



Judith Leyster, Self-Portrait, 1633

AHST 2331-001 (21655)

Understanding Art

Dr. Charissa N. Terranova

Spring 2022

Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:30-12:45 pm

ECSW 1.315 and SOM 1.217

**Modality: Online Jan. 18-Feb. 4; In Person Feb.**

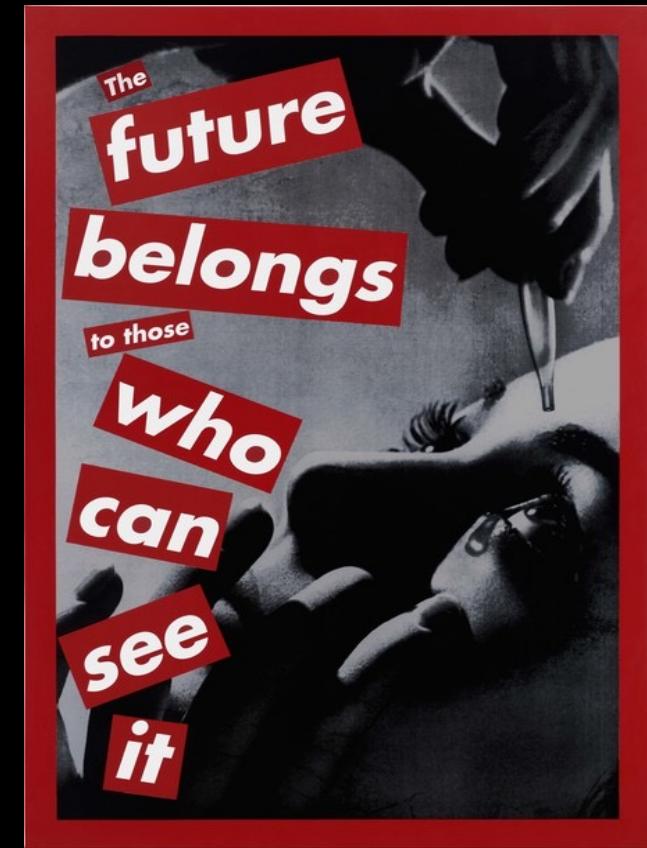
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Women in Prehistory and the First Civilizations

