



Judith Leyster, Self-Portrait, 1633

AHST 2331-001 (21655)

Understanding Art

Dr. Charissa N. Terranova

Spring 2024

Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:30-12:45 pm

GR 2.530

Office Hours: By appointment

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Introduction

Women in Prehistory and the First Civilizations



Barbara Kruger, Untitled, 1997

## **Description**

This course offers an introduction to the history of art told from the perspective of women. It focuses on goddesses, matriarchy, women artists, women patrons, or matronage, and women collectors from antiquity to the present.

## **Organization**

The class is organized around a close reading of the textbook *Women Artists in History: from Antiquity to the Present* (Fifth Edition) by Wendy Slatkin. It is divided into lectures given by the professor and guest speakers and teachback from the students. Artist and engineer Gordon Pask coined the word “teachback” fifty years ago to identify the generative circular feedback between teachers and students that constitutes learning on both sides. Pask argued that teaching must have a component of learning and, likewise, learning of teaching.

### **Teachback: I teach! You teach! We all teach! (25% x 2 = 50%)**

Class begins each week with teachback, five-minute presentations made by 10-12 students every Tuesday. During the semester, students make two of these presentations. Each is based on the assigned reading and a work of art, artefact, or technology related to the reading in some way, which the student chooses. The work or technology can come **from inside or outside** the reading. The teachback presentation schedule is posted at elearning. For further details, see handout on teachback at elearning.

### **Mid-term and Final Exams (25% x 2 = 50%)**

There are two exams in the class, a mid-term exam on March 7 and a final exam the date of which is TBA. Each has two components: slide identification and short essay. In the first portion, students identify 10 works of art from memory, naming each by the artist's name (where known), title of work, and date. The artworks come from a list of 25 located in a review sheet distributed two weeks prior to the exam. In the second portion, students write short essays about two favorite works of art they have learned about in class up to that point. The final exam is not cumulative.

## **Reading Assignments**

Course textbook: Wendy Slatkin, *Women Artists in History: from Antiquity to the Present* (Fifth Edition). San Diego, CA: Cognella, 2020.

## **Watching Assignment**

Students are required to watch the documentary *Women Art Revolution* (2010) directed by Lynn Hershman Leeson, which is screened in class April 29.

## **General Requirements**

Students are required to attend every class, complete all assignments (reading, watching, writing, and exams), and participate with candor, verve, and commitment in class. Students are allowed one unexcused absence after which each absence will result in the lowering of the final grade by one-third letter (scale: A+, A, A-; B+, B, B-, etc...). Students with illnesses that require extended periods of absence are encouraged to officially withdraw from the class.

## **Grades:**

Teachback #1	25%
Teachback #2	25%
Mid-Term Exam	25%
Final Exam	<u>25%</u>
TOTAL	100%

## Schedule

Tuesday January 16

Course Introduction

Thursday January 18

Discussion/Lecture Topic: Women in Prehistoric Art and Art of First Civilizations

Reading: Chapter 1, "Prehistory and the First Civilizations," 1-18.

Tuesday January 23

Teachback!

Topic: Women in the Art of the Classical World

Reading: Chapter 2, "The Classical World," 19-38.

Thursday January 25

Lecture Topic: Women in the Art of the Classical World (cont'd) Guest Speaker: Karlyn Lienhard

Tuesday January 30

Teachback!

Topic: Women in the Art of the Medieval World

Reading Assignment: Chapter 3, "The Medieval World, 39-62.

Thursday February 1

Lecture Topic: Women in the Art of the Medieval World (cont'd) Guest Speaker: Dr. Alibhai

Tuesday February 6

Teachback!

Topic: Women in the Art of Italy 1400-1600

Reading Assignment: Chapter 4, "Italy 1400-1600," 63-84

Thursday February 8 (cont'd)

Lecture Topic: Women in the Art of Italy 1400-1600 (cont'd) Guest Speaker: Jacklyn Haefner

Tuesday February 13

Teachback!

Topic: Women in the Art of Italy and Northern Europe during the Seventeenth Century

Reading Assignment: Chapter 5, "Italy and Northern Europe: The Seventeenth Century," 85-102

Thursday February 15

Lecture Topic: Women in the Art of Italy and Northern Europe during the Seventeenth Century (cont'd) Guest Speaker: Sofia Penny

Tuesday February 20

Teachback!

Topic: Women in the Art of the Eighteenth Century

Reading Assignment: Chapter 6, "The Eighteenth Century," 103-116.

Midterm Exam Review Sheet Distributed

Thursday February 22

Lecture Topic: Women in the Art of the Eighteenth Century (cont'd) Guest Speakers: Nida Jaffer and Golsa Eghbali

Tuesday February 27

Teachback!

Topic: Women in the Art of the Nineteenth Century

Reading Assignment: Chapter 7, "The Nineteenth Century: 1800-1870," 117-140.

Thursday February 29

Guest Speakers: Aisen Caro Chacin and Adam Zaretsky, contemporary bioartists

Tuesday March 5

Midterm Exam Review

Thursday March 7

Midterm Exam

Tuesday March 12-Thursday March 14

Spring Break No Class

Tuesday March 20

Teachback!

Topic: Women in the Art of the Late Nineteenth Century: 1870-1900

Reading Assignment: Chapter 8, "The Late Nineteenth Century: 1870-1900," 141-160.

Thursday March 22

Lecture Topic: Women in the Art of the Late Nineteenth Century: 1870-1900 (cont'd) Guest Speaker: Damian Enyaosah

Tuesday March 27

Teachback!

Topic: Women in the Art of the Early Twentieth Century: 1900-1920

Reading Assignment: Chapter 9, "The Early Twentieth Century: 1900-1920," 161-182.

Thursday March 29

Lecture Topic: Women in the Art of Europe and America: 1900-1920 (cont'd)

Tuesday April 2

Teachback!

Topic: Women in the Art of Europe and America: 1920-1945

Reading Assignment: Chapter 10, "Europe and America

Thursday April 4

Lecture Topic: Women in the Art of the United States: 1920-1945 (cont'd)



Tuesday April 9

Teachback!

Topic: Women in the Art of the United States: 1945-1970

Reading Assignment: Chapter 11, "The United States: 1945-1970," 213-232.

Thursday April 11

Topic: Women in the Art of the United States: 1945-1970 (cont'd)

Tuesday April 16

Teachback!

Topic: Contemporary Feminisms

Reading Assignment: Chapter 12, "Contemporary Feminisms," 233-258

Thursday April 18

Lecture Topic: Contemporary Feminisms (cont'd) Guest Speaker: Merve Sahin

Tuesday April 22

Teachback!

Topic: Contemporary Global Feminisms

Reading Assignment: Chapter 13, "Contemporary Global Feminisms," 259-278.

Final Exam Review Sheet Distributed

Thursday April 24

Lecture Topic: Contemporary Global Feminisms (cont'd)

Tuesday April 29

Topic: Women Art Revolution

In-Class Film Screening: *Women Art Revolution* (2010) directed by Lynn Hershman Leeson

