

The Seated Mother Goddess Object analysis assessment 2 Spaces, Places

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The Seated Mother Goddess Of Catal Huyuk

The object I have chosen for analysis is what has been originally described as the "Seated Mother Goddess". This object was discovered during the second season of excavations in 1962, at the location called Catal Huyuk. This site, in the words of its discoverer, James Mellaart, is "the Neolithic city mound in the Konya Plain" (Mellaart, 1963, p. 43). Mellaart in his 1967 book *Catal Huyuk: A Neolithic Town in Anatolia*, describes the purpose for the book as a means of identifying the value of this site to the non-specialist public, comparing its importance to Jericho, and then calling it "one of man's first known essays in the development of Town-life" (Mellaart, 1967, p. 15). Catal Huyuk, as Mellaart describes having first seen the "mound of Catal Huyuk" (Mellaart, 1967, p. 27), in 1952, but due to ill health was not able to explore the mound in any detail before 1958. Mellaart (1967) describes the mound at Catal Huyuk as being nineteen metres and possibly more. This is composed of "17.5 metres above the present level of the plain" (Mellaart, 1967, p. 30) and formed an oval in shape, covering an area of approximately "32 acres" (Mellaart, 1967, p. 30) in size. Mellaart explains to the reader that excavation has provided "twelve successive building levels" (Mellaart, 1967, p. 49), and that each of these levels form an actual distinctive city and not just a minor contrast from any of the previous ones.

why not include an image - always useful for an object analysis

Mellaart in his "1962: Second Preliminary Report" printed in 1963 in the journal *Anatolian Studies*, has four photographs of the "Mother Goddess" (Mellaart, 1963, plate XXIV) taken from different angles. In addition to these photographs, there are also four hand drawn pictures of this figurine after it has been restored (Mellaart, 1963, p. 96-7). The object is described as a "seated goddess giving birth" (Mellaart, 1967, p. 203) in the list of sculptures. Made from clay and standing 16.5 centimetres tall without its head. It is described as "from the shrine in Level II (A II, 1)" (Mellaart, 1963, plate XXIV).

The first point about the figure to catch my attention, is that it is naked, very overtly naked, it feels provokingly exposed. It is as if the figurine commands your attention through the almost rawness of this exposure. There is a commanding authority about this nakedness, it is as if this bestows it authority, almost the antithesis of the story of the Emperor's new clothes. The figurine is seated upon something without a back. Two animals flank either side of this seat, described as leopards. Both animals heads reach just above the thigh and hip height of the seated figure. The original unrestored figurine is missing its head, as is the right-hand leopard creature. The statue is seated with both its arms outstretched towards the heads of the two leopards standing at its seated sides. Upon the top of each shoulder is a thin cylinder-shaped piece of clay, in the restored version, this is the end of the tail of the leopards. The shoulder to elbow of both of the statues arms are large and roundly shaped. This is contrasted with the statues arm from elbow to hand, which is approximately a quarter of the size of the arm from shoulder to elbow. This contrast in size contributes to the overall appearance of exaggerated body parts.

This can be seen next in the pendulous breasts that cascade down the chest of the statue towards each arm, gravitationally forced there by an exaggeratedly raised breastbone. This breastbone is part of the statues stomach that forms an almost bird beak in appearance. Two incised lines reach forward from the hips and stop at the incised crescent moonlike belly button. The opening of the crescent points towards the ground. The high breastbone and incised lines make the upper stomach have an almost slope like appearance. The final feature of the stomach are the lines below the belly button, again reaching from the hips forwards to the knees where they meet to form a small final protrusion of the belly. This belly is large, again potentially exaggeratedly so, this belly sits upon the top and inner thighs of the statue before stopping just a few millimetres before the ends of the knees.