Thursday January 20



Barbara Kruger, Untitled, 1997

Fig. 1.1 Venus of Willendorf front view, ca 28,000-25,000 BCE

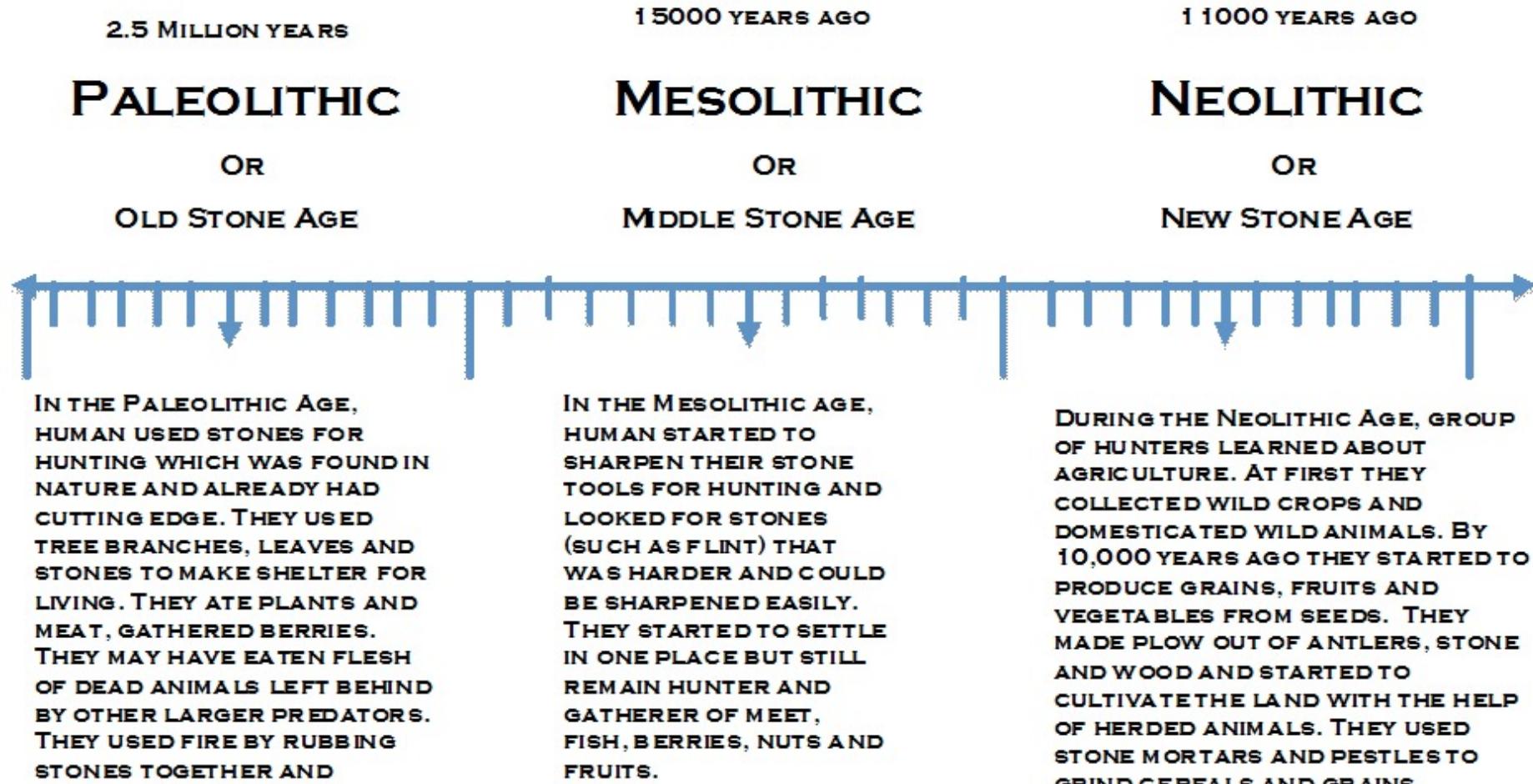
## NEOLITHIC PERIOD



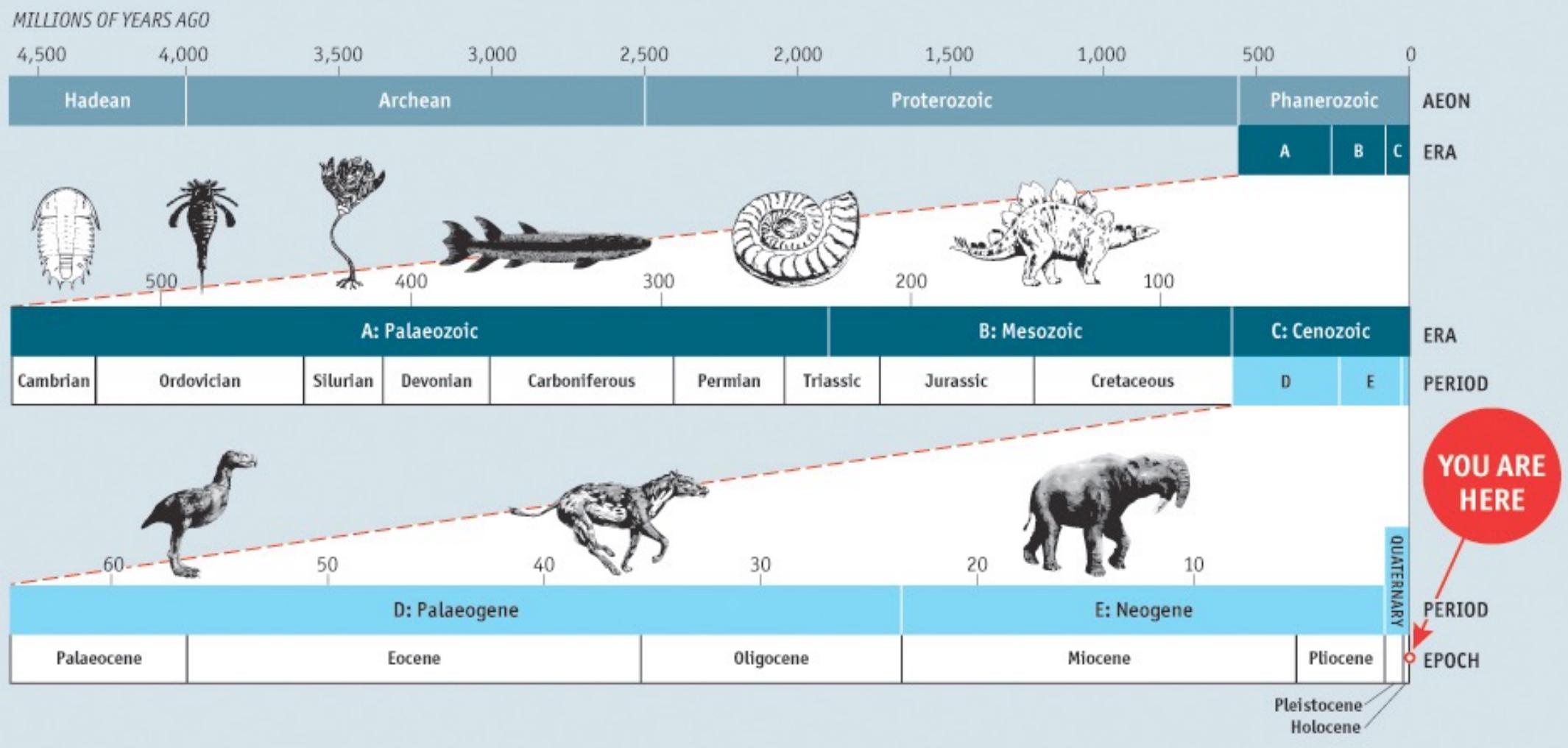
# Deep Time

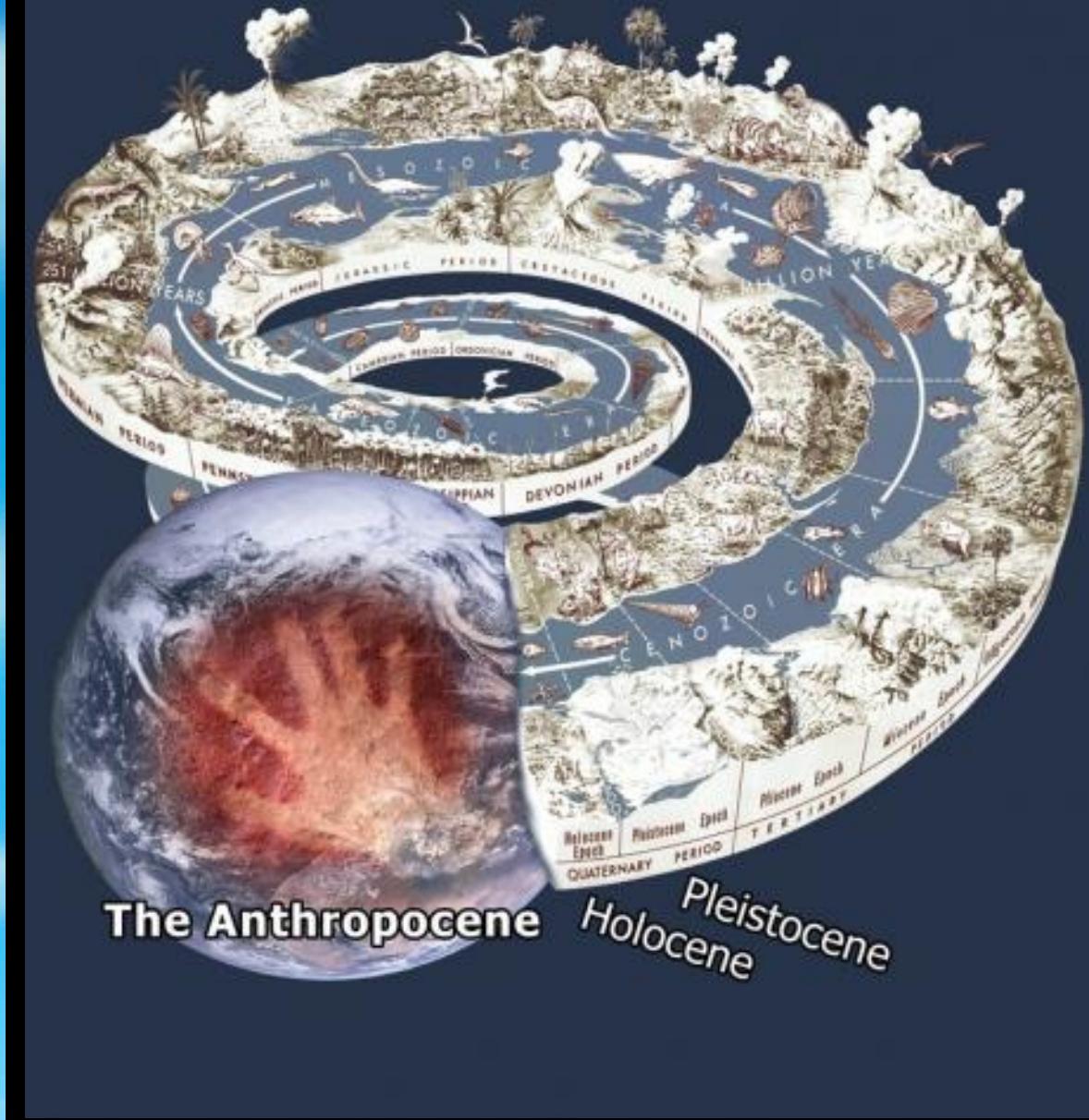
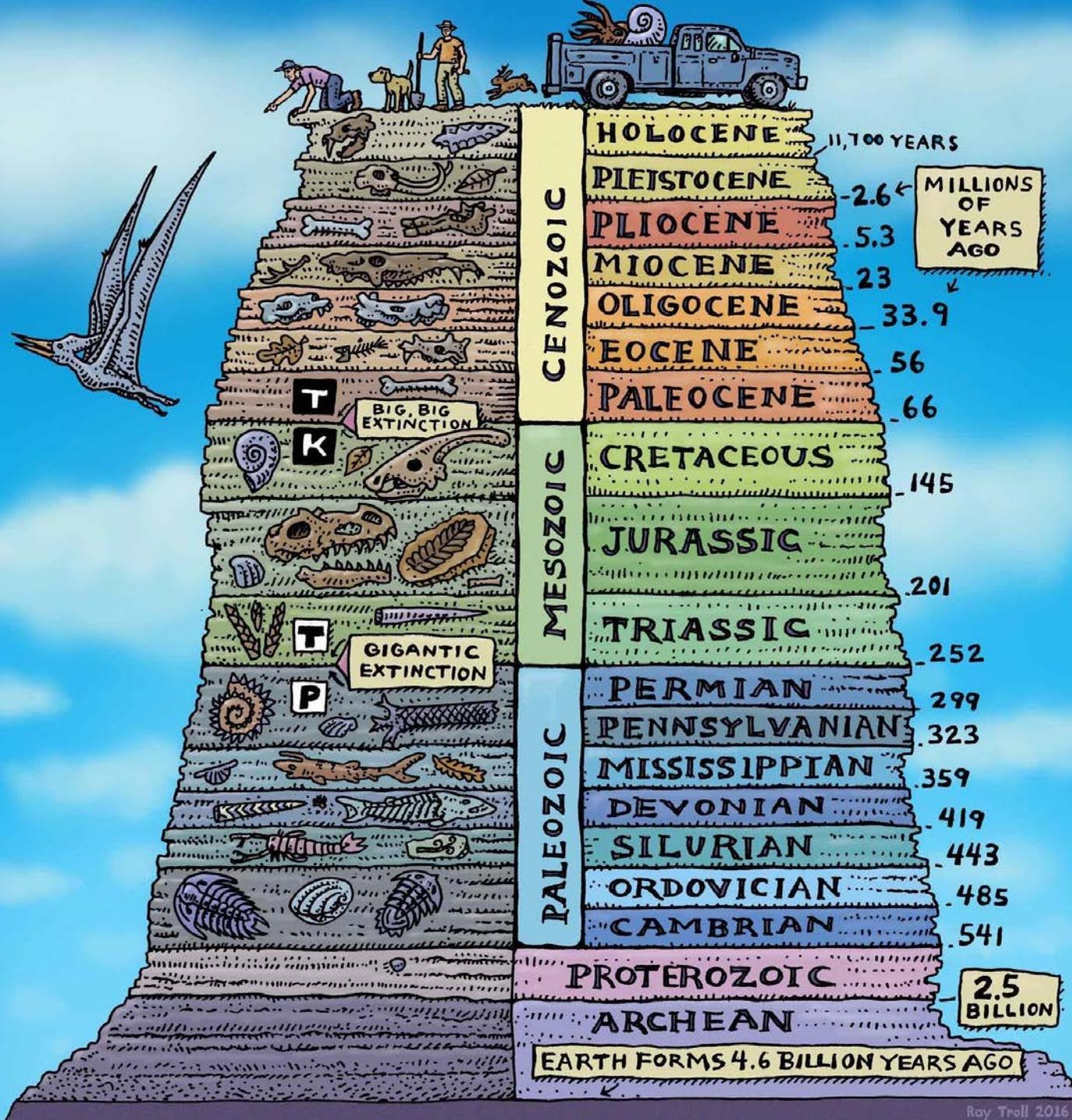
How do we reconcile the time of individual human consciousness (80-90 years) with the age of planet earth (4.5 billion years)?