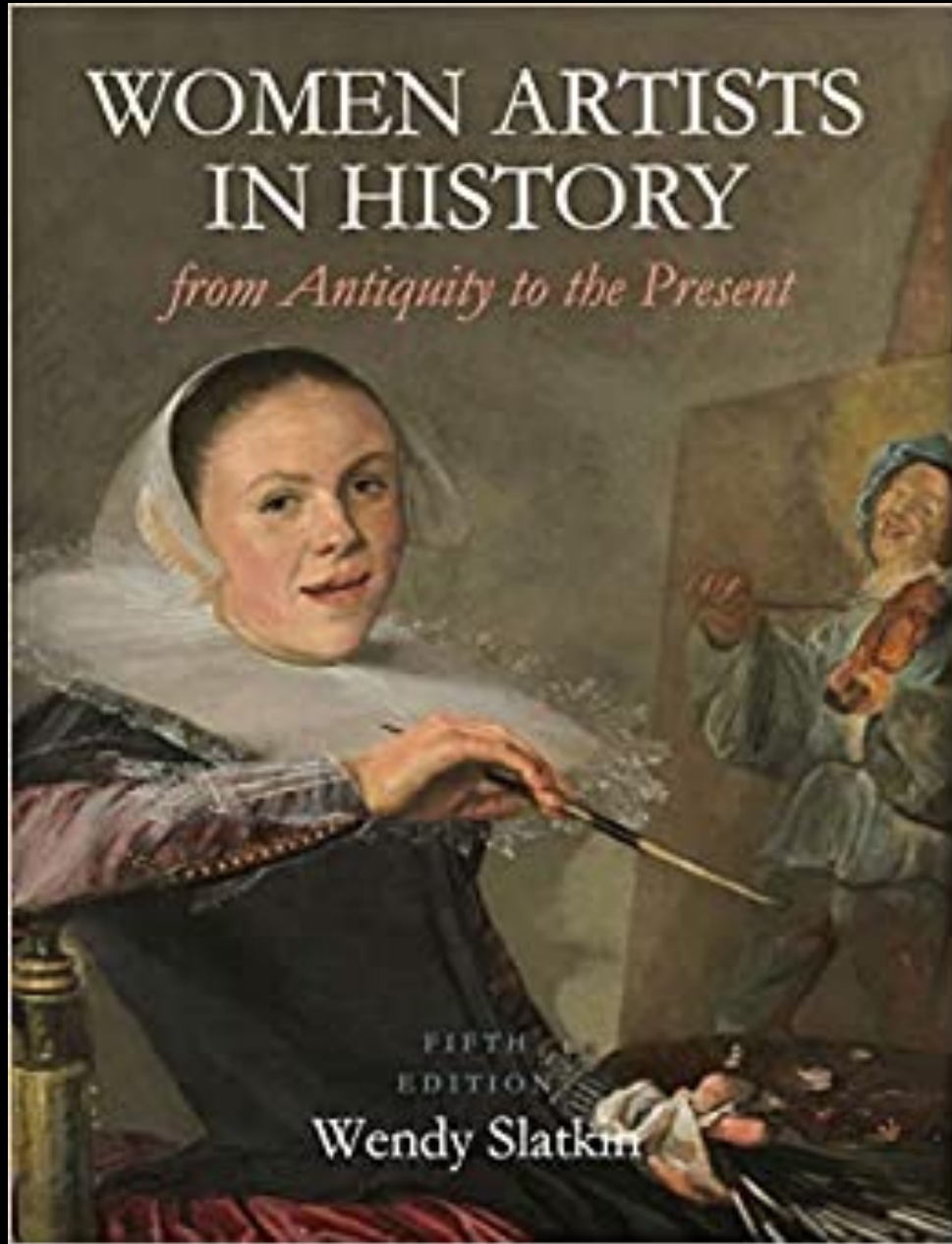
Thursday May 2

Discussion Topic: Women Art Revolution (cont'd)

Final Exam Review

Date TBA

Final Exam



- Canon
- Context
- Discourse
- Eurocentric
- Feminism
- Fine arts
- Gender
- Identity
- Matriarchy
- Metanarrative
- Patriarchy
- Patron
- Representations
- Sex
- Text
- Visual culture

# **Women in Prehistory and the First Civilizations**

## **Prehistory versus First Civilizations**

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

2.5 MILLION YEARS

**PALEOLITHIC**

OR

**OLD STONE AGE**

15000 YEARS AGO

**MESOLITHIC**

OR

**MIDDLE STONE AGE**

11000 YEARS AGO

**NEOLITHIC**

OR

**NEW STONE AGE**



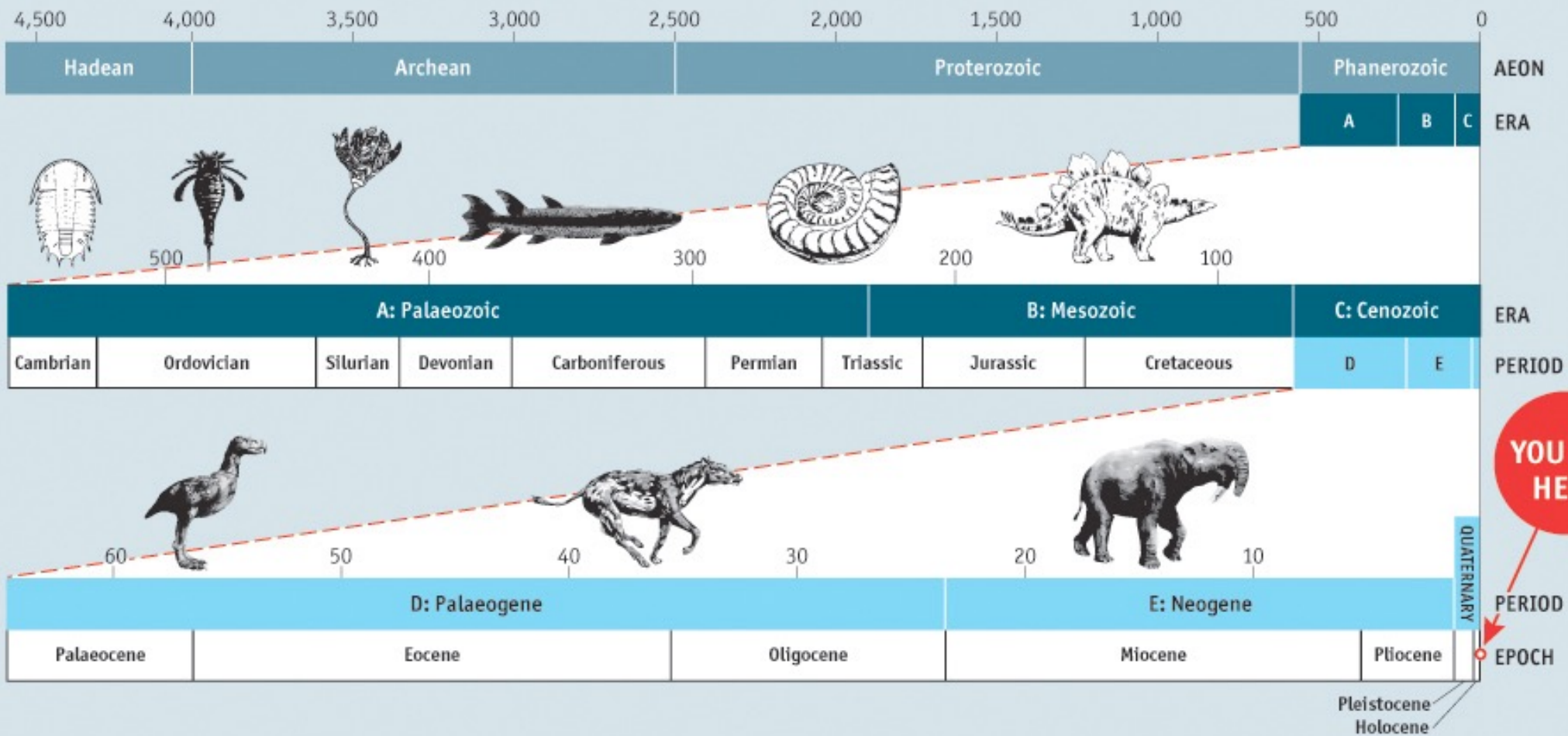
IN THE PALEOLITHIC AGE, HUMAN USED STONES FOR HUNTING WHICH WAS FOUND IN NATURE AND ALREADY HAD CUTTING EDGE. THEY USED TREE BRANCHES, LEAVES AND STONES TO MAKE SHELTER FOR LIVING. THEY ATE PLANTS AND MEAT, GATHERED BERRIES. THEY MAY HAVE EATEN FLESH OF DEAD ANIMALS LEFT BEHIND BY OTHER LARGER PREDATORS. THEY USED FIRE BY RUBBING STONES TOGETHER AND ROASTED MEAT.

IN THE MESOLITHIC AGE, HUMAN STARTED TO SHARPEN THEIR STONE TOOLS FOR HUNTING AND LOOKED FOR STONES (SUCH AS FLINT) THAT WAS HARDER AND COULD BE SHARPENED EASILY. THEY STARTED TO SETTLE IN ONE PLACE BUT STILL REMAIN HUNTER AND GATHERER OF MEET, FISH, BERRIES, NUTS AND FRUITS.

