

CHAPTER 18 Gender in Southwest Asian Prehistory

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INTRODUCTION

Research on gender in Southwest Asian prehistory was almost non-existent before the 1990s, but it is now beginning to be undertaken on a more significant scale due to changes in archaeological interpretation during the last 20 years; these include the decline of unilinear evolutionary models of social development; a shift in focus from processual models to more socially based approaches that emphasize context as well as spatial and temporal variability; and a greater degree of engagement with social theory (Bolger and Maguire 2010). While factors such as environment, population, climate, and technology were no doubt instrumental to the origins of agriculture and the growth of social complexity in the region, they cannot by themselves explain how and why those changes occurred or shed light on shifts that occurred in social relations. Gendered approaches restore agency to archaeological inquiry by looking at the ways in which people structured their worlds; they also enable us to move beyond the static, one-dimensional narratives of the past that have been so prevalent in archaeological accounts of early human societies.

In this chapter we focus on some of the key areas of gender research in Southwest Asian archaeology that are beginning to reframe traditional interpretations. We also draw attention to some of the gaps in this research to date, particularly in terms of current theoretical approaches in gender, feminist, and queer theory. We conclude by offering our prospects for productive avenues of research on gender in the years to come. It is our contention that only by incorporating gendered and feminist perspectives into scholarly agendas can archaeologists begin to overcome the long-standing misrepresentations of men's and women's roles in the two most fundamental

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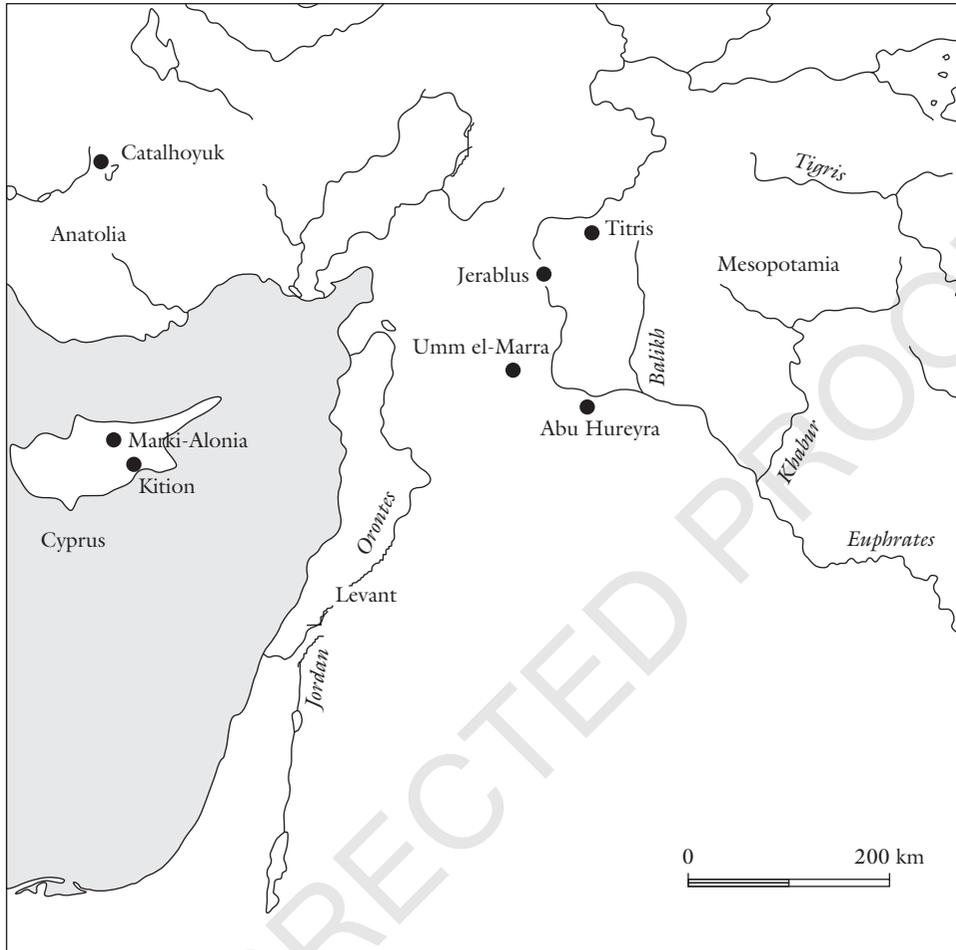


Figure 18.1 Map of Cyprus, Anatolia, the Levant, and northern Mesopotamia with locations of prehistoric and protohistoric sites referred to in the text (produced by Diane Bolger).

“revolutions” of prehistoric times – agriculture and urbanism – that began to emerge in Southwest Asia nearly 10,000 years ago and that continue to have a profound impact on our lives today.

The geographical regions included in this chapter are ancient Anatolia, the Levant, Cyprus, and Mesopotamia, which correspond to the territories of modern Turkey, Cyprus, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Israel, Palestine, Iraq, and Iran (see Figure 18.1 and Figure 18.2). We begin by looking at some of the recent research on gender in hunter-gatherer communities of the Epipaleolithic period and early farming communities of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. This is followed by a discussion of gender in the more complex “protohistoric” societies of the Late Chalcolithic and Bronze Age societies, particularly in Mesopotamia, which witnessed the rise of the first urban centers and states, as well as the earliest known use of written records.

