Gender and Early Farming Societies

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GENDER STUDIES OF prehistoric farming societies are perched precariously between the detailed, often text-aided studies of complex societies and the more speculative, techno-environmental reconstructions associated with Paleolithic archaeology. Neolithic and Formative villagers often left behind an assortment of tantalizing clues—from burials, human remains, architecture, artifacts, and images—so that archaeologists feel they ought to be able to address some fairly substantial questions about the gender systems of early farmers. And these are important issues, seeing that making the transition to an agricultural economy is commonly perceived as one of the major, transformational events in the human career. How the first farmers organized their work, how they structured their relationships with family and community, and how their ideational systems shaped and reinforced gender concepts were undoubtedly critical features in the success or failure of their ventures. Yet the promise of reconstructing the gender systems from the fragmentary and static prehistoric remains has remained often illusive.

My intent is to chart the sometimes uneven progress of gender research concerning early agricultural societies. The discussion is limited to those societies that *did* depend on domesticated plants or a mix of domestic plants and animals for their livelihood but *did not* exist as part of larger state-level entities that involved institutionalized hierarchical structures. I will forefront those studies that, by virtue of theoretical insight and methodological innovation, have advanced and challenged how we think about gender in early farming societies. By doing so, I hope to provide some suggestions about conceptualizing sex roles and gender and how to overcome problems that continue to plague gender studies.

Two important trends unfold in the course of these discussions. First, while the "Neolithic Revolution" was clearly a transformative process wherever it took hold, results of gender studies suggest that the inception of settled, village farming

life led to few outcomes that can be viewed as broadly generalizable across regions. Despite the strongly seductive metaphor of evolutionary change, universal (or even regional) descriptions of the effects and outcomes of the agricultural developments inevitably falter in the light of local data sets and detailed analyses. So it may seem to some that there is little we can say with certainty about gender during the rise of agriculture. I would offer, alternatively, that the variation is less a symptom of theoretical inadequacy or lack of methodological rigor but more a reflection of the stunning variety present in the data themselves—in terms of both the diversity of gender systems in place and the material ways these systems are imbued with meaning (Crown 2000a). Frequent reinterpretations and active debates indicate the incremental, sometimes awkward development of archaeological knowledge in an arena that is still experiencing substantial growing pains. Second, the past twenty years have also reminded us of the truism in anthropology that culture is holistic. It is difficult to talk about sexual roles or the sexual division of labor, for example, without considering social, economic, political, and ideological categories of gender (Dobres 2004). So it becomes increasingly clear that the most compelling studies consider multiple cultural spheres and integrate diverse data sets in their discussions of sex and gender.

I suggest that there is no one, simple solution to moving gender studies forward because there is not, one uniform limitation. Some shortcomings continue to have their roots in stereotypical projections of Western gender patterns into the past. Gender clichés are perpetuated by archaeologists who continue to claim that the search for gender is a futile pursuit and then inject assumptions about sex and gender freely into their interpretations. Yet authors who express sympathy to feminist goals and familiarity with feminist theory have sometimes presented naive, formulaic accounts as well. The archaeological record and variable preservation can also have an impact. Yet if we search out the most robust, well-preserved data sets, we do not necessarily find the most advanced gender studies. Confronting these challenges constitutes the next stage for gender studies among farming societies. And there is still an enormous potential for insightful, engendered archaeological analyses. The incentives to build a more coherent and less stereotypical gendered past are strong. As prone as we are to situate the present in the past, a more complete and unbiased view of that past clearly paves the way for thoughtful reflection and action concerning our gendered future.

Domesticating Gender

As the arbiters of culture change over the vast expanse of prehistory, we have never been hesitant about modeling gender roles, relationships, and ideologies in

sweeping terms. First came the universally-applied essentialist assumptions about the roles of women and men rooted firmly in their biology and the limitations those were thought to imply. Women in farming societies were increasingly stressed by the demands imposed by larger families. Increasing sedentism fully tethered them to the "domestic" sphere. And women were less likely than ever to contribute to the technological or political developments of a group. These assumptions—and the reconstructions of Neolithic society that emerged from them—provided fodder for a first wave of critical analysis.

In 1970, Boserup published the tremendously influential study *Women's Role in Economic Development*. This pathbreaking work documented African women's massive contribution to agricultural economies and also formulated an engendered model for changing agricultural production. She claimed that women did the bulk of agricultural work in tribal societies where population levels were low, land was both abundant and collectively owned, and technology was handheld (hoe). Her typology from extensive to increasingly intensive farming was evolutionary, with demographic change and land pressure precipitating intensification and technological advance. Increased male participation coincides with the introduction of the plow.

Boserup's "female farmer" model seemed to demonstrate that women made significant productive contributions in the subsistence economy of extensive farmers. The "female farmer" model provided a basis for responding to those who supposed that modern divisions of labor were rooted in the biological limitations imposed on women by the rigors of bearing and nurturing children. And it was a powerful inferential tool for feminist researchers who were predisposed to structural-Marxist analyses (Leacock 1978, 1981; Martin and Voorhies 1975; Sacks 1974; Schlegel 1977). For many archaeologists, the model relied on technological and economic behaviors that were likely to leave material clues. Boserup's categories seemed to correspond not only with technological trajectories identifiable in the past (hoe to plow) but also with widespread social conditions in the present. This combination proved irresistible for many, and the outlines of Boserup's model are still resonant in gender accounts of prehistoric farming societies to this day.

The decline in women's agricultural contribution was viewed as a starting point for social declines. Some interpreted Boserup's model as supporting the notion that women's relegation to the domestic realm and their declining status was a historically late phenomenon associated more with the rise of private property and the state (Silverblatt 1988). Other historians and archaeologists projected the African trajectory wholesale much deeper into the prehistoric past. The onset of domestication economies served as a trigger for institutionalized sexual

labor roles and further sowed the seeds of widespread social inequality between the sexes (Aaby 1977; Chevillard and LeConte 1986; Divale and Harris 1976; Ehrenberg 1989; Lerner 1986; Mears 2001; Meillassoux 1981). Accounts, often not overly burdened by data, posit a unlineal devolution of women from autonomous, valued agents to subordinate, disenfranchised objects corresponding with the rise and development of agricultural societies.

Despite its influence, Boserup's model has not survived the past thirty-five years unscathed. And the range of critiques is highly relevant to archaeological research. Foremost, the evolutionary link between an ethnographically based era of "female farming" in Africa and primitive agricultural systems writ large has crumbled under the weight of ethnographic evidence. As one example, Guyer's (1991) work among the Beti of Cameroon skillfully demonstrates how the "female farmer" model is more an artifact of the volatile social and economic conditions in the past two centuries than a result of long-term, evolutionary processes. The Beti's ancient stable crops of millet, yams, and sorghum were never produced by female labor alone. In the case of millet, men cut back tree branches, and women stacked the branches. Men placed the seeds in the ground, and women covered them with soil. Men fenced the fields, and women tended the growing crop. Only reaping was the sole domain of women. Each of these tasks took place in a ritualized context, sometimes set to music and literally choreographed. It was only with the introduction of maize and cassava and the colonial policies that encouraged their production that cultivation took on "female farming" mantle (Guyer 1991).

