Woman’s Share in Neolithic Society: A View from the Southern Levant ~ Jane Peterson

Early farming groups set into motion substantial, even revolutionary, socioeconomic changes during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period (ca. 10,500–6,000 cal. B.C.E.) in the southern Levant of Southwest Asia. Social organizational structures capable of addressing new opportunities and challenges would have been integral to these developments. This contribution focuses on the archaeological evidence from which our understanding of the gendered aspects of this new social order can be gleaned. Specifically, evidence for sex-based labor patterns, the relative status of men and women, and gendered ideology are discussed by synthesizing current data from human skeletal remains, mortuary contexts, architecture, and figurative art. Available evidence does not support the hypothesis that Pre-Pottery Neolithic societies were organized hierarchically in terms of gender.

Was It a Man’s World? Gender Relationships at the Transition to the Bronze Age in Cyprus ~ Maria Mina

This article examines whether the apparently equitable gender relationships of the Chalcolithic period in Cyprus were replaced by gender inequality in the Bronze Age. The discussion critiques the axioms (assumptions, really) that underlie the idea that technological advancement brings gender inequality, while considering some of the data for gender relations in Early Bronze Age Cyprus.

All the Queen’s Clothes: Identifying Female Royalty at Early Dynastic Ur ~ Aubrey Baadsgaard

In spite of widespread recognition of the burial of high-ranking individuals, including women, in the Early Dynastic Ur Royal Cemetery, ca. 2500 B.C.E., most of the details about the nature of their social position remain obscure. This article attempts to fill this gap by identifying the possible social roles of prominent females buried in the cemetery. A reconsideration of the evidence from three royal graves reveals how high-ranking females might have attained social and political prominence and asserted profound social influence, ultimately perhaps wielding power and prestige in their own right and acting as full participants in the building and institutionalization of increasingly complex social roles and institutions in Early Dynastic Mesopotamian society.
158 Visualizing Masculinities: The Gala, Hegemony, and Mesopotamian Iconography
~ Ilan Peled

This article examines the gender image of the Mesopotamian cult attendant known as gala (Sumerian) / kalû (Akkadian) against the background of the theory of hegemonic masculinity, putting an emphasis on visual representations as sources of information. The gala/kalû was a performer in funerals, and later a professional lamenter in the cult of Inanna/Îštar. His gender identity has long been considered to have possessed ambiguous elements: effeminate, homoerotic, and the like. A more nuanced approach is offered here, whereby the gala/kalû’s gender image is analyzed as a social construct of a non-hegemonic type of masculinity. To this end, visual representations are considered in addition to textual evidence.

166 Reduced to Her Bare Essentials: Bronze Age Piriform Pendants in the Levant
~ Stephanie L. Budin

This article considers the symbolic meanings of the face, breasts, vulva, and branch images which typify the schematic piriform pendants which first emerged in Tell el-Âjjul in the Late Bronze Age and spread through the Levant. In contrast to the usual hypotheses regarding fertility, I suggest that each of these elements refer to the Egyptian goddess Hathor as aspects of her attributes and powers in the Levant under Egyptian domination.

174 Gender in Ancient Egypt: Norms, Ambiguities, and Sensualities
~ Uroš Matić

This article looks at new trends in the study of sex and gender in ancient Egypt, especially as influenced by gender and queer theories. We shall consider notions of binary gender, third gender, and same sex relations, with a final look at the endurance of folk tradition in Egyptian fertility practices.

186 Engendering the Israelite Harvests
~ Jennie Ebeling

It is commonly believed that women were the preparers of food and drink in the Iron Age (ca. 1200–586 B.C.E.) Israelite household while men were primarily responsible for agricultural field activities. Various lines of evidence suggest, however, that this indoor female/outdoor male dichotomy as related to food production was not always the reality, especially during the crucial harvest seasons. The Hebrew Bible and other textual sources, iconography, and Middle Eastern ethnography suggest that women not only took part in the cereal grain, grape, and olive harvests, they were also valued for their participation in these seasonal field activities and the festivals that celebrated them. In this article, I shall examine the evidence for male and female participation in ancient Israelite harvests and challenge popular assumptions about how men and women contributed to the production of food and drink in ancient Israel.

196 Masculinities and Militarization at Hasanlu, Iran: A View from the Burials
~ Megan Cifarelli

The site of Hasanlu, Iran, is best known for its destruction around 800 B.C.E., likely at the hands of the Urartian army. The period preceding the destruction, Hasanlu IVb, was
one of rapid change at the site, which was located at a point of conflict between the burgeoning of the Urartian state to the north and the expansion of the Assyrian Empire from the west. Changes—which have been loosely attributed to “militarization”—are evident throughout Hasanlu, including in the approximately 100 Period IVb burials on the site’s lower mound. The IVb burials introduce new, gender specific, militarized mortuary assemblages. This article focuses on the burials of biologically sexed males, arguing that masculine militarization as evidenced in burials is not a monolithic phenomenon at Hasanlu. Rather, careful analysis of male burial assemblages suggests the performance of materially differentiated “masculinities” at the site.

206 The Use of Facial Characteristics as Engendering Strategies in Phoenician-Punic Studies
~ Mireia López-Bertran and Agnès Garcia-Ventura

Facial characteristics such as discs on cheeks or exaggerated chins have been traditionally used to interpret Phoenician-Punic materials as representing either females or males. Beards and pointed chins, for instance, have been considered male attributes for terracotta masks, while disks have been interpreted as feminine makeup when present on figurines and ostrich eggshells. However, problems and even paradoxes of interpretation emerge when such characteristics appear on objects already (and perhaps arbitrarily) alternately gendered male or female. Thus, the cosmetic disks on “feminine” figurines become “warts” and “astral symbols” when appearing on “male” masks. Such conundrums show how slippery and contradictory engendering objects using facial characteristics might be, and cast doubt on the gender assignment of the objects themselves. In this article we analyze a sample of Phoenician-Punic materials from the Western Mediterranean (Iberia, Carthage, Sicily, and Sardinia) dated between the seventh and the third centuries B.C.E. with an eye towards such engendering strategies.

214 Royal Eunuchs and Elite Masculinity in the Neo-Assyrian Empire
~ Omar N’Shea

This article looks at the gender identity of eunuchs in the Neo-Assyrian Empire by examining the letter corpus from the state archives and the extant images from the palace relief programs. This reading of the sources suggests that, far from being effeminate or third gender, eunuchs occupied positions of power and privilege in the royal court of ancient Assyria that enabled them to negotiate and validate their claim to elite masculinity.

222 Studying Gender in the Ancient Near East: First Steps and Future Prospects
~ Agnès Garcia-Ventura and Saana Svärd

The Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale held in Paris in 2009 enabled us to realize we both had a common interest: gender studies. This common interest materialized in a joint project we launched in 2012. The aims of our project were, first, to discuss some possible methodological approaches to gender within the framework of ancient Near Eastern studies; and second, to create spaces where people interested in such discussions could interact with each other. With our contribution to this special issue of the Near Eastern Archaeology we aim to offer a brief presentation of the genesis of our project, the initiatives carried on until now, the current state of research, and future prospects.