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elected government in Afghanistan, there has been a Ministry of Women Affairs (MWA) that has sponsored many new projects for women in crisis, including those previously detained in prison, and for women seeking refuge from domestic abuse, facing health problems, or aspiring to an education. Although hospitals and schools are scarce, there is no restriction on women's access to health care, employment, and participation in public life. In 2004, Afghanistan was represented by its first women Olympic competitors: Robina Muqimyar, a runner, and Friba Razayee, in judo.

Most local NGOs in Afghanistan are supported by U.N. agencies or women's organizations overseas, especially from the United States. They use multipronged strategies focusing on health, education, and livelihood programs. Despite many state and private initiatives for women's empowerment, norms of sex-segregation prevail in Afghan society. In 2005, reports from the U.N. Fund for Women, the World Health Organization, and Physicians for Human Rights showed that, of 4 million young Afghans going to school, only 25 percent were girls, and 40 percent of the 1,038 health-care facilities had no female health workers. Social prejudice against women entering public life remains strong—on 25 September 2006 the provincial director of the MWA in Qandahār was assassinated by two gunmen outside her home. A resurgence of sporadic Taliban-sponsored violence in 2006–2007 has caused concern.

Although international funds pouring into Afghanistan have brought much-needed financial resources for reconstruction, most NGO documentation and appeals for support lavishly use the figure of the "helpless" Afghan woman "victimized" by her own religion, thus echoing stereotypical Orientalist discourses that demonize Islam. It is important to underscore that Afghan society is not homogeneous, and the decrees of the Taliban cannot be seen as Qurʾanic injunctions. This would give extremist regimes the legitimacy they seek for brutal suppression. More important, this would overlook the courageous acts of resistance of Afghan women as they struggle with issues of livelihood, poverty, and violence that plague their lives.

[*See also* Islam.]

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MAINA CHAWLA SINGH

AFRICA

This entry consists of three subentries:

7000–5000 B.C.E.
5000 B.C.E.–1000 C.E.
1000–1500

7000–5000 B.C.E.

This essay reviews the transition from foraging to farming and animal keeping in Africa from 7000 to 5000 B.C.E.—particularly in northern Africa, where the major changes occurred—with attention to gender relations. Addressing such a huge geographic expanse in ancient times presents challenges of scale and interpretation. Africa was probably as culturally diverse in prehistoric times as it has been historically, and this part of the prehistoric time span is documented solely by archaeological evidence, presenting its own interpretive challenges to studying gender relations.

Environmental Background: Tumultuous Times. Nine thousand years ago—around 7000 B.C.E.—northern Africa was very different than it is today. Paleoenvironmental evidence shows that at the end of the last Ice Age (12000 B.C.E.) northern Africa warmed rapidly. Rainfall increased to several times its modern levels, lakes were about 330–660 feet (100–200 meters) higher and much more extensive than today, and northern and eastern Africa were joined by a network of rivers over a huge area. Mediterranean vegetation and equatorial forests expanded into the Sahara, and deserts became savannas. These millennia of greening also held dangers: torrential rainfall in the Ethiopian highlands produced what geologists call the "wild Nile." Floods scoured the Nile Valley, which had been a human refuge in the hyperarid late Ice Age, driving groups into the green Sahara. By 7000 B.C.E., rainfall levels lessened, and the Nile Valley was again inhabitable, but lakes and rivers were still extensive throughout the Sahara, and true desert was restricted to the Sahara's central core. Rainfall became more erratic over the next two millennia. By 5000 B.C.E. the aquatic network linking northern and eastern Africa had been cut, and the Sahara reached its final desiccation by 3000 B.C.E.

Northern Africans coped with these environment dynamics by consistently innovating subsistence strategies.

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Rock Engraving. *Fat Ladies*, Chad. DAVID COULSON/TRUST FOR AFRICAN ROCK ART

Some innovations led toward animal domestication and farming, but the details differ markedly from those of the better-known Southwest Asian (Near Eastern) Neolithic. Many early hunter-gatherers in the greening Sahara were not nomadic; instead, they settled for at least part of the year by lakes and rivers or in well-watered highlands. They did not farm but relied on abundant wild foods, including wild millet, sorghum, and other grains; fish, waterfowl, and aquatic reptiles such as crocodiles; and turtles and land mammals. Profuse grinding stones and grain storage pits in their settlements testify to intensive use of wild grains. Ceramic vessels, radiocarbon-dated to more than 9,500 years ago, appear in sites across the Sahara, antedating Southwest Asian pottery by two millennia. Saharan hunter-gatherers also left behind a rich corpus of rock art that testifies to their material and spiritual worlds and suggests something of gender relations.

