

## “THE HEAVENS ARE SEVEN, THE EARTHS ARE SEVEN”

### INTRODUCING A NEW SPATIAL PARADIGM IN THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF BRONZE AGE MESOPOTAMIA.

#### Space and belief structures.

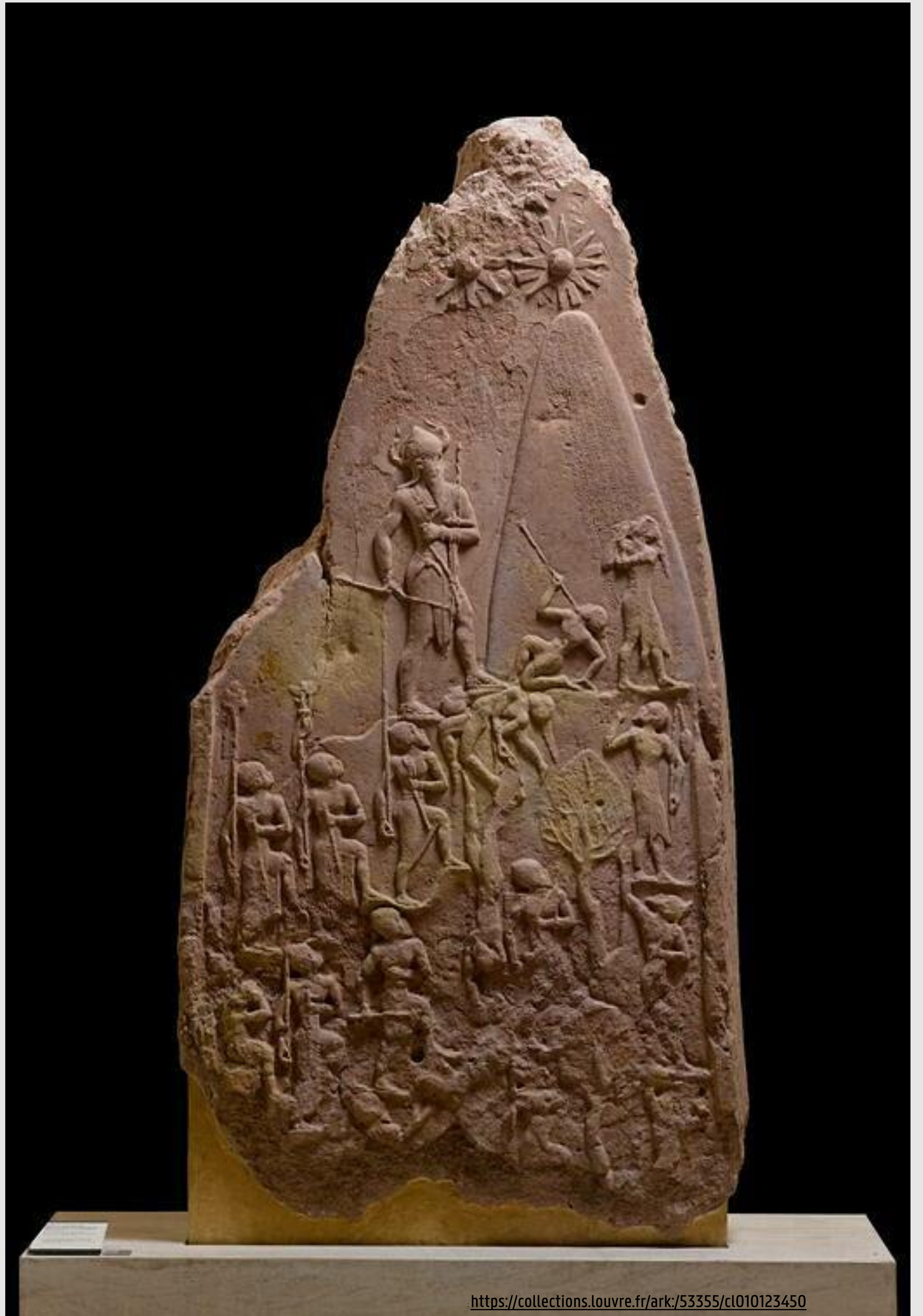
The Bronze Age in Lower and Upper Mesopotamia was a time of major changes in power, culture, and society. New social and cultural ideas from this period shaped the unique identity of Mesopotamian societies and had a big impact on how people viewed and used space. This influence is visible in settlement layouts, architecture, cuneiform writing, maps, and artwork, all reflecting how people organized and understood their world. Belief systems and its associated practices played a key role in shaping this everyday life and use of space, but there is still a lack of archaeological research connecting this spatial organization with belief systems in Bronze Age Mesopotamia.

#### Constructing a spatial archaeological framework.

Space plays a crucial role in archaeology, though it is often seen as a complex and sometimes debated concept. Traditionally, archaeologists view space as physical areas defined by boundaries, like walls or doors, which connect or separate different spaces. However, how we move through and experience these spaces is shaped by our daily experiences, perceptions, and interactions. These shared behaviors help us understand and use symbols to navigate the structure of spaces. Only recently have archaeologists, especially those studying architecture and archaeological landscapes, started incorporating ideas from social theorists like Henri Lefèbvre, Edward Soja, David Harvey and others to explore these aspects. These studies suggests that space does not just contain different structures or actively creates them. By organizing itself in dynamic ways, space also generates meaning, knowledge, and patterns of behaviors, shaping belief systems, symbols, power structures, and social practices.

To fully understand this spatial production, we also need to grasp how space functions through our own awareness. The human brain processes space through a multi-dimensional map and grid system. This neurobiological framework examines the ways in which space acts as a communicative system conveying meaning, identity, social relationships, and cultural values. Decoding this language of spatial arrangements, implies using spatial semiotics. Rather than viewing space as a mere setting for social activity, spatial semiotics encourages the interpretation of space as a sign that embody the intentions, beliefs, and social structures of the societies that constructed and inhabited them.

**Using these ideas will help create a spatial archaeological framework to better understand the unique way the cultures in Bronze Age Mesopotamia organized space, assigned meaning, and used physical settings to reinforce or challenge social norms.**



<https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010123450>

#### Space: a new frontier ... in archaeology?

The goal of this PhD is to demonstrate how the way space depicted 'in', 'on', and 'through' 2-dimensional Bronze Age Mesopotamian glyptic and monumental representations was molded by belief structures tied to space, and to recognize how these complex spatial designs shaped imaged expressions of behavioral actions and interrelational patterns reflecting very distinctive power structures. The broader aim is to expand archaeologists' understanding of how past societies use space as a conscious concept and tool to create, maintain, and expand belief systems carrying symbolic meaning and transferring knowledge to shape the power structures enacted by social practices which are visually represented on artefacts and monuments.

Contact

[domniek.dutoo@ugent.be](mailto:domniek.dutoo@ugent.be)