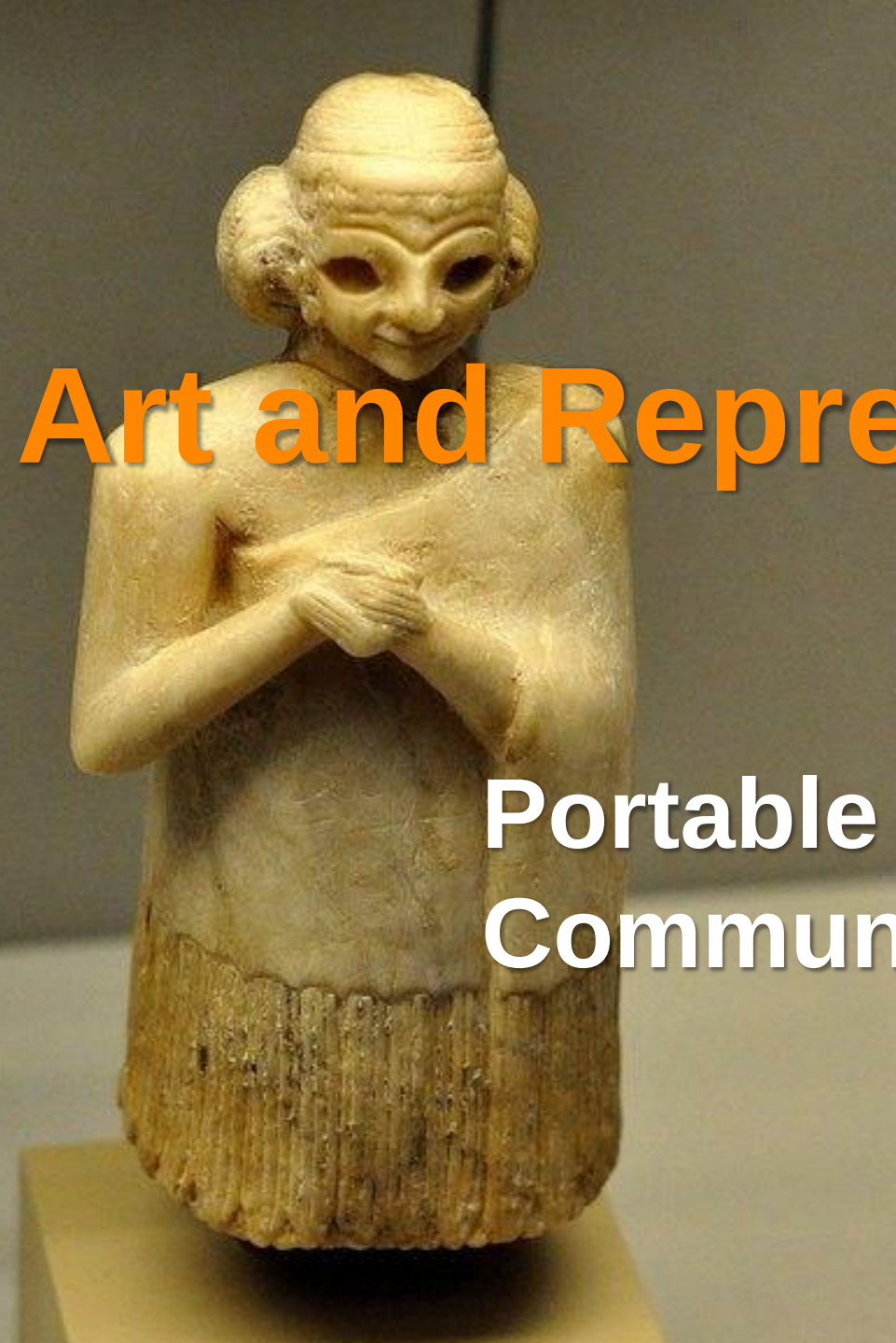




Art and Representation

Portable Art: Urban
Communities

Impact of the Portable

- Study of non-monumental art in the Near East:
 - Small scale objects traditionally characterized as minor arts or crafts
- Tendency to assume these had “less significant visual, intellectual or emotional impact on ancient viewers”
 - Separation of craft objects from art objects implies different purpose/intention



Disc of Enhaduan: Ur
c. 2300-2250 BC

Portable Arts in Mesopotamia

- Portable objects: less value-laden terminology
- Incorporates wide range of object types:
 - Cylinder seals
 - Vessels in variety of media
 - Religious paraphernalia including statuary
 - Figurines
- Also objects that have not survived:
 - Textiles, basketry, leatherwork etc.