Results from the first wave of ethnographic research, spawned by a growing feminist interest in women's roles, reinforced Guyer's critique. Numerous geographically far-flung examples can be cited in which the productive tasks in agricultural societies do not conform to the universal, sex-segregated patterns Boserup envisioned (Bacdayan 1977; Cloud 1985; Peters 1978; Trenchard 1987). Furthermore, conceptualizing complex sets of related tasks as monolithic entities such as "farming," "hunting," or "exchange" rather that suites of smaller, related tasks often masks dual participation, complementarity, and interdigitation of men's and women's lives (i.e., Brumbach and Jarvenpa 1997 regarding hunting). These observations have not been lost on all archaeologists (see Fish 2000; Szuter 2000). But it remains all too common for archaeologists to constitute activity as monolithic chunks to be assigned to either "male" or "female" columns. Inevitably, these same accounts "snowball" into formulaic reconstructions of labor, social relationships, and power structures. From a theoretical position informed by feminism, this style of evolutionary argument is no less problematic than biological imperative models. It still maintains that gender roles are somehow rooted

in fixed, essentialist capacities in men and women that map out their progress in a predetermined way over vast expanses of time and space. In sum, there are a plethora of reasons to approach evolutionary models with skepticism. My point is not that there can be no variables that are widely influential in forecasting gender but only that evolutionary models do an inadequate job of explaining known gender variability and patterning, let alone the variety likely to have been present in precolonial and preindustrial agricultural settings (sensu Leacock 1978).

In keeping with broader trends in the social sciences, archaeological gender studies increasingly embrace perspectives that stress human agency, practice, and historical contingency more than evolution (Hegmon 2003; Meade and Wiesner-Hanks 2004; Sørensen 2000). We have been reminded of Schlegel's (1977) important message that separate domains of activity and influence between the sexes do not necessarily imply a hierarchy of values associated with those domains (Claassen 1997). And the dangers of projecting etic, Western concepts of worth onto productive tasks are more often avoided (Crown 2000a). While recent studies tend to be more theoretically sophisticated and nuanced, the road is still bumpy. The process of switching paradigms has not always been graceful, nor has it ensured coherent accounts of gender. Many of the studies are aptly characterized as involving rapid intellectual reappraisal rather than deep logical consideration (Guyer 1995:26).

Lamphere (2000) has provided one particularly effective modeling effort in her synthesis of evidence from the pre-Hispanic Southwest. This model focuses on a concept of hegemony defined as both *ideas* about prestige and value and also the *practice* of exercising power (sensu Ortner 1996), combining elements of productive labor, status, and ideology. She situates the source of hegemonic influence in the realm of ritual power; which, when defined emically, should be broadly applicable to prehistoric agricultural societies outside the Southwest.

Gender relationships can be played out on a field characterized by either balanced or hierarchical hegemony. Balanced hegemony prevails when the "power associated with ritual is widely dispersed among kin groups and among men and women, and where there is little control over productive resources by kin groups whose leaders are 'important' people" (Lamphere 2000:389). Gender balance can be maintained in situations where the sexual labor is either shared or segregated (overlapping or complementary in Lamphere's words). Hierarchical hegemony, her Ritual Power Model, exists in situations where a more limited number of ritual practitioners have access to the higher prestige roles. Productive labor is likely to be more sex segregated and reinforces growing social and ideological divides. She makes a compelling case that elements of hegemony can be wrested from a range of archaeological data, albeit indirectly.I find Lamphere's model

valuable as a framework to discuss a number of gender studies among prehistoric farming groups. In doing so, we are able to highlight variation in prehistoric gender systems and suggest the applicability of this model to studies outside the pre-Hispanic Southwest.

Regional Gender Case Studies

My approach in organizing a more detailed investigation into recent research trends is to highlight several broad, geographic regions. The logic of this choice rests in the publication of several influential gender volumes that review and synthesize bodies of regional data for China, Africa, North and South America, and Mesoamerica and North America (Bruhns and Stothert 1999; Claassen and Joyce 1997; Kent 1998; Linduff and Sun 2004). This format also facilitates a discussion of the influence regional research traditions has played in developing gender studies. Admittedly, the choice of the regional case studies also reflects my own familiarity with the archaeological record. My hope is that the range of Old and New World regional case studies is representative of research developments in the study of gender and farming. For readers with interests in farming societies not covered here, I direct them to the chapters in part 4 of this volume. These chapters will provide important supplemental information.

Europe (with an Emphasis on the Mediterranean Region)

The architecture of longhouses, a large corpus of figurines, mortuary data, and diverse ethnographic gleanings feature prominently in the Neolithic gender research of Europe. Economic and ideological realms have often been considered by separate authors in separate articles. There is evidence of both more sophisticated and nuanced treatments of gender and also the retention of some unproductive lines of inquiry.

One well-known vision of a pan-European gendered past was offered by Gimbutas (1974, 1989) in her examination of female figurines. Gimbutas interprets the numerous figurines as representing a religious system centered on a Great Mother Goddess, who represents concepts of fertility and life force in societies that, while egalitarian, were matrilineal and "matrifocal." There are echoes of a biological imperative model as women's position in society is centered primarily on their reproductive role. Women's downfall comes in the Bronze Age with the onslaught of male herders from the East. Archaeologists have criticized Gimbutas's data, methods, and theory related to the Goddess Culture of Old Europe (Meskell 1995). But we will limit our discussions to reworkings of the gendered implications of the figurine data.

Gimbutas's model, stretching as it does over thousands of miles and thousands of years, overlooks substantial variation in the figurines of Neolithic Europe. So it is predictable that scholars have mounted critiques of her model by analyzing the uses and meanings of specific assemblages. Concerns with fertility, particularly as it is connected with agriculture, have persisted, but alternative interpretations include considerations of figurines as territorial markers, toys, teaching aids, self-representations, good-luck charms, votives, and effigies. Talalay (1987) offers one such alternative hypothesis to explain a distinctive assemblage drawn from five sites in the northern Peloponnese. The group consists of eighteen individual female legs that appear to be as parts of broken leg pairs. A review of ethnographic and historic sources suggests that broken, paired tokens often served to identify partners in social or economic exchanges in preliterate and classical societies. Given that the legs are all sexed female, one possibility is that the legs represent the relocation of women through an exogamous marriage system (Talalay 1987:168).

Binary conceptions of sex and gender that many have imposed on figurine data have also come under fire. Talalay (2000) documents the variation in the Greek corpus. Although female figurines are the most numerous and varied—in terms of decoration, material, and position—male, dual-sexed, and sexless figurines also occur. The same is true of eastern European Neolithic figurines (Hamilton 2000). A number of possibilities in conjunction with the sexless figurines are reviewed. The figures may represent 1) individuals who subsumed or transcended sexual/gender classification (e.g., child, shaman, and so on), 2) the irrelevance of sexual classification to the image portrayed, 3) items that took on sex by the addition of perishable clothing or ornaments, or 4) individuals with sexed information that we cannot "read." Whatever the case, their interpretation is not straightforward. And these discussions encourage us to envision gender systems in which sex and gender are conceived of and represented as more multifaceted, potentially fluid categories than previously envisioned.