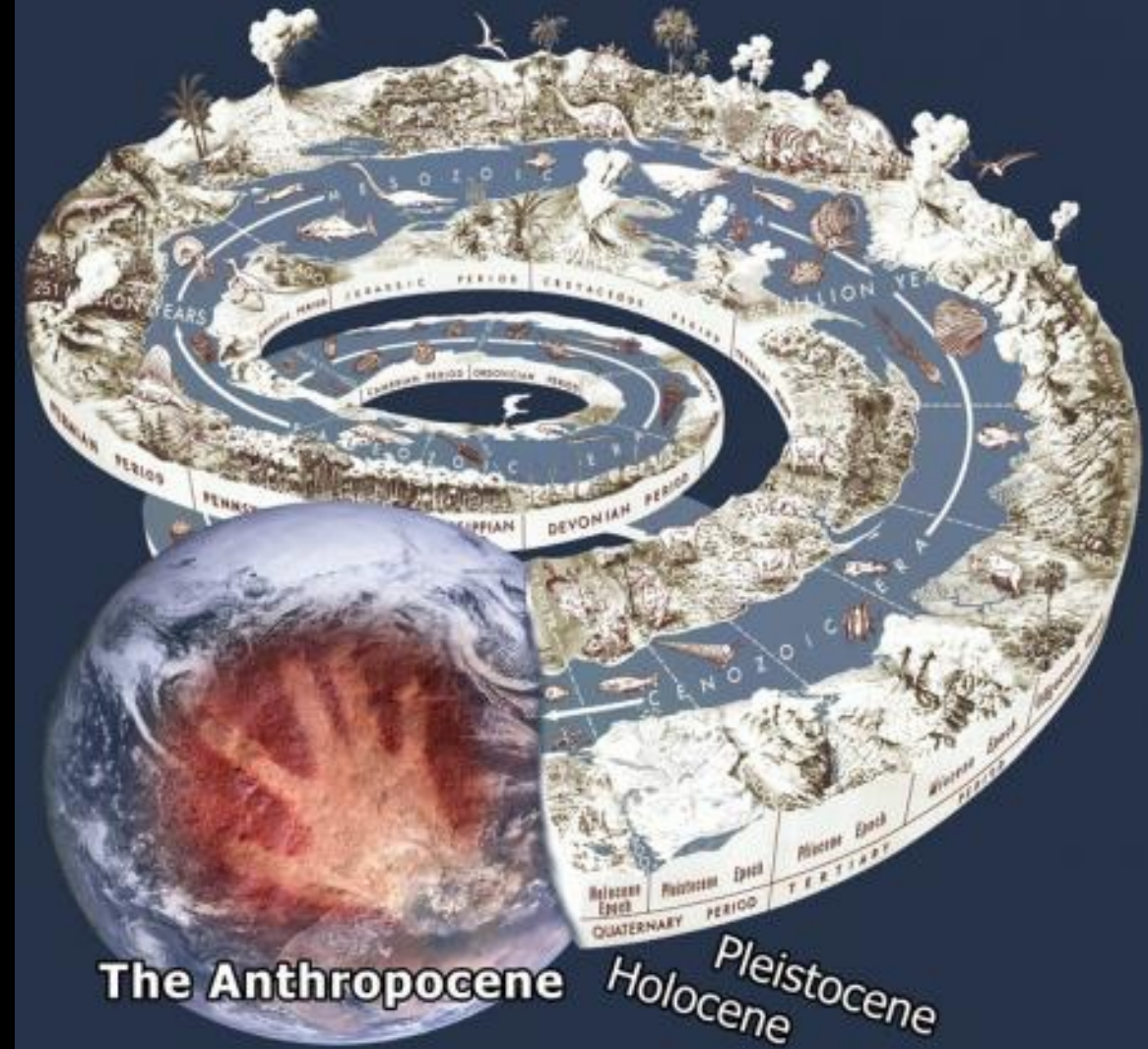
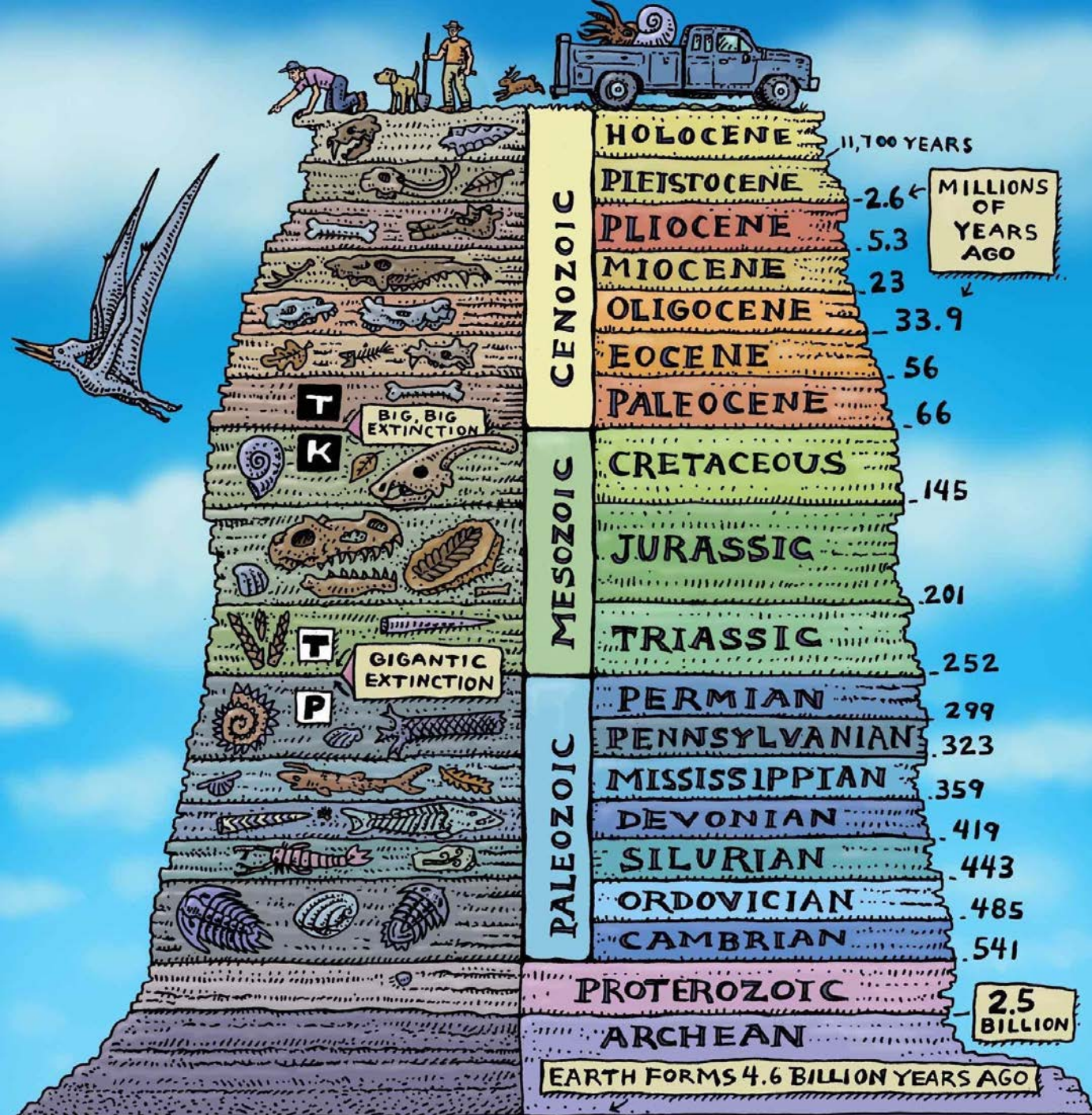
DURING THE NEOLITHIC AGE, GROUP OF HUNTERS LEARNED ABOUT AGRICULTURE. AT FIRST THEY COLLECTED WILD CROPS AND DOMESTICATED WILD ANIMALS. BY 10,000 YEARS AGO THEY STARTED TO PRODUCE GRAINS, FRUITS AND VEGETABLES FROM SEEDS. THEY MADE PLOW OUT OF ANTLERS, STONE AND WOOD AND STARTED TO CULTIVATE THE LAND WITH THE HELP OF HERDED ANIMALS. THEY USED STONE MORTARS AND PESTLES TO GRIND CEREALS AND GRAINS.

# A geological timeline of the Earth

MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO



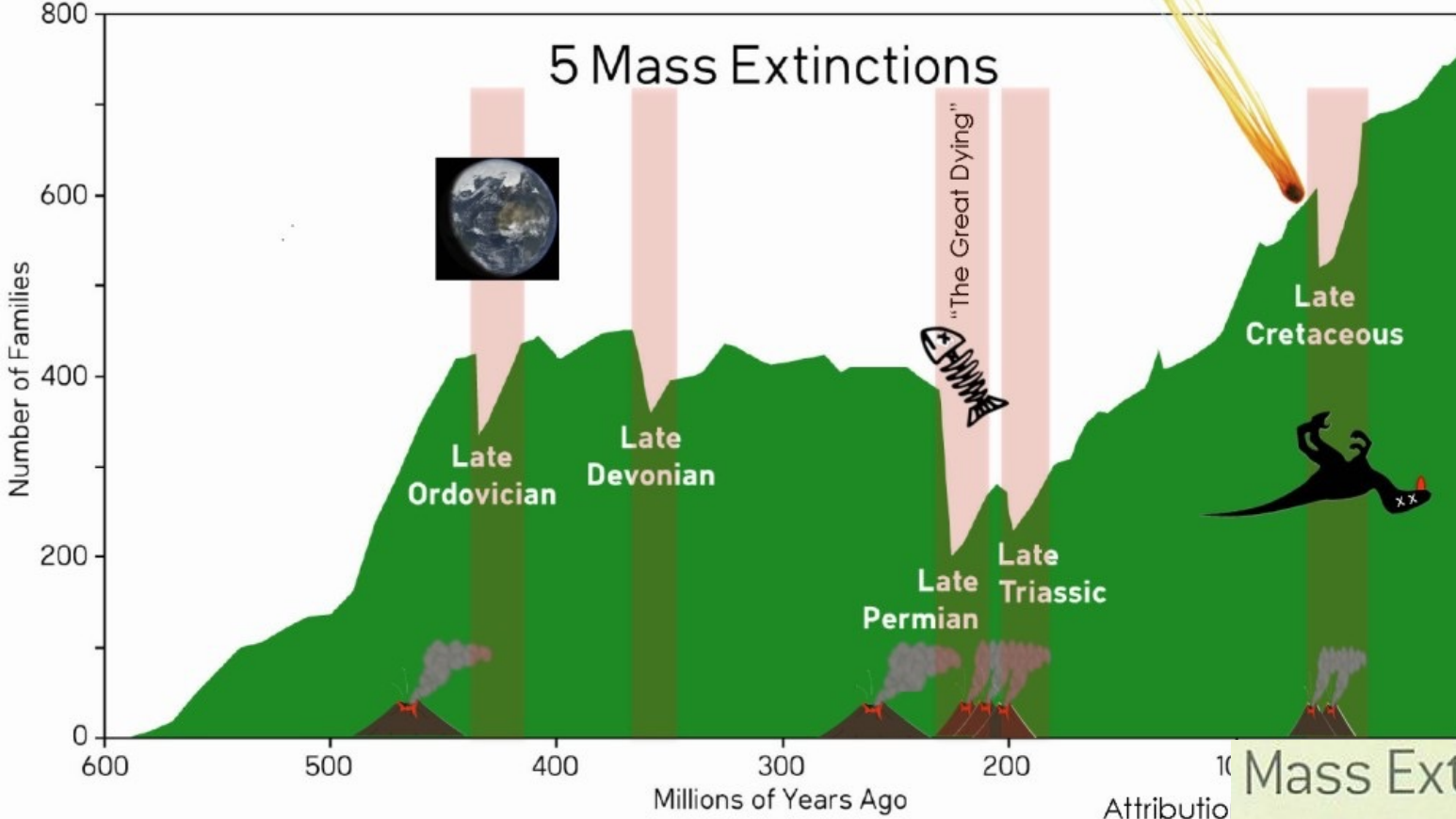




The Anthropocene Pleistocene Holocene

**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.



## 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 EXTINGUISHED: 85%  
 SUSPECTED CAUSE: Dramatic fluctuations in sea level