# TIME LINE OF STONE AGE



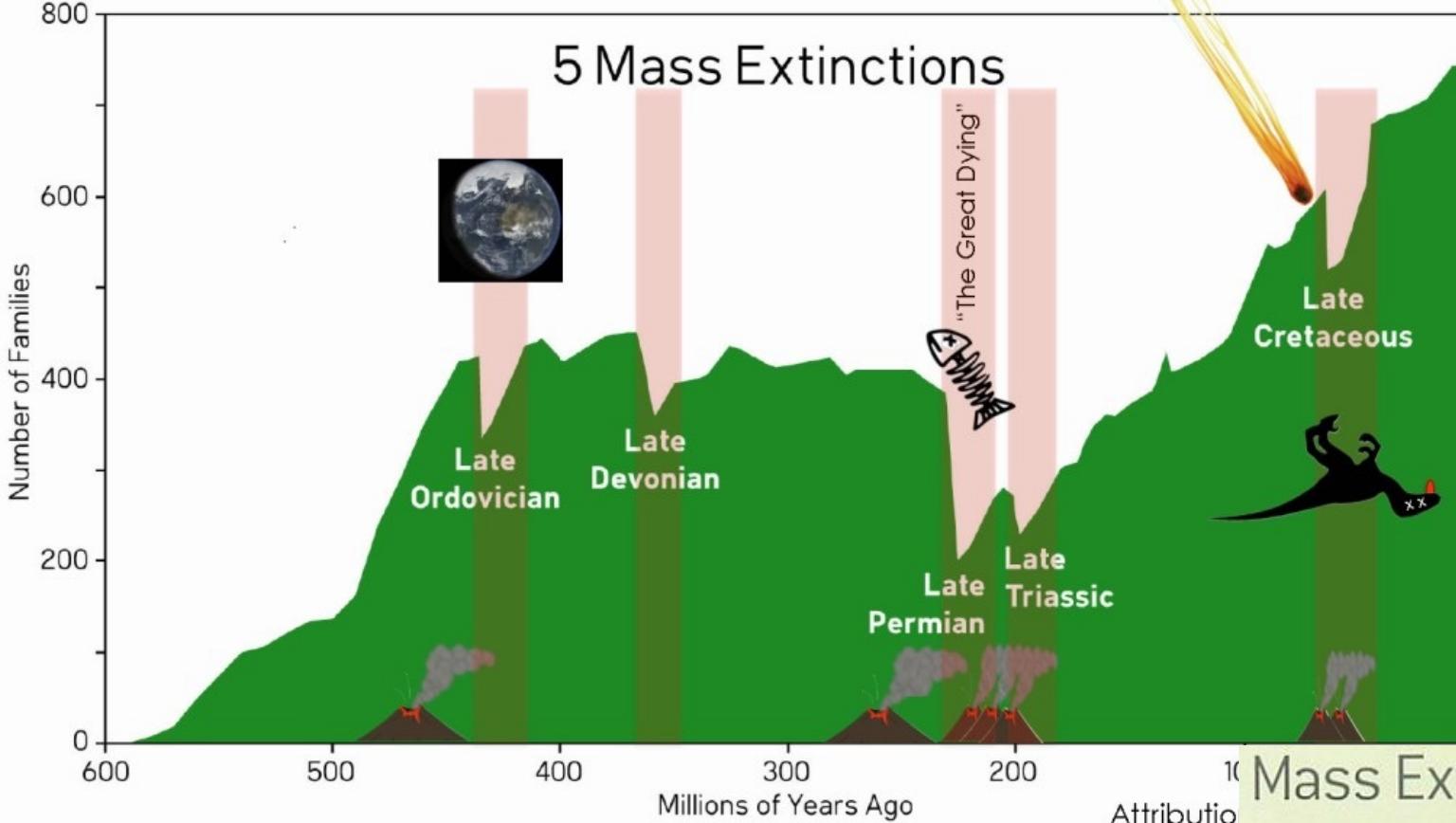
## A geological timeline of the Earth





**Anthropocene:** relating to or denoting the current geological age, viewed as the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment.

Anthropocene: relating to or denoting the current geological age, viewed as the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment.



Attribution  
to  
C. Knobell  
and  
J. M. Sepkoski

## Mass Extinctions Past—and Present?

TIMELINE OF EXTINCTION marks the five most widespread die-offs in the fossil history of life on Earth.

**END ORDOVICIAN**  
Duration: 10 million years (my)  
Marine genera observed extinguished: 60%  
Calculated marine species extinct: 85%  
Suspected cause: Dramatic fluctuations in sea level



Millions of years ago



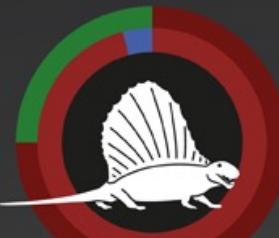
# WE ARE IN THE MIDST OF A 6<sup>TH</sup> MASS EXTINCTION



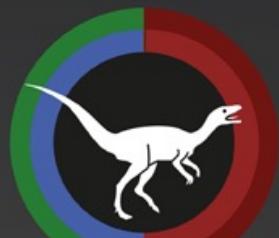
Ordovician-Silurian extinction  
450-440 million years ago



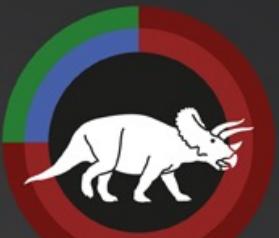
Late Devonian extinction  
375-360 million years ago



Permian-Triassic extinction  
251 million years ago



Triassic-Jurassic extinction  
205 million years ago



Cretaceous-Paleogene extinction  
65 million years ago

- █ Marine species that survived or aren't immediately threatened with extinction
- █ Terrestrial species that survived or aren't immediately threatened with extinction
- █ Species that went extinct
- █ Species threatened with extinction
- █ Species estimated to be extinct 100-500 years from now

**A mass extinction** is the extinction of a large number of species within a relatively short period of geological time.

**The Earth** has known five great mass extinctions in the past that each wiped off 50 to 85% of the species that were alive at that time. Some of these events were preceded by a huge disaster, such as a meteorite hitting the surface of the Earth or a supervolcano erupting, while others were caused by the shifting of the continents.

**But** the sixth mass extinction isn't like the ones that killed the dinosaurs; this one is entirely man-made. If we continue the precedent we have set up to this point, this extinction event could be the fastest and one of the most devastating ones we have seen, yet.



## WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

**Ecosystems are fragile.** Every animal, insect and plant species fulfills one or more invaluable roles to sustain the ecosystem it lives in. If one of those species goes extinct, the ecosystem needs time to adjust and restore. If several species go extinct in rapid succession, the consequences could be dire.



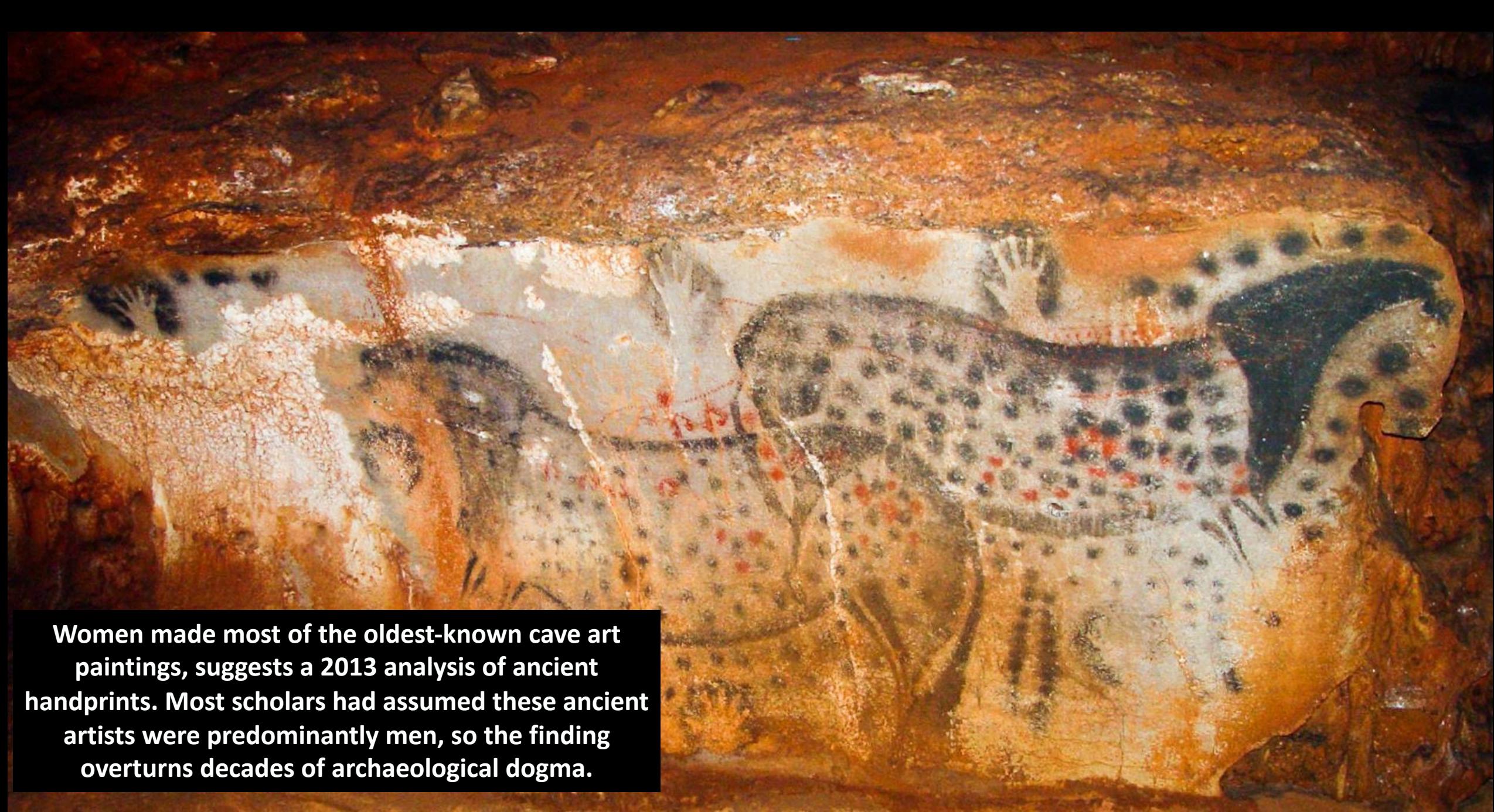
**We depend on ecosystems to survive.** The environment provides us with clean air, fresh water, ores and fuel. It provides us with the fertile soil we need to build our crops. It regulates climates and functions as a natural buffer against floods and storms.



