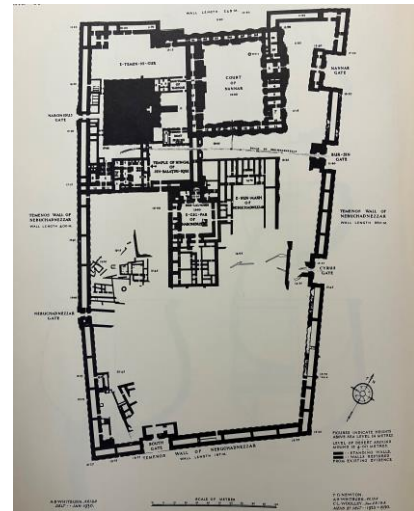




Motherhood and religious devotion in Ancient Mesopotamia

Ur, in southern Iraq, is considered one of the most important cities in Mesopotamia. Excavated by Leonard Woolley between 1922-1934, the material from Ur sheds light on the lives of ancient Mesopotamians from different social strata.



A view of the archaeological site at Ur and a plan of the excavated area.

The figurine was found to the NW of the ziggurat which is the black-filled building at the upper left of the plan.

Among the hundreds of artefacts excavated at Ur, are votive plaques depicting women or women carrying children. Some were found in domestic settings others within the precincts of temples suggesting they had been offered and dedicated to those temples. The purposes of creating these plaques were many and encompassed protection, divine intervention, and expressions of the importance of fertility, motherhood and healthy children. They served as tangible representations of the reverence accorded to motherhood in ancient Mesopotamian society.

Mother and child figures are not unique to Mesopotamia and were present in other early cultures (such as the figure of the goddess Isis cradling her son Horus which was a popular image in ancient Egypt). They continued to be depicted historically in later cultures, and came to be seen as symbols of tenderness, compassion and sometimes divinity.

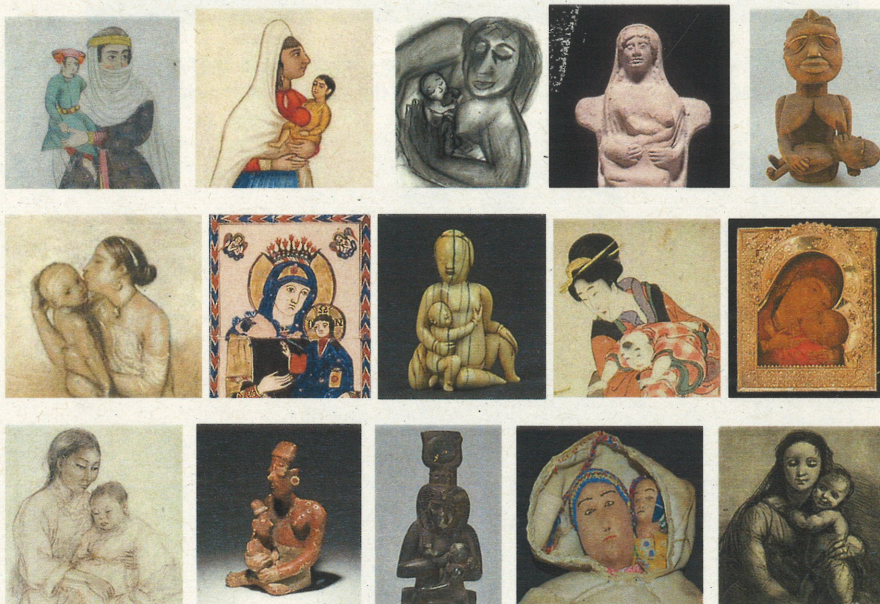
Mother nursing a child plaque

This clay plaque depicts a woman nursing her infant. She is shown seated cross-legged holding her infant on her lap with her arms wrapped tenderly and protectively around it. This plaque may have been a votive created to appeal for divine protection for a woman and her infant during labour. It could also have been used to seek assistance in becoming pregnant. Although plaques have been found in domestic contexts, this one was found near a temple so may have been officially dedicated.

Clay votive plaque
Ur, (Iraq), 700-500 BCE
123224

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Below are some other mother and child images from the British Museum collections



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Mina Megalla

and

Twana Mamand

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Mother nursing a child plaque