As northern Africa desiccated during the period 7000–6000 B.C.E., evidence testifies to Africans' initiative in managing dwindling resources. Some in southern Libya penned wild Barbary sheep (aoudad), but the species was not fully domesticated, perhaps because domestic cattle, sheep, and goats appeared in the region at about the same time. Wild ancestors of sheep and goats live only in Southwest Asia, where they were domesticated, but wild cattle were widespread throughout temperate Eurasia and North Africa. Until the very late twentieth century, archaeologists thought that cattle were domesticated in Southwest Asia and introduced into northern Africa and Europe. However, genetic comparisons of living cattle from South Asia, Southwest Asia, Africa, and Europe suggest three independent cattle domestications: in the Indus Valley, in the Taurus Mountains of Syria and Turkey, and in northern Africa.

In the period 6000–5000 B.C.E., permanent settlements gave way to nomadic pastoralism in the Sahara's still widespread grasslands, where livestock provided a viable alternative to dwindling aquatic resources. Pastoralists prosper in savannas, where their herds convert grass into meat and milk, but people must move in rhythm with the availability of water and forage for their animals. Archaeological evidence from 6000–5000 B.C.E. reflects pastoralists' extensive communication networks: exotic stones and seashells were traded over thousands of kilometers, and rock art shows strong similarities in artistic conventions throughout the Sahara. African pastoralists continued to make pottery and harvest still profuse wild grains in an increasingly Sahelian semidesert environment.

In the Nile Valley and Egyptian oases, abundant water allowed the sedentary forager lifestyle to endure, and these groups incorporated cattle, sheep, goats, and domestic barley and wheat from southwest Asia rather late (4500–4000 B.C.E.). Predynastic Egypt probably represents a fusion of these communities, with pastoralists who moved into Lower Egypt during a fifth millennium B.C.E. Saharan drought. By 4000–3000 B.C.E., large sedentary communities near Khartoum, Sudan, added domestic sheep and goats to a

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Rock Painting. *Women and Cattle*, Chad. DAVID COULSON/TRUST FOR AFRICAN ROCK ART

lifestyle heavily reliant on sorghum and fishing. Whether the Khartoum people farmed the sorghum is debated: it lacks the physical hallmarks of a domestic grain, but staggering numbers of storage pits and grinding stones suggest to some archaeologists that people were actively fostering its growth.

Pastoralists finally abandoned the Sahara for regions to the south during the third millennium B.C.E. Their long way of life in the Sahel apparently ended during a severe, prolonged drought in 800–0 B.C.E. Pastoralists and local hunter-gatherers alike were driven to seek refuge at the Niger River's inland delta and Lake Chad, where they developed new economic strategies to cope with very poor conditions. When climate improved in the first millennium C.E., Africa's first farming villages appeared, as well as specialized herding societies interdependent with farmers, and commodity-producing towns. Such economic innovations were basic to the rapid emergence of Central and West African cities and states.

Gendering Archaeological Narratives. How do gender relations fit into this story of ecological challenge and human response? Gender studies emerged in archaeology in the period 1985–1990, rather later than in anthropology. Though some approach this as a hunt for "women" and "men" in the archaeological record, more sophisticated research begins by questioning whether such dichotomous and universalized modern categories are useful to a gender-conscious archaeology.

Approaches to gender-conscious archaeological research vary, but two central ideas guide research on gender relations in the undocumented past. First, given the ethnographic evidence for great cross-cultural diversity in gender roles, one must avoid essentializing ancient gender roles. Thus specific crafts and occupations should not be assumed a priori to have been the province of prehistoric women or men; for example, it should not be assumed that women were invariably potters, or even that women were "the gatherers." Such linkages of gender and work are best seen as hypotheses, to be evaluated with data. As a corollary, a gender-conscious archaeology allows that ancient gender categories may have diverged from any known today, with more than two genders, differing relations of gender to sex, gender to sexuality, sex to sexuality, and so forth.

