

AP® ART HISTORY

2012 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 7

Identify the work shown. What was its intended meaning? Analyze how formal and symbolic elements are used in the work to communicate its intended meaning. (10 minutes)

Background

This question asks students to identify a work of art and its intended meaning. Students are then asked to analyze how formal and symbolic elements are used in the work to communicate its intended meaning. The intent of this question is to measure students' ability to examine the formal and symbolic elements of a work and to show how these elements contribute to its meaning.

The work shown is the *Stele of Naram-Sin*, a six-foot, seven-inch-tall slab of rose limestone that was carved circa 2254–2218 B.C.E. The stele was intended for public display to commemorate the victory of the Akkadian King Naram-Sin over the Lullubi people in the mountains of what is now day Iran. An inscription in cuneiform declares that Naram-Sin had led his army with this victory to “where no other king had gone before him” and further names Naram-Sin with a divine determinative. Naram-Sin is a godlike “King of the Four Regions”; in other words, the entire world. Historians believe that Naram-Sin was the first Mesopotamian king to claim such divinity. The intention of this work was therefore not only to commemorate an important battle but also to consolidate Naram-Sin’s power by asserting his divine right to rule.

In formal terms, the stele communicates this meaning first and foremost by representing Naram-Sin in hieratic scale. As the largest and most important figure in the stele, Naram-Sin stands tall and victorious next to the topmost mountain. Three solar deities (which have been partly damaged) shine upon him. The inclusion of these deities suggests that the gods have sanctioned Naram-Sin’s military triumph, thereby conferring celestial approval. In symbolic terms, Naram-Sin wears a horned headdress, previously the sole privilege of the gods, clearly announcing his claim to divinity.

With regard to figuration, Naram-Sin is shown in a composite view: his shoulders are frontal, but his hip and head are in profile. Below him to the left, the Akkadian soldiers share this same composite representation as they march up the narrow mountain path in neat, stiff rows. The effect of this presentation is to convey that the Akkadians are proud, glorious, and upright, marching ever upward toward their gods. By contrast, the Lullubi (carved below Naram-Sin and to the right) are portrayed as a chaotic group descending or being cast off the mountain in a variety of more naturalistic positions. In contrast to the neatly chiseled forms of the Akkadians, the Lullubi twist and contort, connecting them more with the earth than with the sky. Their defeat is obvious: Naram-Sin is shown stamping on one of his vanquished enemies, while another Lullubi pleads for mercy. Another is attempting to pull a spear from his neck. Yet all these figures, whether the conquering Akkadians or the conquered Lullubi, look upward at Naram-Sin, further enhancing his importance as the central, commanding figure of the work.

The stele is innovative in presenting a dynamic scene of upward motion that reflects both the steep, wooded landscape of the mountains where the battle actually took place as well as Naram-Sin’s symbolic ascent to godhood. Specifically, the Akkadian army’s ascent up the mountain is parallel to Naram-Sin’s personal ascent to the heavens, an artistic conceit that had already been employed in the region through the soaring architectural forms of the ziggurats. Significantly, this story of divine victory is not told through what was then the established artistic convention of layered horizontal registers.

AP[®] ART HISTORY

2012 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 7 (continued)

Ultimately this imagery — both formal and symbolic — is conscripted into the service of asserting Naram-Sin's divine right to be king. More than just memorializing an important military success, the *Stele of Naram-Sin* also shows how the victorious ruler has succeeded in capturing the approbation of the gods. Naram-Sin is now a god-king. His divinely sanctioned victory and right to rule grant order and security to the Akkadian world.

Three Tasks for Students

1. Correctly identify the work as the *Stele of Naram-Sin*.
2. Correctly identify the intended meaning of the *Stele of Naram-Sin*.
3. Analyze how formal and symbolic elements are used to communicate the intended meaning of the *Stele of Naram-Sin*.

Points to Remember

This is both a formal and a contextual question. If a student cannot identify the intended meaning of Naram-Sin as a commemoration of a battle and/or a glorification of the divine right of a ruling king, it will be difficult to analyze the formal and symbolic elements of the work in a manner relevant to the question.

