

Mesopotamia.  
Egypt. Indus Valley.

Strength and Power

Last week we looked at very early female figures made in the Prehistoric period.

The time periods we are looking at this week represent very early civilizations. Humans are no longer nomadic but rather settling down and creating cities. They are farming and raising animals.

Written language emerges along with large and small scale images that support beliefs.

Evidence exists to suggest the first wars of conquest began at this time.



*The Venus of Willendorf,  
28,000-22,000 BCE, limestone. 4.4"  
tall. Natural History Museum, Vienna.*

This week we are looking at three different river valley civilizations that grew up at about the same time in different places.

**The Ancient Near East (Anatolia and Mesopotamia)**– in the Tigris and Euphrates River Valleys in what is present day Iran, Iraq and Syria.

**Egypt**– in the Nile River Valley, Egypt.

**Indus Valley** – Indus River, Northern India, about 2600-1900 BCE.

We have record of other early River Valley Civilizations in other areas of the world, but these are the ones that might have meaning for Western thought.



*Seated mother goddess Catal Hoyuk, Turkey, 7500 BC to 5700 BC and reconstructed in a Polish Museum*

The first civilization we will explore is the Ancient Near East (Anatolia and Mesopotamia)

Two areas, Anatolia (present day Turkey) and Mesopotamia (present day Iraq, Kuwait, parts of Syria and Turkey)

Some of the most important developments in human history are attributed to these areas from about 4,500 BCE to the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE.

Important developments include:

- Invention of the wheel
- Planting crops
- Written script— as opposed to pictures
- Mathematics
- Astronomy
- Agriculture
- Literature and Libraries



Cuneiform writing—from 3100 BCE

This one shows both pictographs along with different shaped impressions.

These are the first evidence of written language.

Stamped into wet clay, they were originally used to keep track of things like, rations, grain, etc.

# The Ancient Near East



Anatolia and Mesopotamia

We are following the development of female imagery into these areas to see what was important to people of this time

Let's start with this image that was found in a grain bin in Turkey. The black and white version below is how she was found; the head broken off. The figure to the right has been reconstructed to what archaeologists believe was more like the original statue.



Seated mother goddess Catal Hoyuk, Turkey, 7500 BC to 5700 BC and reconstructed in a Polish Museum

## Description:

### Çatalhöyük Seated Mother Goddess

1. Female figure seated on a throne
2. Two lionesses flank on either side
3. Female has large breasts and belly
4. Arms and legs are also large with deep incisions at belly and knees
5. A head can be seen emerging from between her legs

We have now a more representational reason to believe this figure is about childbirth; the baby's head is emerging from between the legs.



Seated mother goddess Catal Hoyuk, Turkey, 7500 BC to 5700 BC and reconstructed in a Polish Museum

We also have a reason to believe the statue is more than a talisman to help with childbirth; the throne.

It is believed that now, the female has been given goddess status as she sits on a throne surrounded by two lioness figures; symbols of strength and power.

In addition, having been found in a grain bin leads archaeologists to believe the concept of fertility has now been expanded to other things besides humans.

The female giving birth is now seen as a metaphor for generation of other things, including the crops.



Seated mother goddess Catal Hoyuk, Turkey, 7500 BC to 5700 BC and reconstructed in a Polish Museum

Many other female figures have been found in this area. Some are considered to be goddess figures and others are not as clear.

The one below is a transitional figure for us.



This one was made about 1000 years later than our previous figure. She was found in Syria. Look at the images on the next slide. Notice the similarities.

Female figure from northern Syria, ca. 6400 BCE



This is a cup with a horned female deity . Ca. 2600-2350 BCE Mesopotamia. Remember how humans have themselves represented with animal parts to show how they also have that animal power.

These are two images of Ishtar (or Inana) from Mesopotamia. *They were made over 4000 years after the one on the previous slide.*

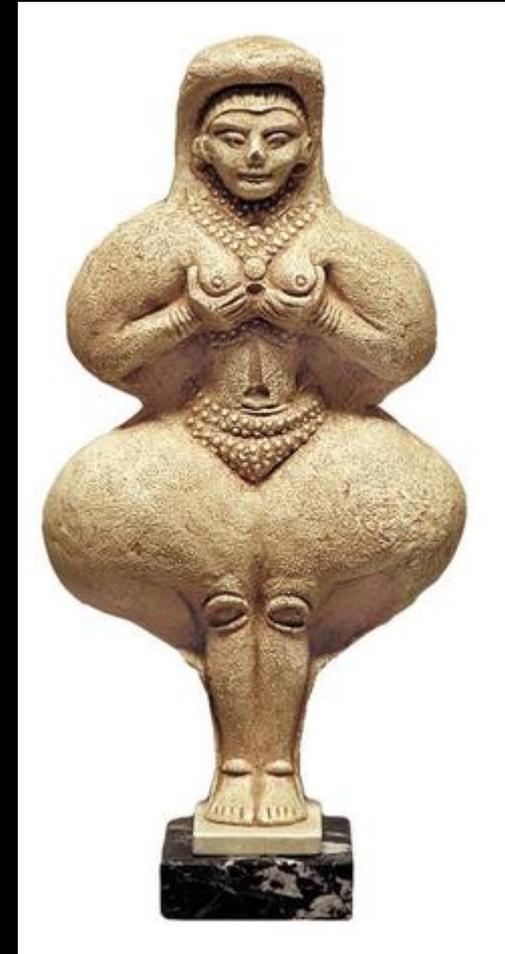
They are both shown holding their breasts in symbolic offering. The goddess was known at this time as:

Mother of the Fruitful Breast  
Queen of Heaven  
Creator of People  
Mother of Deities

The breast-offering pose symbolizes her providing all nourishment and fertility.

Inana is how she was known by the Sumerians and Istar or Ishtar by the Akkadians (two Mesopotamian cultures).

She is one of the most important of the Mesopotamian deities and the most important goddess.



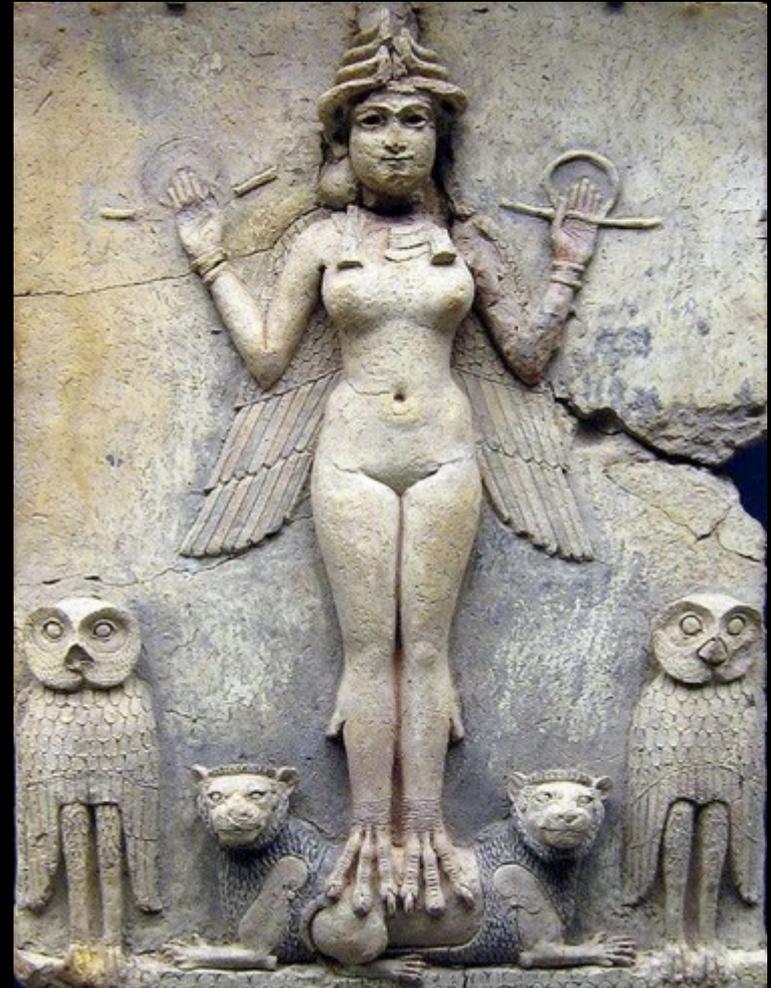
Ishtar offering her breasts. (left ) Susa ca.1300-1100 BCE (right) Babylon ca. 2000BCE

A goddess of contrasting traits, Ishtar (or Inanna in Sumerian) was projected as the female divine entity of beauty, sex and desire, while at the same time being the symbolic purveyor of war and combat.

**Description:**

1. A nude female figure with tapering feathered wings and talons
2. standing with her legs together
3. shown full frontal, wearing a headdress consisting of four pairs of horns topped by a disc
4. wearing an elaborate necklace and bracelets on each wrist
5. holding her hands to the level of her shoulders with a rod and ring in each
6. figure supported by a pair of lions above a scale-pattern representing mountains or hilly ground, and flanked by a pair of standing owls

Significant amount of red ochre paint found on the body of the female figure.



Why do you think this figure looks the way she does? Why does she have animal parts? What do all the animals mean now?

What I'm mentioning here is somewhat of a side note:

Look carefully at many of the images of female figures, especially the ones standing. In many of them you will notice an inverted triangle shape at their vaginal area.

This shape came to be associated with females. It is an ancient symbol that developed into a representation of the genitalia of a goddess.

See if you notice it as we move forward.