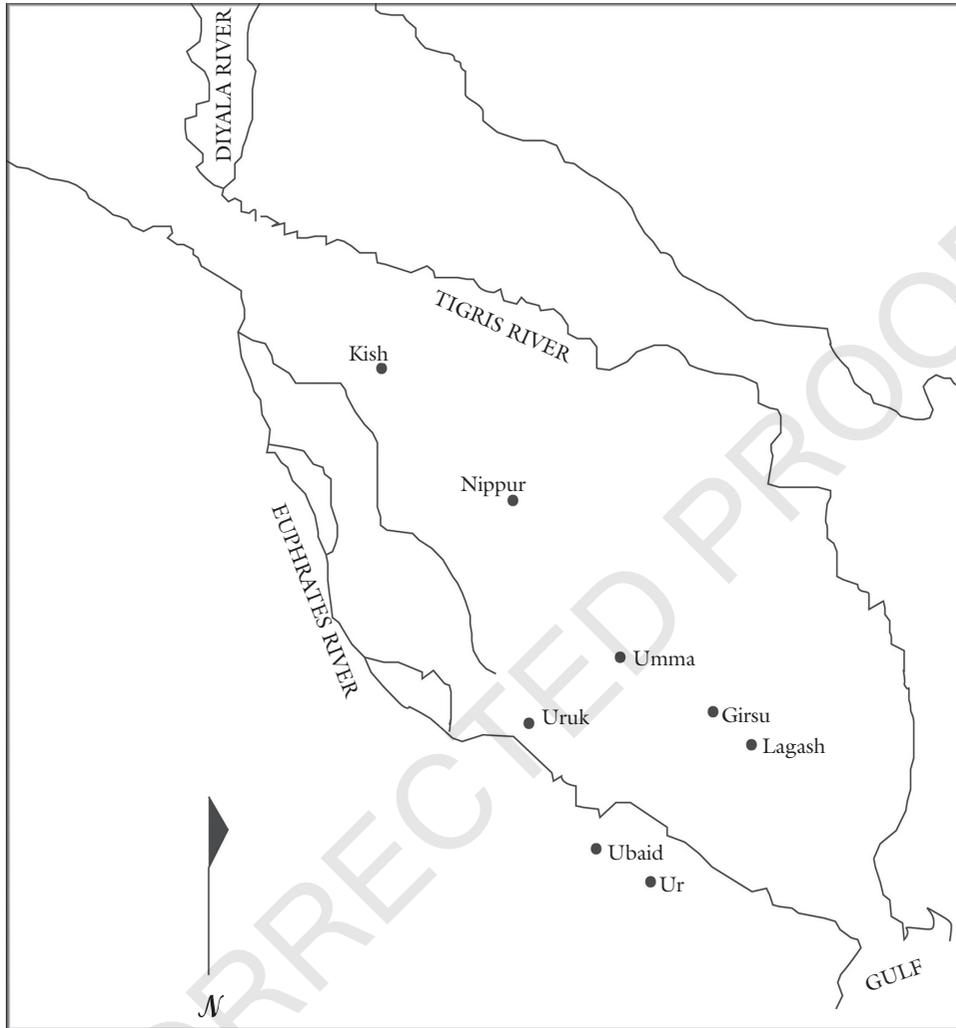


Figure 18.2 Map of southern Mesopotamia showing locations of later prehistoric and protohistoric sites referred to in the text (produced by Abigail Buffington).

GENDER IN HUNTER-GATHERER AND EARLY FARMING SOCIETIES

In a critique of the various interpretations offered to explain the emergence of complex society in Southwest Asia, Patty Jo Watson has noted the absence of human agency in traditional accounts of early societal development in the region and has underscored the need for archaeologists “to accommodate intentional decision making and problem solving by human beings of all ages and both sexes” (1995:37; for similar arguments, see also Asouti 2006; Bruno 2009; and Denham 2009). Most archaeological accounts have not followed that path and continue to focus on external factors, such as environmental, demographic, and climate change; however, greater attention has been given during the last decade to more socially based social approaches. Although gender issues have not figured widely in these discussions, they are beginning

Table 18.1 Chronological chart of early prehistoric periods in Southwest Asia referred to in the text.

<i>Period</i>	<i>Date</i>
Epipaleolithic	ca. 11,500–10,000 B.P.
Pre-Pottery Neolithic A	ca. 10,000–9000 B.P.
Pre-Pottery Neolithic B	ca. 9000–8000 B.P.
Late Pre-Pottery Neolithic	ca. 8000–7200 B.P.
Pottery Neolithic	ca. 7200–6000 B.P.

Note. B.P. “before present” signifies uncalibrated dates before the radiocarbon present, 1950 C.E.

to play a more central interpretive role. In this section we look at four key areas in which gendered perspectives on foraging and early farming communities have been addressed: subsistence and the division of labor; mortuary ritual and feasting; human imagery; and the built environment during earlier periods of prehistory (Table 18.1). For other recent considerations of these issues, see Sinopoli 2006, Bolger 2008a, Bolger 2010, and Peterson 2010.

Gender and subsistence

Agriculture in Southwest Asia emerged initially among complex foraging groups, some of whom had begun to cultivate various wild species of plants and had adopted sedentary or semi-sedentary lifestyles prior to the Neolithic period (see Barker 2009 for a detailed overview). Consequently, traditional interpretations of the sexual division of labor have been based to a large extent on ethnographic evidence for gender roles among modern hunter-gatherer groups. This is a problem as ethnographic research is itself prone to gender bias, with the effect that binary narratives of the sexual division of labor have been extended back into the remote past. Today, the narrative of “Man the Hunter” has lost much of its earlier appeal, having been challenged over the last several decades by a number of feminist scholars (e.g., Conkey and Spector 1984; Crabtree 1991, 2006; Bolger 2006; Brumbach and Jarvenpa 2006; Zihlman 1997, this volume). Crabtree, for example, has observed that ethnographic reports tend to define the capture and killing of small game by women and children as “gathering” rather than “hunting” activities, with the latter reserved exclusively for larger animals (1991:384). Brumbach and Jarvenpa argue further that “hunting should not be defined as simply killing animals, but should encompass all the strategies involved in their pursuit, transport, processing and storage. When the full range of activities is considered, it is arguable that men and women (and children too) worked interdependently at this goal” (2006:506).

The invention of agriculture and the shift from transient to sedentary lifestyles represent some of the most significant achievements of prehistory, and the material remains associated with the emergence of agriculture, including the manufacture of specialized stone tools for clearing and farming land during the Neolithic period, have been of particular interest to archaeologists concerned with processes of domestication, sedentarization, and socio-economic development. Some scholars argue that female labor was instrumental to the invention and spread of plant cultivation on account of women’s

earlier roles as gatherers (e.g., Watson and Kennedy 1991), but this view remains untested and only serves to reinforce the binary models constructed by archaeologists for early foraging societies. Recent studies based on a wide range of actual data contradict the long-held view (e.g., Hodder 1990) that gender roles were clearly demarcated in early agricultural societies of Southwest Asia (e.g., Hodder 2006; Bolger 2010; Peterson 2010). Indeed, the notion that sharp divisions in male and female labor were in force among the relatively egalitarian hunter-gatherer and farming communities of the region appears increasingly unlikely, and it is now widely regarded as an unmediated reflection of the normative gender patterns of modern Western society (Bolger 2010).