Second, feminist archaeologists assert that archaeological research is always an interpretive act, always historically situated, and always a mix of theory, method, and materials analysis. Margaret Conkey, Joan Gero, and Alison Wylie, for instance, have noted that although it is true that archaeologists cannot "dig up" gender, it is equally true that they cannot dig up ecosystems, a time-honored topic of archaeological study. The challenge, then, is to craft ways of thinking about scanty archaeological evidence that enables socially focused research, using the anthropological literature to enhance our awareness of gender diversity on the one hand and feminist perspectives on social inequality, control, and resistance on the other.

Concretely, what kinds of evidence can be used to explore gender relations? Archaeologists recover artifacts, food debris, structures, burials, and art. They can document how

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these vary across the landscape and over time. The next sections explore gender in the earlier hunter-gatherer and later pastoral phases of northern African history using such data.

Reproduction and Production. The earlier "green Sahara" hunter-gatherer phase saw a semisedentary lifestyle in many areas, with groups staying in one place and relying on stored grains and rich aquatic resources for a significant part of the year. This is unusual among foragers, who historically tended to be more mobile. Both sedentism and reliance on stored foods have implications for women in such groups. Cross-cultural studies of hunter-gatherers reveal that most groups divide work and gender roles in two, male and female, but that age distinctions are very important markers of status and of work obligations. We may imagine that earlier foragers probably divided work along generally dichotomous gender lines, with most females in their reproductive years forming households with one or more male partners serially or simultaneously, seeking to rear offspring, and dividing food-getting work with male partners. However, as with historically documented foragers, it is possible that persons of other genders, with variable social roles, may have existed.

A fundamental question is whether women in early sedentary forager communities lived in better or worse circumstances, in terms of workload, diet, and health, than did their more mobile counterparts. To explore this question, it is possible to study the regular and important changes that occur in modern foraging women's lives, regardless of where in the world they live, when nation-states press their groups to settle down. These are not all beneficial.

One result of shifting to a sedentary life is that women do not try so hard to space their children four to five years apart, as they did when following a mobile lifestyle. Mother's milk was a forager baby's sole sustenance until it was weaned to adult foods, often not until four to five years old. A physically active mother usually could not nourish two nursing children simultaneously. Moreover, mothers living on the move and foraging for food daily would have had literally to bear the extra burden of children born too close together. In settled communities, forager women relaxed their vigilance against pregnancies that come too soon after the birth of the previous child. Milk from domestic animals and cereal gruels enhanced the survival chances of babies born two to three years apart. This ultimately leads to rapid population growth, but in terms of women's everyday lives, more of their time must be devoted to infant care, though older children may help.

Storing grains extends the season in which they can be eaten, but this in turn presents novel labor allocation and management problems. Grains are digestible only after processing with grinding stones and cooking with water as porridge or bread. The profusion of wild grains and grinding stones in ancient northern African sites necessarily implies increased demands for firewood, water collection, and good grinding stones. Such increments in workload were undoubtedly points of tension and negotiation between ancient male and female foragers. Though female workload may have increased with grain use, new forms of female authority may also have emerged: in the majority of ethnographic cases, senior female household members manage stored plant foods, and only they can decide how to use them.

Older ethnographies of pastoralists often placed women at the periphery of male-dominated societies, but more recent, woman-focused studies show that they are neither passive nor sequestered. They build their own homes, sometimes engage in trade, milk livestock, care for young animals, and are especially involved in managing sheep and goat flocks. Male ethnographers tended to see "small stock" as insignificant "small change" in pastoral systems, but economic development studies have demonstrated that sheep and goats play a major role in feeding women and children.

Saharan Rock Art and Gender Relations. The rich array of Saharan rock art provides provocative insights into gender and sexuality in the hunter-gatherer and pastoralist times. Like Paleolithic cave art of western Europe, Saharan hunter-gatherer art is full of animals, but unlike European cave art, Saharans portrayed many people, too. Like South African rock artists, Saharans often depicted animal-headed, human-bodied beings, or "therioanthropes." South African rock-art analysts have interpreted these as shamans in trance states, and at least one student of the Saharan images (Jean-Loïc Le Quellec) accepts this interpretation, but they may be mythic beings.