Inanna, a prominent Mesopotamian female deity inscribed on the Ishtar vase



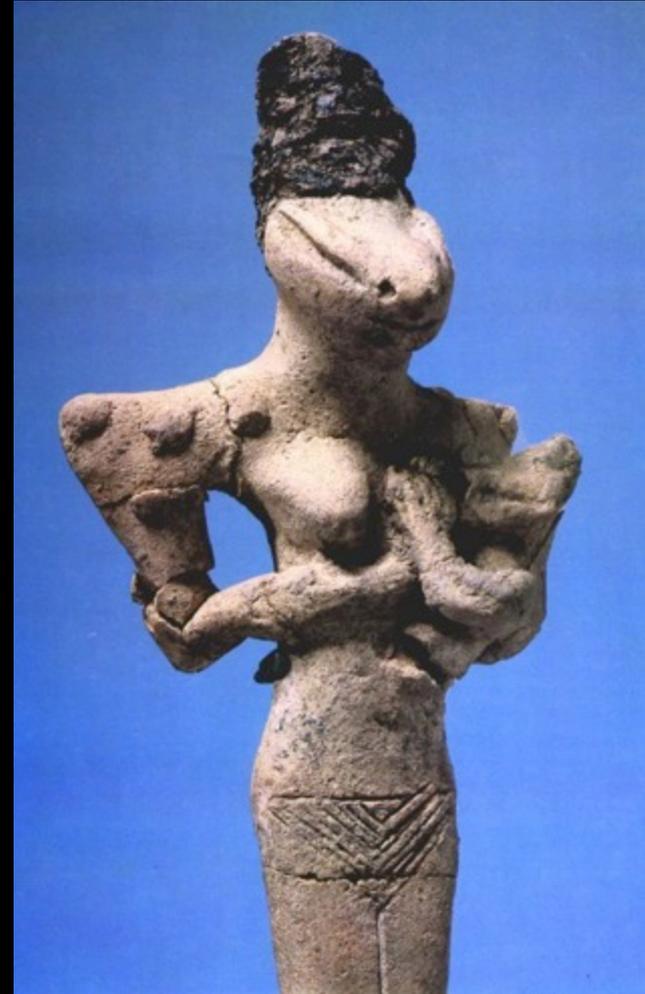
Here are two images of female figures with children. The one below from Anatolia was made 3000 years later than the one to the right.

The snake headed goddess, Nammu, (goddess of the sea), in Sumerian myth gave birth to the earth and sky.



Seated goddess with a child, ca. 1400 BCE, made from gold,

The disc behind her head is most likely the sun.



Mother goddess Nammu—Snake Head Goddess figurine feeding her baby. Terracotta 4<sup>th</sup> M BCE, Iraq

If this were an ordinary Art History class we would be discussing the artwork and ideas of these civilizations differently.

Many different civilizations developed here and there was much fighting including wars of conquest.

Powerful rulers were worshiped as gods and many myths and stories were written about their conquests and artworks made to visually testify to their power.



Head of an Akkadian ruler, from Nineveh (modern Kuyunjik), Iraq, ca. 2250–2200 BCE. Copper, 1' 2 3/8" high. Iraq Museum, Baghdad



We already looked at this one made around 880 BCE in what we now call Iraq. This one is from the citadel of Sargon II, a really powerful king.

Our next exploration will be into Egypt.

The Ancient Egyptian Empire, similarly to Mesopotamia, lasted a long time. We usually begin learning about Egyptian history in the Pharaonic Period, from about 3200 BCE to 330 BCE (when the country fell under Macedonian, Greek, rule)

Divided into Kingdoms— the Early, Middle and New Kingdoms, indicates relatively consistent ways of visually representing pharos, queens, gods and goddesses throughout the thousands of years.



Most of you probably know some things about Egypt. It grew up around the Nile River in north Eastern Africa.

Egyptian artwork is generally very stiff and what we call 'stylized.' This means rather than attempting to create a portrait of the pharaoh and his queen, they are made according to a convention.

This way all pharaohs will look the same, wear the same clothes and headdress, have the same beard, stand with one foot forward, hands clenched, etc.

Ordinarily, it is quite hierarchical, meaning the most important person (in this case the pharaoh) is either larger or placed in a higher position.



Menkaure and Khamerernebtj (?),  
from Gizeh, Egypt, Dynasty IV, ca.  
2490–2472 BCE. Graywacke, approx.  
4' 6 1/2" high.

The queen too has her own conventional way of being represented.  
(notice the inverted triangle visible through her dress.)

Stylization was done with the artwork to be sure everyone would know exactly who these people were.

Since few ever really saw the pharaoh, the statue would not be mistaken for an ordinary person. It can only be a Pharaoh.