The polarized model of male and female labor thought to exist among hunter-gatherers has traditionally been extended to later periods, and many archaeologists continue to assert that the transition to agriculture reinforced gender divisions. In actual fact there is no firm evidence to support this view on a broad scale. Most of the arguments for gender polarity, in areas such as food production, food processing, pottery and stone tool manufacture, and the use of domestic space are based almost entirely on biological differences between the sexes, in particular men's greater physical upper body strength and women's roles in reproduction and child rearing, which are presumed to have restricted women's ability to participate in extra-domestic activities. The secondary products revolution, for example, which involved the exploitation of domesticated animals for wool, milk, traction, and transport during the fourth and third millennia B.C.E. (Sherratt 1983), has often been linked to the privatization of female labor and a decline of female status; however, recent research on gender challenges this view, arguing instead for flexibility of task allocation, seasonal variations of labor patterns, changes in social roles throughout the lifecycle, and the sharing of workloads by men, women, and children (Crabtree 2006; Peterson 2006, 2010; Bolger 2010). Clearly there is a need for further research in this area based on what people actually did rather than what they are presumed to have done. One particularly productive area of research which has done so is the scientific study of human skeletal remains.

Osteological evidence for male and female task differentiation

Traces of stress, deformity, and injury to the bodies of individuals can often be detected through osteological examination, and provide an important means for inferring the degree to which a gendered division of labor may have been practiced. The first significant research in this area was conducted by Theya Molleson on skeletal material from Abu Hureyra in northern Syria (Molleson 1994, 2000). Excavations at the site during the 1970s and 1980s yielded the remains of 162 individuals, 102 of whom were dated to the Epipaleolithic (the period of complex hunter-gatherers) and the early Neolithic (the period of the site's first farming communities). Molleson's study detected strain injury to various parts of the body, including the first metatarsals of the feet which resulted in severe arthritis of the big toe; the majority of those affected were women. In Molleson's view this pattern is best explained as the result of a demanding activity such as grinding of grain on querns, many of which were found in the houses excavated at the site. Grinding with a saddle quern is done in a kneeling rather than a squatting position, and metatarsals are affected as the result of excessive pressure applied to the toe joint. She further argued that the extent of the arthritic damage can only have occurred if women were engaged in this activity regularly, for a

number of hours per day, suggesting that women spent a great portion of their time inside the house in food preparation tasks (2000:324).

Similar results have been obtained in a study of musculo-skeletal stress patterns among Natufian and Neolithic populations in the southern Levant (Eshed et al. 2004), but research by Jane Peterson (2002) on over 150 skeletons at 14 sites has yielded very different results. Peterson maintains that men and women were both engaged in strenuous workloads, but that female activity levels were more stable diachronically than those of males. The most significant dimorphic patterns occur during the Natufian, which Peterson attributes to hunting tasks by males (such as spear throwing), activities which result in asymmetrical development of arm muscles (2002:143). Peterson's main conclusion, that there is no strong evidence to support the notion of a sharp division of labor prior to the Bronze Age, causes us to question the universal notion of a sexual division of labor among the early farming communities of Southwest Asia. When compared with the results obtained by Molleson and Eshed, it seems likely that different localities or sub-regions engaged in different labor practices during the Epipaleolithic and Neolithic periods.

Gender, labor, and domestic space

Studies of domestic architecture at prehistoric sites in Southwest Asia have looked at the ways in which the growth and development of the built environment both reflected and influenced changes in social organization (e.g., Banning and Byrd 1987; Steadman 2000; Wright 2000; Asouti 2005; Cutting 2005). Few of these studies, however, have explicitly investigated the relationships between gender and domestic space. One important exception (Wright 2000) examines the possible effects of increasing levels of sedentism on gender relations during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic of the southern Levant. Following Byrd and Banning, Wright notes the ways in which storage bins, hearths, and other activity areas for processing and cooking food become increasingly privatized over time, developments which she attributes in part to growing restrictions on women's visibility in relation to the community during the period. While Wright's is an interesting hypothesis, it falls into the common "gender trap" of uncritically linking female labor with domestic, interior space. Recent work at Çatalhöyük, in fact, has yielded no conclusive evidence of such a linkage (Molleson 2007); on the contrary, carbon residues found on the ribs of older adults, presumably contracted in smoke-filled houses, suggest that men as well as women spent considerable amounts of time indoors (Hodder 2006:210).

Archaeological evidence in most regions of Southwest Asia shows that domestic space became more complex during the early phases of the Bronze Age, a development that can be attributed to the need by expanding populations to carry out an unprecedented range of domestic tasks. The interfaces between this more complex use of space and gender roles have been the subject of several recent studies in Cypriot archaeology (Bolger 2003:chap. 2; Webb 2009). Webb has noted the increasing privatization of access to buildings, the transfer of storage and domestic facilities to interior locations, and the gradual isolation of households during the Bronze Ages, particularly at the Early/Middle Bronze Age site of Marki-Alonia near Nicosia, Cyprus which she and co-director Frankel excavated painstakingly over many seasons. According to Webb, the enclosure of the household is likely to have resulted in the

relegation of women and women's activities to the interior and to increasingly sharply defined gender identities within and beyond the domestic sphere (2009:264). By correlating the evidence of the built environment at Marki to evidence of modeled scenes on contemporary pottery vessels that show men and women engaged in a different activities, Webb manages to demonstrate, rather than assume, that the activities assigned to women on these vessels (grinding, baking, kneading, etc.) took place in domestic "hearth rooms." But since hearth rooms at Marki also yielded evidence of other types of activities, such as ground stone tool production and flint knapping, it appears unlikely that female labor was spatially segregated at this time (2009:265).

Webb's study is an important example of the way in which careful excavation and the use of multiple lines of evidence can furnish important insights into the gendered division of labor without recourse to essentialist assumptions. While segregated patterns of labor may indeed have been the norm in some regions or periods of Southwest Asian prehistory, the example of Marki-Alonia demonstrates that this was not always the case. Clearly there is a need for similar research at other sites in the region in order to more fully appreciate the complex relationships between gender and the built environment and to establish the degree to which those relationships were subject to temporal and geographical variability.