Each thigh appears to be a continuous piece, forming upper leg before making a ninety degree turn towards the ground in the shape of the lower leg. Each leg from the knee to the ankle, is formed by large round pieces of clay that taper towards the ankle area. Each lower leg has a dimpled, incised crescent moon shaped knee cap. The opening of the crescent is again like the belly button towards the ground. The feet are really quite small compared to the lower legs largeness and have

your descriptions are very good - but would be well supported by illustrations

incising to represent toes or any decorated aspect towards that effect. It is not possible to tell from any photographs I have yet seen whether that aspect has been worn away with time or not.

At a point between the lower calves and ankles is a small semi spherical object, this is considered to be the birthed baby of the Mother Goddess. The two leopards actually form the sides of the seat the goddess sits upon, are formed by excising the clay. From the front only the right hand one has any discernible detail of its front legs. Both its legs from the front are visible, unlike the left-hand leopard which only its left leg barely visible, and then only by looking at the statue's left side profile. Each leopard is the length of the seated figure, from kneecap to buttock. This is interesting when later considering the overall size of the seated figure, particularly when you compare its size next to the overall length of what appear to be two adult leopards.

The right-hand leopard was damaged at sometime and its head was broken off before being restored by a member of Mellaart's team. It unfortunately has not been the most sympathetic of restorations, whilst the ears are like the left-hand one, its muzzle with nose slits and flat lined mouth unfortunately give it more of a sheeplike appearance. The left-hand leopard's head has been damaged at some point in time, with an obvious crack running all the way around the base of the neck where it meets the top of the shoulder.

Neither the left nor the right leopard appear to be either under-nourished with visible signs of a ribcage, nor overfed, just sleek in shape. As you move to the back of the statue, it is possible to observe that neither leopard has an intact tail, here the restoration drawings show long tail snaking up and over the figure's shoulders and down onto them. They appear to be resting upon the shoulders and stopping within a small distance from the top of the breasts. Another point of the restored version is the hands now are resting upon each of the leopard's heads, where in the originally found statue the hands are broken off at the wrist from the outstretched arms.

When you look at the statue side on, you can observe the figure from the point of the knees to the furthest point of its back, takes possibly two thirds of the seated

space, the final third is the figures buttocks. Observing the back increases the sheer sense of the size of the figure, the upper arms appear even larger than from the front and rounder. The shoulders are wider, but then there are incised marks from the figures outside edges that appear to emphasize the upper torso. These incisions have two more incisions the same but a few centimetres below the others, this time referring the upper waist of the figure. Beneath these are two large and almost cylindrical shaped buttocks, with a vertical incision that emphasizes the curves at the top of the buttocks.

Mellaart in his description of plate IX, uses the specific words of "enthroned goddess.... Mistress of Animals.... grain bin of the shrine" (Mellaart, 1967, p. 156). A particular point that had not been dealt with by Mellaart is that it was found damaged within a grain bin, not a shrine or carefully buried. Mellaart in describing the statue calls the figure "Mistress of Animals" (Mellaart, 1967, p. 156), highlighting the fact that it is flanked by two leopards. Diane Gifford-Gonzalez in her 2007 paper 'On beasts in breasts. Another reading of women, wildness and danger at Catalhoyuk', offers the theory that the figure is not in control of these animals as much as dependent upon their maleness for her authority. Gifford-Gonzalez takes this view based upon her analysis of all the imagery found at the site with leopards, between wearing their skins, seen holding or seated upon them, but there are no images of women hunting and therefore they cannot adopt their leopards persona of authority but be dependent upon it being bestowed upon them.

This was not the only clay "Mother Goddess" found at Catal Huyuk according to Kathryn Rountree in her 2007 paper, "Archaeologists and Goddess Feminists at Catalhoyuk: An Experiment in Multivocality". She uses the word "stately" (Rountree, 2007, p. 8) when speaking of other similar figurines to the seated birthing goddess. Louis Lagana in his 2009 paper 'The Re-emergence of the Great Mother Goddess' and considers this resurgence of interest in the symbolical imagery of the feminine, and how it has been interpreted using such subjects as archaeology and ancient art. Rountree informs us that it was two particularly influential pieces of work that paved the way. The first piece was from 1978 by Anne L. Barstow and the second piece from 1991, by Marija Gimbutas. Rountree argues that Barstow writing about Catal Huyuk and the Goddess drew the interest of feminists and Gimbutas drew the

interest of groups that would adopt Catal Huyuk as a place of "Goddess spirituality....a quintessential Goddess site" (Rountree, 2007, p. 9).