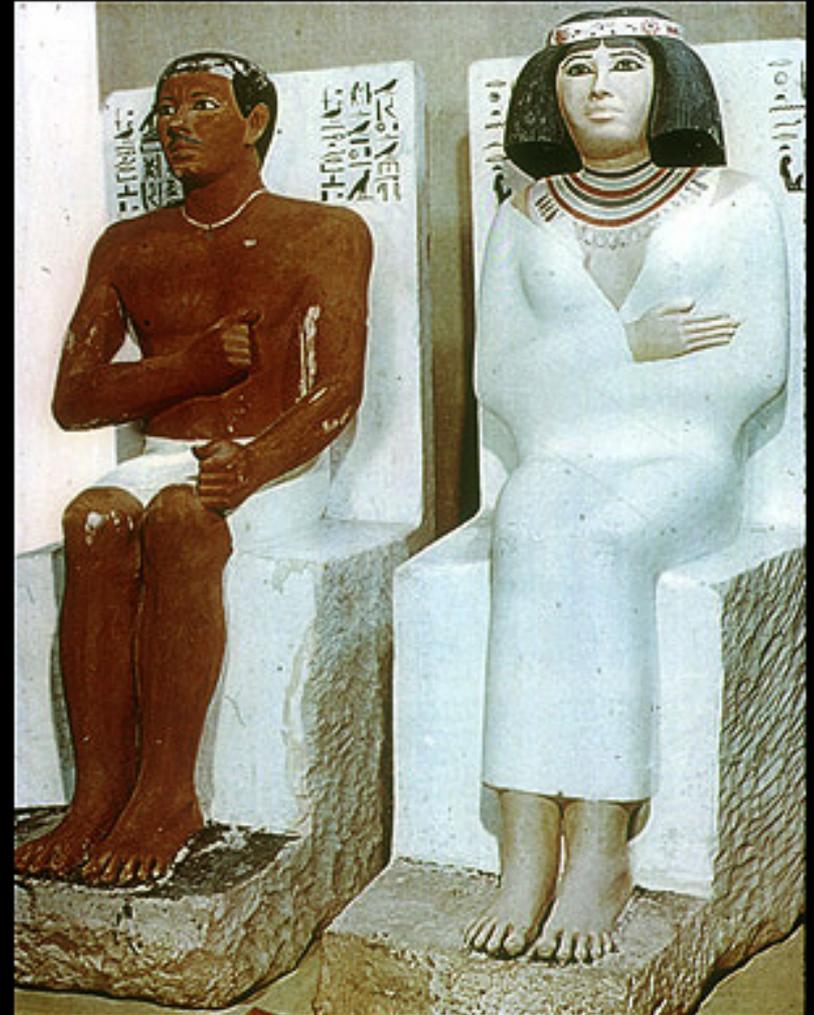


Menkaure and Khamerernebtj (?),  
from Gizeh, Egypt, Dynasty IV, ca.  
2490–2472 BCE. Graywacke, approx.  
4' 6 1/2" high.

Some other conventions in Egyptian Art have to do with skin color.

Often the male is depicted with brown skin tone and the female with white.

These two statues to the right of a prince and princess were found in their tombs. In the tomb painting below the male (pharaoh) is much larger than the two females, even though they all have darker skin.



*Prince Rahotep and Princess Nofret, from Dashur, c. 2580 BCE (Old Kingdom, Dynasty 4)*

One of the most important Egyptian goddesses was Nut.

Nut is the personification of the sky and heavens.

Personification happens in art a lot. It is when an idea is presented in human form. The idea of the sky is represented by a female.

In one myth she gives birth to the Sun god every day and it passes over her body until swallowed at night, to be reborn the next day.

On this scroll she is depicted with Geb.

Together they are the sky and earth. She's arching above as he reclines below. Their union creates all things. This is from a book of the dead.



The goddess **Auset** was the daughter of Nut and Geb she was worshiped as the ideal wife and mother.

**Auset** was thought to be a virgin mother having had spiritual intercourse to produce Heru. She is also symbolic of regeneration and the promise of eternal life.

Here she is the divine mother sitting on a lion throne (missing). Her wig is covered with a vulture headdress, surmounted by the cobra crown, with cows horns and solar disc. She is offering her breast to her son Heru, who was born a King, seated on her lap.



Here is another version of this theme.



*Statue of Auset Suckling Heru, 664-332 BCE, Egyptian Museum, Cairo*

Many gods and goddesses in Egypt are represented as part human and part animal.

This relief scene shows King Taharqo as a child being nursed by the goddess Bastet.

Showing kings this way implied their divine status. We will see this often in art. Placing a secular ruler in close proximity to a deity emphasized their god-like status.

The goddess of warfare before the unification of Egypt, Bastet was worshiped as early as 2890 BCE.

Originally a lioness warrior goddess of the sun she was later represented as a cat. Defender of the pharaoh, she is also a divine mother who had aspects of Isis, another goddess we see later.