### LATE DEVONIAN

DURATION: <3 my  
 MARINE GENERA OBSERVED EXTINGUISHED: 57%  
 CALCULATED MARINE SPECIES EXTINGUISHED: 83%  
 SUSPECTED CAUSES: Impact, global cooling, loss of oxygen in oceans

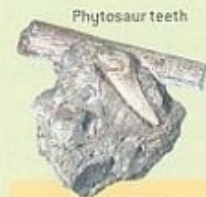
### END PERMIAN

DURATION: Unknown  
 MARINE GENERA OBSERVED EXTINGUISHED: 82%  
 CALCULATED MARINE SPECIES EXTINGUISHED: 95%  
 SUSPECTED CAUSES: Dramatic fluctuations in climate or sea level; asteroid or comet impacts; severe volcanic activity



### END TRIASSIC

DURATION: 3 to 4 my  
 MARINE GENERA OBSERVED EXTINGUISHED: 53%  
 CALCULATED MARINE SPECIES EXTINGUISHED: 80%  
 SUSPECTED CAUSES: Severe volcanism; global warming



### END CRETACEOUS

DURATION: <1 my  
 MARINE GENERA OBSERVED EXTINGUISHED: 47%  
 CALCULATED MARINE SPECIES EXTINGUISHED: 76%  
 SUSPECTED CAUSES: Impact; severe volcanism



Millions of years ago



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



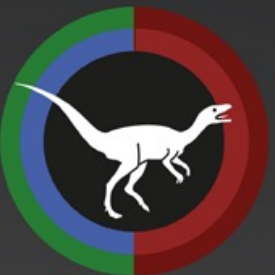
Ordovician-Silurian extinction  
450-440 million years ago



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

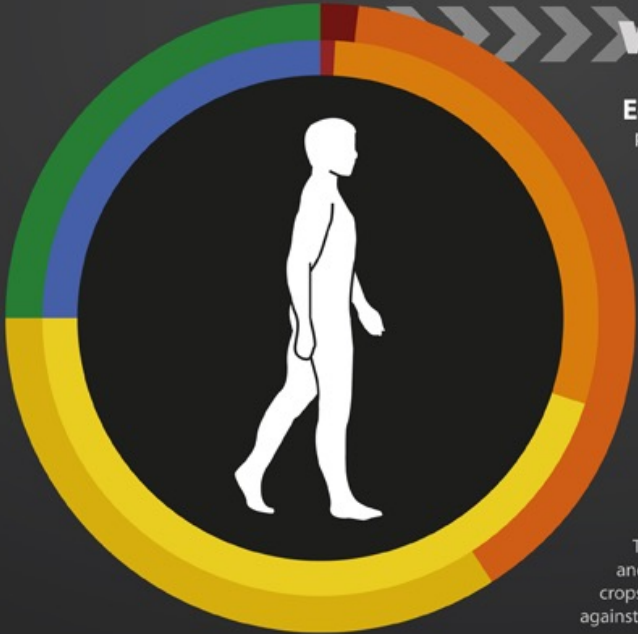


## WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

**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.



**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.



**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.

**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.



How old is art?



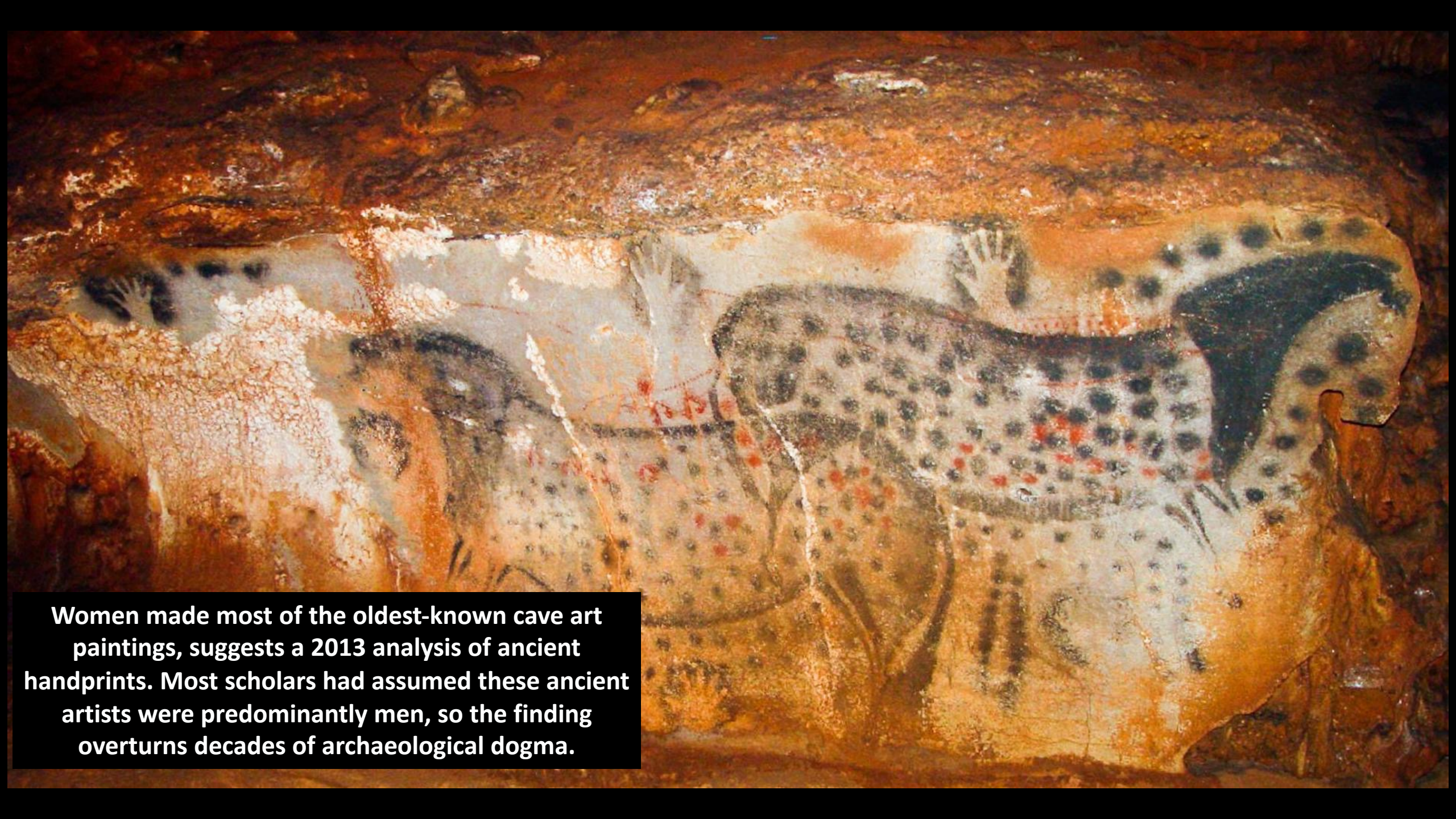
**First Sculpture: Handaxe to Figure Stone**  
**January 27, 2018 - April 28, 2018**  
**An exhibition at the Nasher Sculpture Center**

This exhibition focused on ancient handaxes and figure stones as works of art. Traditionally understood as the longest-used tool in human history, with examples dating back more than two million years, some handaxes are equally fascinating for their non-utilitarian, aesthetic qualities.





- 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.



