

Gender and kinship

© Copyright Bruce Owen 2009

- Major shift of gears here
 - from methods and materials to be analyzed
 - to questions about the past we want to answer
- Gender roles
 - to understand a society, past or present, one of the basic issues is the relations between men and women
 - determines a lot about family structure
 - how people spend their time
 - how economy is organized, etc.
- Sex and gender
 - **sex**: biological male, female, or occasionally intersex (one or two in 1000)
 - **gender, gender role**: the social categories constructed to accommodate variations in sex and associated behaviors
 - in some societies, gender closely parallels sex
 - with alternatives being suppressed or not considered to be distinctly different
 - other societies have "**third**" **genders**, which may be heterosexual, homosexual, asexual, or have other sexual aspects
 - in some cases, “genders” are not even tied to sexual activity at all
 - gender roles have many components that are not biologically connected to sex
 - expected forms of dress
 - expected ways of speaking
 - expected jobs or tasks
 - roles such as being shamans, handling the dead, or other socially-charged tasks are sometimes restricted to certain genders, sometimes "third" genders
 - degrees and arenas of power and respect, etc.
 - **gender ideology**: beliefs about nature of gender, relationships, power, etc. associated with gender
- Gender in archaeology
 - we should not assume that gender roles in the past are the same as we know them now, in our own culture
 - instead, we should attempt to reconstruct them from the available evidence
 - research questions:
 - what different kinds of gender roles and ideologies have existed at different times and places?
 - that is, what is the range of possibilities that humans have tried out?
 - how and when did our own (or other modern) society's gender roles and ideologies arise?
 - what roles have gender systems played in shaping other aspects of prehistory and the evolution of societies?
 - in practice, much of this work has emphasized debunking assumptions

- replacing them with rigorously supported alternatives has been much harder
- typical: ridiculing old museum displays, textbooks, and popular culture documentaries
 - this has current political value
 - it denies that any one gender system (particularly one that is disadvantageous for females) is ancient, inherent, "right", or unchangeable
- unfortunately, really sound gender archaeology will be extremely difficult
 - because gender categories are in people's heads
 - they may not be material in any obvious way
 - so reconstructing gender roles is a great but maybe unachievable goal
- The most straightforward way of addressing gender in the past: burials
 - what goods are buried with biological males, and what with females?
 - or other variation, like positions of the body, form of the tomb, etc.
 - but burials require caution
 - goods are placed in them by the survivors, not the occupants
 - for complex reasons
 - ideas about death and the afterlife, if any
 - what might be needed there
 - do the dead stay in contact with us, can they affect us, and what do they want?
 - are the dead beneficent, dangerous, malevolent...?
 - are possessions of the deceased dangerous, or polluted?
 - politics and status of survivors as well as deceased
 - to impress others at the burial event
 - with the survivors' wealth
 - or religious piety
 - or modesty, etc.
 - grave goods may not be what the deceased would have wanted
 - may not even be particularly related to the deceased...
 - also, biological sex of the bones does not necessarily tell us the gender identity of the deceased
 - often, but not always
- example of Upper Mantaro (Peru) burial with a spindle whorl (for spinning yarn from wool) and an infant
 - excavator assumed it was female
 - turned out to be male
- Example: Upper Mantaro (Peru) sex differences in maize consumption
 - bone isotopic fractionation of ^{13}C
 - males consumed more maize
 - presumably as chicha beer
 - using historical and ethnographic analogy, probably due to extensive feasting put on by local leaders supported by the Inka state
 - in which women participated less or not at all
 - suggests males' roles in public, political realm
 - vs. females' roles in less public realm

- Example of gender issues in archaeology: sex roles and ideology at Çatal Hüyük
 - In Anatolia (Turkey), about 7400 - 6400 BC, calibrated
 - a neolithic town, densely packed rectangular rooms something like a southwestern pueblo
 - architectural/domestic evidence concerning gender roles:
 - forty rooms (over 1/4 of all rooms excavated) were sufficiently decorated that the excavator James Mellaart called them "shrines"
 - although others suggest that many were just decorated rooms
 - reliefs on walls
 - include arrays of bumps that Mellaart interpreted as modeled human breasts
 - inside the clay of each is the cranium of a raptorial bird or a wild feline - dangerous predatory animals
 - stone and clay female “statues”, showing young woman; woman giving birth to child, ram, or bull; older woman; possibly variants of a single deity
 - usually found in grain storage areas
 - a recently found one is a fat female on the front... and a skeleton on the back!
 - apparently some complex ideas about female gender, fertility, dangerous animals, and death
 - a few male “statues” as well
 - wall paintings showing hunts by people with pointed black beards
 - burial evidence concerning gender roles:
 - burials of both sexes contained textiles, wooden vessels and boxes
 - female burials: jewelry, bone spatulae and spoons, obsidian mirrors, baskets with red pigment powder
 - but also adzes, which are heavy woodworking tools, for tasks like squaring up beams
 - male burials: maceheads, flint daggers, obsidian points, bone hooks and eyes, belt fasteners
 - suggesting hunting, maybe fighting; fasteners suggest more warm clothing, possibly needed for hunting
 - but also clay seals... why?
 - Easier with literate societies like the Maya
 - example of male and female elites such as lintels from Yaxchilan
 - Point: gender roles are interesting, but tough to work out with archaeological data
- **Kinship**
 - system of identifying and relating to relatives by descent and marriage
 - nuclear or extended family organization
 - form of marriage
 - monogamous (one male, one female)
 - polygamous (more than two spouses)
 - polygynous (multiple females)
 - polyandrous (multiple males), etc.
 - **descent system**: how family line, inheritance, etc. are determined and passed on
 - matrilineal (through wife's / mother's kin)
 - people belong to a given matrilineage

- patrilineal (through husband's / father's kin)
 - people belong to a given patrilineage
- bilateral or ambilateral (both play major roles)
- **residence system**: rules of where new couples live
 - matrilocal (couple lives with wife's relatives)
 - patrilocal (couple lives with husband's relatives)
 - neolocal (couple sets up an independent household)
- clans: groups of lineages that are believed to be related
- moities: two halves of a society, each including multiple lineages and clans, if present
- crucial for understanding any living society
 - affects organization of power
 - often based on matrilineages and/or patrilineages
 - distribution of wealth and tasks
 - the context for almost everything in people's lives
- like gender, kinship is hard to get at archaeologically
 - one clue: look at biological relatedness among many burials from a single site
 - using DNA or skeletal markers
 - or markers of birth location, like strontium isotopes
 - or markers of birth ethnicity, like cranial deformation
 - if males are similar, but females vary, we infer patrilocal residence
 - wives were brought into the husband's group
 - if females are similar, but males vary, then matrilocal residence
- but frankly, kinship practices may be another important aspect of society that archaeology is just not able to recover very well
 - like language, music, dance, religious ideas...