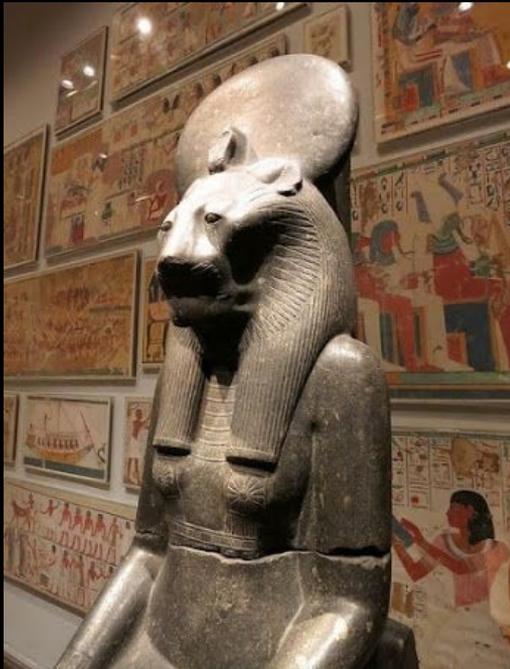


*Menat of Taharqo: The King being Nursed by the Lion headed Goddess Bastet 690-664 BCE*

Many gods and goddesses in Egypt are represented as part human and part animal.

The goddess Sekhmet means the Powerful One. Another warrior goddess she is also worshiped for healing. Depicted as a lioness because the lioness was thought to be the most fierce hunter. She wears the sun disc

because she's also a solar deity, called the daughter of Ra.



*This statue of the Goddess Sakhmet is from ca. 1390-1352. It's in the Met Museum.*



*Bust of the Goddess Sakhmet, ca. 1390-1352 BCE, Brooklyn Museum*

Taweret is a protective ancient Egyptian goddess of childbirth and fertility.

She is usually depicted as a human female, with two legs and long breasts, with feline head and crocodile back.

Very early versions included aspects of the Hippopotamus.



Her fierce image was thought to frighten away demons.

*This statue of the Goddess Taweret is from ca. 332-30 BCE. It's in the Met Museum.*

It once had a sun disc on the head.

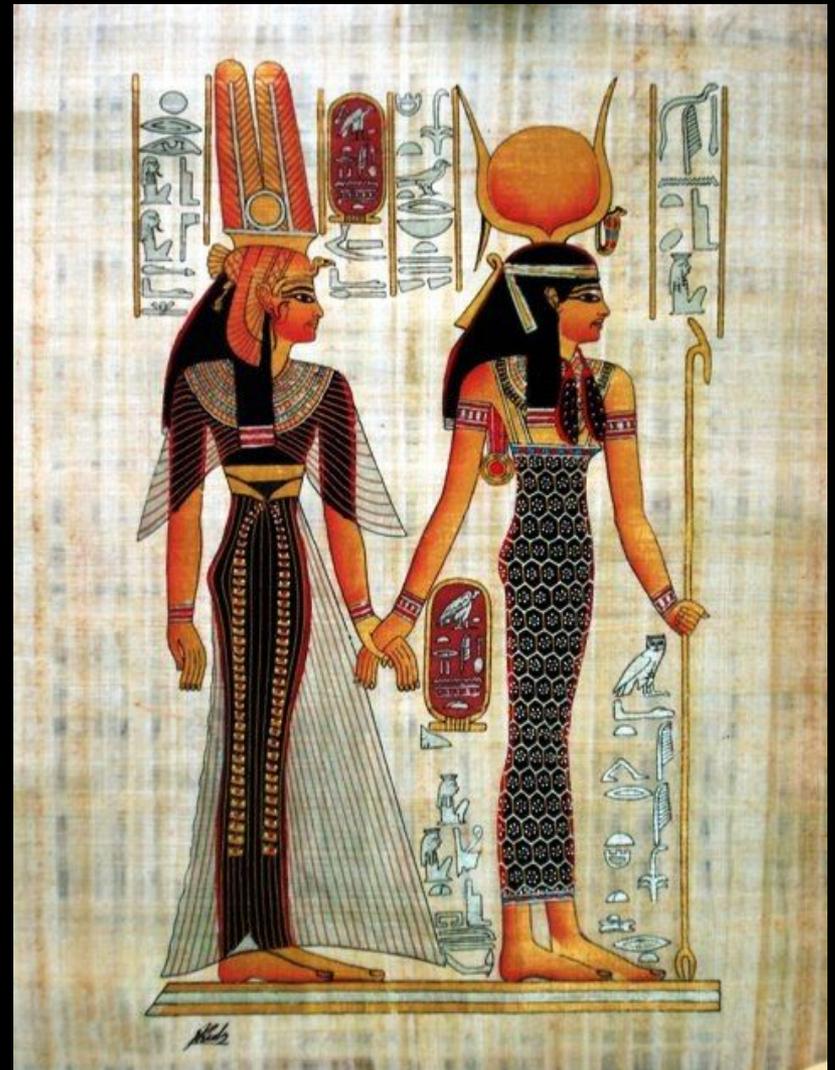


*Tawaret, Nubia, c. 623-595 BCE, Boston Museum.*

**Isis**—One of the most important Deities in Ancient Egypt. She was later worshiped in the Greco-Roman Empire as well. Worshiped as the ideal mother and wife as well as patroness of nature and magic. She is also known as the protector of the dead and goddess of children. She married her brother Osiris, which led to an important myth.