A second pan-European model of gender systems was put forward in Ehrenberg's *Women in Prehistory* (1989). Her reconstruction of the European Neolithic owes much to Boserup in that it identifies diminished economic production at the crux of women's disenfranchisement over time. During the Early Neolithic, women across Europe are lauded not only as the innovators of agriculture and the technologies that farming required (lithic and ceramic) but also as the main source of labor in a mixed agropastoral economy. They were socially supported by an extended matrilocal kin network and economically empowered by their control of domestic products. But by the end of the Neolithic, with the advent of the plow and increases in the importance of milk and wool, their lives had

been transformed by men usurping their economic roles and relegating them to the constant drudgery of making and raising babies and the repetitive, mindless tasks of cooking and textile production. By this process, the groundwork was laid for the modern gender asymmetries seen in Western society today (Ehrenberg 1989:77). The most detailed analysis discusses the connections between family size, family structure, postmarital residence patterns, and the architectural variability of European longhouses.

There are serious problems implicit in the detailed, dichotomous sexed labor scenario on which the model is founded. Most significant, it is unsupported by any archaeological data. And since the causal mechanism for change rests in the reallocation of productive resources and labor input, these are telling. Ehrenberg is not alone in facing this dilemma. Archaeologists have been exhorted to establish an empirical basis for assigning tasks to one sex, the other, or both (Conkey and Spector 1984; Spector 1983). It is through this basic step that patterns of artifacts and features take on gendered meaning. However, this has proven a more difficult task than many first imagined. There is substantial ambiguity in our understanding of sex roles with respect to farming and herding task sets. The utility of the ethnographic record is hampered by the very diversity of sexed labor scenarios that it describes.

Whitehouse's (2002) gendered look at the data from southern Italy faces some of the same problems in discussing gendered tasks and spatial domains. Yet her model, which seeks to describe role, status, and ideology by synthesizing a wider range of archaeological materials and entertaining multiple interpretations of those data, is a good deal more satisfying. Based on grave treatments, figurines from settlement and cave deposits, and paintings on cave walls, she describes a spatially segregated but complementary gender system in which the roles, relations, and ideology of men and women were balanced (Whitehouse 2002:40–41). Men are associated with hunting by virtue of painted depictions at cave and rock-shelter locations. Only female figurines are found at settlements. Images and figurines from caves depict both males and females. And there is no evidence of status differences between the sexes from grave goods. Men and women are interpreted as having separate (off-site vs. village-based) activity spheres that also serve as the loci of ritual activity. The lack of differentiation in graves suggests that both domains are socially valued.

This preliminary engendered model is highly reminiscent of the balanced hegemony scenario previously outlined and speaks well for the value of applying Lamphere's scheme outside the pre-Hispanic Southwest. Second, the value of considering less binary classificatory systems for studying gender in Neolithic societies is reinforced. Southern Italy has its own dual-sex and sexless figurines.

Furthermore, the one significant correlation of sex in burials is that men tend to be buried on right sides and women their left. However, the rule is far from universal, as 26 percent of males and 31 percent of females are buried on the wrong side. And the lack of strict differentiation along sex lines has led authors to speculate about possible disconnects between sex and gender (Robb 1994a, 1994b). Finally, Whitehouse admits her difficulty in assigning economically important subsistence tasks by gender. Nonetheless, her discussion belies a tendency to segregate tasks by sex and lump complex task sets together. Thus, women become the cultivators, potters, and weavers and men the hunters, herders, traders, and stone-tool makers (Whitehouse 2000:39). The clear association of women's tasks with the areas close to the house and village and men's tasks to areas at greater distances affirms rather than supports her conclusion.

In looking for potential activity sphere's or specific tasks that can more safely be associated with women's work in Europe, spinning and weaving are good candidates for some regions. A Hallstatt vase from Hungary depicts groups of women spinning and weaving to musical and dance accompaniment (Barber 1994:88). Textiles themselves bear the traces of communal weaving. Crisscrossing weft threads from a man's burial cloak from Trinhoj in Jutland (ca. 1300 B.C.) demonstrates that three weavers, passing the bobbins back and forth between them, produced the garment (Barber 1994:86–87). Well-preserved textile fragments, spindle whorls, weights, and loom emplacements have begun to yield gendered insights about the social and economic contexts of weaving at the Neolithic Swiss Lake Dwelling of Robenhausen (Lillis 2004).

Africa

Archaeological gender studies are in their infancy throughout most of Africa, although the application of ethnoarchaeology, ethnohistory, and linguistics hold great promise. I know of no studies focusing on gender from early farming sites in the Sahara-savanna zone of Africa that produced the first indigenous domesticates—millet, sorghum, and African rice. A gender study of the Early Iron Age Urewe communities along Lake Victoria's lakeshore and vicinity (ca. 500 B.C.) has been conducted (Maclean 1998). Indirect evidence for farming includes the location of Urewe sites on the most fertile lands in the region and palynological sequences suggestive of human-induced deforestation. Domestic cattle and caprovine remains suggest a mixed agropastoral economy that approximates Neolithic conditions elsewhere. However, a well-developed iron-smelting technology was in place here as well and makes this case unique.

Maclean identifies four new activity sets in Urewe Early Iron Age communi-

ties: ceramic production, iron production, agricultural production, and pot cooking. Who produced the ceramics is ambiguous, although regional ethnographic accounts suggests household production is overwhelming assigned to one sex or the other. A system of joint control of agricultural production is achieved by men clearing the land and women providing all other labor. Local linguistic and ethnographic evidence support this division (Maclean 1998). The author describes pot cooking and iron smelting as a pair of emergent technologies—equally complex and equally powerful—that are linked conceptually in a developing belief system with females responsible for cooking and males for smelting. Cooking and smelting are both perceived as acts of procreation in which the application of heat changes natural objects into cultural objects (plants/animals into food and stone/ore into iron) in the same way blood and semen, when heated, produce a child (Maclean 1998:173).

The study is of note for several reasons. Maclean's emic appreciation for the social value and power associated with pot-cooking technology is important. Producing a range of cooked, nutritious foods required skills and knowledge. As the providers of cooked meals, women would have had the power to withhold food, manipulate food to cause poor health, and pollute food. Communal occasions involving cooked food would have provided arenas for displaying these skills publicly (Brumfiel 1992; Maclean 1998). The joint discussion of productive labor, technology, and symbolism produces a foundation for describing Urewe gender relations in terms of its hegemonic tendency. Lacking a discussion of ritual power per se, Maclean seems to be well on her way to describing a balanced system in which the value of men's and women's productive and symbolic realms were both intimately connected and valued.