Impression of Mesopotamian cylinder seal from Cyprus

Mesopotamian Concept of Art

- No Akkadian word / concept for art
- Representation (object or image) intended to resemble the real or imagined world
 - Šalmu: usually translated as image
- Descriptions of objects: importance determined by:
 - Quality of workmanship
 - Ability to effect a response in the viewer



Detail of Stela of Naram-Sin

Mesopotamian Concept of Art

- Portable objects (minor art) had affective qualities
- Relates closely to Gell's concepts of art:
 - Enchantment of object
 - Agency
- Art is “any work that is imaginatively conceptualized & that affords visual & emotional satisfaction, for which manufacturing skill is required” (Winter 1995, 2570)



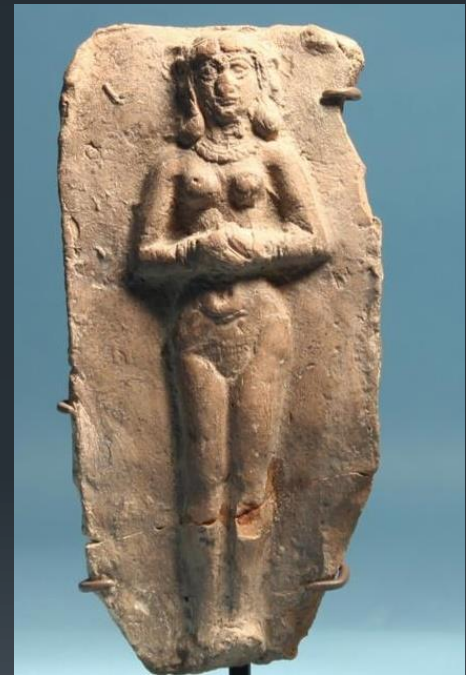
Early Dynastic III votive

Representing the Human Body

- Focusing on the female form
- Two ways in which the female body was portrayed:
 - Third millennium, stone votive statuary
 - Second millennium plaques & figurines formed from clay
- What changes beyond medium & why?



Lady in shawl, Telloh



Babylonian plaque

Sumerian Art: 3rd Millennium

- Early Dynastic I (2900-2750 BC): appearance of votive statues
- Representation of **human** form
 - Stands in for person making dedication
 - Captures gesture of prayer
 - Represents people as worshippers
- A personal image intended to encounter the gods



Tell Asmar statuettes

Sumerian Art: Materiality

- Male and female figures carved from white stone:
 - Gypsum, alabaster, limestone
- Details carved or inlaid using other materials:
 - Shell, black limestone, bitumen
- Bahrani: sculptors copied clay maquettes:
 - Evident in the waves of hair, imitating working of a soft material



Tell Asmar statuettes

Representations

- “The statues were active forces that were believed to possess agency” (Bahrani 2017, 71)
- Uninscribed, but some individuality in details:
 - Differences in dress & hairstyle suggest these represent particular people
- To what extent is this representing reality?



Tell Asmar statuettes

Attributes: Body

- Gesture/posture:
 - Standing on rectangular base, facing forward
 - Enlarged staring eyes
 - Hands clasped in front of chest
 - Head, torso, arms, legs: static, stiff, unmoving...
- Gesture of devotion
- Abstraction (?) of the human form



Tell Asmar statuettes

Attributes: Hair

- Gender differences performed through materiality of the body:
 - Hair, dress etc.
- Men:
 - Long wavy locks of hair & beards
 - Clean shaven
- Women:
 - Elaborate hairstyles
 - Might wear headdress