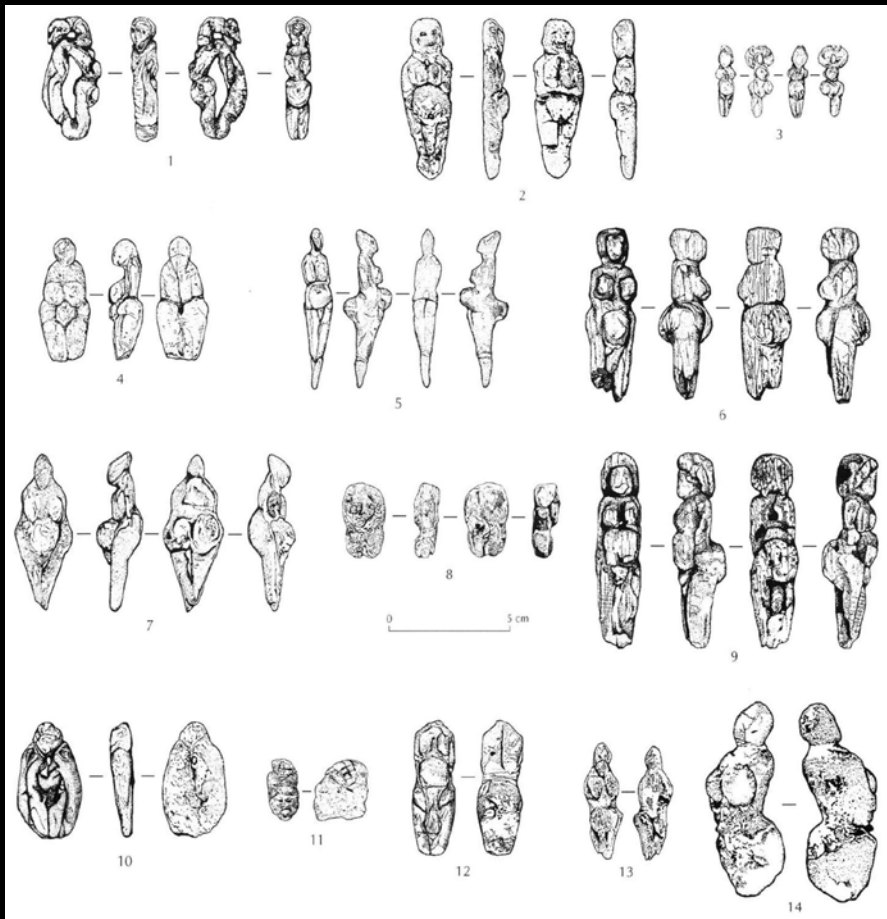
Fig. 1.1 Venus of Willendorf front view, ca 28,000-25,000 BCE

- 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





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

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)



- 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



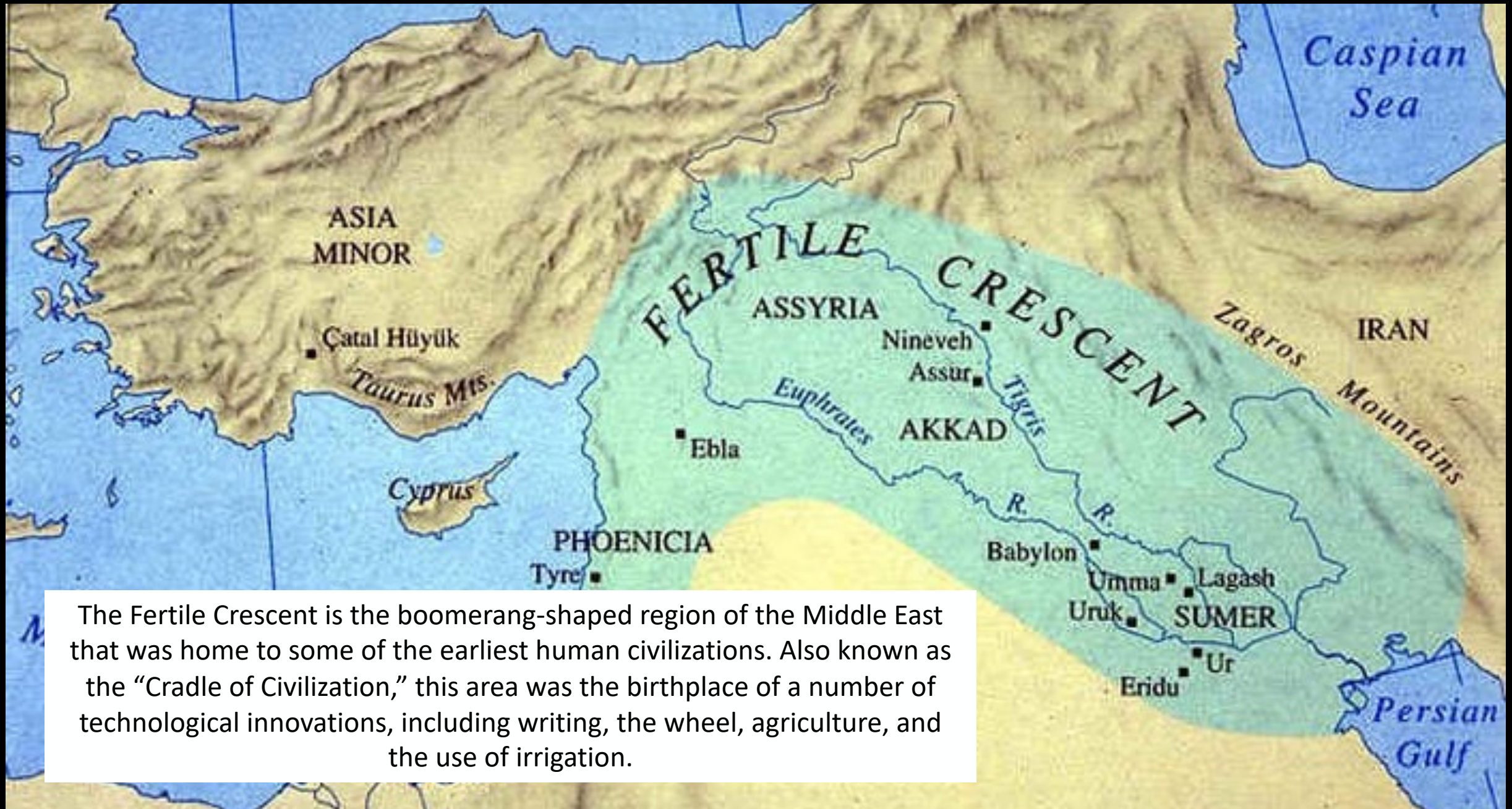
Venus of Willendorf front view, ca  
28,000-25,000 BCE



Cycladic Marble female figure, 4500–4000 BCE



The Fertile Crescent



The Fertile Crescent is the boomerang-shaped region of the Middle East that was home to some of the earliest human civilizations. Also known as the “Cradle of Civilization,” this area was the birthplace of a number of technological innovations, including writing, the wheel, agriculture, and the use of irrigation.



According to Slatkin, how is society organized in the Fertile Crescent?



- 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?

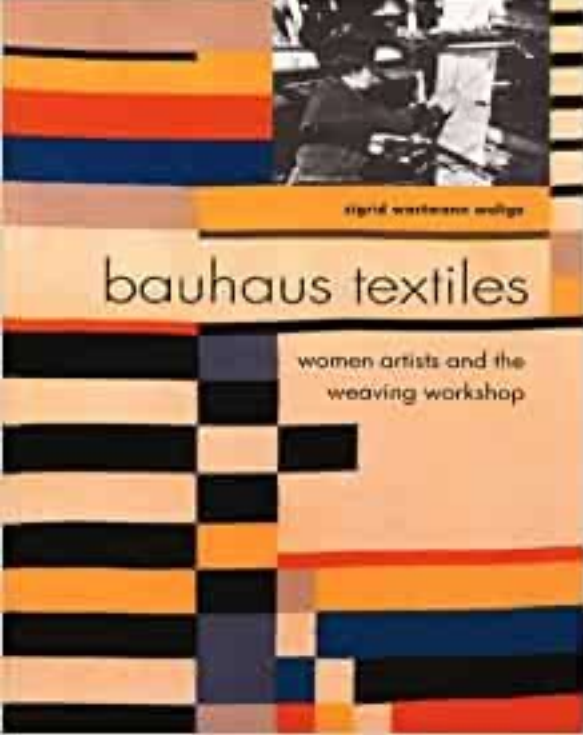


One significant occupation of women in Mesopotamia continued to be the making of textiles, a laborious and time-consuming activity that could be performed in the home and was therefore well suited to women. The fibers of flax, cotton, or wool first had to be cleaned and prepared and spun into thread.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

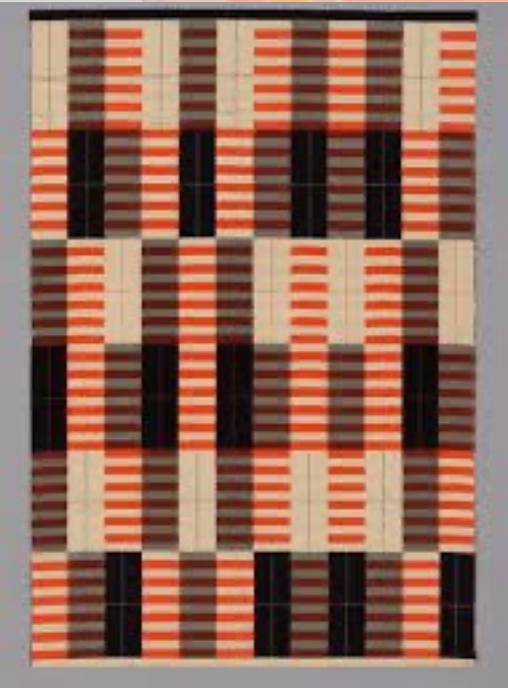
While other cultures in the Middle East gathered wool and used it to weave fabric for clothing, the Sumerians were the first to do it on an industrial scale.