The highest score a student can earn if the intended meaning is not identified even in a general way is 2 points.

The highest score a student can earn if the work is not identified as the *Stele of Naram-Sin* is 2 points.

Students are not required to discuss the subsequent history of the work — how the stele was pillaged and repurposed in the 12th century B.C.E. by the Elamite king Shutruk-Nahhunte, who added his own inscription stating that that the monument was seized during the sack of Sippar and taken back to what is now Iran. However, if students do include such discussion and contextualize it within the original intended meaning of the *Stele of Naram-Sin*, such information could be relevant.

AP[®] ART HISTORY

2012 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 7 (continued)

Scoring Criteria

4 points

Response shows thorough knowledge and understanding of the question.

The work is correctly identified as the *Stele of Naram-Sin*. Its intended meaning is identified completely and correctly. The response uses specific visual evidence to analyze how formal and symbolic elements of the work are used to communicate its intended meaning. The response may include minor errors that do not have a meaningful impact on the analysis.

3 points

Response shows sufficient knowledge and understanding of the question.

The work is correctly identified as the *Stele of Naram-Sin*. Its intended meaning is identified with general correctness. The response uses visual evidence to analyze how formal and symbolic elements of the work are used to communicate its intended meaning. However, the response may be somewhat unbalanced — focusing more on formal or symbolic elements, although both are represented — and/or may include minor errors that have some impact on the analysis.

2 points

Response shows some knowledge and understanding of the question.

The work is correctly identified as the *Stele of Naram-Sin*. The response uses visual evidence to analyze formal and/or symbolic elements of the work, but this analysis is not connected to the work's intended meaning even in a general way.

OR

The work is not correctly identified. The intended meaning of the *Stele of Naram-Sin* is identified with general correctness, although this meaning may be incomplete or implied. The response refers to visual evidence to discuss how formal and/or symbolic elements of the work are used to communicate its intended meaning. However, the discussion is less analytical than descriptive. It may be overly general, simplistic, or unbalanced. For example, the discussion of formal elements may be mostly accurate, whereas the discussion of symbolic elements may include errors that impact the response.

NOTE: This is the highest score a response can earn if it does not discuss the intended meaning of the *Stele of Naram-Sin*.

1 point

Response demonstrates little knowledge and understanding of the question.

The work is correctly identified as the *Stele of Naram-Sin*, but there is no other discussion of merit.

OR

The response fails to identify the work or the meaning even in a general way, but the response demonstrates some familiarity with the issues raised by the question through some relevant discussion of the formal and/or symbolic elements of the work. The discussion is weak, overly descriptive, and/or contains significant errors.

0 points

Response demonstrates no discernible knowledge or understanding of the question.

The student attempts to respond, but the response makes only incorrect or irrelevant statements about the *Stele of Naram-Sin*. The score of 0 points includes crossed-out words, personal notes, and drawings.

— This is a blank paper only.

7. Identify the work shown. What was its intended meaning? Analyze how formal and symbolic elements are used in the work to communicate its intended meaning. (10 minutes)

The work shown is the palatke of Naram-sin. The palatke depicts the leader Naram-sin having crushed his enemies in battle approaching a near god-like status as his troops follow in procession behind him. A formal element that contributes to the supremacy of the leader conveyed on the palatke is the use of hierarchical scale. Hierarchical scale is a composition device that was used in ancient art to illustrate the figure of importance, and those who were of lesser importance. Naram-sin is shown as the definitively largest figure in the piece, followed by his troops, and finally his enemies who appear child-like in comparison with the size of the leader. A symbolic element that is used to convey the meaning of the work is the symbol of a god as a star or bright light. Naram-sin appears to be the closest to reaching this divine light, symbolizing the leaders near equivalence with the level of divinity assigned to the gods. Naram-sin was one of the first leaders to put place himself on the same level with the gods, and this decision is evidenced on this palatke.

