

Social Structure and Organization

Classes, Kinship, Gender and
Family

So what is “social organization”?

- Categories
- Relationships
- Roles
- Dynamics

Social Hierarchy: Status, Rank, and Power

Questions to ask:

- How is the society divided?
- Separated categories are not necessarily ranked. So why are they ranked in urban states?
- What is the basis for status differences in these societies?
- How mobile are individuals?
- What is the connection between class and power?

Upper Class Status and Identity

- Controlled most of the wealth
- Had an opulent lifestyle with lots of conspicuous consumption
- Wielded power administratively
- Role of heredity in class identity variable

Commoners

- Divided by occupation, especially specialized laborers, producers
- Relative degrees of patronage, protection from elites
- Great majority were farmers, food producers
- Access to, control over land was key issue, highly variable

Slaves and Slavery

- Distinction between patronage dependency and chattel or property status
- Visually marked, and excluded from kin groups of higher status classes
- Usually of a different ethnic group than their owners

Social Mobility

- Rates, degrees of mobility linked to access to, control over knowledge, information
- Often legally regulated
- Most common in expansionist territorial states or economically expanding city states
- Connections to kinship, especially marriage patterns and inheritance
- Endogamy (and exogamy) as strategies for limiting, creating mobility

Family Organization and Gender Roles

- Could vary across classes
- Restructuring in these areas directly linked to the rise of state authority
- Gender is WAY more than females and males
- Directly linked to economic production, especially the production of surplus
- Patriliney, matriliney, locality and polygamy: changing practices of family structure and descent

Gender Bias and the State

- A key 'structuring element' in the development of the state
- Hotly debated topic in modern society – so the issue is a hot one in archaeological research
- Helps to highlight the links between society and state power over the individual
- Remember that Trigger's data are written records written by elites: how true did this hold for others?

One model for analyzing links:

- All societies organize identity using gender, kinship, and age
- This organization is key to the way all societies define and organize labor: who does what, for whom?
- The emerging state has to 're-engineer' these ancient links between kinship, gender and society to extract surplus agricultural production
- The state's key challenge: how to get people to stop sharing food with their kin groups, and start giving surplus to state

kinship

gender labor

Windows on the process: women's labor, women's status and the State

- Was it the women whose status declined, or their labor, or both?
- Special question of women and slavery (as in Mesopotamia, for instance)
- “Since antebellum planters reserved artisan positions for male slaves, the majority of the (rice and cotton) field hands were female. Slave women constituted nearly 60 percent of the field workforce in coastal plantations” (www.georgiaencyclopedia.org)

Was it the women, or their class?

- Rules of behavior, status in society radically different for high status, low status women
- The Ur burial ground data: women of high status (royal) had grave goods marking them as women; women of nonroyal status did not: can gender be neutral?