Northern China

China presents an interesting anomaly to the historical and theoretical trends already outlined. Shelach (2004) argues that the Chinese archaeologists of the Marxist era (1960–1980) were actively discussing gender and that this concern has become less mainstream in post-Marxist times. Researchers agree that the predominant Marxist paradigm problematized the study of gender by glossing over variation in the name of universal patterns and assuming set temporal trajectories for men's and women's status. Yet Shelach describes the gender discussions of the Marxist era as producing robust, empirically based debates as well (Shelach 2004). Political agendas in the post-1980, nationalistic era have tended to marginalize gender interpretations, focusing instead on situating "Chinese-ness" in the Neolithic past (Barnes and Guo 1996; Shelach 2004). The recent publication

of Linduff and Sun's *Gender and Chinese Archaeology* (2004) represents a significant event in the reintegration of gender studies into Chinese archaeology. Reexamination of robust mortuary data sets, ceramic images, figurines, and statuary feature most prominently is recent discussions.

Marxist-era models for the plethora of regional cultures identified across China typically equated Early Neolithic periods with matrilineal, egalitarian society, while Late Neolithic periods were associated with the emergence of patrilineal and patriarchal societies in which gender and social stratification emerged (Pearson and Underhill 1987). Sexual labor scenarios were constructed to accommodate the assumption that men usurped women's role in the productive economy during the Late Neolithic. As such, the expectation was that stone tools associated with cultivation (adzes and stone plowshares) would be found in males' graves and tools associated with domestic chores found in females'. Spindle whorls were typically singled out as female grave goods. Extensive samples from the Late Neolithic cemeteries of the Yangshao culture (north-central China) area and the Qijia culture (northwestern China) demonstrate that this correlation is not supported (Jiao 2001; Sun and Yang 2004). Either utilitarian grave goods are not good indicators of sexed labor patterns, or there were significant overlaps in sexed labor. In contrast, grave goods from the Late Neolithic cemetery of Dadianzi (Xiajiadian culture of eastern Inner Mongolia) lend support to traditional sexual labor divisions, as axes and arrowheads pattern consistently with males and the majority of spindle whorls occur in female graves (Wu 2004). The presence of spindle whorls in a relatively small number of male graves is never discussed, nor is the regionally variability in artifact:sex correlations.

Mortuary analyses of body position, number and type of grave goods, and labor investment in burial pits suggest that the Late Neolithic involved significant social restructuring in several parts of northern China. The distribution of grave goods and increasing numbers of exotic finds in a limited number of burials during the Late Neolithic certainly seems to suggest the emergence of distinctions between important and common people in some regions (Sun and Yang 2004; Wu 2004). How gender features in the emergent stratification is often unclear. The consideration of male/female patterning is often limited to a small subset of the burials. Double burials of adult males and females have received considerable attention in discussions of gender relations (Jiao 2001; Sun and Yang 2004; Wu 2004). During the Marxist era, this emphasis stemmed from their assumed association with the arrival of patriarchy, establishment of monogamous marriage patterns, and the resulting loss of social and economic independence for women (Sun and Yang 2004:31–32). Subsequently, they have also been used to trace changes in the status balance between the sexes. In some of the Qijia double burials, for

example, female burials with skeletal elements either missing or out of anatomical position are interpreted as wives, slaves, or concubines sacrificed as part of the burial ritual (Jiao 2001; Sun and Yang 2004).

Yet mixed-sex double burials are a short-lived phenomenon limited to certain regions. In the Late Neolithic alone, single burials predominate—even at the sites with double burials. There are documented examples of double burials involving adults and children as well. And finally, mixed- and single-sex multiple burials are also part of the tradition (Jiao 2001). Thus, while site-specific cases for emerging social (and possibly gender) stratification can be built (Wu 2004), any attempt to generalize broadly about gendered mortuary patterns is quite premature.

The only discussion of human imagery on ceramics I know of briefly introduces Early Neolithic examples from the Majiayao culture. Male, female, and sexless figures occur on ceramics in burials. Images of figures that hold hands encircling bowl interiors are described as indicating men's and women's ritual dances associated with harvest, fertility, and sexual potency. One anthropomorphic jar has a female image on one side and a male on the other. This dual-sexed image and the association of both male and female painted representations on ceramics in graves suggests to some a complementary and unified conception of gender in the Majiayou Early Neolithic and is contrasted with the succeeding Late Neolithic Qijia, with its evidence for asymmetrical treatment of males and females in burials and lack of human iconography on pottery (Sun and Yang 2004:444–45).

Two ritual sites uncovered in the 1980s in northeastern China contain fascinating female-sexed figurative imagery. Both belong to the Hongshan culture of northeastern China, which flourished from 6,000 to 4,500 years ago. While most Hongshan sites consist of unpretentious Neolithic-style village sites, Dongshanzui and Niuheliang contain unique evidence of ritual elaboration and hierarchical social development in early farming contexts (Nelson 1995, 2002). Dongshanzui is a ritual site consisting of a cluster of house floors, stone platforms, and enclosures. Among these features are spread twenty clay figurine fragments, several of which are described as nude, probably pregnant females and a third that may be nursing (Jiao 2001; Nelson 2002; Pearson and Underhill 1987). Fragments of larger statues, at least one life sized, are in some cases sexed female (Jiao 2001).

Niuheliang is more accurately described as a ritual complex rather than a single site. It consists of tombs, structures, and compound enclosures stretching over eighty square kilometers. The complex does not contain a settlement component. It lies across from a low mountain shaped like the head of an animal (Barnes and Guo 1996). The tombs are considered to be elite resting places because of the effort required for their construction as well as the wealth of exotic and finely

made grave goods—particularly intricate jade pieces (Barnes and Guo 1996; Nelson 1991, 2004). A large cruciform pit structure with elaborate construction and painted designs is described as the "Goddess Temple." Among the stunning finds within the temple were a painted clay mask with inlaid jade eyes and fragments of at least seven large clay statues, one estimated to be three times life size. At least one statue can be sexed female, given the presence of a breast fragment. A radiocarbon date of about 3500 B.C. situates the site in the Late Neolithic of the Hongshan culture and suggests that it may pre-date the first life-size human sculptures previously known from 3200 B.C. in Egypt (Barnes and Guo 1996).

One interpretation of Niuheliang simply assumes that the mask and statues within the complex represent the worship of female deities on which the Hongshan culture's religion centered (Jiao 2001:60). In a series of publications, Nelson has explored the political and religious significance of these images in more detail (Nelson 1991, 1995, 1996, 2002, 2004). She notes as relevant the absence of male figures at these ceremonial sites. Based on Sanday's (1981) cross-cultural research concerning gender formulations in origin myths and other religious contexts, it is difficult to deny females social power in the Hongshan cultural system where female symbolism predominates (Nelson 1991, 1996). Both ancient texts and ethnohistoric data suggest clues as to the possible sources of this power. Women may have exercised considerable leadership in spiritual life as shamans (Nelson 1996, 2002). Furthermore, women may have played important roles in the management and husbandry of pigs. While the economic importance of pig declines over the course of the Hongshan, its cultural significance is magnified as manifest through increased pig imagery and evidence for pig feasts (Nelson 1995, 2004). Working from the figurative evidence, Nelson builds compelling arguments that women were influential agents in elite Hongshan cultural circles.

Sexing the individuals in the elite tombs will certainly provide relevant data; however, results of these analyses are currently unavailable (Nelson, personal communication). If women are among the important people buried at Niuheliang, then credence is lent to a discussion of their role as central figures in elite spheres. If the burials contain only males, then the appropriation and manipulation of female imagery by males may become appropriate paths of future inquiry.