**Ecosystems are valuable,** and they provide us with resources and "services" free of charge. For instance, the total economic value of pollination by insects worldwide was estimated to be \$200 billion in 2005.



- Caves of Lascaux  
France
- It is famous renowned for its over 600 excellently detailed parietal wall paintings, that decorate the interior walls and ceilings of the cave in impressive compositions.
- Upper Paleolithic art (10,000-40,000 years old)



**Women made most of the oldest-known cave art paintings, suggests a 2013 analysis of ancient handprints. Most scholars had assumed these ancient artists were predominantly men, so the finding overturns decades of archaeological dogma.**

Analysis of Late Pleistocene and Early Holocene burial practices throughout the Americas situate the archeological site of Wilamaya Patjxa in Peru as the earliest and most secure hunter burial of female hunters. The findings are consistent with nongendered labor practices in which early hunter-gatherer females were big-game hunters.



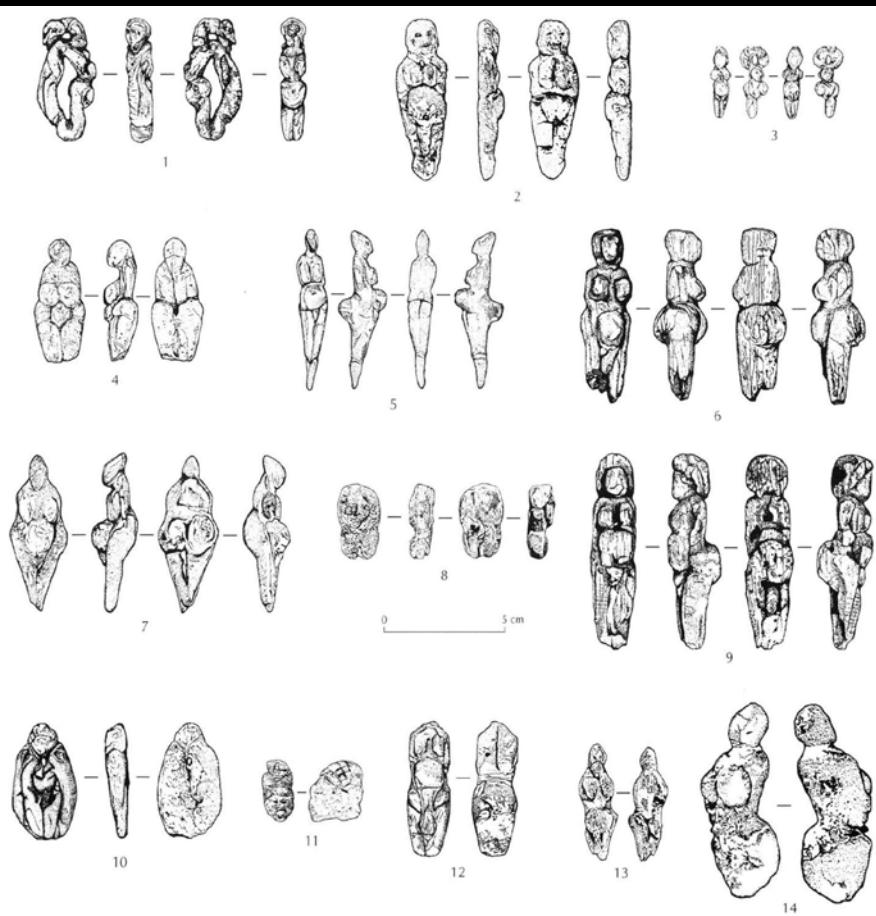
Fig. 1.1 Venus of Willendorf front view, ca 28,000-25,000 BCE

- What is this?
- How big is this?
- Where was it found?
- Is it the only figure like this or are there more?
- What are some of the hypotheses on how this stone figure functioned?



Fig. 1.1 Venus of Willendorf front view, ca 28,000-25,000 BCE





- When scholars discovered the sculpture in Willendorf, they mistakenly identified the figure as Venus, a Roman Goddess. Why did they decide to keep the name Venus of Willendorf if the figure dates back before Roman times?
- What is the “Mother Goddess” theory and did it lead to statues like the “Venus of Willendorf” being used as an object of worship? The book states that religions based on personified deities were very rare in the small, hunter/gatherer, paleolithic tribes, so why was the “Mother Goddess” theory discussed?



The ancient Greeks called them *kyklades*, imagining them as a circle (*kyklos*) around the sacred island of Delos, the site of the holiest sanctuary to Apollo.

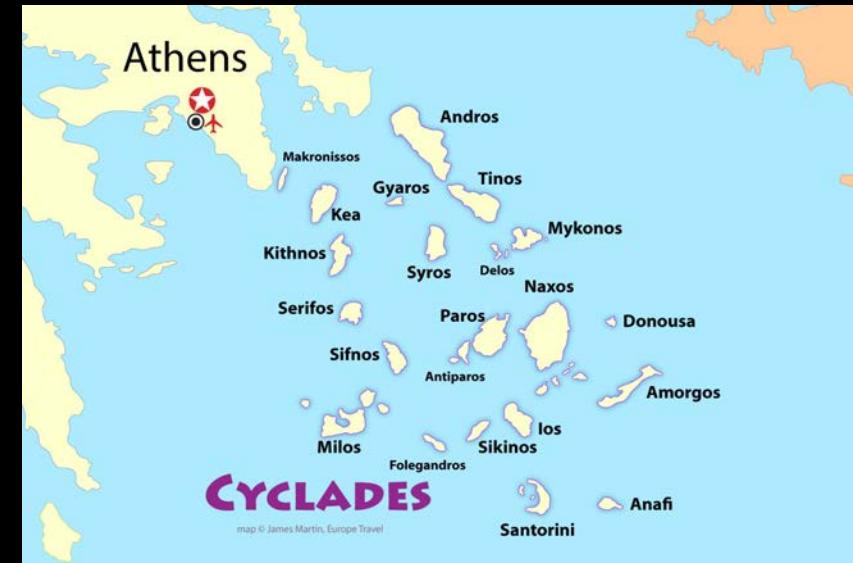


Fig. 1.2 Cycladic, c. 2500-2400 B.C.E., White marble with traces of polychrome

## BRONZE AGE

- What is the difference between matriarchy and patriarchy?
- What does Slatkin say is the cause for the fall of matriarchy and rise of patriarchy? pp. 6-7
- How does the advent of agricultural practices change society? pg. 7



Fig. 1.2 Cycladic, c. 2500-2400 B.C.E., White marble with traces of polychrome



Constantin Brancusi,  
The Miracle (Seal [I])  
(Le miracle), 1930-32



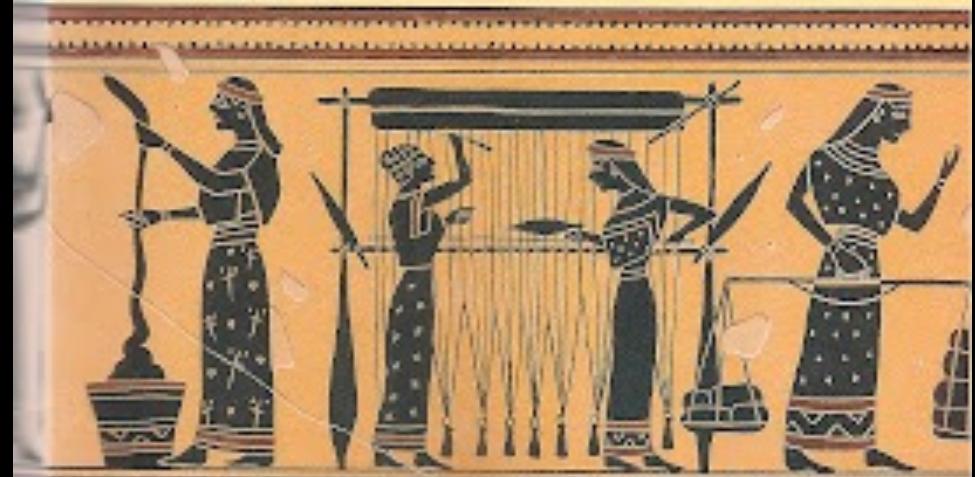
Constantin Brancusi.,  
Bird in Space, 1928

- Slatkin writes that women can be credited with the discovery of agriculture. The book is unsure whether or not women are responsible for making the fertility figures, pottery, or basket weaving. However, researchers do know that women were involved in crafting what?