Tell Asmar statuettes



Attributes: Clothing

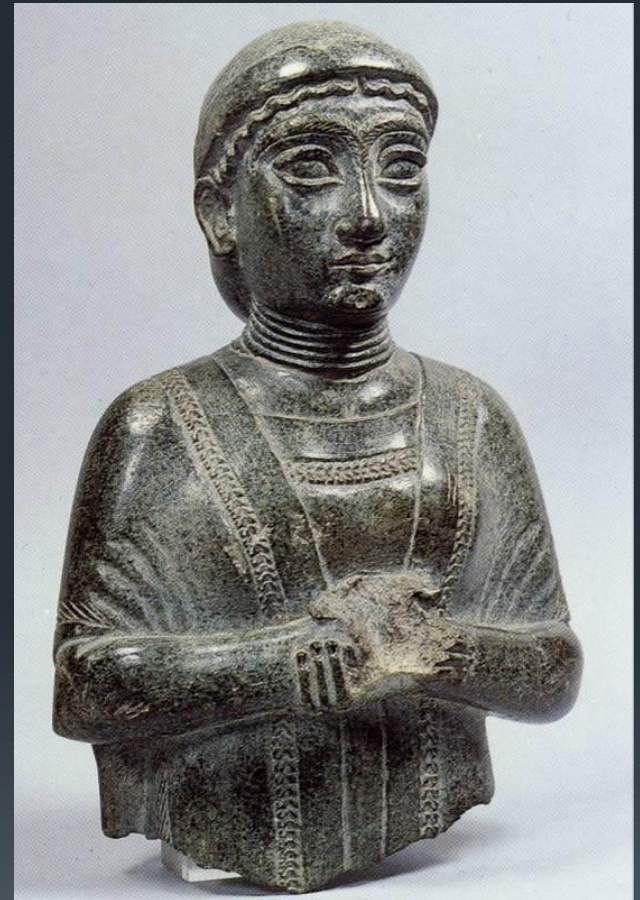
- Long robes: to ground or revealing lower leg
- Male clothing:
 - Torso uncovered
 - Wearing long skirt
- Females:
 - Long robes folded over upper body, typically with right shoulder left uncovered
- Distinction between woven textiles & fleeces



Tell Asmar statuettes

Portraiture

- Late 3rd millennium portraits:
- Individual as worshipper to be placed in temple as worshipper
- Many with inscriptions
 - Dedication to specific deity for life of named patron & family
 - Female statues often for life of husband and children
- An act of individual piety



Telloh, ancient Girsu 2150 BC

Portraiture

- Statuettes considered as representations of individuals:
 - Essentially portraits standing in place of the person represented
- Not based on specific physical resemblance but capturing essence of the individual
- Image had very real agency



Dudu the scribe, Girsu

Portraiture: Mari

- Early Dynastic III c. 2450 BC
 - Temple to Ishtar
- Greater movement & more rounded carving



Itur-Shamagen & Lamgi-Mari, kings of Mari

Portraiture: Mari

- Urnanshe: master signer does not conform to the standard male representation
 - Fluid modelling of seated posture & arms
 - Unusual hairstyle & clean shaven, but bare torso
 - Identified as a castrato: amar-TUD
 - Does not fit into typical male/female representations



Urnanshe, Mari

Clay Plaques

- Height of production in late 3rd-2nd millennium BC:
 - Akkadian & Babylonian
- Consistent imagery over period of use:
 - Focus: frontally oriented women standing on small platform, legs together
 - Plain background
 - Naked
 - Arms crossed in front of body, hands clasped below breasts
 - Typical hairstyle
 - Details of jewellery: necklaces, bracelets, anklets etc.



Clay plaque: 17th century BC

Modelling in Clay

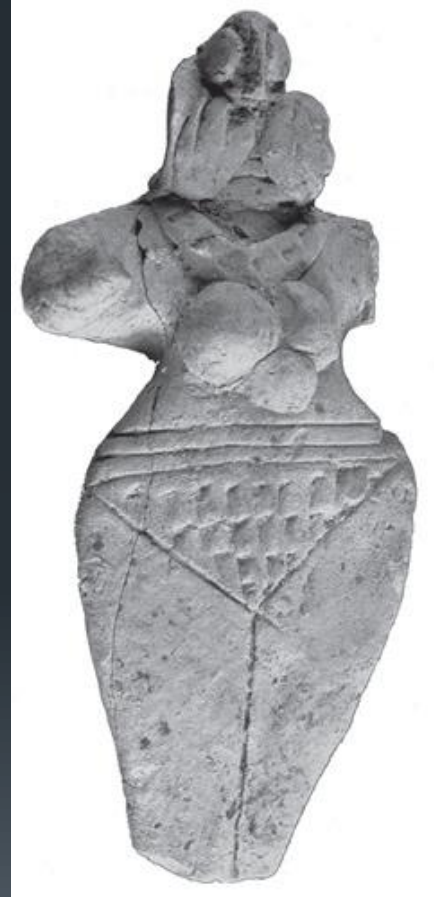
- Ancient tradition, but largely disappeared in Uruk period
- Uruk - Early Dynastic: focus on specialist production of stone statuary
- Terracotta production reappears in Akkadian period – Ur III:
 - Figurines & plaques