Southern Levant

As recently as 1998, well-respected figures in Levantine prehistory were cautioning that gender was all but impossible to recognize in the early prehistory of the Middle East (Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen 1998:279–80). I disagree with this pessimistic forecast in light of a growing corpus of bioarchaeological work that

has provided considerable insight into the activities of early farming populations. In addition to well-preserved skeletal material, the Levant boasts spectacular architectural preservation of both domestic and ritual structures. Figurative representations painted on ceramics, molded from clay, and formed with plaster on skulls are all open to gendered analyses.

In a research tradition dominated by technological and environmental analyses, statements about internal social dynamics are scarce and about sex and gender even more scarce. When pushed to consider women's activities in Neolithic societies, authors sometimes provide a litany of women's economic tasks including house construction, food preparation, water and wood gathering, planting fields, tending crops, harvesting, caring for domestic animals, cleaning, and refuse disposal (Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen 1998:283). In this same account, no similar list is provided for the men. We are also told to expect that productive labor will become increasingly sex segregated with the establishment of farming communities as women are described as having new agricultural tasks and additional child care duties added to their workload. Men, meanwhile, would be increasingly involved in long-distance trade (Bar-Yosef 1995). Not only are tasks not shared, but they are spatially separate. A related point suggests that the appearance of female figurines during the Neolithic is a cultural expression for a growing dichotomy between males and females (Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen 1992). The authors' recent statements regarding the inaccessibility of gender have not kept them from making some fairly specific statements on the subject in the past.

Despite these gloomy projections, a number of researchers have found productive venues to explore gender. The skeletal material from Abu Hureyra, a site in the Euphrates River valley of present-day northern Syria, was analyzed with specific attention paid to markers of occupational stress (Molleson 1994, 2000). A suite of morphological changes to the skeleton (joint faceting, degeneration of joints, and pronounced muscle attachment sites) suggested to Molleson that women spent a considerable amount of time kneeling on the floor with their toes tucked up under their feet, probably processing grain at querns. She also identified groups of females who, by virtue of distinctive dental use-wear patterns and enlarged mandibular joint surfaces, were probably involved in processing quantities of tough plant material to obtain fibers (Molleson 1994, 2000). Based on Molleson's research and the evidence showing that more women than men were buried beneath house floors, the excavators hypothesize that women's labor was closely associated with the household. They extrapolate that men would have been involved in agriculture and herding and further that men and women would have likely cooperated in labor-intensive, tightly scheduled activities like communal game drives and harvesting (Moore et al. 2000).

Two multisite analyses of Neolithic skeletal remains have suggested that Levantine sexual labor patterns might be highly localized (Eshed et al. 2003; Peterson 2002). The authors agree that Neolithic farmers had more physically demanding lifestyles than their Natufian predecessors and that new kinds of activities influenced musculature. However, they disagree on sexual divisions of labor. Osteological material from nine sites indicates to Peterson (2002) that there is little clear evidence to support a pronounced sexual division of labor during the Neolithic, as both males and females appear to have used similar muscle groups at similar levels and in similar ways. Perhaps a large number of labor-intensive tasks were shared by both sexes, or male and female tasks differed to some degree but produced similar musculature signatures. Eshed et al. (2003), in contrast, find that males in their Neolithic sample retain a high degree of muscle asymmetry in contrast to the more bilaterally symmetrical musculature of females. Since the majority of their sample comes from the coastal site of Atlit Yam (now underwater), the author proposes that paddling boats might have been a significant contributor to male musculature. The collective results suggest that sexual labor patterns varied with respect to local environments within the southern Levantine setting. Both studies provide results that occasionally suggest specific activities but more often reconstruct general activity patterns and levels. Nevertheless, even coarse-grained patterns add substantially to the discussion of sexual labor patterns.

Wright's analysis of the social contexts of food preparation and dining in Neolithic societies discusses changing men's and women's roles over time. She describes grinding and cooking as women's tasks, citing osteological and ethnographic evidence. During the earliest phase of food production (Pre-Pottery Neolithic A), grinding tools and hearths are found both indoors and outdoors representing fluid and unstructured boundaries between house and common spaces. By the Late Pre-Pottery Neolithic B, these same tools and features are found increasingly inside larger, more complicated houses in spaces that Wright describes as less accessible and out of the public eye. Following Hastorf (1991), she associates a spatial restriction of food-processing artifacts as a circumscription and control of female activities (Wright 2000:114).

This is a fascinating line of inquiry but one that needs to consider several points before its potential is fully actualized. For one, most of the structures that Wright examines have good evidence of being multistoried. The analysis of interior spaces and artifact distributions succumbs to a "tyranny of the floor plan." By this I mean that archaeologists have difficulty, in all but the most rare cases, reconstructing the arrangements of space and artifacts that occurred anywhere except on the ground floor (Peterson 2004). Furthermore, the conclusion that

female activities are being controlled and circumscribed, to me, seems predicated on the notion that men are operating in different social and spatial contexts. Aside from hunting, which is becoming much less economically significant as sheep and goat domestication provide most of the needed protein, we do not have any archaeological or bioarchaeological evidence for what the men were doing. Recent osteological evidence from Çatalhöyük suggests that men were spending as much time in the smoky interior spaces as women were (Hodder 2005). Finally, our etic notions of interior spaces as "inferior," "dark," and "cramped" need to be critically examined. Considering the placement of burials under house floors, might not ground-floor rooms have been "sacred" and "powerful"?

Figurative imagery increases during the Neolithic of the southern Levant. The sculpted assemblage divides logically into larger, plaster and clay statues (thirty or more centimeters) typically found in ritual caches and smaller figurines made from clay and stone and found in domestic areas and refuse deposits. The larger statues have been interpreted as having roles in public rituals, as their size, stylized features (big eyes), and probable added garments would have made them highly visible (Garfinkel et al. 2002; Schmandt-Besserat 2004b). Examples of the large plaster statues have been described from Jericho, Nahal Hemar Cave, and 'Ain Ghazal. The most extensive collection (parts of approximately thirty-four statues) comes from two caches at 'Ain Ghazal. Morphologically, most are sexless, although three have sexual characteristics that indicate that they are female (Tubb and Grissom 1995). Examples of female images predominate among the figurines, although examples of both male and sexless figurines occur there as well (Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen 1992; Miller 2002).

A recent interpretation of the proliferation of anthropomorphic images during the Neolithic revolution suggests that their meaning can be broadly interpreted. Cauvin (1997) maintains that the Neolithic revolution, rather than having its genesis in climate change or economic need, derived from a symbolic revolution grounded in a religious beliefs that placed women and bulls jointly at the apex of the prehistoric pantheon. Cauvin's position is evocative of Gimbutas at some levels, and the response to the sweeping explanatory framework in the Levant has been similar to that in Europe.