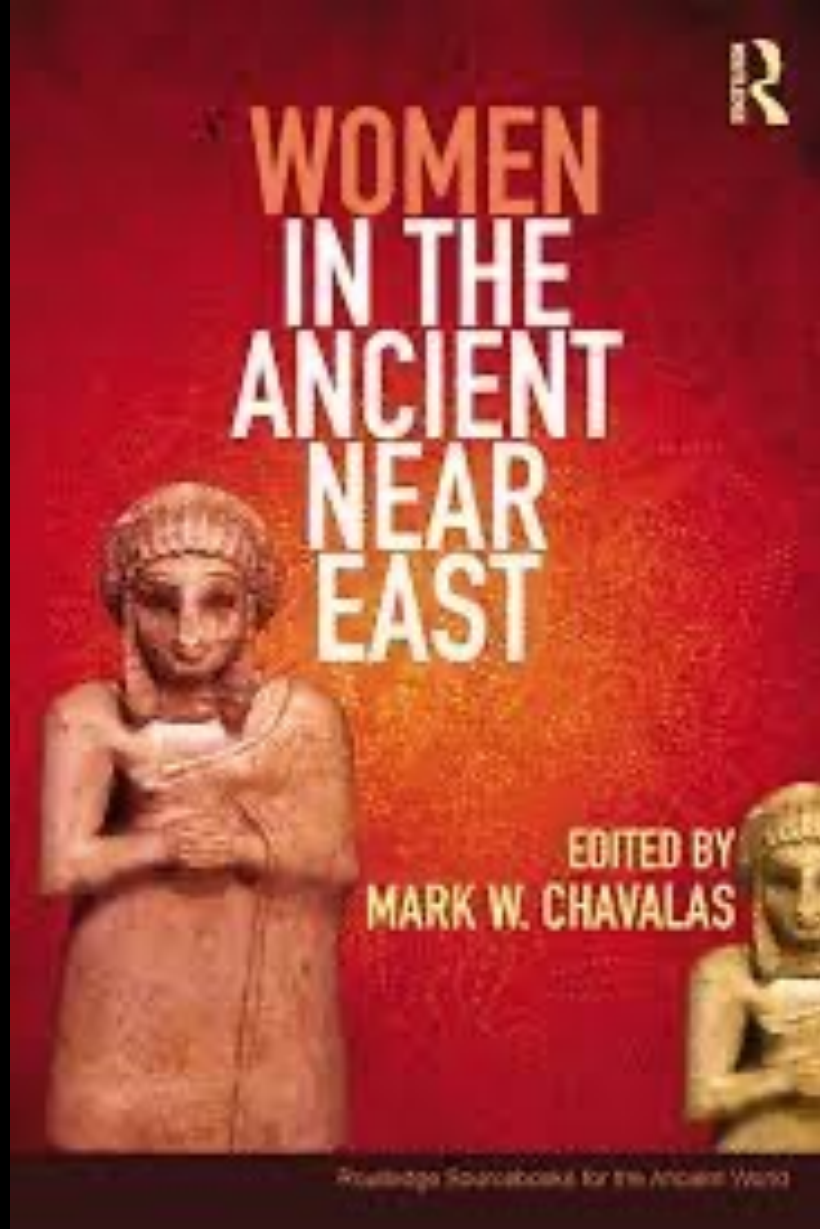
"The Sumerians innovation was to turn their temples into huge factories," Goodman explains. He notes that the Sumerians were the first to cross kin lines and form larger working organizations for making textiles -- the predecessors of modern manufacturing companies.

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

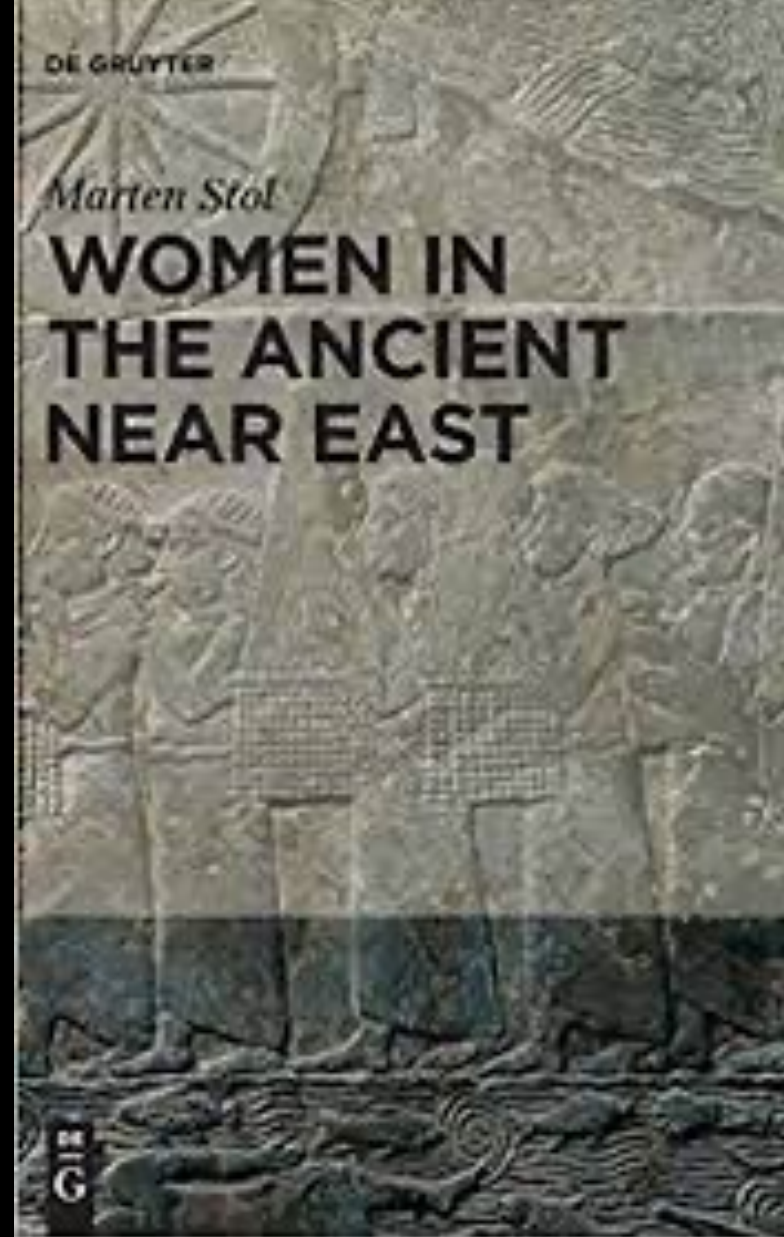


# The Weavers Workshop Bauhaus, Germany, 1919-1933





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

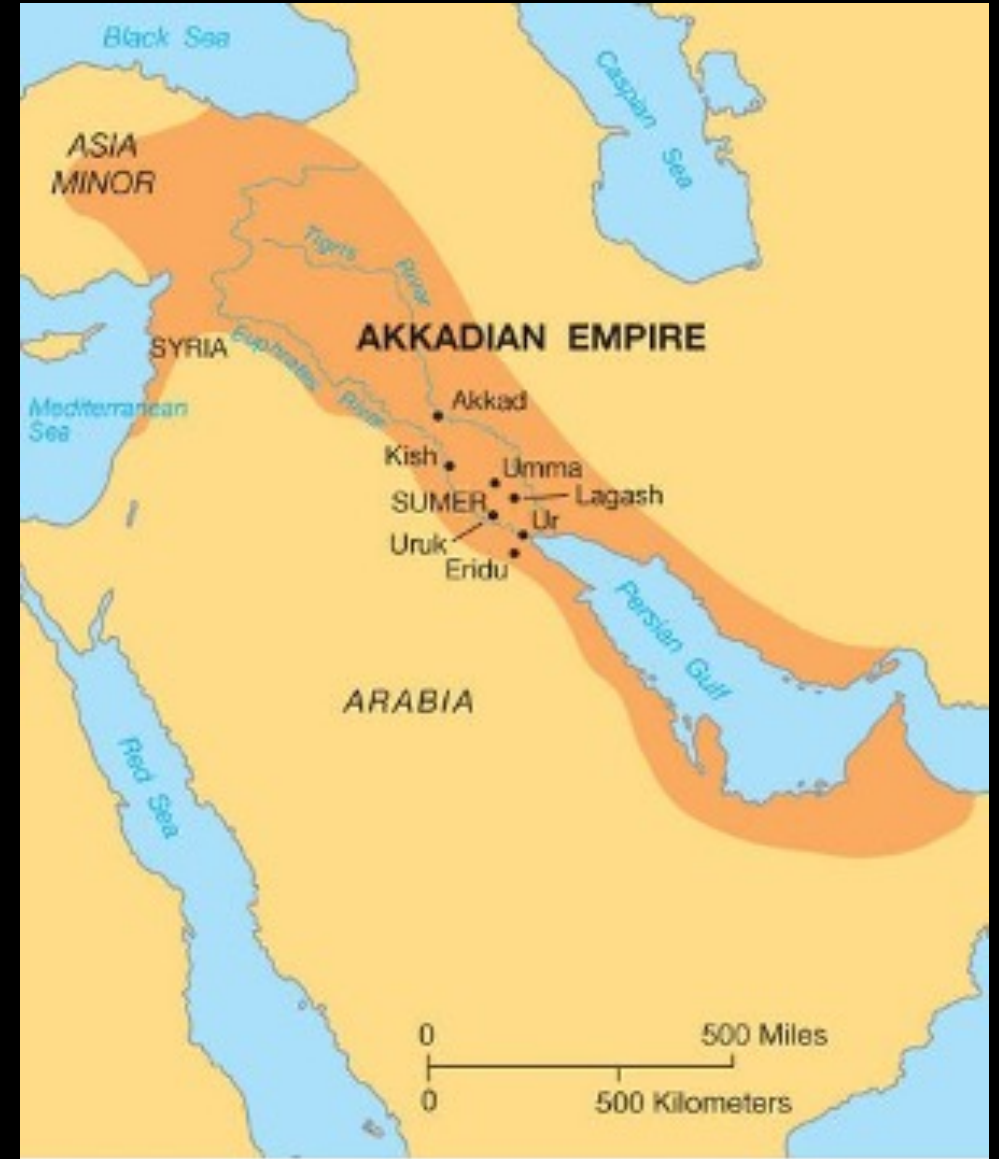
Fig. 1.3 Votive Disk of Enheduanna, ca 2300-2250 BCE

## 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







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.