Saharan therioanthropes are portrayed as carnivore-headed, many resembling African hunting dogs, and are often depicted killing or carrying huge wild game. Therioanthropes with gigantic phalli are shown engaging in sex with elephants and other animals, female therioanthropes, and human females. Human males and females are also depicted in sexual intercourse, and other representations depict wild animals in sexual states and activities, such as male elephants in musth, with dripping penises. An engraving from the Messak, southern Libya, depicts a human female and male having intercourse, while near them a Barbary sheep ram is shown sniffing a ewe's vulva, a prelude to copulation.

Female bodies are often shown in an "open woman" position, frontally with knees drawn up, sometimes receiving the erect penis of a male mate, sometimes giving birth, sometimes simply exposing a cavernous vagina. In other cases, women are depicted from the side in intercourse with human males, with therianthropes, or with beings that appear to be animals.

What do these images say about early Saharan hunter-gatherer gender relations and ideological systems? Three beings are commonly depicted: sexually active human females, sexually active human males, and persons with

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carnivore heads and human genitalia shown hunting or in heterosexual intercourse. Hunting and sex are privileged activities in this widespread art, and females join in the sex—but not the hunting—without appearing to be physically coerced. If the carnivore heads reflect African hunting dogs, the images assert a link between humans and a species that hunts cooperatively and shares food with everyone in its group. Children and babies are not portrayed, other than in birth scenes. Thus the central foci are adult, sexually active beings, mapped onto male and female by genital representation, in a dyadic heterosexual pattern, but one not species-restricted, because each gender is depicted having relations with other species.

Gendered Life Paths among Pastoralists. Saharan pastoralist rock art contrasts not in style but in subject matter with earlier hunter-gatherer representations. Sexual acts are seldom shown, and genitals depicted are not exaggerated in scale. Women, men, and, notably, children are shown, as are domestic and nondomestic animals, often in scenes that appear to portray daily routines. As in dynastic Egyptian art, pens and houses are shown from above, but humans, animals, containers, beds, and other objects are represented in profile. Cattle are shown tethered to a picket line and milked, being led out in herds from camp or in the field, and people forage or sit in small houses. Scenes showing men and dogs hunting are common, and therianthropes sometimes appear in them.

The Cameroon-born archaeologist Augustine Holl has presented a provocative view of gender among ancient North Africans, analyzing a painted panel at Tikadouine in Tassili, southern Algeria. He argued that the panel presents a narrative of a male's life history, from boyhood to elderhood, stages typical of modern pastoralist males. Holl asserts that signifiers of gender and age mark males in each panel segment. For example, hunting wild animals defines a phase of youth, whereas a different hairstyle and association with domestic herds, a house, a woman, and a child appear to mark elderhood.

Neither Holl nor others have discussed signifiers of adult womanhood or other female statuses, but associations of female figures with specific hairdo, dress, and activities should be explored systematically. Holl's idea that pastoral representations engender male individuals as men through multiple markers and activities may equally apply to gendering female persons as women by their hairdo, dress, and consistent association with children and a house. Paintings show female figures dancing, digging, harvesting wild grain, tying cattle on picket lines and milking, and resting inside houses, as well as interacting with men and children. In contrast with hunter-gatherer art, Saharan pastoral art shows children, and these are placed mainly with female figures, either as babes in arms or as freestanding small figures, apparently helping with tasks.

Westerners may be inclined to read the depictions of women in houses as reflecting an oppressive, woman-at-home ideology, but these may convey Saharan notions of adult female agency. In most ethnographically documented African pastoralist societies, adult women build and hold their own homes as property, and from early marriage women exercise a level of authority over household activities unknown in most Indo-European societies. Adult female status in such societies rises with the number of surviving children, and prehistoric depictions associating females with children may also reflect a positive mark of achieved status among ancient Saharans. Only systematic research will reveal if such representational associations hold up consistently.

Pastoralist burials provide insights into the equipment of womanhood and manhood. Adult pastoralist females in the south-central Sahara were interred with large, elegantly formed grinding stones, while males are not, perhaps attesting to female work and crafts during life. Ostrich eggshell beads, made almost exclusively by adolescent and adult females in historically documented times, are interred with female adults but seldom with males.