More nuanced treatments of the representations have been offered by individuals looking at the context, technology, clay composition, range of sexed types/combinations, and standardization in specific assemblages. Schmandt-Besserat describes one alternative suggested from early Babylonian texts—that the plaster statuary from 'Ain Ghazal might have functioned in ghost rituals. Ghosts featured in rituals as 1) beneficent spirits called on to remove pain by taking it with them to the underworld, 2) diviners, and 3) malevolent spirits to be exorcised

(Schmandt-Besserat 2004a). Both morphological features and contextual associations of the archaeological assemblage resonate with early historical accounts and make this hypothesis worthy of further consideration.

The largest assemblage of figurines to date comes from Sha'ar Hagolan, a village near the Sea of Gallilee (Garfinkel et al. 2002). Among the 200 figurines, a subset of seventy-four seated clay figurines has received special attention. They are designated "cowrie eyed" by virtue of their most prominent feature: long elongated oval eyes with diagonal slits. The cowrie-eyed seated figurines stand out because they appear substantially more standardized in facial and body features, apparel, and body position than the other figurines at Sha'ar Hagolan and those at other Levantine Neolithic sites as well (Miller 2002). Miller interprets the figurines as representing the Matron of Sha'ar Hagolan. As for the matron's authority, she assumes that the seated posture is linked with a position of power—as it is often assumed for male figures. Given the domestic context of finds, the matron's authority and power may hold sway primarily within the household. As to her maturity, Miller interprets the generous proportions of the lower torso and legs as being linked not with youth but with the joint effects of gravity, childbearing, and sedentism on a middle-aged body.

This interpretation is interesting and plausible but forgoes any discussion of the male cowrie-eyed figure mentioned but not illustrated (Garfinkel et al. 2002:195). In addition, there has been considerable discussion of the dual-sexed nature of these and similar figurines in the Levant and Cyprus. While the figurines have female anatomical details on the front, their overall outline and profile, when viewed from the rear, resemble phalli and glandes (Gopher and Orelle 1996; Miller 2002). Casual observations of the photographs and drawings of examples from the Sha'ar Hagolan assemblage substantiate possible dual-sex imagery in the cowrie-eyed assemblage as well. Consideration of the dual-sex interpretations does not enter into Miller's final assessment.

Less numerous than the figurines and statues from Neolithic sites are a set of figurative representations engraved on stone vessels or slabs; incised, painted, and molded in relief on ceramics; and painted on plaster floors. Garfinkel (2003) argues that these are best understood as "dancers" in religious rituals and surveys the distribution and frequency of similar imagery across the Near East and Europe from the eighth to the fourth millennium B.C. The emergence and increase in dancing motifs, beginning in the Neolithic, marks the intensification of ritual practice that would have provided the needed cohesion among members of growing agricultural villages. The decline in dancing motifs during the fourth millennium is viewed as signifying the reduction in prominence of dance in public, ritual life concomitant with the emergence of religious specialists and centralized

authority. The Neolithic examples are widely distributed over space and relatively scarce. The celebrants are female, male, and sexless. While I do not always agree with the author's sex assignments (Peterson 2005), I think it is safe to say that females constitute the majority. From Neolithic objects, all-female and mixed-sex groups occur, but there are no clear examples of all-male groups. Accepting Garfinkel's premise that these are dancers, it seems reasonable to suggest that women played a significant role in Neolithic ritual sphere. But Garfinkel astutely reminds us that these images are not the equivalent of photographs of ancient rituals. The depictions on ritual and commemorative objects are realistically interpreted as reflecting the concepts *behind* the dance. The consistent uniformity in appearance, size, and posture of grouped figures is suggestive of an egalitarian ethic in which male, female, and sexless bodies had similar representational meaning at some level(s) (Garfinkel 2002).

In contrast with the communal ethic represented among the dancers, the production of plastered skulls seems to have been a Neolithic ritual that focused on the maintenance of individual identity. The postmortem removal of the skull was a common part of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic mortuary ritual. Certain of these removed skulls were slated for special treatment and subsequent reinterment. Plaster was applied to create distinctive facial features. Along with the application of pigment and inlaid items, it seems that there was an attempt to re-create individual likenesses. While this may be true, the widely held belief that these skulls represented an ancestor cult focusing on revered, male ancestors can no longer be sustained. Both CT scans and DNA analysis now indicate that skulls from women, men, and children all received this special treatment (Bonogofsky 2004). This ritual sphere is also inclusive in terms of both age and sex categories.

There is, I would argue, little evidence for a hegemonic gender hierarchy in the southern Levant. Detailed mortuary studies provide no evidence for status differentiation along sex lines during the Neolithic (Grindell 1998). Men and women are jointly participating in range of physically strenuous, habitual activities. Some sexual divisions of labor seem to be present with grinding and fiber processing being done by females and ungulate hunting probably being done by men. But there is no evidence of the bulk of agricultural work being borne by one sex or the other. Females were actively involved in domestic and community rituals that featured plaster statuary, skull plastering, and household figurines. There is some evidence for increasingly cloistered context for women's food preparation activities, but analyses need to consider both men's spaces, roof spaces, and possible emic meanings of ground-floor spaces before conclusions about the emergence of differential access to and use of public and private spaces can be sustained.

Coastal Ecuador

The Early Formative Valdivia culture of coastal Ecuador maintained sedentary village life based on multicrop agriculture. Domesticates included maize, beans, squash, and manioc. Fishing and shellfishing were important dietary components as well. During the 2,800 years that mark its development (ca. 4400–1600 B.C.), there is some evidence for emergent hereditary inequality as sites become more internally complex, evidence for ceremonialism increases, and mortuary data provides some evidence of social ranking (Zeidler 2000). Recent studies have suggested that symbolic separation between the sexes characterized household spaces and, less convincingly, daily tasks. But it is equally clear that neither separate household spheres nor the onset of incipient complexity removed females from a wide range of political and religious roles.

Efforts to differentiate the primary economic tasks of Valdivian culture are the least satisfying of recent gender efforts. Ethnographic and Spanish ethnohistoric sources have been used to establish a sexed labor pattern for the primary economic tasks. The sources are accepted grudgingly but without much critical analysis and no independent archaeological support (Bruhns and Stothert 1999). Not surprisingly, a highly segregated labor scenario emerges with men and women taking on different tasks and carrying these tasks out in different spaces. Women worked in the fields doing most of the agricultural work. They also maintained kitchen gardens and collected fish and shellfish in the mangrove swamps. Textile and, possibly, pottery production were female domains as well. Men cleared virgin agricultural land, fished in the bays and estuaries, constructed houses, hunted, and trapped (Bruhns and Stothert 1999:108). It has been suggested that a broadly diversified economy, like that of the Valdivians, would have labor and scheduling requirements likely to involve a pronounced sexual division of labor (Pearsall, in Bruhns and Stothert 1999:114).