**Nefertari** was the main wife of the pharaoh Ramses II. The goddess is on the right. This image indicates the queen's high status as she is 'allowed' to interact with deities without him.

This image depicts the goddess Isis leading the Queen Nefertari by the hand.

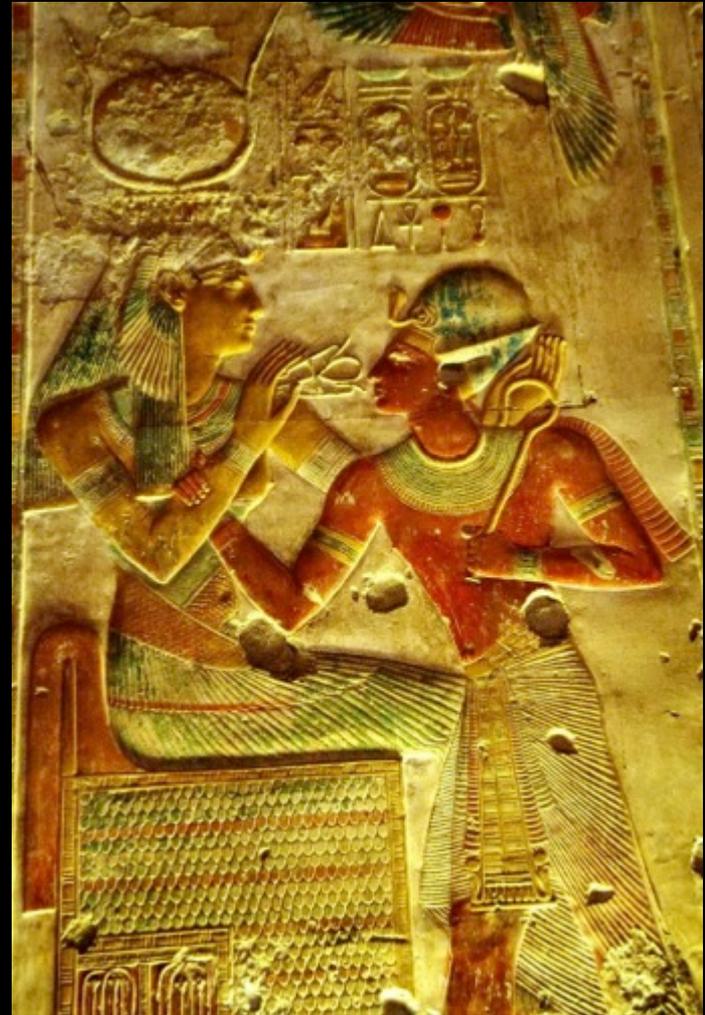


*Nefertari led by Isis, watercolor of a wall painting from the tomb of Queen Nefertari, 1270-1213 BCE. Also in the Met Museum*

Isis was originally pictured as a woman with a crown in the hieroglyphic sign for a throne.

Later she sits on a throne with a headdress that looks like a solar disc. Her earlier association with the cow goddess has her retaining the horns. Sometimes she is also depicted with a cow head. She is often seen holding the ankh (the sign for life).

In this image to the right, she places the ankh in the kings mouth.



*The goddess Isis Blessing and giving Ankh (life) to King Seti I , Abdos Temple.*

There are many more female Egyptian goddesses.

These are a few that continue some of the themes we saw earlier and ones we will see continuing later.



*This is an Isis/Aphrodite image. As we move into the Classical period next week, some goddesses just take on new forms.*

Indus Valley – Indus River, Northern India, about 2600-1900 BCE.

One of the world's earliest urban civilizations.

The roots of our own civilization can be seen in these early ones, especially Mesopotamia and Indus Valley. We see evidence these civilizations interacted with each other allowing for cross-cultural connections.



Mainly located in what is now parts of India, Afghanistan and Iran.  
To the left is a seal from Harappa. On the left side is the original Stamp seal and on the right is the impression made in clay.

As you can see, the dates 2600-1900 BCE for this civilization are shorter than the others we've looked at thus far.

Generally, at this time period we see female figures, known as goddess figures and seals that predate the development of the Hindu Religion.