Other cultural practices in northern Africa are more alien to Westerners but nonetheless enduring in the region: for instance, pastoralists from Egypt to the western Sahara sometimes buried young cows near human interments or under monumental stones, a practice that continued into dynastic Egyptian times.

Thinking about gender in the ancient past challenges us to transcend modern categories of "woman" and "man." Sometimes, as with the burials and representations of cows and people, we might even need to entertain the idea that some significant creatures were thought of as persons, and thought of as gendered. Hathor, symbolic mother of all pharaohs, is depicted as a fusion of woman and cow, supporting the life-giving sun with her horns. Researchers would be well advised to be open to possibilities that ancient people could have defined personhood, gender, and difference in ways truly alien to our own, and to seek to understand traces of those systems of thought in their own terms.

[*See also* Agriculture; Gender Roles; Gender Theory; Hunting and Gathering; Nomads; Pastoralism; *and* Prehistory.]

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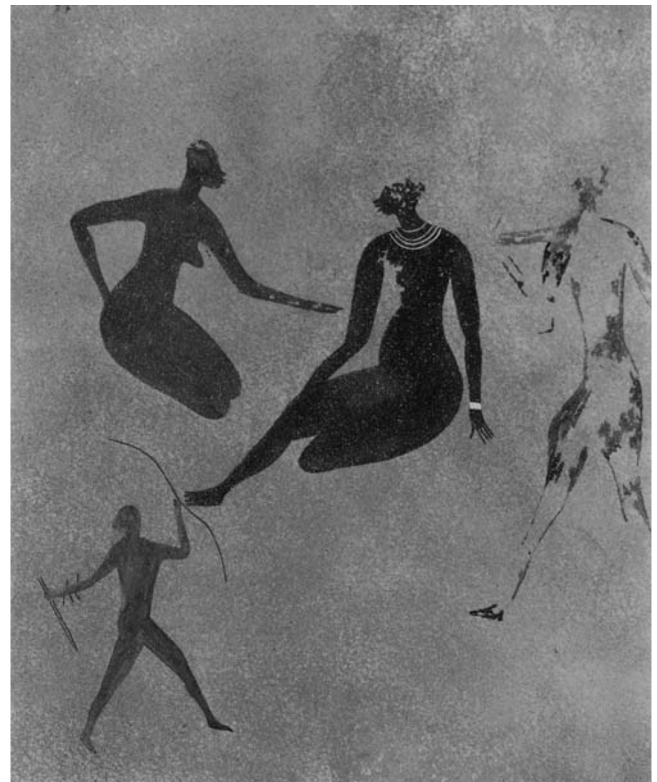
DIANE GIFFORD-GONZALEZ

5000 B.C.E.–1000 C.E.

Most studies that have addressed the history of African women have examined the roles and status of women in the colonial and postcolonial periods, but because of the lack of evidence little is known of the history of women in ancient Africa. Most is known about women who lived in the region of the Nile River valley, especially Kemet (Egypt).

The period around 5000 B.C.E. was a turning point in ancient African history. It witnessed the transition from Paleolithic to Neolithic societies in different parts of the continent. As more societies settled down and attained food surpluses, they were able to engage in endeavors beyond the search for food. The origin of the Nile River valley civilizations has been traced to transformations in the region of what is now the Sahara Desert. Around 5000 B.C.E. the Sahara experienced desiccation and hence set off human migrations to the precincts of the Nile River valley in the east and southward toward the cluster of river valleys, including the Niger, the Senegal, and the Volta.

By 3500 B.C.E., viable Neolithic societies had emerged along the river valleys, including the Nile. The civilizations in the Nile Valley were the most flourishing. Overall, by the Postclassical millennial period of 1000 C.E., African societies had gone through much change. In the fourth millennium B.C.E., Egypt dominated the area around the first cataract, known as Nubia. The spread of Egyptian influence between 1700 and 1500 B.C.E. led to the creation of the Kingdom of Kush with its capital city Kerma around



Hunting and Gathering. Sitting women and returning hunter, frescoes of Tassili n'Ajjer, Algeria, 2000 B.C.E. MUSÉE DE L'HOMME, PARIS/ERICH LESSING/ART RESOURCE, NY