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



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?



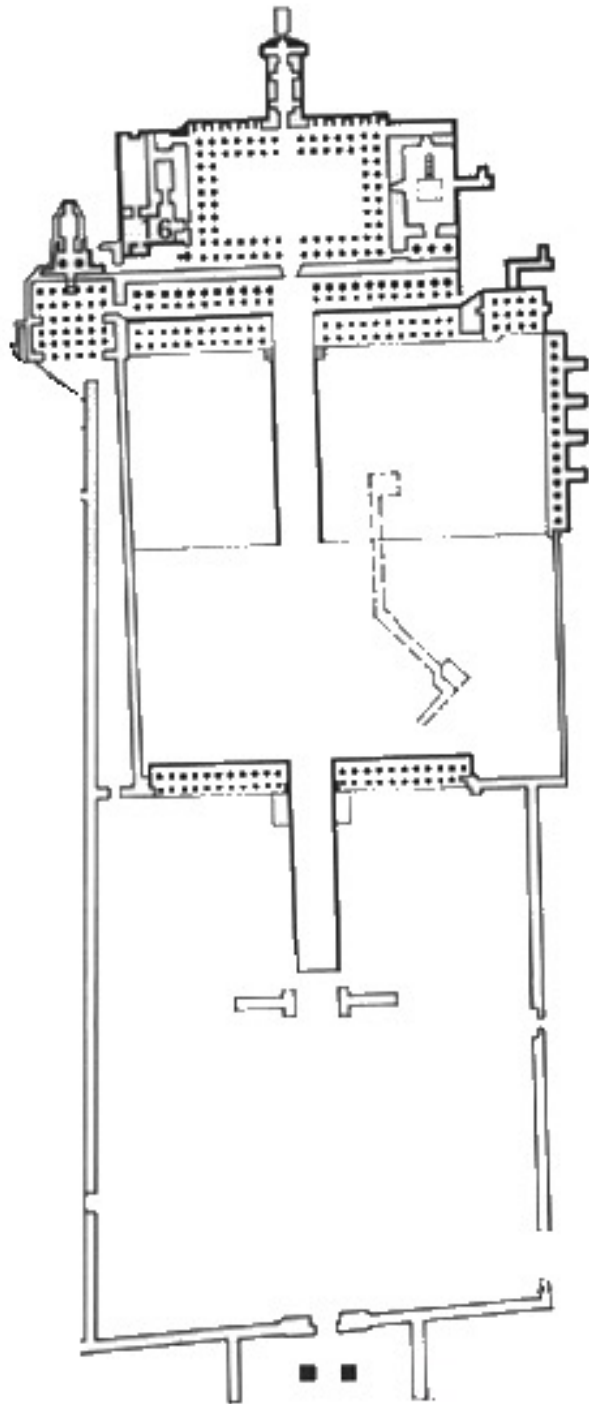
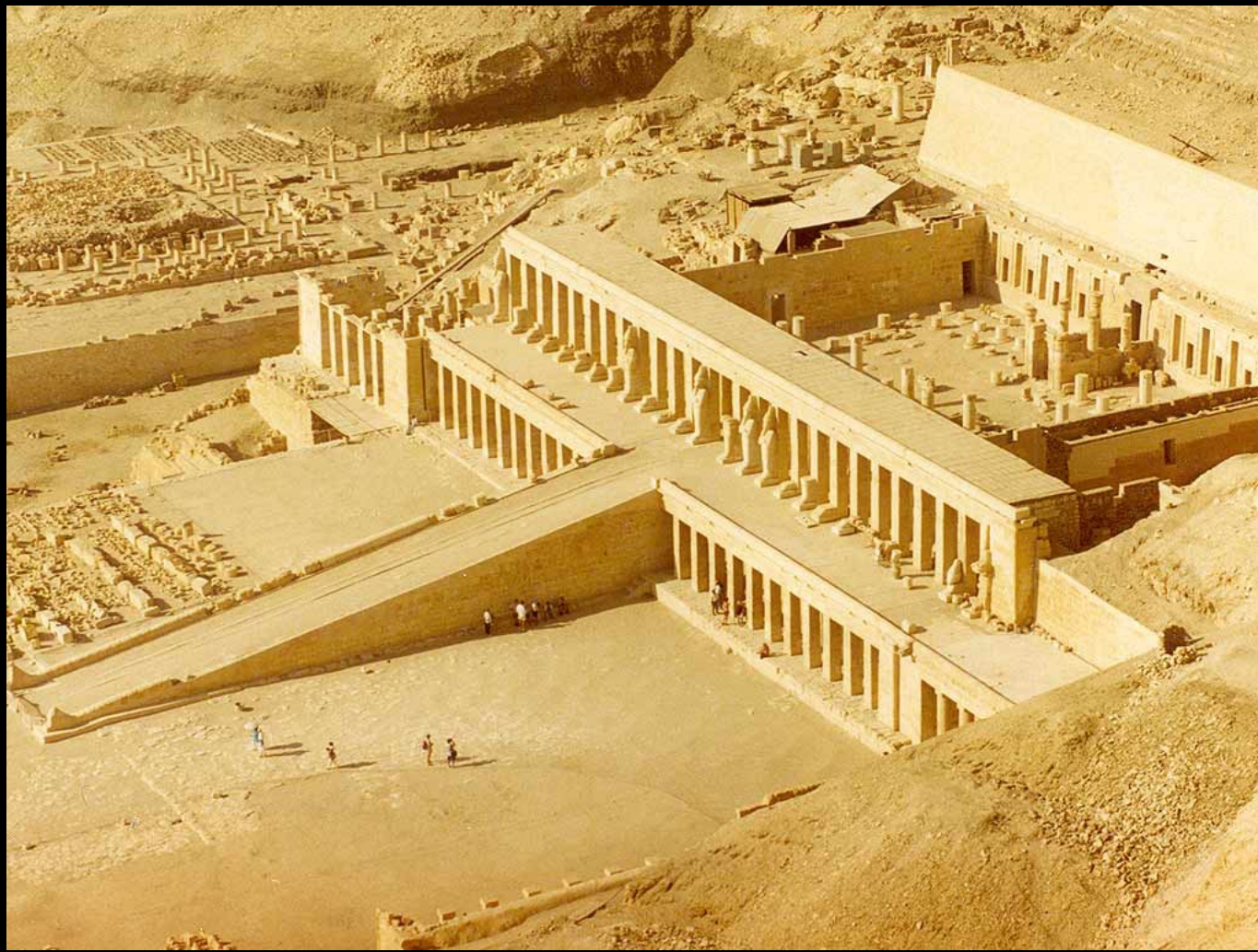


Fig. 1.5 Temple of Queen Hatshepsut at Dier el-Bahri, ca 1473-1458 BCE

- 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?