An interest in household social organization has long been a staple of Latin American archaeology thanks to the pioneering work of Flannery, Winter, Wilk, and others. In keeping with this tradition, several attempts have been made to map gendered activities into domestic spaces and village structure. Village layout at the site of Loma Alta is described as U-shaped, with houses forming three sides around an open plaza area (Damp 1984). Using presumed associations between objects, tasks, and sexual labor divisions, Damp identifies a woman's spinning area from spindle whorls just outside the front door of one structure. Interior hearths are also assumed to be women's food production areas. Lithic debris and a broken tool on an exterior side of the house delimits a men's zone according to the author. A structural separation of male and female spheres is

expanded in the interpretation of village layout using ethnographic data from the Ge Bororo of central Brazil. Damp maintains that the open plaza area, associated with the public and ceremonial aspects of village life, is associated with the "male," while the female sphere centers on the house and is considered peripheral (Damp 1984:582). While the separation of household space into male and female realms garners support from a second study, the interpretations associating male:public and female:household have been more recently challenged.

Ethnoarchaeological work among the Achuar of southeastern Ecuador has provided a basis for interpreting household spaces as well. A conceptual and functional division of house space into male and female areas is identified. Feature placement, artifact distribution, and microassemblages trampled into earthen floors from the archaeological site of Real Alto have produced parallel patterns to those observed and excavated from ethnographic settings (Stahl and Zeidler 1990; Zeidler, in Bruhns and Stothert 1999). These patterns suggest that both men and women use houses, with women's activities centering on the hearth and men's activities along the periphery. While these provide some insights into gender organization and symbolism, one might ask whether a complete picture of men's and women's lives can be constructed emphasizing households and domestic structures. In the case of Valdivia, the answer would be an emphatic no.

Real Alto (Phase 3, ca. 2800–2400 B.C.) contains several ceremonial structures on earthen platforms located in the central ceremonial district. The Charnel House stands on one of these mounds and contained a female skeleton in the central crypt, which was lined with fragmented manos and metates. The tomb complex also contained partially disarticulated and secondary interments of seven males. The group has been interpreted, most recently, as a high-status family. A hereditary component to status is suggested by the inclusion of subadults in the burials. The female burial stands out primarily because of its placement in the central ceremonial precinct of the large village (Zeidler 2000:167–68). Bruhns and Stothert (1999:100) ponder whether this woman might not have been sacrificed when the building was dedicated. While this alternative is plausible, I would note the infrequency with which male burials in similar contexts would be considered sacrificial victims.

A second inhumation from San Isidro (Phase 8, ca. 1800–1600 B.C.) is distinctive by virtue of its grave goods. A young female (age fifteen to twenty) was buried with a suite of tools highly suggestive of a shaman's ritual paraphernalia, including bat bones, a miniature incised vessel, ceremonial pieces of ground stone, and a cape or poncho made from a medium-sized feline with portions of the maxilla and mandible intact. Inside the mouth of the feline was a small figurine. It has been suggested that Valdivia figurines functioned as the repositories for

spirits visited by shaman during trance (Stahl, in Zeidler 2000). Together, the burials from Real Alto's Charnel House and San Isidro suggest that women were highly visible in politico-religious aspects of Valdivian society and definitely not concerned only with preparing family meals and spinning. The archaeological evidence also mounts a substantial challenge to Damp's interpretation of women's spheres and the use of the Ge Bororo as an appropriate analogue.

The final data set to be considered are the Valdivia figurines, which have typically been interpreted as female fertility symbols. While female-sexed images predominate, once again there are examples of male and sexless images as well (Zeidler 2000:172). Figurines are found in a variety of contexts: domestic, mortuary, and ceremonial. One alternative to the fertility hypothesis describes some of the seated female figures as representations of powerful ritual practitioners (Bruhns and Stothert 1999:116). Zeidler proposes a third interpretation, suggesting that they were ritual paraphernalia used in shamanic rites, curing, and rites of passage. The predominance of female figurines suggests that a number of shamanic rituals were female focused related to life cycle changes, illness, and dangerous events like childbearing (Zeidler 2000:174). Alternatives to the fertility hypothesis reinforce the notion that women were highly visible actors in Valdivian society and support Zeidler's interpretations of the mortuary data from Real Alto's Charnel House and the San Isidro "shaman" burials.

Pre-Hispanic Southwest

Claassen (1997:77) noted that little gendered work had been conducted in southwestern archaeology. But Crown's edited volume *Women and Men in the Prehispanic Southwest* (2000b) provides readers a compilation of thoughtful studies written by researchers with long-standing interests in using gender to explore prehistoric farming societies. The Southwest is fortunate to have tremendously diverse and generally well-preserved archaeological data sets, robust regional databases, and contemporary Puebloan groups as possible analogues. Researchers have avoided some of the shortcomings discussed earlier in this chapter by a conservative approach emphasizing the "particular" over the "general."

In the context of sexual labor divisions, rather than assuming a task division for agricultural work, researchers admit that the production and distribution of corn has yet to be engendered (Spielmann 1995). Fish (2000:176–77) suggests that men and women likely shared responsibility and control for different stages of production and use of intensively managed plants. She views it likely that men's labor was pulled into agricultural pursuits as crops became a major share of diet, a view with some osteological support. Measures of cortical thickness and

area indicate that Black Mesa males and females were not significantly dimorphic with respect to skeletal robusticity or muscularity. Both males and females had physically demanding lifestyles that could have resulted from participating either in the same tasks or in different tasks that required similar amounts and types of physical exertion (Martin 2000:282). Mixed-sex participation in hunting also seems likely if we view "hunting" more broadly to include small game drives, trapping, and the like (Szuter 2000:199–200).

There is wide acceptance and substantial archaeological support for assigning several tasks to one sex or the other. Bioarchaeological evidence, sex-patterned mortuary offerings, sculpted images, and regional ethnographies support sex role divisions in which women ground corn using manos and metates and men hunted using bows and arrow (Crown 2000a:224; Szuter 2000:207). The attribution of pottery production to women and loom weaving to men is more dependent on southwestern ethnography (Hegmon et al. 2000; Mills 2000; Mobley-Tanaka 1997). The argument has been made that women produced pottery vessels in response to changing sources of food and food preparation requirements (Crown and Wills 1995). These associations between sex and task provide the material bases (artifacts and features) for exploring the gendered use of space and changing gender relationships.

Issues of productive labor and status have been approached by locating the spatial domains of work within villages. Crown (2000c) argues that although women across the Southwest spent an increasing amount of time and energy preparing food, this work was valued as being critical to society's well-being and resulted in complementary status hierarchies for men and women. When status is viewed multidimensionally (as prestige, autonomy, and power), variable trajectories are uncovered for the Mogollon-Mimbres, Hohokam, and Puebloan sequences (Hegman et al. 2000). Mills (2000) makes a similar observation, finding that the increased demand for craft items in Puebloan and Hohokam settings led to different organizational strategies with different impacts on men and women. It is noteworthy that these efforts are unfettered by the devolutionary models so influential in Europe and the Near East. The lack of plow agriculture and secondary products from domestic livestock make the application of Boserupian models far less likely.

Gender ideology and its relationship with productive labor and status has been explored through a variety of media in the Southwest: rock art; pottery, textile, and basket designs; ceramic and stone figurines; and menstrual aprons/imagery (Hays-Gilpin 2000). Mortuary remains indicate fluctuating gender hierarchies within regions and over time, with inconsistent links between the presence

of gender hierarchy (male vs. female dominated) and the development of social differentiation (important people vs. commoners) (Neitzel 2000).

