باستان‌شناسی
Archaeology
Journal of Iranian Center for Archaeological Research
ISSN: 2645-4629

Architecture and Gendered Spaces in Some Prehistoric Sites of Southwest Asia

معماری و فضاهای جنسیتی‌شده در برخی از محوطه‌های پیش‌ازتاریخی جنوب‌غربی آسیا

Samaneh Nazif [1]*

[1] PhD in Prehistoric archaeology, Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Humanities, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran. Corresponding author: nazifsamaneh@yahoo.com

سمانه نظیف [1]*

[1] دانش‌آموخته دکتری باستان‌شناسی پیش‌ازتاریخ، گروه باستان‌شناسی، دانشکده علوم انسانی، دانشگاه تربیت مدرس، تهران، ایران. نویسنده مسئول: nazifsamaneh@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The emergence of permanent settlements during the Neolithic period profoundly transformed social relationships and daily activities among early inhabitants. Architectural remains serve as critical evidence of past societies' values, norms, and gender roles within domestic spaces. This study adopts an analytical-descriptive approach to explore space-gender relationships across Neolithic sites in Iran, the Levant, and Cyprus, emphasizing the roles of women and men in architectural construction and critically engaging with evolving gender ideologies. Data were gathered through an extensive literature review and field data from selected sites chosen for their accessibility, cultural, and geographic diversity, and availability of spatial and architectural information. Analytical focus centered on gender interactions and labor divisions within residential contexts, utilizing comparative methodologies to reconstruct social roles in architectural processes more accurately. Findings reveal that domestic spaces served multiple gendered functions, challenging traditional views that attribute household domains solely to women. The results underscore a flexible and collective division of labor where both genders actively engaged in constructing and organizing social spaces. Such insights broaden understanding of Neolithic social complexity and spatial dynamics, suggesting gendered roles were contextually variable and integrated.

INFO

History
Received: Nov. 20, 2024
Accepted: Feb. 12, 2025

Keywords
Architecture
Gender
Woman
Prehistory
Archaeology

چکیده: ظهور سکونتگاه‌های دائمی در دوران نوسنگی به‌طور چشمگیری روابط اجتماعی و فعالیت‌های روزمره ساکنان اولیه را تغییر داد. بقایای معماری به عنوان مدارک مهمی از ارزش‌ها، هنجارها و نقش‌های جنسیتی در فضاهای خانگی جوامع گذشته عمل می‌کنند. این مطالعه رویکردی تحلیلی-توصیفی دارد و به بررسی رابطه بین فضا و جنسیت در سایت‌های نوسنگی ایران، شام و قبرس می‌پردازد و نقش زنان و مردان در ساخت و ساز معماری را برجسته کرده و تغییرات ایدئولوژیک جنسیتی معاصر را نقد می‌کند. داده‌ها از طریق مرور گسترده ادبیات و داده‌های میدانی از سایت‌های منتخب که برای دسترسی، تنوع فرهنگی و جغرافیایی و وجود داده‌های فضایی و معماری انتخاب شده‌اند، گردآوری شده‌اند. تمرکز تحلیلی بر تعاملات جنسیتی و تقسیم کار در فضاهای مسکونی است و با استفاده از روش‌های مقایسه‌ای، نقش‌های اجتماعی در فرایندهای معماری را دقیق‌تر بازسازی می‌کند. یافته‌ها نشان می‌دهد که فضاهای خانگی دارای کارکردهای چندگانه مرتبط با جنسیت بوده و دیدگاه‌های سنتی که این فضاها را صرفا حوزه زنان می‌دانند را به چالش می‌کشد. نتایج تأکید بر تقسیم کار منعطف و جمعی دارد که در آن هر دو جنس فعالانه در ساخت و سازماندهی فضاهای اجتماعی مشارکت داشته‌اند. این دیدگاه به درک بهتر پیچیدگی‌های اجتماعی و دینامیک‌های فضایی نوسنگی کمک کرده و نقش‌های جنسیتی را به عنوان متغیر و یکپارچه در زمینه‌های مختلف ترسیم می‌کند.