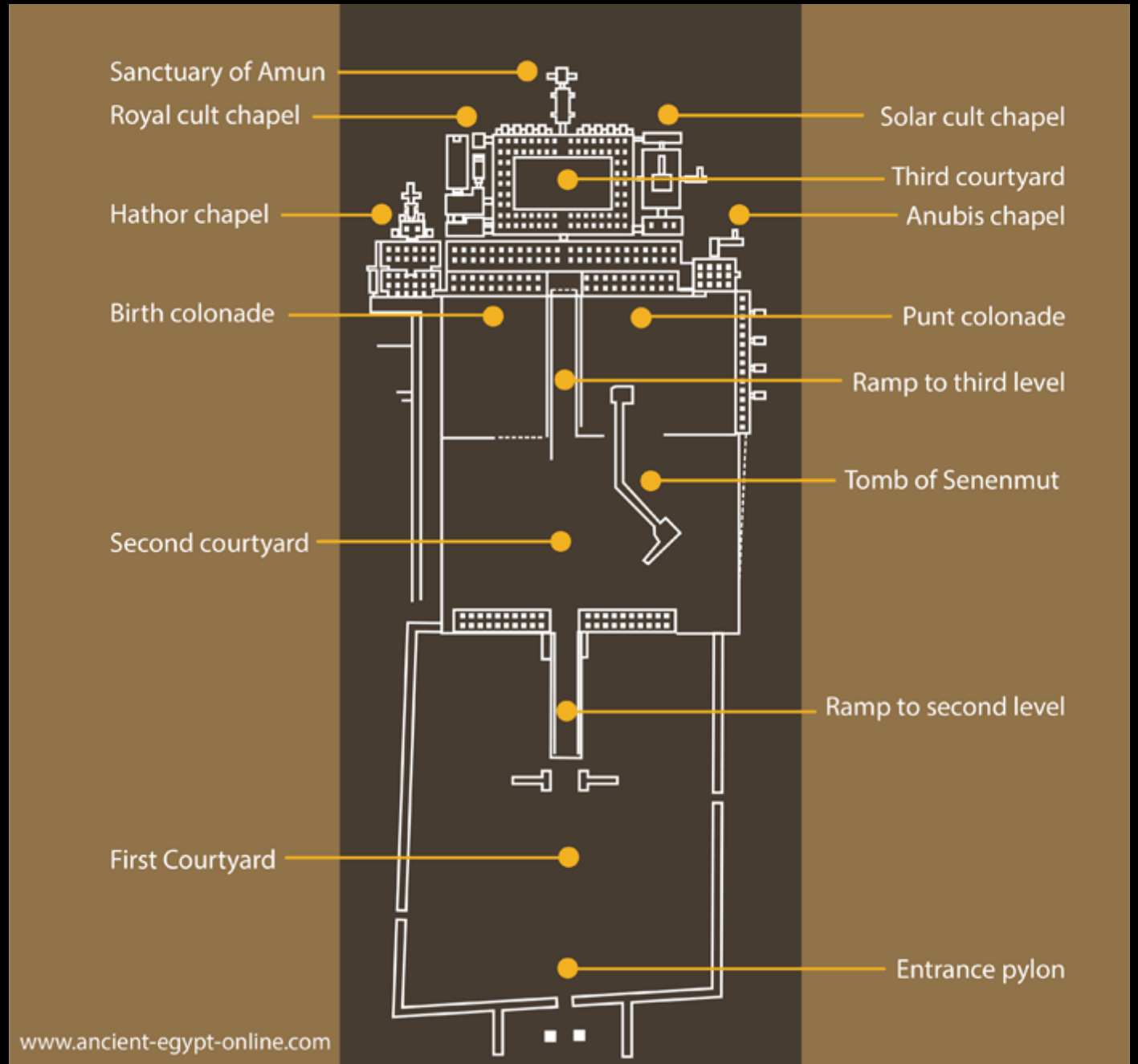
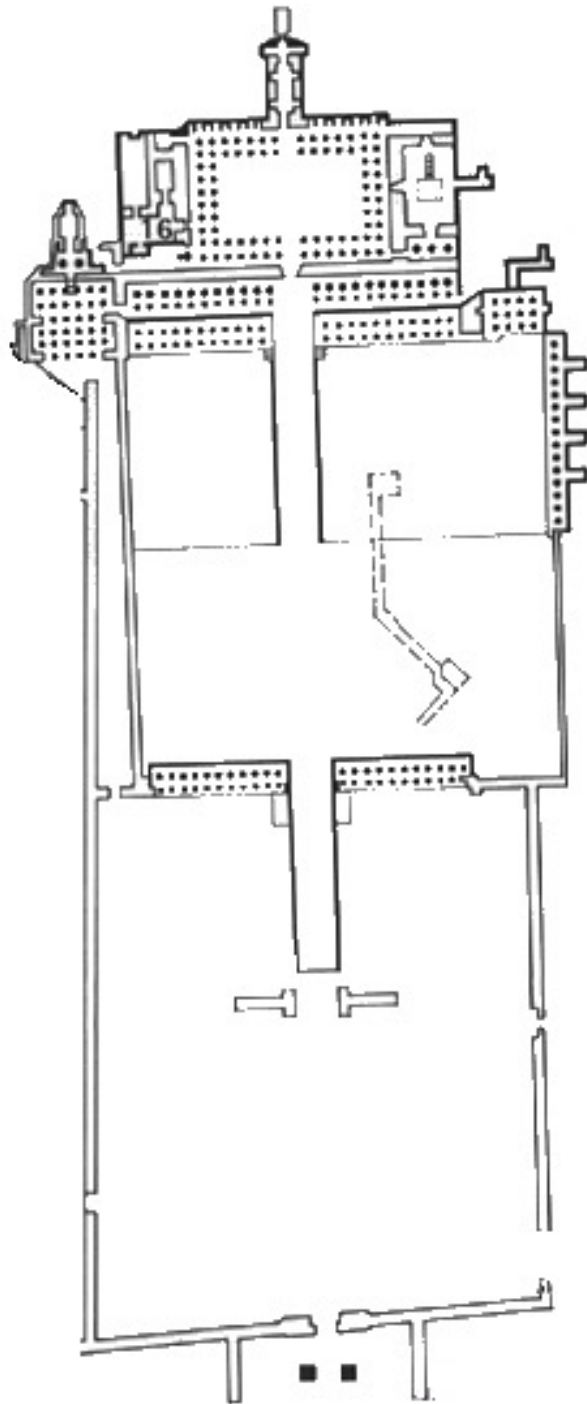
Fig. 1.5 Temple of Queen Hatshepsut at Dier el-Bahri, ca 1473-1458 BCE

- 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?

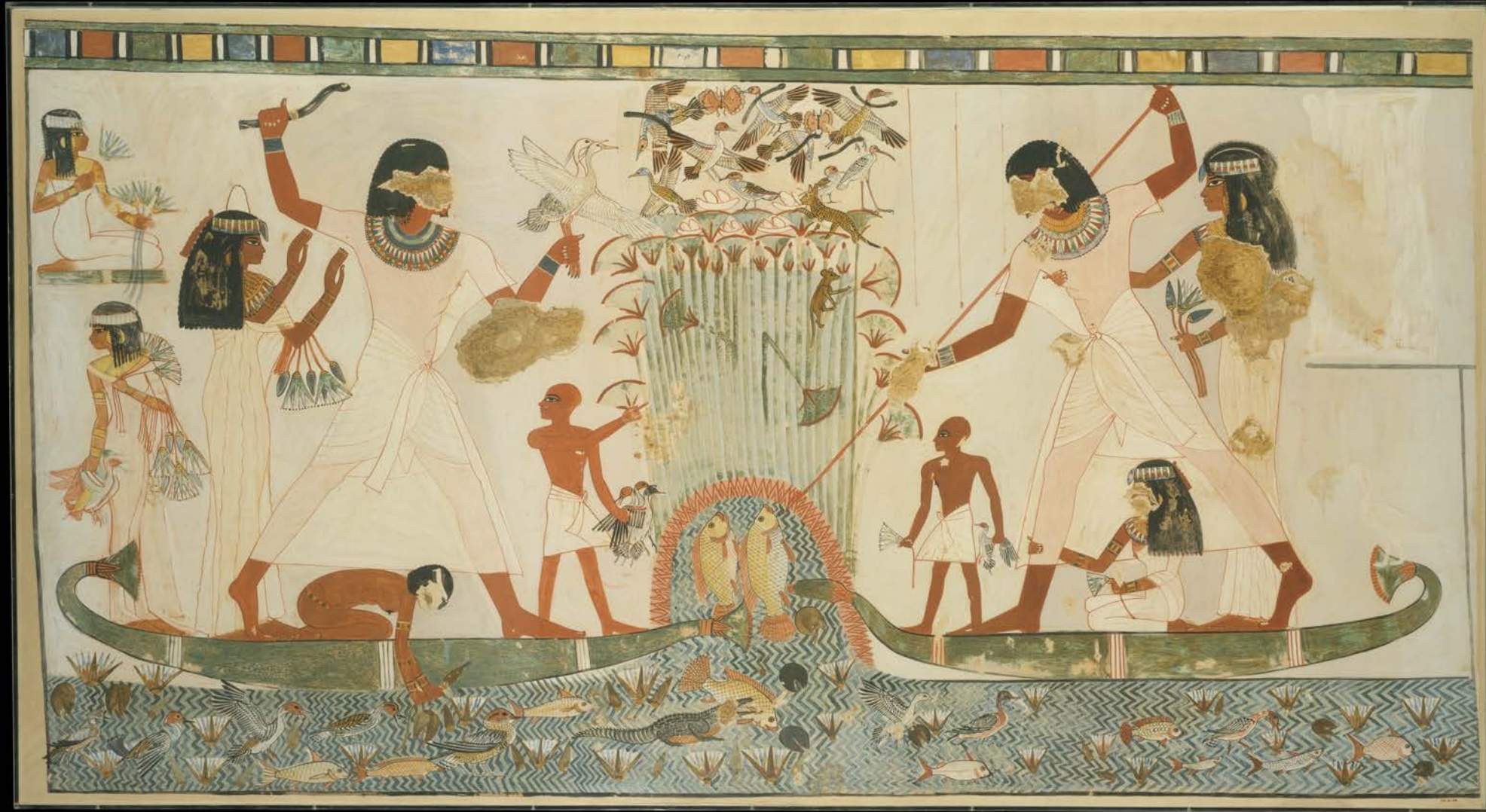


Fig. 1.8 Funerary banquet of Nebamun, c. 1350 BCE



- 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

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