Ubaid figurines

Clay Figurines

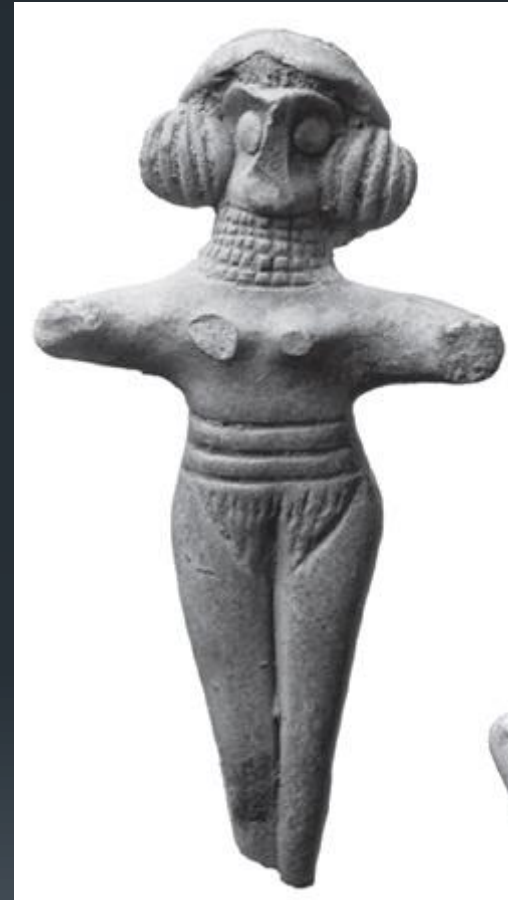
- Production: *ad hoc* from a lump of clay
- Found in variety of archaeological contexts
- Typically broken
- Both female & male figurines:
 - Hair-styles, body forms & other attributes



Clay figurines from Isin

Female figurines

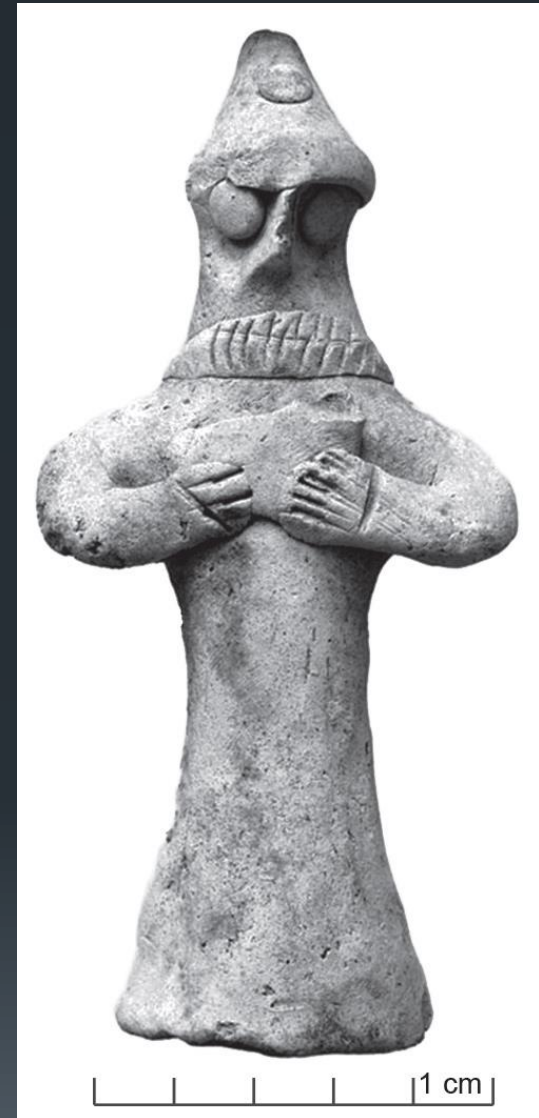
- Incised & modelled decoration:
 - Hairstyle indicated by voluminous striated hair bundles
 - Clay pellets or bands were usually added for eyes and hair
 - Naked: sex indicated by breasts & pubic triangle
 - Arms holding breasts or outstretched stumps
 - Necklaces & belt
- Handling: typically break at waistline