تاریخ‌ها
دریافت: ۱۴۰۳/۰۸/۳۰
پذیرش: ۱۴۰۳/۱۱/۲۴

واژگان کلیدی
معماری
جنسیت
زن
پیش‌ازتاریخ
باستان‌شناسی

Citation: Nazif, S. (2025). Architecture and gendered spaces in some prehistoric sites of Southwest Asia. *Archaeology, 4*(4), 19-29. https://doi.org/10.22034/archj/4.4.2

1. Introduction

The Neolithic[1] period was not only the era of domestication of plants and animals. During the Neolithic age, and perhaps even before, the inhabitants of the Near East increasingly controlled their space and for the first time built remarkable structures that gathered at main centers, if not villages. If, as archaeologists believe, most of these structures were houses, this was domestication in the truest sense. As Wilson (1988) points out, it also transformed human relationships and perceptions in a way that can be considered "the domestication of the human species" (Banning and Chazan, 2006: 5).

Unlike plants, animals, and other material components of the Neolithic "package" that can be transferred and connected to an external environment, houses are confined to the place where they are built. Another point is that architecture is influenced by climate and the availability of local resources, which makes settlement one of the most conservative aspects of human life (Leroi-Gourhan, 1971: 256 as cited in Brami, 2014: 161). In many societies, the earliest settlements are among the best sources for archaeological evidence. It is often possible to determine the function of a building based on the various artifacts found within it. If it becomes clear which tasks were assigned to which gender, it may be understood which rooms or buildings were used for working and how much interior space was allocated to each. With the growth of sedentism and the domestication of plant and animal resources, economic production increasingly took place within the household environment, which in turn had a significant impact on the ways individuals and groups interacted with one another (Peterson, 2016: 138).

Various waves of feminist and postmodern perspectives have expanded a more nuanced understanding of gender within archaeological discourse. Currently, there is a broader recognition of the multiplicity and multifaceted nature of gender and gender system structures (Gero and Scattolin, 2002; Hollimon, 1997). Today, gender and sex are considered alongside other social variables in many archaeological interpretations; however, the underlying assumption in much research remains a binary gender classification. This leads to a gendered division of labor between women and men based on modern and contemporary patterns. Applying a binary gender ideology to labor division in ancient contexts does not provide an accurate or realistic picture of the past but instead shapes the discourse of the past according to the patriarchal model of present-day societies.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore several key questions: How were architectural and residential spaces in prehistoric Southwest Asia organized with respect to gender roles? To what extent did spatial arrangements reflect flexible or rigid gender divisions of labor? How do recent archaeological findings challenge traditional binary understandings of gender in domestic architecture? And finally, what new insights can be gained about social organization in Neolithic communities through a more inclusive understanding of gendered spaces?

In this article, focusing on the variable of gender, we explore the architecture and spatial organization of residential structures in some sites of Southwest Asia. Early studies, mostly shaped by a Western male-centered perspective, typically considered domestic and interior spaces as women's work domains, which in turn led to a gendered division of labor between women and men as recognized in the modern civilized world. However, more recent research, with a deeper approach free from previous assumptions, offers new interpretations of the findings; based on this, in many prehistoric sites of Southwest Asia, houses and interior spaces can be understood as work domains for all gender identities.

The primary innovation of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach that integrates feminist theory, gender archaeology, and architectural studies to provide a comprehensive and comparative analysis of the flexible and collective roles of gender in spatial organization. Focusing on Neolithic communities across Iran, the Levant, and Cyprus, this research moves beyond the binary and reductionist interpretations prevalent in earlier studies. By utilizing multi-source data and comparative frameworks, it aims to illuminate the active participation of both women and men in the production of social spaces. Current scholarship often overlooks such a regional and cross-

[1]. The Neolithic period is the final stage of cultural evolution or technological development among prehistoric humans. This era is characterized by polished stone tools, dependence on domesticated plants or animals, settlement in permanent villages, and the emergence of crafts such as pottery and weaving. At this stage, humans were no longer reliant on hunting, fishing, and gathering wild plants. The cultivation of cereals enabled Neolithic people to build permanent houses and gather in villages, freeing them from nomadism and the hunting-gathering economy, which in turn allowed them to engage in specialized crafts. The beginning and end of the Neolithic period vary across different regions and are entirely dependent on geographical location. The Neolithic period began in Southwest Asia between the ninth and eighth millennia BCE, and in the Levant around 10,200 BCE, lasting until approximately 4500 BCE. (https://www.britannica.com/event/Neolithic [Access date: 27.09.2022]).

disciplinary perspective, making this work a significant contribution that fills an existing gap in gender and architectural archaeology. This research addresses theoretical and practical deficiencies identified in previous critiques and proposes new directions aligned with contemporary global archaeological discourse.

2. Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following key questions:

How were the architectural and residential spaces in prehistoric Southwest Asian sites organized with respect to gender roles?

To what extent were domestic spaces shaped by flexible or rigid gender-based divisions?

How do recent archaeological findings challenge traditional binary understandings of gender in domestic architecture?

What implications does a more nuanced understanding of gendered spaces have for interpreting social organization in Neolithic communities?

These questions frame the investigation into reinterpreting gender roles and employing a more flexible approach to architectural space analysis, serving as the study's core focus.

3. Research Method

This research employs an analytical-descriptive and interdisciplinary approach, grounded in feminist theory and gender archaeology combined with architectural studies. The data sources encompass a comprehensive systematic literature review of scholarly works, including peer-reviewed articles, books, and excavation reports related to Neolithic sites in Southwest Asia, specifically in Iran, the Levant, and Cyprus. The literature review emphasized the identification of gendered spatial use and division of labor insights grounded in archaeological and feminist theoretical frameworks.

Field data analyzed in this study arise from previously published archaeological excavations and spatial analyses of domestic structures within the selected Neolithic sites. Selection criteria for these case studies were based on data accessibility, cultural and geographic diversity, representativeness, and the quantity and quality of gender-related evidence. These sites exemplify a broad regional spectrum and allow comparative studies essential for studying gender roles and social organization.

Data analysis integrates spatial analysis of architectural layouts, artifact distributions, and use-wear analyses with critical feminist interpretations to challenge traditional binary gender assumptions. A comparative and interpretative method was used to evaluate the flexible, collective, and multi-dimensional nature of gendered labor and spatial practices in domestic and social architectural spheres.

This methodology enables a reconstruction of nuanced gender roles reflecting social, economic, and symbolic dimensions embedded in Neolithic architectural spaces. It actively counters androcentric and binary perspectives dominant in classical archaeological interpretations. By synthesizing multi-disciplinary data and feminist critiques, the study advances a broader understanding of gender relations and social complexity in prehistoric communities.

4. Architecture, Society, and Gender

Several theoretical perspectives highlight a strong relationship between social classification and the spatial organization of places where people live, move, work, and interact. While a direct one-to-one mapping between architectural layout and social categories is unlikely, the spatial structure of built environments is significantly shaped by social classifications and anticipated social interactions of their creators. Moreover, existing architectural spaces and their boundaries influence the timing, frequency, location, and nature of future social interactions (Banning, 2002; Ferguson, 1996 as cited in Banning, 2010).

As architect Peg Rawes analyzes Luce Irigaray's[2] work, space construction—which includes both design and use—is a dynamic, relational process emerging through interactions among humans, subjectivities, objects, and other beings (Rawes, 2007). Marie Louise Sørensen further emphasizes that spatial structures and classifications are not static or fixed but emerge through practice (Sørensen, 2000).

Architectural dynamism produces diverse, heterogeneous, and often ambiguous spaces, which evolve during construction, use, and through various relationships shaping the built environment. Even the most orderly architectural designs cannot yield homogeneous experiences of space over time. In Western culture, these dynamic processes intersect with gendered subjectivities, both shaping and being shaped by them (Rawes, 2007).

[2]. Luce Irigaray (born 1932, Belgium) is a French linguist, psychoanalyst, and feminist philosopher who has examined the uses and abuses of language in relation to women. (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Luce-Irigaray [Access date: 27.09.2022])

According to Irigaray (1993), gender identity transcends biological determinants, extending into cultural and social dimensions. This identity is relational—between embodied subjects, objects, and other beings—just like space construction. In Western cultural contexts, space construction is inherently gendered, intertwined with bodily perception and shaping experiences of architecture. Time, place, and material are understood through various discursive and physical modes, all influenced by gender constructions (Rawes, 2007).

However, Irigaray notes that women's experiences have been marginalized or erased in Western cultural histories. Women are often defined in opposition to men through hierarchical binaries, associating femininity with immaterial or unreal ideas, contrasting with masculine positivity. This gendered duality deeply influences prehistoric archaeology, which has traditionally adopted naturalized, universal, binary categories rooted in Western culture.