Gender in rituals of life and death

The archaeological study of mortuary remains can furnish valuable insights into communal beliefs and practices regarding life and death; it can also shed light on the identities and status of the deceased and ways in which gender was negotiated in ritual contexts. Given the richness of funerary evidence in Southwest Asian prehistory, it is surprising that they have been so few detailed investigations of the gendered aspects of mortuary ritual (for exceptions see Bolger 2003:chap. 6; Hamilton 2005; and Croucher 2008). To some extent this is due to the lack of well preserved and reliably sexed skeletal material from many older excavations, but it also reveals the low priority traditionally accorded to gender by archaeologists working in the region.

Recent excavations by Hodder and his team at Çatalhöyük demonstrate how long-standing assumptions about male and female roles in the Neolithic can be overturned by looking closely at the evidence. Here and elsewhere, the practice at the site of burying people underneath the floors of buildings is thought to demonstrate the importance of social memory and ancestry for the construction of social identities. The fact that females as well as males at Çatalhöyük were interred in this fashion associates both sexes with the domestic sphere and suggests that ancestry could be claimed equally through maternal and paternal lines (Hodder 2006:209–211). Specialist analysis of grave goods in the burials at the site has thus far revealed no significant gender differences in the treatment of the dead, and points to a high degree of equality between men and women which contradicts earlier interpretations based on Mellaart's excavations at the site in the 1960s (Mellaart 1967; cf. Hamilton 2005; Hodder 2006:211).

As has been documented cross-culturally in numerous ethnographic studies of pre-state societies, burial often constitutes the first in series of ritual events surrounding the death of an individual. Such multistage rituals occurred in a number of prehistoric communities of Southwest Asia, particularly during the Neolithic period when practices

of skull removal, skull caching, secondary burial, and the like are widely attested (Kuijt 2000). One can readily imagine the celebratory ceremonies, processions, and feasts that must have accompanied these rituals, and ethnographic examples suggest that for pre-state societies these are likely to have been more than single-phase events. The role of feasting during the Neolithic of Southwest Asia has been a central focus of research in recent years (e.g., Hayden 2009; Kuijt 2000, 2009; Twiss 2008), yet the sex or gender of those who organized and competed in these ritual events has not been explicitly discussed, implying by default that males were the principal actors (Bolger 2010). A more gender-oriented approach to ritual in early societies in the region has been undertaken by Garfinkel (2003), who has analyzed dancing figures depicted on representational art of the eighth to fourth millennia B.C.E. These painted figures appear to be engaged in ritual performances, perhaps associated with feasting, and Garfinkel has calculated that female figures appear more frequently in earlier depictions and decrease with time; male depictions do just the opposite, being relatively rare in early contexts but becoming more numerous in later periods. It may also be significant that more than 50 percent of the figures in Garfinkel's study had no indications of gender, and that images of male and female figures dancing together were relatively rare. While more work is needed on this topic, Garfinkel's pioneering efforts suggest a central role for females in feasting activities and ritual performance during the early phases of agriculture and a more prominent role for males in later phases.

Gender and human imagery

The area of Southwest Asian prehistory that has perhaps been most receptive to developments in gender and other types of social theory is the investigation of anthropomorphic imagery, resulting in a veritable flood of research in recent years (e.g., Hamilton 1994, 2000; Knapp and Meskell 1997; Miller 2002; Ribeiro 2002; Talalay and Cullen 2002; Bolger 2003:chap. 4; Kuijt and Chesson 2005, 2007; Meskell 2007; Voigt 2007; Croucher 2008; Daems 2008; Mina 2009; Nakamura and Meskell 2009). While only some of these publications make gender a central focal point, all are highly critical of traditional interpretations that draw exclusively upon evidence of female imagery while ignoring a large body of evidence for male, ambiguous, and dual sexed examples. Current studies of human imagery, especially anthropomorphic figurines, consider entire corpuses of material rather than a few selected examples, interpret material within a contextual framework, and seek to identify particular patterns of spatial and temporal variability. This has resulted in a much more complex picture than the simple matriarchy/patriarchy narrative of earlier research (e.g., Mellaart 1967; Gimbutas 1974, 1991). It also raises important questions about gender. For example, why were anatomical features on these images explicitly depicted in some cases and left vague and ambiguous in others? And why do modes of depiction vary spatially and temporally? Who made and used these images, and for what purpose? Were they intended to portray generic gender and/or age groups or did they represent particular individuals? In a study of Pre-Pottery Neolithic imagery in the southern Levant, Kuijt and Chesson (2007) suggest that diachronic shifts from ambiguous forms to figures with more explicit anatomical detail can be correlated with changes in levels of social cohesion; ambiguous images, they argue, "may reflect attempt to mask or control differences at the individual level, thereby emphasizing collective,

communal practices” (2007:219). Along similar lines, Talalay and Cullen have shown that the manufacture of schematic plank figures in Cyprus coincided with changes in social organization on the island during the earlier Bronze Age that deliberately masked indications of gender and individuality in order to promote ideologies of kinship and communality (2002). Knapp and Meskell (1997) hold the opposite view concerning these figures by arguing that they attest to the emergence of individual identity during the earlier phases of the Cypriot Bronze Age. This view is difficult to sustain on the basis of the formal and contextual evidence (see Bolger 2003: 188–189), but it nevertheless offers a refreshing departure from traditional interpretations of these objects as fertility figures or mother goddesses.

FROM PREHISTORY TO PROTOHISTORY: GENDER, COMPLEXITY, AND SOCIAL STATUS

Beginning in the fifth millennium B.C.E. and moving forward into the third, there were major economic, social, and political changes throughout Southwest Asia that are visible in a number of innovations (see Table 18.2 for chronology of later Mesopotamian prehistory and protohistory). They include the intensification of agriculture and pastoralism, the movement of people into urban settlements, the development of economies based on specialized labor, and in some locations the presence of major religious and political institutions. Although there were cultural differences, the restructuring of households, divisions of labor, and class distinctions significantly altered the social relations between men and women in these societies.