Proto-Hindu  
mother goddesses,  
Mohenjo Daro,  
2000 BCE



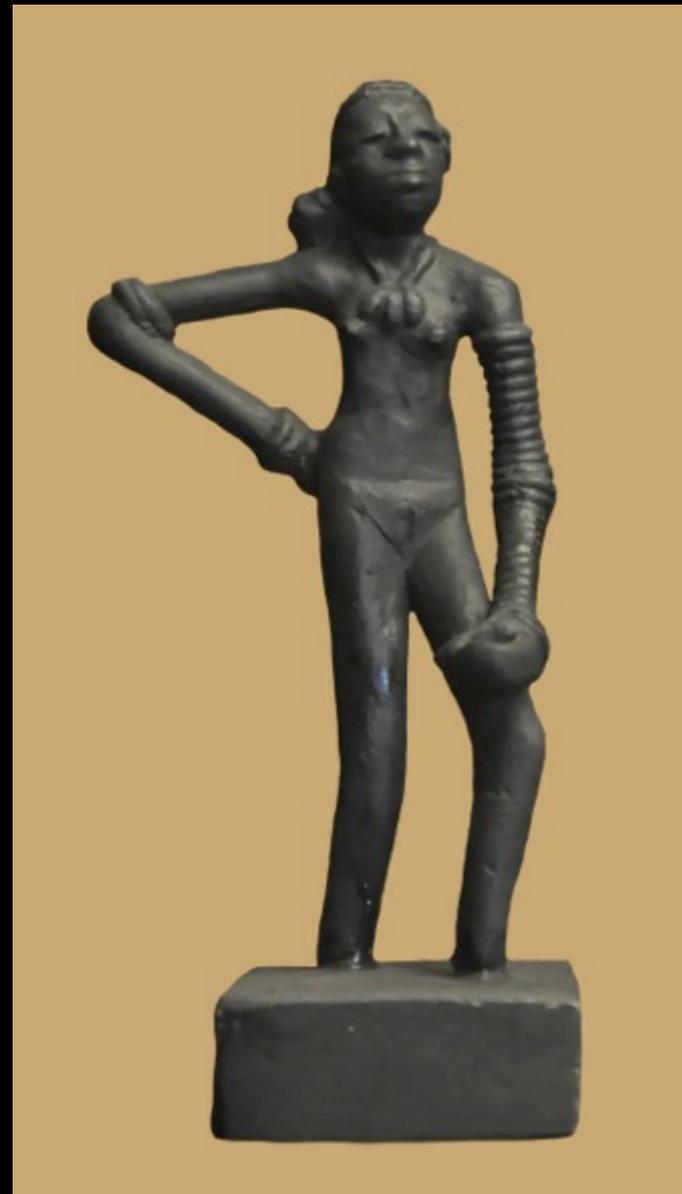
Proto-Hindu mother goddesses,  
Mohenjo Daro, 3000 BCE

The Indus Valley Civilization seems to have had a high regard for nature and the environment. Many animals are seen in the seals excavated from this time.

Seals were pieces of clay with text and image stamped into them.



This one is called Pashupatinath (or Lord of the Animals) from 2500 BCE. The figure here is thought to be the early prototype for the later Hindu god Shiva.



*Dancing Girl, Mohenjo Daro, 2500 BCE*

This early civilization provides us with the seeds of image and idea that later form the Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses.

Similarly to other civilizations we've looked at, a core need of human life is fertility.

Gender could also be flexible as seen in this much later version of the god Shiva. In this form he is half male and half female.

Part Shiva and part goddess Shakti.

Note: not dates from much later.



Lotus Headed Fertility Goddess such as these were first found in Indus Valley Seals. But the ones here are from much later, 1-3<sup>rd</sup> Century.

This week we looked at three civilizations that formed the basis of ideas and images that will continue to develop in Western Civilization.

Perhaps you can already see some that have continued until now.