"Brilliantly original." — Katha Pollitt, *Washington Post Book World*

# WOMEN'S WORK

THE FIRST  
20,000 YEARS



*Women, Cloth, and Society in Early Times*

ELIZABETH  
WAYLAND BARBER



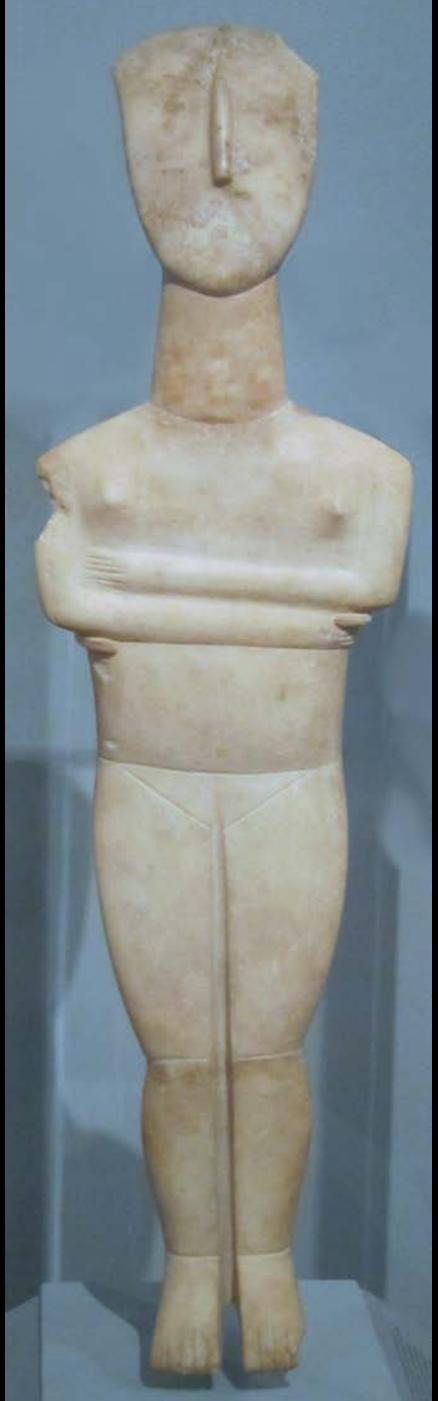


Fig. 1.2 Cycladic, c. 2500-2400 B.C.E., White marble with traces of polychrome

Early Cycladic sculpture comprises predominantly female figures that range from simple modification of the stone to developed representations of the human form, some with natural proportions and some more idealized. Many of these figures, especially those of the Spedos type, display a remarkable consistency in form and proportion that suggests they were planned with a compass. (from the Met.org)

Male marble seated harp player,  
2800–2700 B.C.



- Cycladic female sculptures often symbolized fertility, while Cycladic male sculptures often displayed them sitting and playing a musical instrument. Why do the Cycladic female sculptures emphasize health and fertility while the Cycladic male sculptures seem to have little meaning or symbolism?



Venus of Willendorf front view, ca  
28,000-25,000 BCE



Cycladic, c. 2500-2400  
B.C.E., White marble  
with traces of  
polychrome

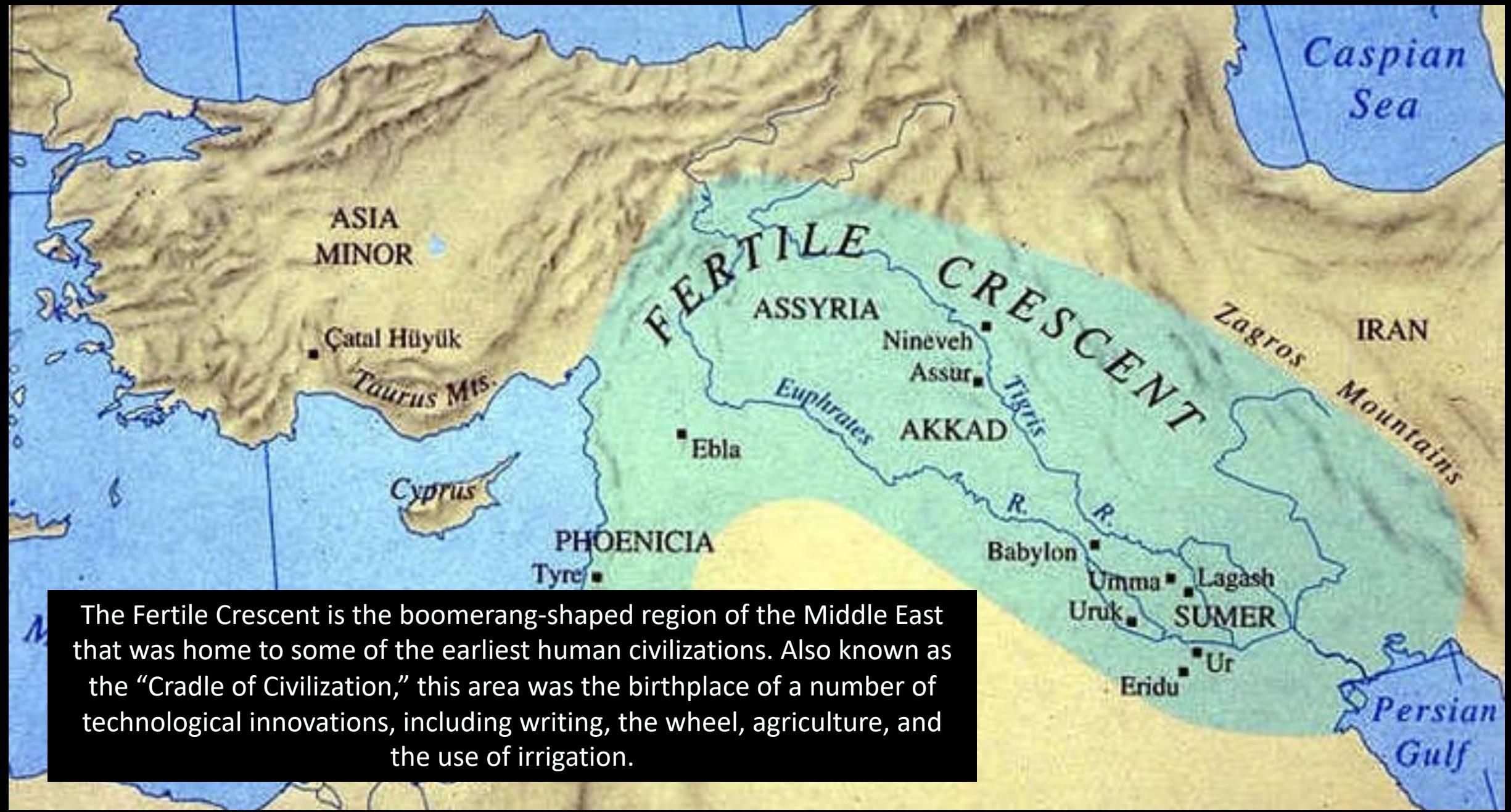


Venus of Willendorf front view, ca  
28,000-25,000 BCE



Cycladic Marble female figure, 4500–4000 BCE







- In Mesopotamia, the primary role of married women was to reproduce children so the husband could continue to build his economic wealth (Slatkin 8). Women in West African tribes used a “Venus of Willendorf” type statue to “promote fertility among the women of the community” (Slatkin 4) despite being an “anachronism” in Roman civilization (Slatkin 5). How were sculptures used by women in Mesopotamia in hopes to reproduce more children since their role was important to continue the growing population?
- When in history did women’s lives become so unimportant that men had to sell their daughters off to make money?
- Why didn’t men sell their sons instead?