In a synthetic chapter concluding Crown's (2000b) volume, Lamphere (2000) suggests that four periods in the prehistory of the Southwest may have supported a more hierarchical hegemony, all of which had men at their apices. A case where hierarchical gender structures reverted to more balanced model is also included. While Lamphere's model is powerful and the database broadly integrative, there is still room for active debate about these interpretations. Discussion of a single case study illustrates this point. Relying heavily on the work by Hegmon and her coauthors, Lamphere suggests that women's prestige declined during the Pueblo IV period (post–A.D. 1300). The symbolic power of the household declined as kivas moved out of household units and into larger, aggregated community contexts. Ceremonial grinding activities, presumed to be a locus of women's power, that were once carried out in specialized mealing rooms or within kivas are increasingly secularized and carried out in open, highly visible plaza settings. This limits women's access to ritual spaces. New tools indicate that labor-intensive tortillas and piki bread making were introduced at this time, increasing women's workloads (Crown 2000c:247, 250; Hegmon et al. 2000:78–89; Mobley-Tanaka 1997:446). A hierarchical hegemony accommodates these data quite well, but the evidence from the realm of ceramic exchange networks and certain mortuary assemblages is less easy to explain.

During the Pueblo IV period, large bowls using a new glaze technology spread quickly across the Albuquerque area. Spielmann (2000:366–76) suggests that women throughout the region were integrated in a network that shared knowledge about how to make and fire these wares. At the site of Hawikku (ca. fourteenth to seventeenth centuries), dental morphology and demographic data indicate that discrete cemetery areas are associated with kin groups. Mortuary treatment and grave offerings suggest that important people (leaders) came from a small subset of the kin groups, suggesting an ascriptive element to status formation. From the 572 inhumations analyzed, eight male and three female "leaders" are identified. The male leaders consistently had grave goods that associated them with warrior roles, and two of the female leaders are described as heads of matrilines (Howell 1995). The third female "leader" had the most diverse array of grave goods, including prayer sticks, human hair (scalps), painted stones, and feathers. Zuni workmen at the site identified her as a "Medicine Priestess" based on a shrine made of shaped and painted wood, string, and feathers contained in the burial (Howell and Kintigh 1996:551). The analyses of mortuary patterns from Hawikku and glazeware ceramics from the Albuquerque area suggest that

several avenues to power and prestige were still active for some women during the Pueblo IV period and may have provided considerable counterhegemonic forces.

Progress to Date

The select case studies and historical analysis of gender studies of prehistoric farming groups demonstrates remarkable (albeit uneven) progress toward more sophisticated treatments of this topic in archaeology. While a few scholars may still holdout that gender is archaeologically invisible, this position has become increasingly tenuous. As gender permeates the discussions of Neolithic and Formative societies around the globe, I sense a growing acceptance of its significance.

Task differentiation continues to pose challenges for many scholars, and it is particularly frustrating that the specifics of agricultural labor have proved so illusive. Very often we do not have a good understanding of who reaped, sowed, or milked—and arguably this may be an overly ambitious goal. The promise of fully engendering the Neolithic activity spectrum is likely to go unfulfilled. One productive trend has been to focus on more modest sets of tasks for which there are integrated data from archaeological sources, physical anthropology, and relevant ethnographies from which to infer female and male roles. Limiting the number and types of tasks discussed has left archaeologists with much to discuss. Studies that speculate on sex roles with reference to a broad range of tasks, based entirely on cross-cultural surveys or random ethnographic analogues, have failed to provide the bases for productive analyses and have tended to perpetuate unrealistic and stereotyped sexed labor scenarios.

Osteological studies of occupational stress markers have also added much to our understanding of labor patterns. The data sometimes reflect specific activities like fiber processing but often warrant more generic statements about the levels of activity, comparisons of synergistic muscle groups, or overall similarity in stress loads between males and females. Efforts to provide fine-grained interpretations from coarse-grained data leave room for injecting preconceived assumptions about labor patterns (Peterson 2002; Robb 1994c).

We can also trace a growing appreciation for the rich symbolic and ritual lives of early farmers. Researchers are actively grappling with the uses and meanings of human representations in a variety of media. Where once we had widespread acceptance that all the representations (or at least those worth depicting and discussing) were female and that all female images were fertility goddesses, we now find these same assemblages being discussed in the context of fluid gender roles, business transactions, shamanistic cures, celebrations of dance, and ghost rituals.

Evolutionary frameworks that viewed gender roles as proceeding through a series of predictable stages defined by technological, economic, and demographic variables served a generation of scholars well in their attempts to understand the processes of culture change. Unpacking the assumptions inherent in long-held theories and choosing alternatives can be an awkward process. But we have, for the most part, emerged from that process. The result is not a set of studies with a single, shared theoretical approach. They are, instead, typically informed by a variety of interests and perspectives: agency, practice theory, and the feminist critique, to name but a few. Their coherence comes not from a shared paradigm but through what Hegmon (2003:219) describes as an openness and dynamism that result from dialogue across theoretical lines. When combined with methodological rigor and an appreciation for the limitations of archaeological data, these hybrid theoretical perspectives have begun to pave the way for the next generation of gender studies.

Future Directions and Conclusions

There are several domains of inquiry that I can foresee providing fodder for future studies of gender in farming societies. The dynamic nature of gender in the human life cycle has gone largely untapped. The socialization and acculturation of children is one venue that seems promising (Morelli 1997). The role of apprenticeship in the transmission of cultural knowledge and craft is another (McClure 2004). Recently, Cannon (2004) has drawn attention to mortuary patterns suggestive of mother–daughter inheritance practices as well.

The new social roles and relationships that emerged between men and women during the Neolithic have typically been approached by trying to "gender" objects. A shift in perspective that examines how gender is made material could be a productive alternative. I am particularly drawn to studies that examine the ways in which identity is communicated through dress and adornment (Arnold 2004; Harlow 2004; Sørensen 2000). While the perishable aspects of clothing (textile, fur, and skin/hide) are often lost to time, nonperishable items can be preserved. Stone and shell items that are sewed onto clothing and headpieces or worn as jewelry can sometimes be identified. This line of inquiry might be of interest in any number of Neolithic and Formative contexts with fine-grained mortuary data sets.

Finally, in recent years, radiogenic isotopes of strontium have been used to identify immigrants among ancient populations. Strontium levels from a burial population in West Heslerton that included Neolithic/Early Bronze Age individuals suggested that some of the adult men and women were nonlocal (Montgomery et al. 2005). This method could be applicable elsewhere where the underlying

geology has been mapped and is sufficiently variable to differentiate strontium signatures. The value of the application at a microregional level, the one of most significance to prehistorians interested in documenting exogamous marriage patterns for example, has yet to be documented.

The primary focus of this chapter has been to highlight the stunning variation in gender arrangements suggested by a set of geographically dispersed case studies. Historical developments provide the context for tracking the increasing theoretical eclecticism and methodological sophistication being brought to bear on archaeological gender studies. My very sincere wish is that we avoid, in the rush and pressure to generalize, the very real risk of ignoring the conspicuous variability of gender systems among early farming groups that sets our work apart as truly interesting and important.

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