Western architectural history similarly rests on binaries—between woman and man, public and private, inclusion and exclusion—shaping the conception and understanding of architectural spaces. Rationalism and masculine humanism, foundational since Vitruvius[3] and reinforced through Renaissance and modernist movements, have centered the masculine body as the measure and metaphor for Western buildings and cities (Agrest, 1988).

This worldview assigns the creation of architectural spaces predominantly to men. The female body is often absent or erased in architectural narratives, appearing only through generative connotations like motherhood, which itself is symbolically replaced by the male architect (Agrest, 1988). Modern architecture, notably following Le Corbusier's[4] dictum, links form to function, assigning domestic interiors in particular to women, framing the home as a patriarchal safe and predictable space (Vale, 2019).

Conceptions of the past often naturalize and legitimize these Western ideals. Feminist scholarship seeks to rewrite prehistory, recognizing women's diverse and active engagements across various spaces. Yet, some studies still treat gender as a fixed, natural attribute. Instead, gender should be understood as relational, contextual, and negotiated through social and spatial practices (Rob & Harris, 2018).

Collective identities emerge through group relations, activities, shared material culture, and embodied perceptions (Hernando, 2002). Archaeologists focusing on social, political, or economic strategies must not overlook the diverse ways individuals constructed identity and experienced the world (Hernando, 2016). Traditional binary gender models imposed from modern frameworks risk misrepresenting past societies.

As Irigaray and other feminist theorists argue, architecture and its experience have been shaped differentially by women and men. Prehistoric architecture has mostly been interpreted through androcentric lenses, confining women to domestic spheres and reinforcing Western stereotypes of home and family. Patriarchal discourses are evident not only in spatial and social roles assigned to genders but also in the production of archaeological knowledge.

Gender archaeology challenges these hierarchical binaries, proposing inclusive and non-hierarchical approaches that value diverse gender identities as active agents shaping spaces and cultures. It calls for retrieving women and marginalized identities from passive roles in narratives and recognizing them as creators and participants in spatial constructions (Vale, 2019).

4.1. Architecture, Society, and Gender in the Neolithic Period of the Near East

The Neolithic period in the Near East marks a critical transition from mobile hunter-gatherer groups to settled farming communities, fundamentally reshaping architectural forms, social structures, and gender roles. In Mesopotamia, early settlements such as Jarmo[5], Iraq, are characterized by rectangular houses constructed with mud walls and compacted floors. These features reflect a structured resource management system at the household level (Braidwood,

[3]. Vitruvius was a Roman architect and engineer in the first century BCE, renowned for his multi-volume work titled *De Architectura*, which served as a guidebook for Roman architects. (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vitruvius [Access date: 27.09.2022]).

[4]. Le Corbusier (1887–1965) was an internationally renowned Swiss architect and urban planner who combined the functionalism of the modernist movement with expressionism in his designs. In 2016, 17 of his architectural works were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Le-Corbusier [Access date: 27.09.2022])

[5]. Jarmo is a prehistoric archaeological site located east of Kirkuk in northeastern Iraq. This site is highly significant for revealing traces of one of the earliest rural agricultural communities in the world. It is estimated that the initial settlement dates back to around 7000 BCE. (https://www.britannica.com/place/Jarmo [Access date: 05.05.2025])

1960). Similarly, Ain Ghazal[6] in Jordan exhibits sophisticated underground storage facilities within domestic spaces, highlighting long-term strategic planning for grain preservation (Rollefson, 1998).

The southeastern Iranian site of Tell-e Atashi[7] presents evidence of pre-ceramic architectural structures with mud floors and advanced lithic technologies, indicating early forms of craft specialization and social differentiation (Hoseinzadeh, 2016). Moving west to Anatolia, the prominent site of Çatalhöyük[8] illustrates densely clustered houses sharing walls. Here, symbolic wall paintings depicting bullfighting scenes and subterranean burials beneath house floors emphasize the integral role of ritual in daily life (Hodder, 2006).