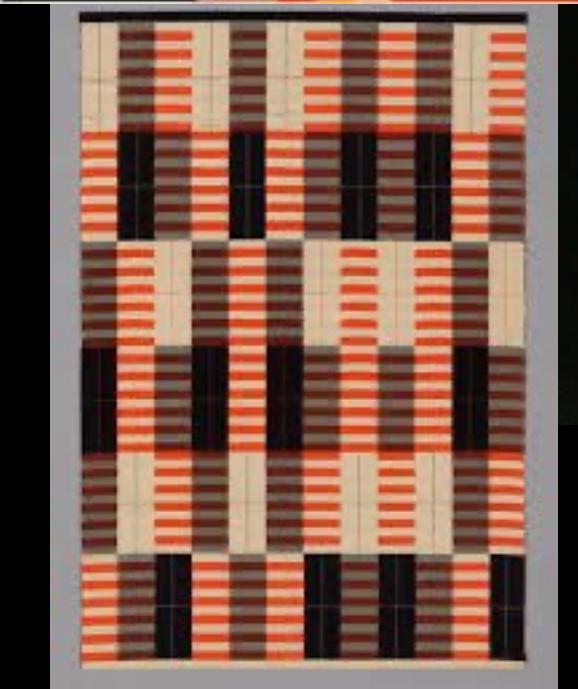
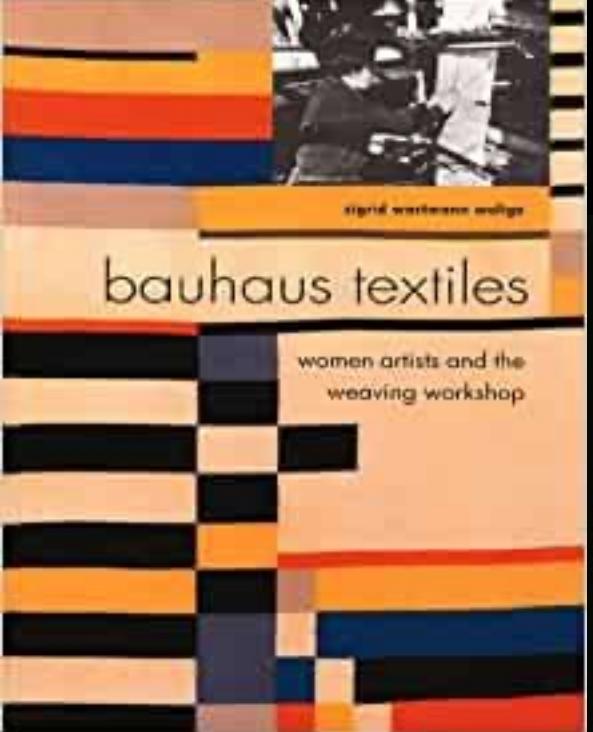


One significant occupation of women in Mesopotamia continued to be the making of textiles, a laborious and time-consuming activity that could be performed in the home and was therefore well suited to women. The fibers of flax, cotton, or wool first had to be cleaned and prepared and spun into thread. Then the thread was woven into cloth. (Slatkin, 8)

While other cultures in the Middle East gathered wool and used it to weave fabric for clothing, the Sumerians were the first to do it on an industrial scale.

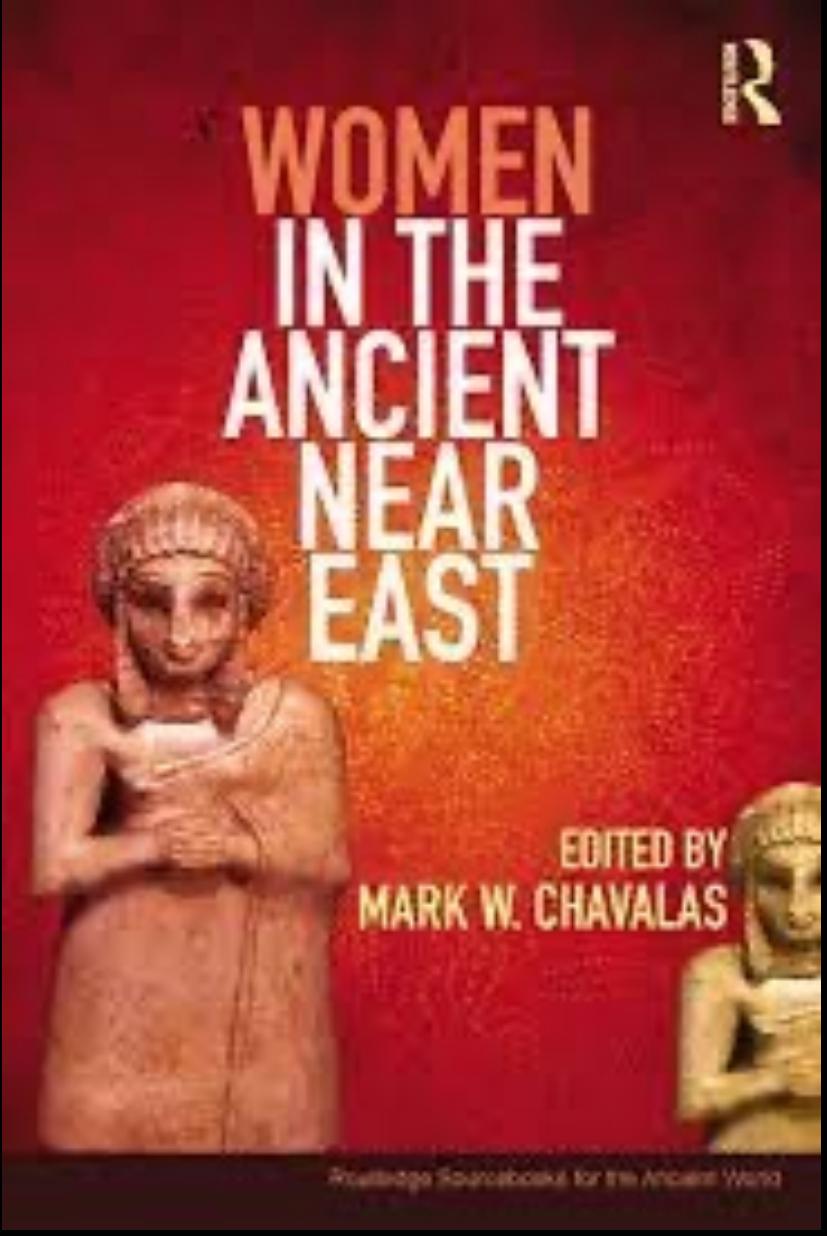
"The Sumerians innovation was to turn their temples into huge factories," Goodman explains. He notes that the Sumerians were the first to cross kin lines and form larger working organizations for making textiles -- the predecessors of modern manufacturing companies.

Left: A Mesopotamian woman weaving.  
DeAgostini/Getty Images /Egyptian Textile  
Museum

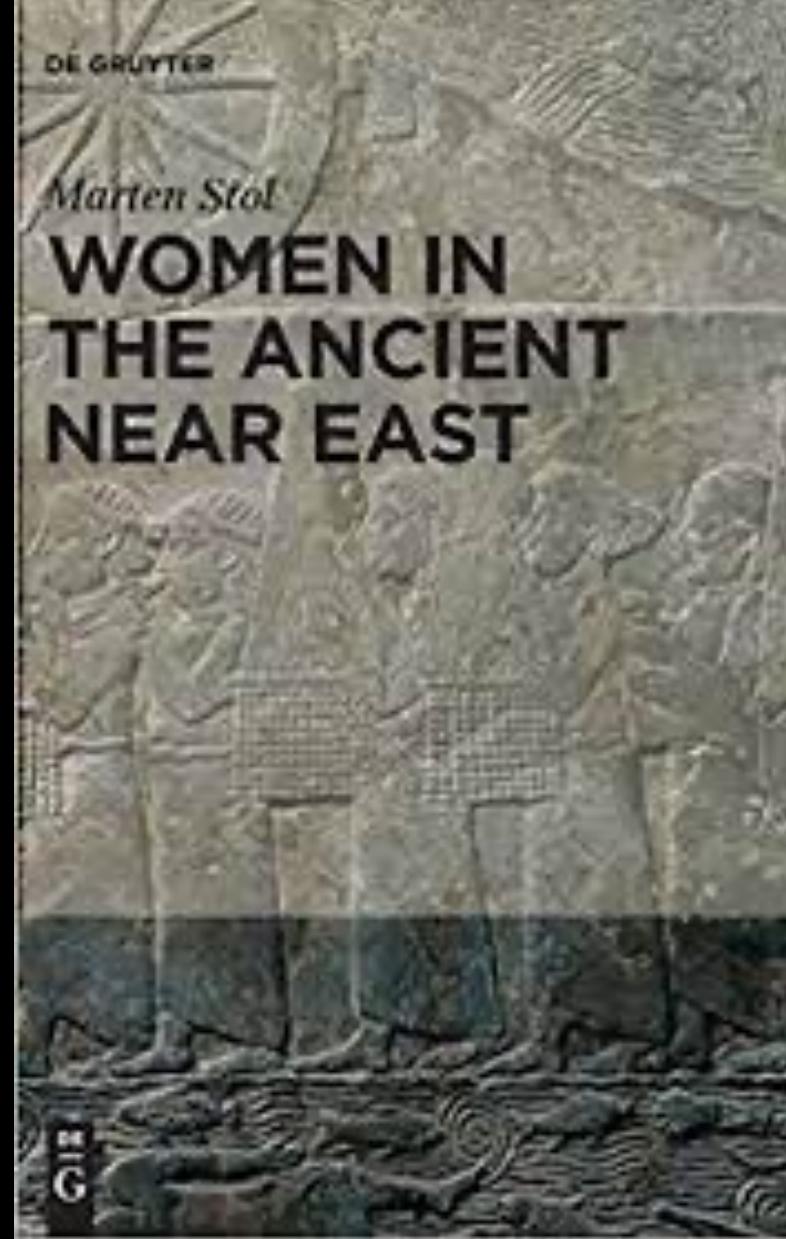


# The Weavers Workshop Bauhaus, Germany, 1919-1933





2013



2016

“invisibility of women” in ancient Near East images and artifacts (Slatkin, 9)

public and private realms

What is the relationship of gender to the public and private realms in history?