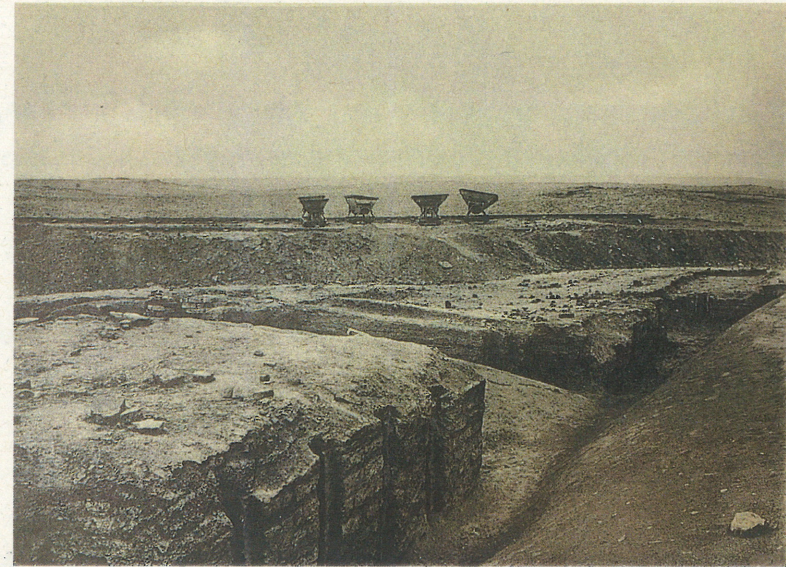
The clay plaque on the front of this leaflet, found at Ur, depicts a woman nursing her infant. She is shown seated cross-legged holding her infant on her lap with her arms wrapped tenderly and protectively around it. This plaque may have been a votive created to appeal for divine protection for a woman and her infant during labour. It could also have been used to seek assistance in becoming pregnant. Although plaques have been found in domestic contexts, this one was found near a temple so may have been officially dedicated.

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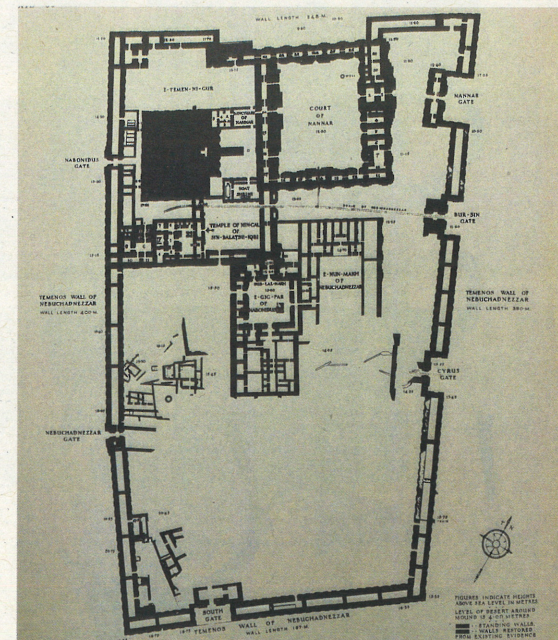
The site: Ur

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A view of the archaeological site at Ur and a plan of the excavated area. The figurine was found to the NW of the ziggurat which is the black-filled building at the upper left of the plan.





1984,0124,0.1.41

Watercolour painting with a pen and ink border of the wife and child of a member of the Akali Nihung Sikh order.
India, 1800s



1974,0617,0.1.15

Watercolour painting of an Armenian woman carrying her child.
Kaempfer album.
Isfahan, Iran, 1684-1685 (AH 1096)



1918,0715.2

Charcoal drawing heightened with white, of an Oriental woman and child.
Alexandre Gabriel Decamps (French), 1803-1860.



1993,1106.8

Chalk drawing of a reclining woman holding a nursing child.
Eileen Cooper (British), 1984



123224

Clay votive plaque with mother nursing a child.
Ur, (Iraq), 700-500 BCE



1922,0413.27

Etruscan terracotta votive model of a woman seated on a chair nursing a baby on her lap.
Italy, 450BC-400BC



1928,1017.1

Tile with a figure of the Virgin and Child.
Kütahya, Turkey, 1750-1830



1906,1220,0.451

Woodblock print. A woman holding a child reaching out for a sweet dish.
Utagawa Toyohiro, 1773-1828



2018,3005.93

Carved ivory figure of a woman with a child at her breast.
Qing dynasty, China, early 18th century



As2006,Drg.2

Tsipr, a young Tibetan woman with child on her lap
Dr Lily Eversdijk- Smulder. Nepal, 1962.



1998,0605.1

Icon, The mother of God Korsunskaya
Russia, 1820-1830



Af1947,18.30

Wooden figurine of a kneeling woman nursing a child.
Yoruba, Nigeria, early 20th century



Am, Hn.25

Pottery figurine of a seated mother holding a child.
Jalisco, Mexico, 300BC-300AD



EA29411

Green basalt (?) statue of Isis carrying her child Horus
Egypt, Late period.



1962,1231,0.13.36

Watercolour of Yashoda nursing Krishna
India, about 1830.



2011,7002.14

Print of the Virgin and Child after a cartoon by Raphael.

William James Linton. 1845



1847,0806.58

Pottery fragment showing a Thracian woman carrying an infant (only the arm of the infant is visible).

Puglia, 420BC – 390 BC



Am1987,23.1

Inuit fabric doll of a mother with her child in her parka.

Québec, Canada, 1965-1980