The evidence provides a rich, though challenging, corpus of materials that crosscuts several disciplines. The cuneiform specialists provide the major gateway to the textual sources. Archaeologists are dependent upon material culture from published data often limited to excavations from the high mounds where temples and palaces were located, although more recent research has included the study of smaller, non-royal mounds and household architecture and activities (Pollock 1999:100ff.; Wattenmaker 1998a). Finally, art historians have focused on the major works of art and architecture

Table 18.2 Chronological chart of later prehistoric and protohistoric periods in Mesopotamia referred to in the text (all dates are calibrated B.C.E.).

<i>Date</i>	<i>Period</i>
2100	Ur III
2350	Akkadian
	Early Dynastic III
	Early Dynastic II
	Early Dynastic I
2900	Jemdet Nasr
3100	Late Uruk
	Middle Uruk
4000	Early Uruk
5000	Ubaid

that appeared for the first time in these regions. Their interpretations of human imagery, often complemented by textual references, have provided major insights into male and female status and roles.

Gender, urbanism, and socio-economic complexity

Research in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was dominated by the writings of Marx, Engels, and Weber, whose theories profoundly influenced conceptions about social changes with the advent of state societies. The evolutionary perspective of Marx and Engels argued for a shift from kinship-based political and economic organization to the appropriation of economies by state leaders. This strategy reduced the power of kinship, leaving the state as the major productive organization and kin groups diminished in their power base. Several anthropologists, following these theories, suggested that changes resulted in gender inequalities (Sacks 1974; Leacock 1983; Gailey 1987) while others argued that both men and women lost their autonomy, though differently (Rapp 1977). Recent archaeological research on this question has shown that while the interventions of states were broadly experienced and transformed gender, other important changes involving class and ethnicity imposed legal statuses that crosscut gender (Wright 1996, 1998). Weber (1968) also viewed early state leaders as the major source of power. Using a patrimonial model, he argued that all households and property were centered on the crown, a position taken by some Assyriologists (e.g., Schloen 2001; Studevent-Hickman 2006:331). Other scholars have documented the “substantial private and disposable real property” held by high-status families, merchants, and some craftsmen (Zettler 1992:236). With respect to gender, elite women held socially sanctioned public roles and substantial property. Along with others in intermediate positions, they engaged in activities independent of the central administration (Wright 2008:205). This evidence (and others to be discussed later) challenges Weber’s patrimonial model although it continues to be widely cited. Finally, in a wide-ranging study of gender in ancient Mesopotamia, Karen Wright (2007) uses evidence of texts, figurines, and other forms of human imagery to assess the degree to which women’s roles were altered with the emergence of early states. She advocates a unilineal model of social change and concludes that women’s status in Mesopotamia declined through time, an interpretation that differs from our understanding of women’s status and the evidence discussed in this paper. Recent research by Proppe-Bailey challenges Wright’s interpretation, arguing that future studies on the effects of urbanization on women’s roles need a more contextual, gender-sensitive approach that focuses on heterarchical rather than hierarchical forms of social organization (Proppe-Bailey 2011). These examples aside, there were significant social, political, and economic changes as people moved into urban environments in northern and southern Mesopotamia and surrounding regions, which can be viewed from a long-term perspective in various parts of Cyprus, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq.

As discussed earlier, significant changes occurred in Cyprus when populations shifted from a hunter-gatherer economy to one based on agriculture and pastoralism and people settled into more sedentary lifestyles. While these changes varied regionally, household dwellings tended to demarcate the boundaries between social groups and evolved into divisions of labor that are linked to the emergence of stratified economies and social classes (Bolger 2003:41). Counter to neo-Marxist

expectations, however, kinship groups in Cyprus maintained a level of control by contesting the power of the emerging state, a factor that may account for the more flexible roles for women in social, political, and economic life that was reminiscent of earlier kinship organization.

At Ebla in northern Syria, the administration was controlled by the palace, as attested by stores of written documents drawn from the palace archive (Archi 2002). Leadership at Ebla did favor men whose positions, in addition to the king, included the chief minister and other officials. The social hierarchy also included the queen who owned land and priestesses who played important roles in establishing alliances between the king and the sanctuaries of the gods. Although women and others “derived their rank from membership in a certain family” (Archi 2002:6), they held property, bestowed rank, made ritual offerings (Archi 2002:7), and were not secluded. Their land belonged to the palace, but it was used for their support and could be passed down to heirs. In other cases, palace land acquired by women and men could not be passed on to their heirs. This clearly indicates that class and rank superseded gender.

In southern Mesopotamia, much of the economy and political organization was centered in temple and state institutions. One of the problems with Weber’s patrimonial model is that it effectively excludes women from history because they are outside of the bounds of his male-centered vision (Wright 2008). Once these barriers are removed, his model is falsified in several ways. Although the major Mesopotamian institutions were responsible for much of the urban infrastructure, there are numerous examples of women and men at many social and economic levels who held official positions and property (Hattori 2002; Maekawa 1973–1974; Zettler 1992). In certain instances access to land was much like some lands described at Ebla that are referred in the Mesopotamian literature as “prebend.” These lands were cultivated, harvested, and taxed on the individual, but they were not inheritable. Some elite women, on the other hand, owned land and other property that was passed down to their heirs, while a deposed king’s land reverted to the palace administration.

Elite women were on a par with their male counterparts as a result of a strategy that promoted stability and consolidated power. These women took advantage of their positions by assuming active roles by building on their sanctioned offices, conducting appropriate cultic activities, acquiring loans, brokering merchants, and buying and selling property. Beyond these elite women, other women, who appear not to have been related to royal lineages, were employed in middle level administrative positions. Others were employed in lower level roles (see below).

Division of labor

The lists of occupations and statuses from Mesopotamia and Ebla offer insights into the wide range of activities in which women engaged. In Mesopotamia, women are listed as slaves, royal women (wives, daughters, and “junior wives”), goddesses, priestesses, child bearers, widows, mothers, and *lukur* (see Sharlach 2008:178 for the complexities of translation and changes over time). Their occupations included overseers, weavers, millers, sheep shearers, spinners, singers, supervisors, and transporters of a variety of products, such as reed or fodder for animals, agricultural laborers working on irrigation, harvesting, winnowing, and hauling (Kramer 1987:107ff.; Sharlach 2008; Wright 2008). They are also listed as female mourners and interpreters of dreams (Asher-Greve

1987). Many of the same professions for women are listed in the Ebla archives, but others named in the latter include wet nurses, stable-handlers, doorkeepers, gardeners, wardrobe mistresses, cloth dyers, basket weavers, and bakers (Archi 2002).