Three ranks of women were active in temple activities of the Ancient Near East:

- High- and middle-rank priestesses
- Queens and princesses representing the ruling family
- Offering-bearers in religious ceremonies

Fig. 1.3 Votive Disk of Enheduanna, ca 2300-2250 BCE

## ANCIENT NEAR EAST

- Who was Enheduanna?
- What is a high priestess?
- Where is she from?



## Sargon of Akkad (ca 2332-2279 BCE) and his daughter the high priestess and poet Enheduenna





Fig. 1.3 Votive Disk of Enheduanna, ca 2300-2250 BCE

The world's first known author is widely considered to be Enheduanna, a woman who lived in the 23rd century BCE in ancient Mesopotamia (approximately 2285 – 2250 BCE). Enheduanna is a remarkable figure: she was a princess and a priestess as well as a writer and poet.

The conquest of her father Sargon catalyzed the development of the world's first empire with the giant city of Akkad at its core, uniting northern and southern Mesopotamia. Enheduanna was Sargon's daughter. She worked as the high priestess of the moon deity Nanna-Suen at his temple in Ur (in modern-day Southern Iraq). The celestial nature of her occupation is reflected in her name, meaning "Ornament of Heaven".



Fig. 1.3 Votive Disk of Enheduanna, ca 2300-2250 BCE



- Enheduenna was the earliest known poet whose name has been recorded, in addition to being the daughter of Sargon of Akkad.
- She composed several works of literature, including two hymns to the Mesopotamian love goddess Inanna. She wrote the myth of Inanna and Ebih, and a collection of 42 temple hymns.
- Is this a true, portrait likeness of Enheduenna?

- The tradition of appointing daughters to positions of religious power, although gives women institutional power, treats them as means to an end. Despite the inherent anachronism from applying the lens of feminism to the historical situation, in what ways is the tradition feminist and empowers women, and in what ways does it not?

Fig. 1.4 Menkaure and Queen Khamerernebti II, ca 2490-2472 BCE

- Is this statue of Menkaure and Queen Khamereernebty II realistic or idealized in quality?
- Why?



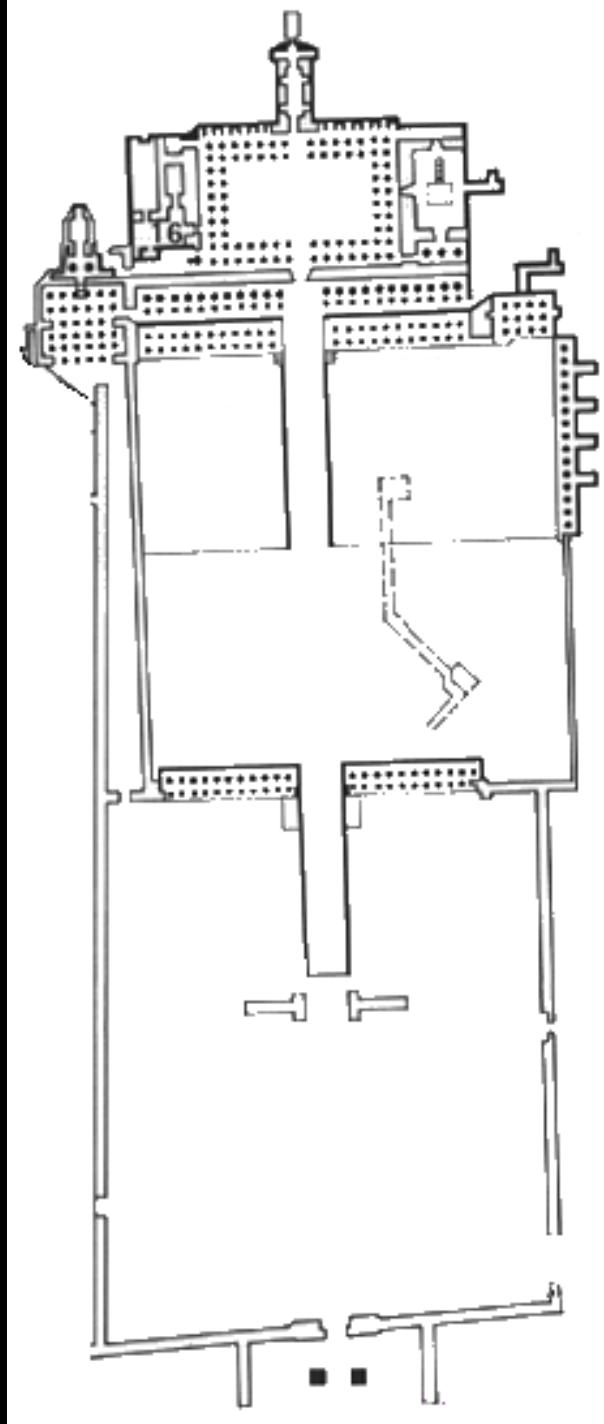


Fig. 1.5 Temple of Queen Hatshepsut at Dier el-Bahri, ca 1473-1458 BCE

- Why is this important?
- Note the stoa, or roofed colonnades.
- Note the hypostyle hall, or room of columns.
- Note the symmetry and axis.



- Wealthier women were known to do business dealings in early civilizations and generally participate in aspects of “male-activity.” In what ways do forms of societal power (such as wealth and class) insulate women from discrimination?

Fig. 1.5 Temple of Queen Hatshepsut at Dier el-Bahri, ca 1473-1458 BCE

- Is this where the queen lived?



