Stone Mace Head
The British Museum

From Sippar, southern Iraq
Early Dynastic period, about 2600-2400 BC

A symbolic weapon dedicated in a temple to receive the god's blessing

This elaborate marble mace head was discovered in the remains of a temple building.

A mace head, fixed to a wooden or metal staff, was an early weapon. By the time of this version, however, they had become symbols of authority, and axes were the main weapons used in warfare. Maces were commonly dedicated to the gods who are often shown wielding one on cylinder seals or sculptures. This one is too large to have been an effective weapon and was clearly a votive object, deposited in a temple to demonstrate the donor's piety. Many hundreds of mace heads been excavated in temples of this date. The lion heads presumably represent strength and may indicate that the donor was royal, since the association between lions and rulers was an ancient one in Mesopotamia.