A major industry listed in the earliest texts that remained prominent throughout the third millennium is textile production. During the Ur III period, there may have been 50,000 to 60,000 people employed in “workshops,” the majority of whom were females. They were responsible for shearing (plucking) sheep, spinning, weaving, plaiting, cleaning cloth, trimming it to size, and possibly sewing garments (Wright 1996:92). The finishing of the cloth or fulling was performed by men, a division of labor in which the production process facilitated the separation of men and women.

Supervision of the weaving establishments was carried out by women and men. At an establishment in Nippur in the late third millennium (Ur III), the daughter of the king owned a textile workshop and employed both women and men as chief administrators. These positions at a “middle rank” were on a par with those of administrators in other state and temple workshops. Using their personal seal, they authenticated records kept in the weaving establishment (Hattori 2002:218), indicating that there were no social sanctions against appointing women to positions at these middle ranks. This may have been an effort by the owner of the workshop to carve out “niches of influence” for women (Meier 1991:547).

In other textile workshops, women are listed in two roles. One group managed teams of workers and was responsible for grading the quality of cloth before passing it on to the fullers for the final step in production. Women workers came from several different social groups. Some (at Girsu-Lagash and Umma (Ur III)) were taken as prisoners of war and cast into slavery, a practice known from the Early Dynastic period, suggesting that slave labor was a significant part of the state’s infrastructure (but see Adams 2009 for a different view). Of the 6000 weavers in addition to slaves, others were indentured or local free women (Waetzoldt 1972, 1987:119, n. 19). In any event, their compensation (rations) was at the lowest end of the scale among all other types of workers and graded by age, young and older receiving less. Whether slave, indentured, prisoner of war, or local free women, they lived and worked together in social groups in what Ruby Watson has referred to, in another context, as a “sharply defined world of somebodies” (Watson 1986:629).

Based on the study of settlement patterns during the Late Uruk through to the Ur III, textile production was an “urban phenomenon” that was financed by urban elites for their consumption and use (Algaze 2008:84). Although clearly more limited, there are reports of textiles brought into cities as tribute (Kang 1973) and Van de Mieroop (2004) suggests there may even have been a “cottage industry” in which women worked at home rather than in institutional workshops.

The evidence from Ebla is more limited but what we do know from texts is that similar divisions of labor and workshop conditions existed. A large number of women and men were employed in the household of the palace. In some instances women outnumbered men, such as one house where there were 82 women and 43 male and female children employed. Among the 5000 family groups working for the palace, some were listed as part of the king’s household, while others lived in the lower city of the town. Women were employed in weaving and milling. Some had male supervisors, while others were supervised by women as was the case in Mesopotamia. Comparisons of compensation for their labor show variations by gender and a different

system of remuneration. For example, women received amounts of silver or barley, while men only received silver. Production also has been documented at the household level in other cities in northern Mesopotamia, where it was carried out on a small scale for domestic use and exchange (Wattenmaker 1998b).

Unlike northern and southern Mesopotamia, there are no written documents for Bronze Age Cyprus. However, there is an excellent archaeological record for certain crafts and divisions of labor. Weaving again is associated with women during the earliest phases of the Bronze Age, when production occurred in the household, but there was a shift in the Later Bronze Age. Joanna Smith (2002) believes that when production became highly specialized and large quantities of textiles were produced, weaving was not as sharply segregated as was the case in northern and southern Mesopotamia. Based on research at Kition, the evidence indicates that men and women were employed in indoor workshops that were located in “large public administrative complexes” (2002:xx). There they performed the full range of production, including dyeing and fulling, without the separation known in the weaving establishments in southern Mesopotamia.

Gender and mortuary evidence

The evidence from mortuary remains throughout southern and northern Mesopotamia complements these interpretations. We consider death rituals as representative of idealized social relations that are expressions of community, social identity or individuality and gender differences (Pollock 1999:199). This conception corresponds to the changes that took place leading up to and during the third millennium in southern and northern Mesopotamia.

In the south the earliest graves (Ubaid period) emphasize the cohesiveness of the community. These burials are relatively undifferentiated, the only exceptions being the under-representation of child burials and a preferential treatment of older individuals. Perceived differences include the presence of a number of copper artifacts and the treatment of skeletal remains (Pollock 1999:196). The most distinguishing characteristic of the Ubaid graves is that a specific area was allocated for burial “as a piece of community land” (1999:203). Whether this practice continued into the Uruk is unclear, since no burials have been discovered for that period.

Changes in burial practices in the following Jemdet Nasr and Early Dynastic periods are in contrast to the homogeneity and community integration reflected in the Ubaid. Burial sites are found in cemeteries (off-site or in unused areas of the settlement), households (still occupied), rubbish heaps, and pits. Some tombs contained multiple burials, while others held an individual. The most spectacular burials during this period are from a cemetery at the city of Ur that contained 2000 graves. The most significant, for our purposes, is from the Royal Cemetery, where major differences during the Early Dynastic period were based on social identities related to gender, class, and age (Pollock 1999:213). Sixteen of the burials were tombs with chambers that are accessed through shafts and contained a major individual, retainers, and lavish burial goods. The largest tomb had 74 retainers. One of the most notable burials was that of a woman named Pu-abi whose grave was richly provisioned with retainers and sumptuous goods. Aside from these elaborate burials, the greatest numbers of individuals were buried in earthen pits. Among all the burial goods, axes, daggers, and

spears were associated with males, while jewelry and other forms of personal adornment were placed with women. McCaffrey (2008) has challenged the precision of gender attributions in the cemetery based on poor skeletal evidence and ambiguities in the excavator's descriptions of at least one of the graves, an issue that is undergoing continued study. Still, the evidence for hierarchy, social status, and conceptions of gendered difference complement analyses from the contemporary graves at the city of Kish that were examined by physical anthropologists. They support the gender-based attributions at Ur (Pollock 1991:373).

This uniformity of burial customs and clear distinctions between men and women in southern Mesopotamia are in contrast to those in northern Syria and southeastern Turkey. While there are status and gendered differences observable in burials, variable burial practices at settlements reveal forms of social organization that differ from the centralization in the south. One type of burial comprises "family groups in elite mortuary facilities" while another includes smaller, more simple facilities suggestive of collective identities.