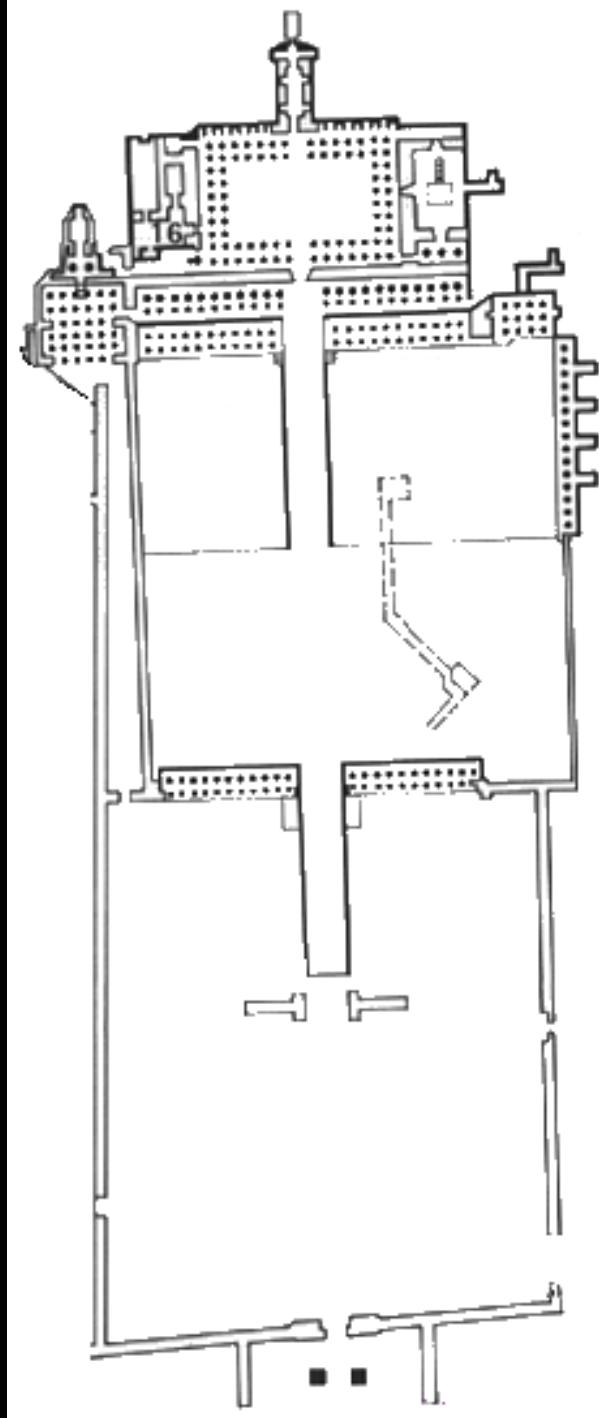
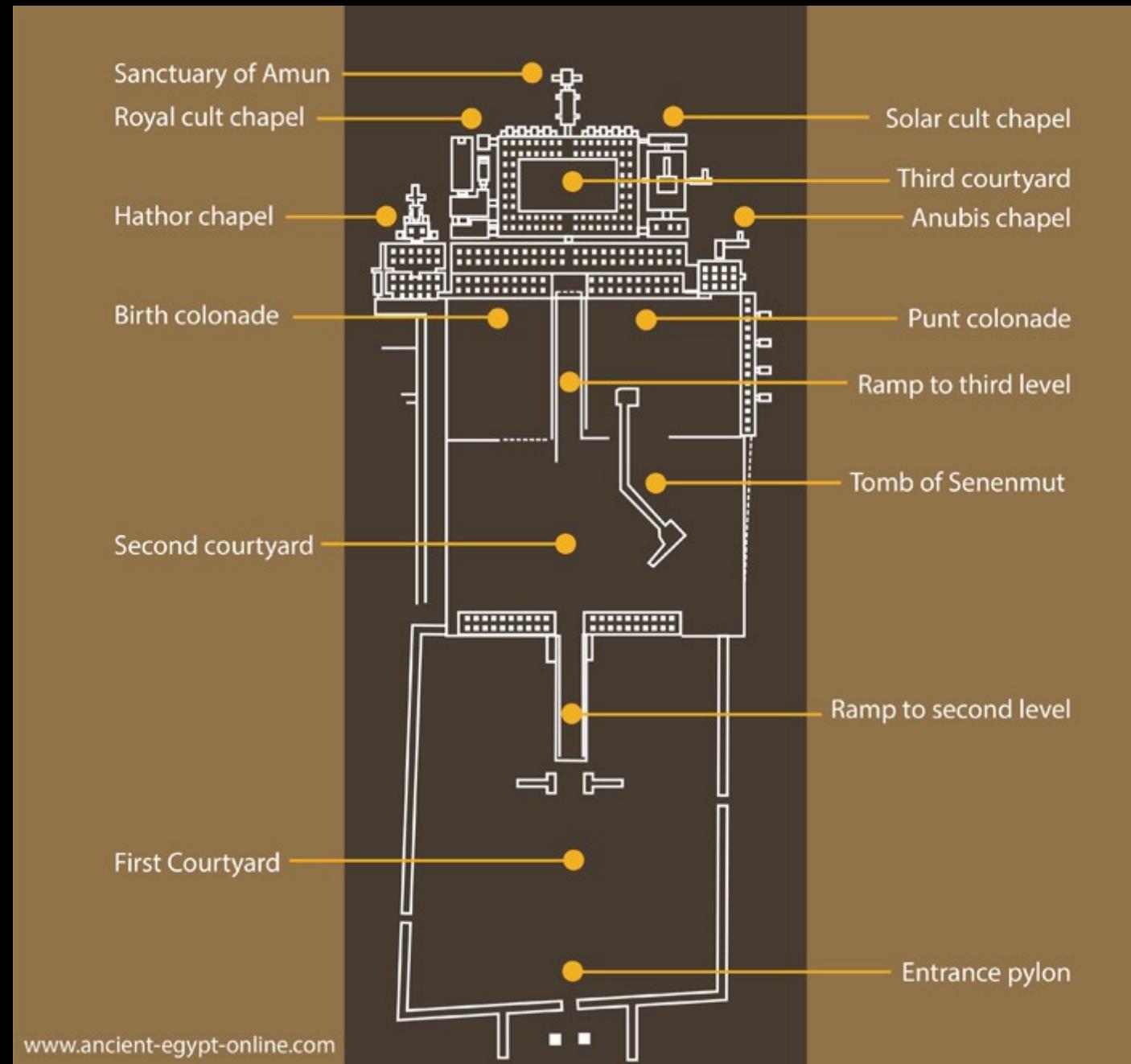


Fig. 1.5 Temple of Queen Hatshepsut at Dier el-Bahri, ca 1473-1458 BCE



- The textbook mentioned that Egyptian art pieces like paintings or sculptures would often depict the “ideal” men and women portrait (Slatkin 11). Similar to the women slaves selling embroidered clothing in Mesopotamia, were there more likely to be areas in Egypt that created more statues or artistic pieces that were easier to market to the upper class?

Fig. 1.6 Stele, alter from Armana  
Akhenaton, Nefertiti and three  
daughters, Eighteenth Dynasty, ca 1353-  
1335 BCE

- What is a stele?
- What is the distinction between polytheism and monotheism?
- Why is this important here?



Fig. 1.6 Stele, alter from Armana  
Akhenaton, Nefertiti and three daughters,  
Eighteenth Dynasty, ca 1353-1335 BCE

- Note the different body types here – in comparison to the statue of Menkaure and Queen Khamereernebty II.



Fig. 1.7 Menna and Family Hunting in the Marshes, Tomb of Menna, ca. 1400–1352 BCE

- What does this depict?
- What is the symbolism of hunting? Fowling? The lotus? The swamp?

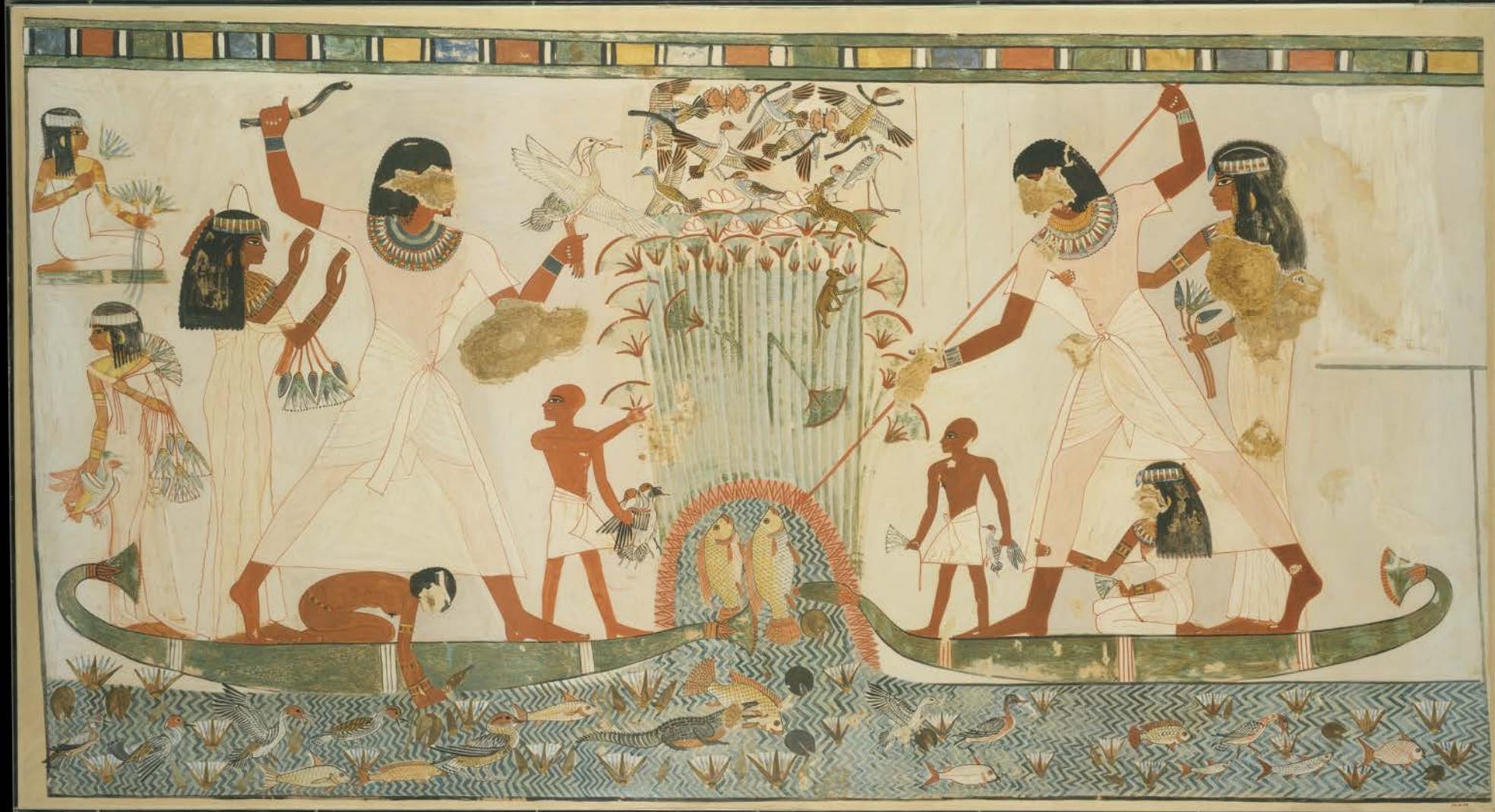


Fig. 1.8 Funerary banquet of Nebamun, c . 1350 BCE



- What does this painting depict?
- How do differences in the physical appearance of individuals translate into class? Think here about silhouette versus frontal portraits, clothed versus unclothed, etc.

# Egyptology

What is problematic about this field?



**William Carruthers** @w\_carruthers · Jul 7

Here's looking at you, Egyptology...



**Arthur Asseraf** ⚡🍊 @ArthurAsseraf · Jul 7

The dirty little secret is that some disciplines don't need to be decolonized, they just need to be shut down entirely

[Show this thread](#)

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