## Vocabulary words.

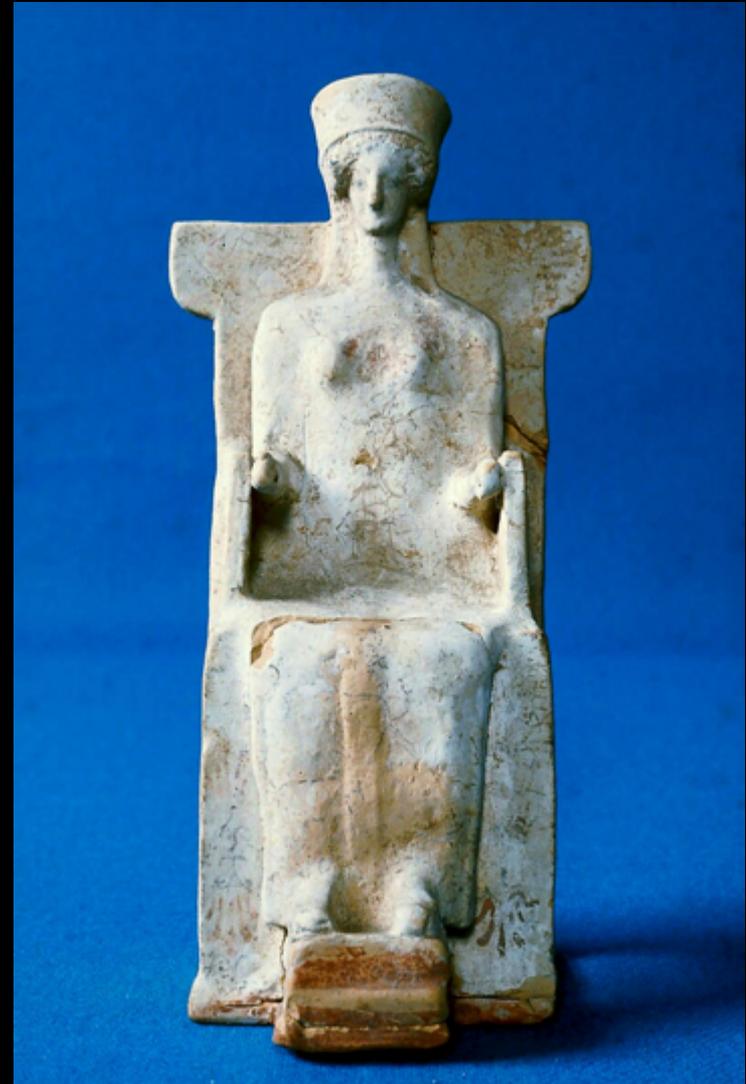
Know these words from this week's lecture:

Visual Hierarchy

Personification

Stylization (or stylized)

Deity



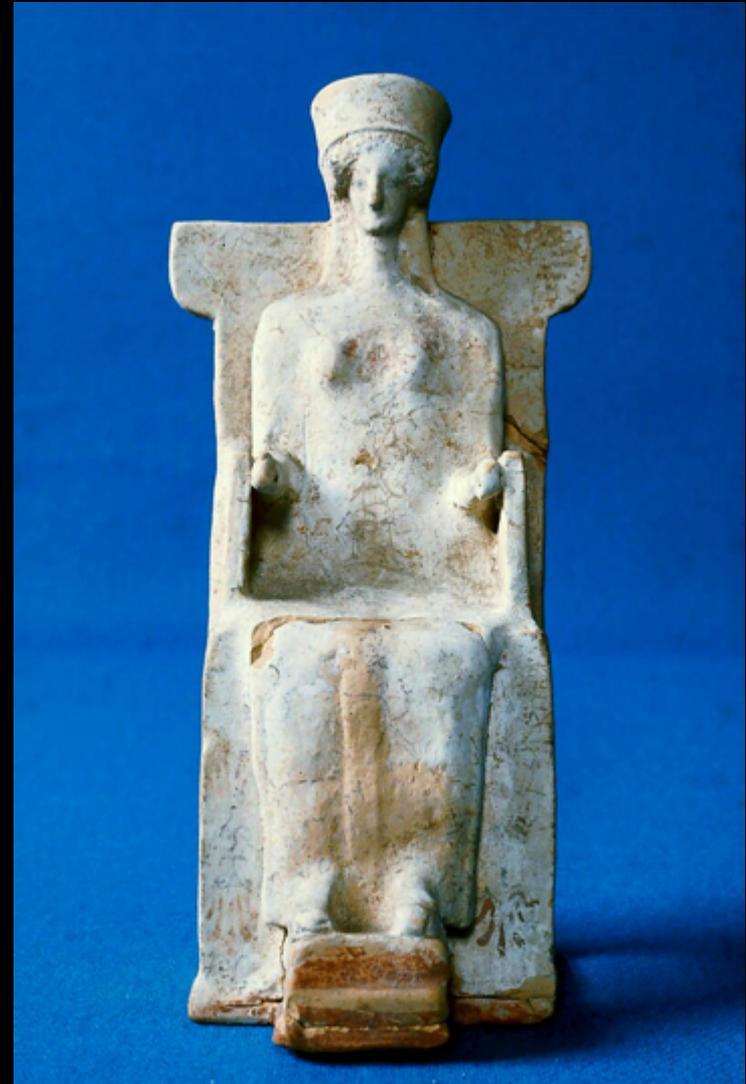
Seated Goddess, Greece, 400 BCE

For your annotation of this lecture:

1. Read carefully.
2. Be willing to scroll back and forth.
3. Note important points about the images and ideas of each civilization.
4. Answer questions as you go.
5. Notice dates of statues and images.  
What do the dates tell us?
6. Read the text and take time to read the image.

Next week we look at artwork from Greece and Rome.

These classical civilizations had many gods and goddesses too.



Seated Goddess, Greece, 400 BCE