At Jerablus, located on the Middle Euphrates in Syria, burials are dated to the second half of the third millennium, a period immediately preceding and coincident with the Early Dynastic at Ur. Like other sites in this region, Jerablus was fortified and contained a defensive wall with gated entrances. Burials were discovered in several locations. One major mortuary complex was situated adjacent to the fort. Thirty-one individuals were interred in a large tomb with corbelled stone walls and entrances. The grave goods included "copper, gold, ivory, and ostrich eggshells" (Bolger 2008b:222), along with 700 pottery vessels, 100 of which were "champagne pots" often associated with feasting. In distinction to the elaborate chamber burials, multiple inhumations were placed in pithoi (2008b:223). In another area of the site there were 30 smaller tombs constructed in the same manner as the larger one. This area also included pit and cist graves and cooking pot burials.

Due to poor preservation and mode of interment, only 20 of the 106 individuals interred were aged and sexed. The analysis presents the impression of more flexible modes of social organization and gendered conceptions than in the south. Of the 20 individuals buried in the various arrangements, nine are associated with the large tombs, six with smaller tombs, and two with pithoi, all in areas that were part of the funerary precinct of the large and smaller chamber tombs. When wealth scores based on the numbers of objects with the individuals interred were calculated (Bolger 2008b:figure 6.6), there were few differences between type of tomb and wealth level, while there were higher wealth scores related to age grades. Tombs with children alone had the lowest levels of grave goods, while tombs with adults and children had a larger quantity and variety of artifacts; in fact the burials with the best preservation included many with high quality artifacts.

This association of gender identity and chamber tombs is consistent with other burials from this period at the Middle Euphrates site of Umm el-Marra where an elaborate tomb includes two young adult males and females and two infants that are spatially separated (Schwartz et al. 2006). Grave goods included gold ornaments, silver pins, lapis jewelry, "stone beads and shells filled with cosmetic material" (Bolger 2008b:225). Male goods included silver ornaments, a copper dagger, pin and spearhead, and young caprid bones. In another tomb in which males and females were interred together, there were no distinctions in grave goods.

Most significant is the handling of disarticulated skeletal remains, a practice that is present at Jerablus and Tell Banat in the Middle Euphrates. At Jerablus, skeletal remains in many of the smaller tombs consist almost exclusively of extremities, “mainly by wrists, hands, feet, and kneecaps” (Bolger 2008b:224). This practice is thought to be a deliberate attempt to obscure individual identities, including the gendered identities, of the persons interred. In a similar mode of interment as the burials at Jerablus, mortuary rituals at Tell Banat included “defleshing, disarticulation, secondary burial, and burning of skeletal remains” (Bolger 2008b:224), a practice interpreted as a means of destroying individual identities in the interest of “collective identities” (Porter 2002:22).

Finally, the site of Titris in the Upper Euphrates in southeastern Turkey is divided into an Outer and Lower town and is believed to be a major trading center (Lanieri 2007:245). Burials contemporary with settlements in the Lower Euphrates bear some similarities to those at Jerablus. In the first phase of the Early Bronze Age (3000–2600 B.C.E.), three cist graves included an adult female and a single pot. Two others contained infants and lacked goods. In the Middle Bronze Age extramural cemeteries were built on the fringes of both the Outer and Lower towns. A chamber tomb was surrounded by smaller cist graves with multiple skeletal remains and various copper and silver ornaments and precious stones. A major shift occurred at the end of the third millennium in the later part of the Early Bronze Age (2400–2100 B.C.E.). Extramural cemeteries were replaced with intramural tombs in private dwellings that were located in the main courtyard of dwellings, apparently built during the initial construction of the building. Multiple burials were discovered in the tombs, some of which were articulated and others disarticulated. Most of the skeletal remains included skulls. The interpretation in this instance is that the bones of previous burials, with the exception of skulls, were removed as new remains were interred. Of the seven individuals in one tomb, one female, a young male, three young adult females, and two other non-sexed adults were buried together. Grave goods in intramural tombs include pottery and figurines, as bronze weapons placed under male skulls, also bronze ornaments and semiprecious stone necklaces in which no sex is reported. Finally, one intramural burial in a plaster basin discovered in the corner of a house in the Outer Town, included 17 skulls encircled with scatters of bones, all of which were young adult males, with the exception of a young adult female, and two infants. There were 19 cut marks on the bones, a practice reminiscent of others in the Lower Euphrates. Taken together, these changes at Titris have been interpreted as the assertion of a new authority in which social stratification and households played major roles in the society (Lanieri 2007, 2011). The lack of gendered differences suggests that the roles of women in kin-based households were strengthened rather than diminished in these later phases of the millennium.

Gender and human imagery

The term ideology often is used to define a society’s religious principles, but feminist archaeologists speak of gender ideologies. These terms need explanation in the study of Mesopotamian imagery. In an important paper on gender ideology, Pollock and Bernbeck (2000) use textual and archaeological evidence to investigate the ways in which ideologies are transformed into social realities. They define ideology as “the

portrayal of the particular interests and values of certain social groups as if they were the interests of everyone in a society,” and maintain that “ideology structures systems of beliefs, knowledge, and values so that they legitimize a particular set of interests” (Pollock and Bernbeck 2000:151; cf. Pauketat and Emerson 1991:920). Ideologies convey powerful messages by masking or naturalizing a particular view of the world and by confounding the social with the natural order. The way things are, the social reality, is thought to be unchangeable because it is natural, or because social relationships are “legitimate products of historical change, innovation and creation of order” (Pollock and Bernbeck 2000:151). While it surely is the case that all members of a society do not adhere to a particular ideology, it may be in one’s best interest to do so.

One of the examples Pollock and Bernbeck provide conveys the significance of a gendered ideology in which pictorial material promotes gendered ideologies. In southern Mesopotamia, a major source for identifying the roles of women is human images on cylinder seals. These include depictions of a variety of productive activities from the earliest seals in which women (identified based on their hairdo) are engaged in weaving and pottery production in what appear to be workshops (Asher-Greve 1985). The imagery on seals from the middle to the end of the third millennium is more complex. A select group of seals is described as “ritualized portrayals.” One type represents seated females engaged in drinking and is referred to as a “banquet scene.” Seals with this scene most often belong to women when they are found in graves and when an inscription specifies a female name (Pollock 1991:381). A second type depicts human figures engaged in combat with wild animals or domestic animals taming wild ones, a “combat” scene. These seals generally are associated with males, an attribution challenged by McCaffrey in the Royal Cemetery at Ur (McCaffrey 2008). Whether or not the images represent real actions, they clearly are a reflection of Mesopotamian views of gender differences.