7. Identify the work shown. What was its intended meaning? Analyze how formal and symbolic elements are used in the work to communicate its intended meaning. (10 minutes)

This is the Stele of Naram-Sin. It was constructed to commemorate the victory of the ancient leader. One of the most obvious elements used is the hierarchy of scale. Naram-Sin is depicted as much bigger than the rest of the figures. Even the importance of the lesser people is determined by size. The figures of the people the leader gained victory over are shown in various stages of death or destruction. Naram-Sin himself is shown wearing a helmet with horns, which symbolize power. Finally, the two suns identify this as a victory. All of these elements contribute to the intended meaning, this meaning being the ~~greatness~~ greatness and victory of Naram-Sin as a leader of the people of the Ancient Near East.

7. Identify the work shown. What was its intended meaning? Analyze how formal and symbolic elements are used in the work to communicate its intended meaning. (10 minutes)

The piece shown is the Victory Stele of Hammurabi. A victory stele was primarily used to portray the power and superiority of a particular leader. Hammurabi, proud of his accomplishments in battle, chose to have a victory stele made to portray his power and authority. Other aspects of the piece also emphasize his power. For instance, he wears an elaborate headdress, which always would symbolize power in ancient art. Also, he is shown as if he is obeying the Sun God, who is his direct master. But perhaps the most important portrayal of his power is in the hierarchical scale of the people shown. Hammurabi, of course, is shown at the top as the largest figure. This was especially significant in this time period because of the focus that ancient cultures put on the hierarchical scale in art. If a figure was the largest and tallest, he was the most important. The meaning of the Victory Stele of Hammurabi was to effectively show his power, which it did.

AP[®] ART HISTORY

2012 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 7

Overview

This 10-minute question dealt with the *Stele of Naram-Sin*. Students had to identify the work, discuss its intended meaning, and analyze how formal and symbolic elements are used in the *Stele of Naram-Sin* to communicate its intended meaning. The intent of the question was to measure students' ability to examine the formal and symbolic elements of a work and to show how these elements contribute to its meaning.

Sample: 7A

Score: 4

The work is correctly identified as *Naram-Sin*. The intended meaning of the work is articulated by the statement, "Naram-Sin having crushed his enemies in battle [is] approaching a near god-like status." This comment indicates that the student is aware of the dual function of the stele: it operates both as a commemoration of a battle and as a deification of the ruler. The response then uses specific visual evidence to analyze how formal and symbolic elements are used to communicate this meaning, mainly the role of "hierarchical scale," which "is a composition device that was used in ancient art to illustrate the figure of importance, and those who were of less importance." The response finishes with a discussion of Naram-Sin's divinity as revealed in symbolic compositional elements such as his proximity to "a star or a bright light," symbolizing his "near equivalence with the level of divinity assigned to the Gods." The incorrect designation of "palette" instead of "stele" is a minor error that does not impact the analysis. In this way the response demonstrates a thorough knowledge and understanding of the question.

Sample: 7B

Score: 3

The work is correctly identified as *Naram-Sin*. The intended meaning is stated in the second sentence: "It was constructed to commemorate the victory of the Ancient leader." The response uses visual evidence to analyze how formal and symbolic evidence are used to communicate this meaning. However, the response is unbalanced in terms of its treatment of these formal and symbolic elements. The discussion of the formal element of hieratic scale is sound, but the reference to the symbolism of the horned helmet is not fully developed. The statement that "the two suns identify this as a victory" is inaccurate in that there are three suns, but this minor error nonetheless expresses an element of symbolism. In this way the response demonstrates sufficient knowledge and understanding of the question.

Sample: 7C

Score: 2

The work is incorrectly identified as the *Victory Stele of Hammurabi*. Without a correct identification, the response could not relate the subject to its intended meaning in anything other than a general way. Nevertheless the intended meaning of the stele is articulated as commemorating a ruler's accomplishments in battle. The response then refers to visual evidence to discuss how formal and symbolic elements are used to communicate this meaning. The response concentrates on the use of hieratic scale in the composition and how this shows another aspect of the ruler's power. The symbolism of the "elaborate headdress" is explained as an aspect of power. In this way the response demonstrates some knowledge and understanding of the question.