancient literature was the so-called *inscription*. The inscriptions were carved on the tombs of kings and nobles, gradually turning into a detailed biography, gaining more and more expressiveness, strength and clarity of images. One of the most remarkable inscriptions is known as *The Story of Sinuhe*. It is a description of a very specific fate of a real person of the Ancient World. It is a small novel of everyday life that is very reliable and written in vigorous style.

But more consistent with the spirit of the time are works of the “high” style – epic stories about heroes. *The Legend of Gilgamesh* stands out among them. This text, the largest in volume, of the Mesopotamian literature is created on a mythological basis.

Sin-leqi-unninni, a summoner from the city of Uruk, is considered a presumable author. He did not just combine separate legends, but carefully thought out and organized the source material, giving it a deep philosophical meaning.

The ending of this legend is remarkable. The hero admits his defeat in the vain search for immortality and finds solace, admiring the view of the walls erected around his hometown. So, the author brings to a final thought: “...the man is mortal, but his actions live”. Millennia would pass, and Goethe would come to the same conclusion about the highest sense of human life in his *Faust*.

A civilized person is a person with a developed *emotional sphere*, which implies a variety of feelings and sensations, their subtlety and flexibility. With the greatest clarity, this quality is represented in *the lyrical poetry* of the Ancient World, which flourished at the final stage of its evolution (approximately since the mid-2nd millennium BC).

The main line of the poetic lyrics of that time is connected with the expansion of the feeling of love in its various manifestations. This feeling acted as an indicator, even a synonym of truly human nature (it means that only a human is capable of such manifestations).

It is most remarkably expressed in the most significant phenomenon of ancient poetry – Egyptian lyrics. A subtle understanding of human nature, a wide range of emotions, an extensive system of life situations, the delight of love and the torment of jealousy – everything was already presented in the literature of that distant millennium.

Poets sang of the power of love, which raises a loving heart above any throne. The harmonious fusion of spiritual and physical principles of love is impressive, giving the feeling a special fullness.

In the enthusiastic description of the object of love, Egyptian authors are looking for new nuances to color their admiration and worship in every possible way. Sometimes one comes across a strikingly refined system of verse, and then it is necessary to talk about the true, complete poetics.

Civilization, in comparison with primitive times, shows different *human relations with nature*. Having tamed it, having become its owner, the man does not consider nature only as a dwelling place anymore, he begins to be imbued with feeling of its beauty, finds ability to admire it, to poetize it.

Artists of ancient civilizations (especially Egypt) learned, in comparison with primitive art, a completely new way to show the animal world: they are interested not only and not so much in the accuracy of the image but in its picturesqueness, in the originality of the perspective. They do it with delight admiring animals, fish and birds.



Illustration 06. Hoopoe (painting of the tomb in Beni Hassan, Egypt)

The tendency to aestheticize imagery declared itself in Egyptian art more noticeable than in other national cultures. In the course of its evolution (especially at the final stage of the Ancient World), it was increasingly inclined towards splendor, details, and refinement.

Among the illustrative examples are the exquisite sculptural **portraits of Queen Nefertiti**, made in the first half of the 14th century BC by master **Thutmose**, where attention is drawn to a completely non-standard model: emphasized elongated neck, general spirituality of appearance.



Illustration 07. Thutmose The Head of Queen Nefertiti

Another important point that marks the life of a developed civilization is the existence of *alternatives* and the so-called *pluralism*. This is expressed in a plurality of points of view, positions, mindsets, indicating the wealth and richness of spiritual culture.

In the atmosphere of such freedom, the man dared to doubt, it would seem, the most unshakeable foundations of the ideology of the Ancient World, including the existence of the afterlife.

For example, in a musical-poetic opus called **Harpers' Songs** (it was performed by harpists – hence the name), it is argued that everything on earth is perishable; everything is doomed to extinction, hope for the beyond does not make sense and therefore it is necessary to enjoy mundane world. And such thoughts were heard in Egypt – a country where so much was subordinated to the cares of the afterlife!

This is evidence of the fact that at a certain stage, the monolith of the worldview of the Ancient World began to unravel. There was opposition to the dominant mood. Such opposition could result in disbelief and even in an openly pessimistic mood at the end of the Ancient World.

Thus, the hero of the Egyptian poem *The Dispute between a Man and His Ba* is extremely critical of the prevailing mores in the society, the life for him is a center of evil and crimes. That is why death seems to him a welcome deliverance from the vicissitudes of the earthly life.

As the wave of pessimism developed, tragic motifs arise in Greek mythology. The most impressive motif was expressed in the legends of the ancestral curse, which lead to the death of several generations. The most famous is the so-called Theban cycle, in the center of which is the fate of Oedipus.

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All the above-mentioned (the features of splendor and refinement that appeared in art, the mood of disappointment and disbelief, tragic motives) was evidence of *the decline* of the Ancient World. Such phases of decline, end, and exhaustion are constantly encountered. It happens at the stages of completion of great historical periods.

However, such decline did not mean the “end of time” and the end of art. “Sunset” was always followed by “sunrise”. It is the rise of a new historical era and, accordingly, a new rise of art.

That was what happened after the decline of the culture of ancient civilizations, which the art of Antiquity replaced, when the front line of development moved from the Middle East (Mesopotamia, Egypt) to Europe (Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome).

The rudiments of this great future appeared in the Greek territories long before the 1st millennium BC (the main time of Antiquity), just in the period of thriving of ancient Eastern civilizations. This is Greek mythology, which was mentioned more than once and which became the basis of the rise of ancient literature. This is also art achievements of *the Aegean civilization*.

It developed on the islands and at the Aegean coast (hence the name) almost simultaneously with the civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt (i.e., since the 3rd millennium BC), but it thrived in the later period (since the 18th century BC).

The most significant results were given by the artistic culture of the island of *Crete*. Here, like in other Greek States of that time (very small in territory and population), the palace of the ruler (king) played a central role. The palace concentrated everything of importance, including in relation to art. **The Royal Palace** in the city of Knossos on the island of Crete was such a center.

This architectural complex had been built for several centuries (finally, it was formed by the 16th century BC). The huge size of the Palace, the intricate plan and the magnificent interior, complemented by all kinds of picturesque effects, made a strong impression on contemporaries, which was reflected in the myths about the mysterious Labyrinth and its owner, the man-bull Minotaur.

Decorative painting (frescoes on the walls of palaces, public buildings, rich houses) was diverse in plot, bright, colorful, bold in pattern and contrast of color comparisons, which reflected the freshness of perception peculiar to the ancient inhabitants of the island of Crete.

Great success was achieved by applied art. In addition to the beauty of forms, utensils differed in variety of ornament, based on all kinds of plant and animal motifs. The ornament was made very subtly, gracefully, inventively.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing in the Aegean art is the artistic ceramics (usually vases), decorated with paintings, which resulted in a separate art. Vase painting in Crete reached a high perfection of fulfilment and was remarkable for the richness of imagination.



Illustration 08. *The Octopus Vase (the Palace of Knossos)*

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