In western Iran, the Neolithic settlement of Tepe Abdul Hosein[9] reveals housing units that possess simple, geometric layouts. Partitioned interior spaces were functionally organized for cooking, sleeping, and storage, reflecting an intentional spatial design aligned with the lifestyle and daily necessities of its inhabitants (Pullar, 1978). Female figurines at Ain Ghazal and Çatalhöyük, often with ambiguous gender characteristics, arguably signify fertility or female ancestral figures, playing pivotal roles in ritual practices and belief systems of Neolithic communities (Gimbutas, 1989; Hodder, 2006).

Despite these insights, clear gendered distinctions in burial practices or spatial activity distributions remain indistinct in pre-ceramic Neolithic contexts, warranting further comprehensive investigation. The later Neolithic era witnessed the rise of stratified societies, as exemplified by sites such as Eridu[10] in Mesopotamia, where temples and centralized storerooms denote emerging concentrations of power among elite groups (Adams, 1981). In Iran's Chogha Bonut[11] private underground storages imply the advent of individual ownership claims on resources (Alizadeh, 2003).

Extensive trade and exchange networks further denote regional interactions. For instance, Anatolian obsidian artifacts found at Tepe Guran[12], Iran, and Abu Hureyra[13], Syria confirms the existence of long-distance commodity flows, underscoring economic and cultural interconnectivity across the Near East (Renfrew, 1975).

In sum, the Neolithic Near East exhibits notable regional diversity yet shares common architectural patterns in residential and ritual contexts, ambiguous gender divisions of labor, and widespread exchange networks. The Iranian Neolithic tends to emphasize

6. The Ain Ghazal archaeological site is a pre-pottery Neolithic settlement located near Amman, Jordan, which was active from around 7250 BCE to approximately 5000 BCE. During this period, the inhabitants gradually transitioned from relying simultaneously on wild and domesticated plants for subsistence to becoming a pastoral society. (https://www.britannica.com/place/Ain-Ghazal [Access date: 05.05.2025])

7. Tell-e Atashi is an important archaeological site in southeastern Iran that belongs to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period. Archaeological studies at Tell-e Atashi include preliminary visits, archaeological surveys, sampling, and stratigraphy, and the findings include architectural structures, tools and stone artifacts, figurines, clay objects, and stone vessels.

8. Çatalhöyük: An important Neolithic site in the Middle East, located near Konya in south-central Turkey. Excavations (1961–1965) by British archaeologist James Mellaart have shown that Anatolia was the center of an advanced culture during the Neolithic period. The earliest building phase at Çatalhöyük dates to around 6700 BCE, and the latest to about 5650 BCE. The inhabitants lived in rectangular houses made of mudbrick and clay, which were probably entered from the roof, likely via a wooden ladder. The houses, in addition to ovens and hearths, had platforms for sleeping, sitting, or working. (https://www.britannica.com/place/Catalhuyuk [Access date: 27.09.2022])

9. Tepe Abdul Hosein is one of the important Early Neolithic sites in the Central Zagros region. Culturally and technologically, Abd al-Hossein Hill plays a significant role in understanding the early Neolithic developments in the Central Zagros and demonstrates its cultural connections with other contemporary sites in the region.

10. Eridu: The ancient Sumerian city is in southern ancient Ur, Iraq. Eridu was known as the oldest city in Sumer and was one of the most important prehistoric urban centers in southern Babylonia. This city, probably built on sand dunes in the 5th millennium BCE, fully represents the Ubaid civilization sequence before writing, with a long succession of superimposed temples illustrating the growth and development of complex architecture made of mud bricks. (https://www.britannica.com/place/Eridu [Access date: 05.05.2025])

11. Chogha Bonut is an archaeological site in the Shoosh Plain, Khuzestan province, in southwestern Iran. This site, located about 20 kilometers southeast of Dezful and 5 kilometers west of Chogha Mish, is of special importance because it has so far provided evidence of the earliest stages of agricultural life and permanent settlement in Khuzestan. Calibrated radiocarbon dating shows that the age of this site dates back to around 7200 BCE, making it the oldest agricultural village in the Khuzestan plain.(https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/coga-bonut-archaeological-site/ [Access date: 05.05.2025])

12. Tepe Guran: This hill is located in the Holeylan Valley near Kermanshah and contains evidence of human settlement from the Neolithic period to the Islamic era. It plays an important role in understanding the prehistoric developments of western Iran.

