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Breaking Boundaries: Women in Mesopotamia

Eleanor Noble

Chapman University, enoble@chapman.edu

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Breaking Boundaries: Women in Mesopotamia

Lamaštu:

The Demonized Woman

- A prominent figure in cuneiform tablets, linked to disease and childbirth difficulties.
- Identified as a demon, always depicted as female.
- Sumerian culture: a lion-headed goddess with talons and pigs that suckle her breast.
- Assyrian culture: Demon-goddess, bringing plague and death to children.
- Depicted with wings or as a wild-haired woman with bare breasts.
- Held responsible for miscarriages and infant mortality, feeding poisonous milk to babies.
- Known for her ability to enter homes at will and her violent temper.
- Protective measures included wearing bronze amulets and inscribed stone plaques.

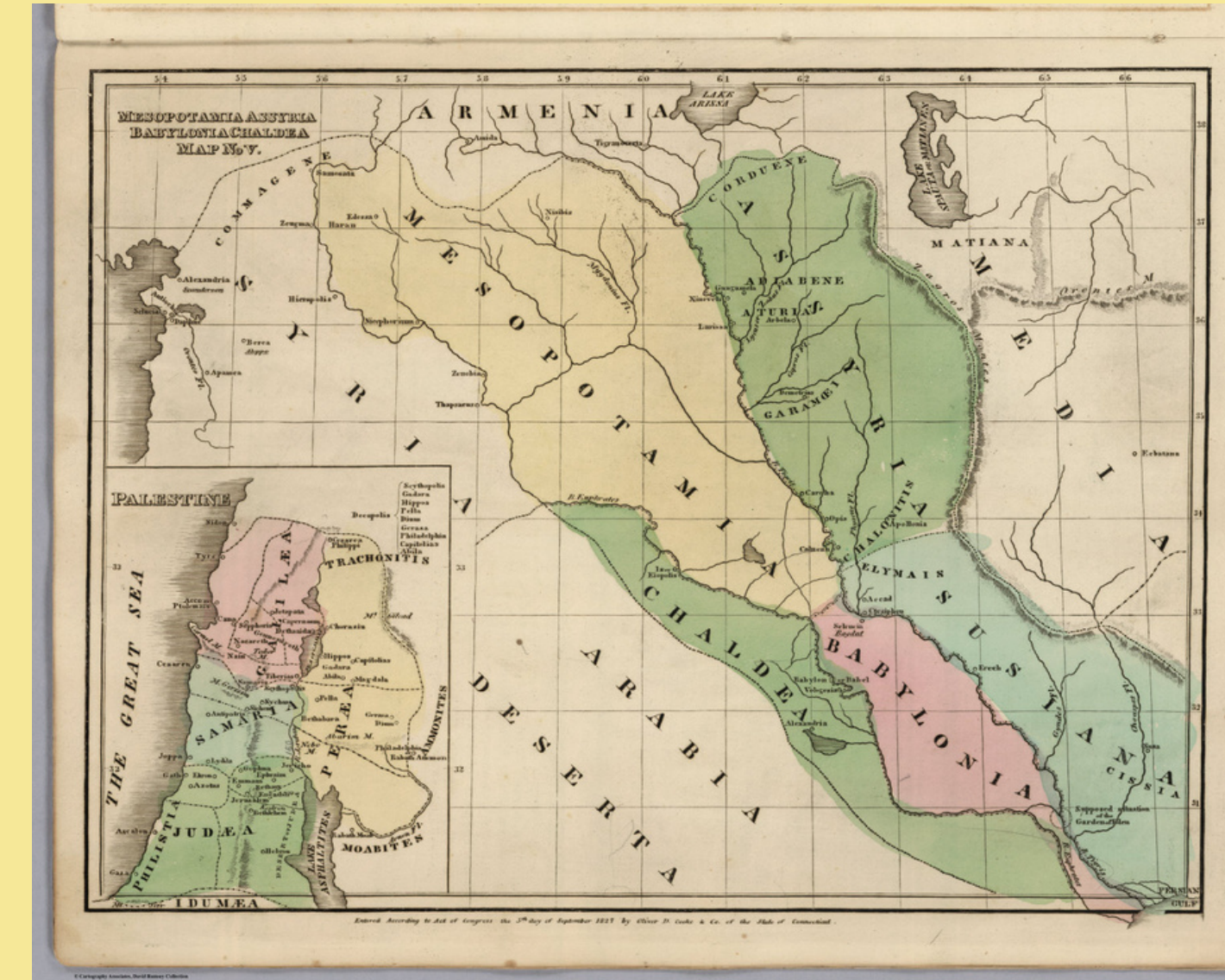


Mesopotamian Era

Traditional Gender Roles

Restricted to Domestic Duties

Marriage, Childbearing, Home



- Lack of participation in intellectual and economic spheres
- Negative mythological and religious portrayals of strong female figures
- Demonization of female role models in mythology

Analysis

- Lamaštu epitomizes ancient views on female infertility and maternal failings.
- Portrayed as an unsightly woman with sagging breasts nursed by pigs, her poisonous milk symbolizes the struggles and societal blame placed on women unable to breastfeed or bear children.
- This representation emphasizes a harsh cultural narrative where women, not men, are blamed for reproductive issues, suggesting a flawed and diminished societal value.

- Tiamat exemplifies how women are stripped of their femininity when they reject socially assigned gender roles.
- Tiamat's deviation from motherhood caused by grief and betrayal from her own children marks her as villainous.
- This underlines the harsh judgment faced by women who step outside stereotypical roles.
- Despite being killed, her body serves as the material for the creation of the world, proving that even in destruction, women's value is exploited.
- The myth stresses the societal expectation for women to suppress their emotions and conform to assigned roles.

Tiamat: The Non-Conforming Mother

- Primordial goddess of Salt Water, also a mother figure.
- Dragon-like with wings, symbolizing power.
- She birthed the first generation of gods in Enuma Elish.
- Her husband was Apsu, god of Fresh Water.
- Tiamat's son Ea kills Apsu, leading to her outrage.
- Enraged, Tiamat causes chaos and destruction. Consumed by anger, she rejects her maternal instincts.
- Eventually defeated by the god Marduk.
- Marduk stabs her heart, splitting her in two, forming heavens and earth.



Contemporary Era



- Restricted Reproductive Rights: access to contraception and safe abortion — politicized.
- Gender-Based Violence: higher chances of domestic and sexual violence.
- Lack of Political Representation: authoritative figures in government and leadership positions.

Conclusion



It's evident that there's resistance against women in authority and leadership roles. Although, recognized as powerful, they're often depicted as evil, and their actions are judged as wrong even when responding naturally or emotionally in times of need. These tales and mythologies serve as a foundation for women, symbolizing strength and power. Tiamat and Lamaštu are examples of women who have been frequently misunderstood and betrayed.



"We live in the body of the mother, but she has neither activity nor power."
Tikva Frymer-Kensky