Tell Asmar

Male Figurines

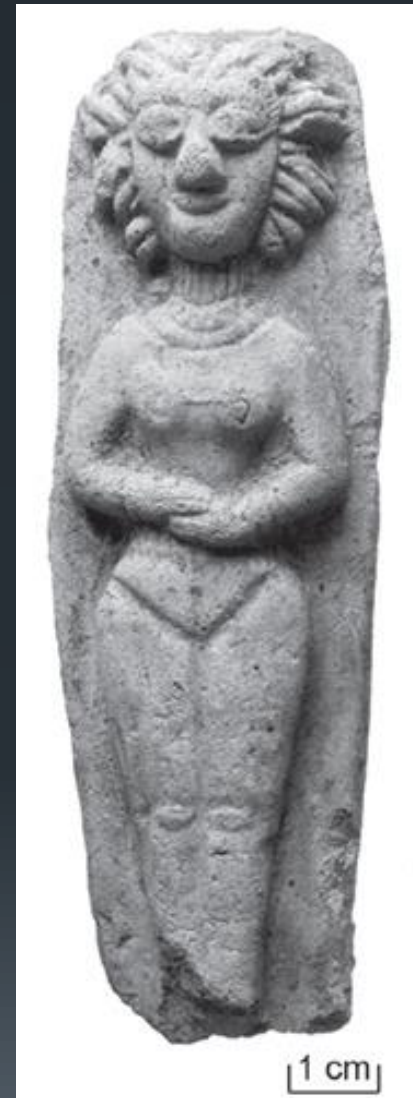
- Shared characteristics, though each one unique: modelled, pellets & incisions
 - Large beards
 - Brimmed or pointed hats, often decorated with small pellets
 - Hands and fingers are prominently visible, sometimes enlarged
 - **Hold** things: animal, curved staffs
- Lower body is frequently missing:
 - Roughly cylindrical, substantive base maybe indicating a long dress, but essentially



Tell Asmar

Clay Plaques

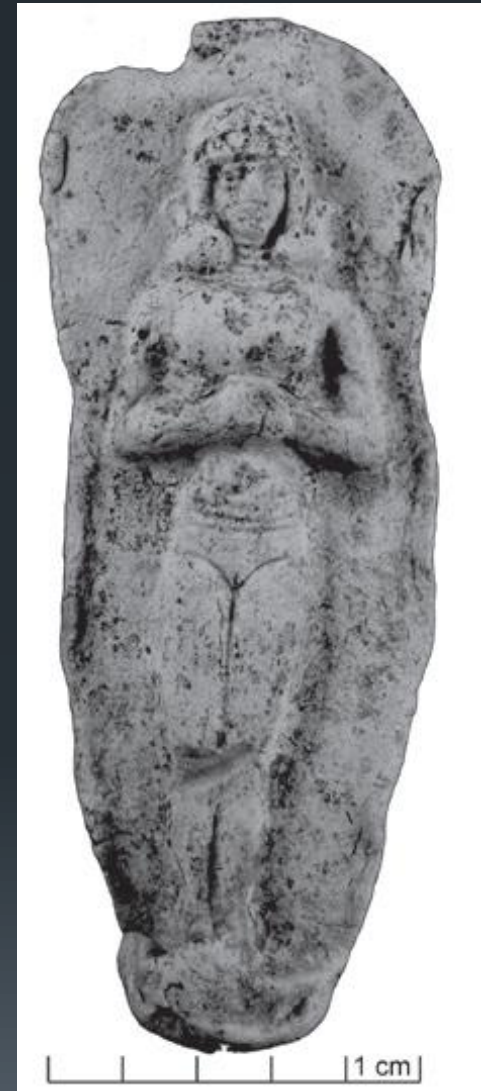
- Appear in Ur III (end of third millennium)
- Mould-made rather than modelled
- Naked female form
 - Emphasis on the curvy body outline & pubic triangles
 - Voluptuous hairstyle
 - Hands either hold the breasts or are folded below. In some cases, the negative
- A certain amount of stylistic variation



Tell Asmar

Clay plaques

- By late 19th century little stylistic variation
- Youthful, 'barbie-doll'-like appearance:
 - Slim hips, primary sexual characteristics minimally indicated
 - Arms folded beneath breasts
 - Simple rings around the neck
 - Uniform shoulder length hair
- A fixed representation of female body:
 - A “visual ideal for the naturally proportioned female physiognomy without any exaggerating features” (Rossberger 2018, 527)



Iščali

The Modelled Mesopotamian Body

- What do these representations from ancient Mesopotamia **do**?
- How should we think about interpreting them?
 - Aesthetic
 - Symbolic Communication
 - Enchantment
 - Agency
- Gender distinctions significant
- By second millennium:
 - Male doing / clothed
 - Female passive / naked – sexualised?



Clay plaque: 17th century BC

Summary

- Rich seam of portable art and statuary from Mesopotamia: third – early second millennium
- Primarily religious in function / used
- Sumerian stone figures: substitutes for dedicant & develop into portraits:
 - Bahrani highlights their agency
- Re-emergence of terracottas might suggest more personal material engagement?
 - Rossberger highlights Bailey's cheirotic approach
- Significance of nudity?