13. Abu Hureyra is a prehistoric archaeological site in the Upper Euphrates Valley in Syria, inhabited between approximately 13,300 and 7,800 years ago. It is the largest known site from the period, marking the beginning of plant and animal domestication. Two occupation phases have been identified at Abu Hureyra, encompassing the transition to agriculture. In the first phase, the diversity of plant and animal remains shows that the inhabitants exploited significant amounts of wild einkorn wheat (the ancestor of modern wheat), rye, and gazelle, and also harvested lentils and vetch. In the later occupation phase, the people of Abu Hureyra cultivated a wider range of crops such as barley, rye, and two types of early domesticated wheat (emmer and einkorn). (https://www.britannica.com/topic/agriculture/Early-development#ref982152 [Access date: 07.05.2025])

utilization of local resources, while Mesopotamian and Anatolian sites highlight complex ritualistic architecture. These characteristics advocate for intensified interdisciplinary research to unravel the social and cultural complexities of early sedentary societies.

5. Gender and Architecture in Some Sites of Southwestern Asia

5-1. Gender and Neolithic Architecture in Archaeological Sites of Iran

The Neolithic period in Iran presents a complex and significant context for exploring the role of gender, particularly the position of women, in shaping the spatial organization of settlements and both residential and ritual architectures. This era witnessed fundamental changes in social, economic, and architectural systems.

Notable Neolithic sites such as Chogha Mish[14] in the Susiana Plain and Chiasabz Sharqi[15] in western Iran demonstrate spatial organizations reflecting a relative separation of public and private spaces and corresponding gender roles in architecture. At Chiasabz Sharqi, analyses of stone tools associated with food production and preparation—such as grinding stones, mortars, and pestles—reveal their crucial role in daily activities linked with agricultural and plant domestication processes. These tools are predominantly found in architectural and residential areas rather than storage, suggesting that women likely played active roles in food preparation and household economies, shaping the spatial layout accordingly (Darabi, 2016). Nevertheless, substantiating such interpretations requires further investigations, including bioarchaeological studies.

Technological shifts in Chiasabz Sharqi's lithic industries also parallel broader social and economic transformations that may indicate changing gender divisions of labor. These shifts likely influenced space utilization and gendered social roles within the community (Darabi, 2014).

At Chogha Mish, one of Khuzestan's largest Neolithic settlements, the architectural complexity of houses and workshops similarly suggests a nuanced spatial organization that reflects gendered labor division. Collectively, these studies propose that Neolithic Iranian architectures—including those at Chiasabz Sharqi and Chogha Mish—are not solely expressions of settlement or agrarian lifestyles but deeply intertwined with gendered activities and roles.

Further west, archaeological research at sites like Godin Tepe[16] reveals complex Neolithic social structures reflected through architectural forms. Oval buildings and workshop areas indicate varied social stratifications and probable labor divisions among members of these early communities (Mohammadi Qasrian, 2021).

Symbolic and semiotic studies alongside feminist archaeological perspectives highlight that architectural styles and cultural motifs—such as geometric and plant designs—encode gender concepts and status indicators. For instance, the swastika pattern, rooted in Neolithic traditions, recurs in ancient Iranian architecture as a cultural-spiritual emblem linked to social and gendered frameworks (Mohseni & Bastanfard, 2020).

5-2. Gender and Architecture in the Neolithic Levant

Relatively few studies have directly examined the relationship between gender and domestic space in the Neolithic Levant[17]. Wright's research (2000) is notable for exploring how increasing sedentism influenced gender relations in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic southern Levant. Wright highlights the gradual privatization of storage containers, hearths, and food preparation areas over time (Bolger and Wright, 2013).

In her analysis of social contexts around food preparation, Wright draws on ethnographic parallels and Molson's work at Abu Hureyra, identifying grinding and cooking as female-associated tasks. Early Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (8800–10,000 BCE) evidence shows grinding tools and hearths found

[14]. Chogha Mish is one of the most important Neolithic sites in Iran, located in the Khuzestan plain. Its studies have been conducted by archaeologists such as Dyson and Kantorovich. This site provides evidence of the beginning of agriculture, animal husbandry, pottery, and the formation of the first rural communities.