Ian Hodder points out in his edited volume *Religion in the emergence of civilization: Catalhoyuk as a case study*, published in 2010, that the site had been abandoned since 1965 until his return in 1993 and "Through both projects, only 5% of the mound had been excavated" (Hodder, 2010, p. 3). Hodder points out that comprehensive analysis of the figurines from the site dispute Mellaart's and later expressed views of symbolic and religious nature of the figurines. By considering that the "examination of their context of deposition shows that the objects are not in 'special' locations, but were discarded, often in middens" (Hodder, 2010, p. 15). Webb Keane in a chapter from Hodder's book, titled *Marked, absent, habitual: Approaches to Neolithic religions at Catalhoyuk*, considers the modern motivation behind looking for religion in our prehistoric past. He considers it to be thoughts and actions beyond the purely utilitarian necessity of prehistoric survival. He then acknowledges a problem with this as he then describes it as "a venerable tradition in British anthropology, lack of utility defines something as religious" (Keane, 2010, p. 190). He considers those who have not been able to interpret the practical use of an artefact, must then fall back on a symbolic or religious purpose, pointing out the flaw in being personally unable to see a practical purpose in something does preclude it from having had one.

The seated statue flanked by leopards, first described as a goddess by Mellaart, and then later claimed as a goddess of the feminine by others. Next a goddess of religion, both empowering and transforming, before being claimed and owned by later groups with particular agendas. Mellaart excavated an object made from clay and 16.5 centimetres tall, of a large naked figure flanked by two leopards. Was Mellaart already predisposed to make that Mother Goddess claim, he points out that "the wealth of religious imagery depicted in the shrines is often hard enough to describe" (Mellaart, 1963, p. 78). He makes references to classical Greek religious imagery, specifically Greek goddesses.

The size of the figurine can be characterised with various descriptive words, ranging from obese and bloated too full figured. The ideas behind these descriptions

have to be considered in our 21st century image saturated experience. I have no other dimensions, such as its overall width and length. There is nothing about how much it actually weighs, nor how tall are the leopards. On knowing that in its unrestored state it stood 16.5 centimetres tall, with the newly added head it was now 20 centimetres in height. I consider that this particular object has not yet been fully evaluated, without people's preferences or needs leading the interpretation first. This object needs to be looked at again, and questions asked and if possible answered. how long did the leopard imagery persist, over what period of time, layers of occupation. Can we understand why the leopards tail rest across the top of the figures shoulders, is this a protective, or artistic expression? Why is no one else feeling the authority of this figure of a seated naked woman, whether she is protected or supported by these large predatory leopards, why has no one really looked at it yet?



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The Seated Mother Goddess Object analysis assessment 2

Spaces, Places

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

GENERAL COMMENTS

65/100

Instructor

This is so nearly an excellent object analysis. Your description of the object is excellent - but why no images?

You contextualise very well in terms of the available literature and have demonstrated really good background research.

What you need to do to push your mark up is to present your own analysis and interpretation - there are hints of this, but you leave it hanging. Embed more thoroughly in the theoretical literature. Is it a religious object associated with belief systems and if so how was it used?

PAGE 1

Text Comment. why not include an image - always useful for an object analysis

PAGE 2



Comment 1

good observation



Comment 2

birthing stool?

Text Comment. your descriptions are very good - but would be well supported by illustrations

PAGE 3



Run-on

Run-on sentence:

The sentence contains two or more independent clauses. Separate the clauses with a period or semicolon.

PAGE 4

PAGE 5

PAGE 6



Comment 3

this is your opportunity to do so. How might some of the theories we have covered help with an interpretation