A second example, from figural imagery, is the well-known Uruk vase, a 1.5 meter tall alabaster vessel from the Late Uruk that was discovered in the sanctuary of the goddess Inanna at Uruk (Bahrani 2001). It is a depiction of an event in celebration of fertility and a fruitful harvest. In five ascending registers, this cultic scene depicts wheat and flax, male and female animals, male nudes carrying vessels or baskets that are offered to a figure at the top, presumably Inanna, who accepts a basket filled with various “fruits of the land” (Pollock and Bernbeck 2000:158). The basket is offered by an unidentified male figure, variously interpreted as a priest, leader, or king. Much has been said about the ambiguity of this goddess and the contradictions her aggressive behavior, as told in legendary sources, may have presented to Mesopotamian women and their real world. Still, it cannot be doubted that the focus of cultic attention in this image is the female, clearly reflecting the importance of females in religion and ritual performance.

One of the best known women in the “real world” of Mesopotamia is Enheduanna, the daughter of an Akkadian king (Sargon), who was appointed to the official position of en-priestess. We know her from a votive object she commissioned and from her poetry. The office of en-priestess was one of the highest attainable in Mesopotamian society. Most likely her appointment to the office was arranged by the king in order to forge an alliance with a temple that was dedicated to the male moon god Nanna, the most important god in the city of Ur. What is important about Enheduanna is her

active involvement in official life. The alabaster disk on which she is represented, most likely not a “mimetic portrait” (Bahrani 2001:116ff.), preserves her image in a visually dominant position as an important official engaged in a ritual act (Winter 2010). On its obverse an inscription identifies Enheduanna by name (Winter 2010). During the time in which she served as en-priestess, which may have been as long as 35 years, she wrote poetry that is one of the first literary works “attributable to a specific individual, whether from Mesopotamia or elsewhere” (Bahrani 2001:116). Today we might refer to her words as “writing women’s worlds” (after Abu-Lughod 1993). Enheduanna uses her poetry to promote her own ideas, thereby acquiring social recognition (Pollock 1991:370). She does this by writing poems that have political overtones and what appear to be her frustrations about and aspirations to male power. In one she complains that Sargon has driven her out of her official position and she appeals to the goddess Inanna and to the god Nanna to restore her to the office of en-priestess. The poem ends when she is given a sword and a dagger, the “symbolic trappings of male power” (Pollock 1991:370). Enheduanna’s manner of representation and ideas expressed in her poetry demonstrate one of the ways in which gendered ideologies were challenged by elite women and those who attained important positions. Other examples discussed here might also fall within this attempt to break the “glass ceiling” and defy certain ideologies.

Finally, another way in which gendered ideologies reflect on how conceptions of males were represented was in public monuments. Irene Winter, in a collection of papers in *On Art in the Ancient Near East* (2010), examines stele, public monuments, and seal imagery from the early periods to the end of the third millennium B.C.E., showing male and female representations. Winter bases her analyses on Mesopotamian gendered ideologies by drawing on a “lexicon of value,” the ideal attributes ascribed to a king from texts that can be read in imagery. She identifies these as “good form or breeding, auspiciousness, vigor/vitality, and specifically, sexual allure or charm” (Winter 2010:86). Her subject is a stele in which the king, Naram-Sin, is shown at a military victory where he stands above his stricken enemy. He wears a helmet with bull horns, previously reserved for gods alone, thereby asserting, the “fusion of a hero-plus-ruler” (2010:92). His well-rounded and muscled upper torso and other attributes thus combine virility and sexuality and link his image with the “concepts of power and leadership” that prevailed for millennia in Mesopotamia in a way that was “seen as not unnatural”(2010:101).

CONCLUSION

Not surprisingly, our review of current research on gender studies in Southwest Asia shows both variability and patterning. There is no question that as societies became increasingly complex with the advent of urbanism and state societies, there were major changes in gender and status. We cannot, however, state unequivocally that gender was always the guiding principle. In many instances, status or class distinctions superseded gender as in the case of certain elite women in virtually all of the cultures discussed here.

There is much variability in the ways in which women’s status and roles changed when we take the full swath of evidence from the prehistoric to the protohistoric periods. Divisions of labor varied spatially and chronologically, with no predictable

pattern, undermining support for traditional evolutionary narratives of women's status in early states (see Hutson et al. this volume for discussion of this issue in other world regions). In Upper Mesopotamia and Cyprus, for example, producers were not segregated by gender as was the case in the major institutional settings in southern Mesopotamia. Women at the lowest ranks there, however, present most dramatically an erosion of women's status.

When it comes to changes in kinship organization over time, clearly a major shift occurred between an era of early hunter/gatherer subsistence groups and settled populations. In those instances, there is much variability in Upper Mesopotamia and Cyprus where the evidence indicates that corporate groups could be identified by kinship, guild, or other form of lineage arrangements, and maintained their power or at least, demonstrated in funerary settings, a strong impulse to demonstrate their individuality. In southern Mesopotamia, the evidence also does not support earlier theories that the power of kinship groups was vastly diminished (Wright 1996). Additionally, the relatedness and kin-based power structures are best viewed among royal and other elite women in Lower Mesopotamia (Wright 2008).

In conclusion, the picture that has begun to emerge from recent gender-oriented research in Southwest Asian prehistory is far more complex and variable than the unilinear models of traditional research – and it is also far more interesting. There are tremendous gaps in this research, however, both in terms of regional imbalances (more work has been done in Cyprus and southern Mesopotamia, for example, than in Anatolia or the Levant) and theoretical limitations (e.g., there has been almost no research to date on non-binary gender constructs, or on queer prehistory, as has been noted also by Croucher 2005). If gender research in the region is to continue to expand and to address more comprehensively a greater range of issues and approaches in current feminist and social theory, greater effort must be made – in the field, in the classroom, in the lab, and at the desk – to integrate gender and feminist perspectives into broader teaching and research agendas.

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