[15]. The Chiasabz Sharqi site is one of the important archaeological sites in western Iran that belongs to the Neolithic period and plays an important role in understanding the cultural and economic developments of this period. Archaeological studies at Chiasabz Sharqi have shown that this site is an example of Neolithic settlements with simple residential structures and the use of advanced stone tools, reflecting the gradual transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture and animal husbandry.

[16]. Godin Tepe is one of the most important archaeological sites in western Iran, belonging to the Neolithic period, and plays a key role in understanding the cultural and social developments of this era. Archaeological studies show that during the Neolithic, especially in the late 5th and early 4th millennia BCE, communities in this region achieved complex social and hierarchical structures.

[17] Levant: Historically, it is a region along the eastern Mediterranean coast that roughly corresponds to Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and some adjacent areas. (https://www.britannica.com/place/Levant [Access date: 27.09.2022])

both inside and outside homes, reflecting fluid boundaries between private and communal spaces. However, by the Late Pre-Pottery Neolithic B, these tools are found mainly in larger, more complex domestic spaces that appear less accessible and more concealed (Wright, 2000). Following Hastorf's interpretation (1991; cited in Peterson, 2010), Wright links these changes to increased social restrictions on women's labor and spatial limitations on their activities.

Despite the appeal of this model, recent findings from Çatalhöyük challenge the assumption that women's work was confined to interior domestic spaces. Carbon residue analyses suggest both men and women spent considerable time in houses (Hodder, 2006). Neolithic houses consisted of complex, often segmented spaces that were likely gender-mixed work areas rather than strictly divided along gender lines. For example, at Ain Abu Nukhayla in southern Jordan, stone tool production and pigment processing occurred within domestic settings alongside food preparation (Kadowaki, 2006).

Late Pre-Pottery Neolithic domestic architectures, such as those Wright studied, featured multi-story buildings with adjoining rooms and shared walls. Studies of spatial patterns reveal increased control over access, which may have limited daily interpersonal interactions (Banning, 2004). However, the exact function of some rooms, especially ground-floor corridors described as storage areas, remains debated, as hearths were often absent in these spaces (Bard and Banning, 1988; Byrd and Kirkbride-Helbæk, 2005).

Critically, focusing only on ground-floor plans neglects vertical spatial use. Ethnographic and archaeological evidence underscore the sociocultural importance of rooftops and terraces as work and social spaces (Stevanovic and Tringham, 1998; Düring, 2001).

Wright's conclusion that gendered activities became increasingly segregated, confining women largely to private spaces, depends on assumptions about men's lesser interior presence. Yet microwear analyses at Çatalhöyük reveal male-associated tasks like stone tool production occurred inside houses (Murdock and Provost, 1973; Carter *et al.*, 2005).

Moreover, burials beneath house floors may signal that ground-floor rooms held sacred or powerful meanings, complicating simplistic private/public dichotomies regarding gendered space. These considerations challenge Wright's view of Late Pre-Pottery Neolithic gender spatial segregation and its implications for women's socio-economic roles.

5-3. Gender and Architecture in Neolithic Cyprus: Reinterpreting a Complex Society through Archaeological Evidence

The Neolithic period of Cyprus (circa 8500–3000 BCE) stands as one of the earliest centers of agricultural settlement in the Eastern Mediterranean. It serves as a crucial case for understanding social, economic, and symbolic transformations linked to the transition from mobile to sedentary life. This study explores the structure of Cypriot societies during this era, focusing on architectural evidence and indirect gender-related data while reconsidering their cultural ties with the Near East. Key archaeological sites examined include Shillourokambos, Kissonerga-Mylouthkia, Choirokoitia, and Kalavasos-Agios.

5-3-1. Geographical-Cultural Context and Migration of Early Neolithic Communities

As the largest island in the Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus experienced significant migrations during the Early Neolithic period (8000–5000 BCE) from neighboring regions, particularly Anatolia and the Levant. These migrations brought advances in agricultural practices, animal husbandry, and tool-making technologies, contributing to the emergence of unique Neolithic cultures on the island.

The Pre-Pottery Neolithic site of Shillourokambos offers the oldest evidence of human settlement in Cyprus. Its circular huts, constructed with stone walls and wooden roofs, closely resemble contemporary architectural forms at Mureybet[18] in northern Syria and Aşıklı Höyük[19] in Anatolia (Peltenburg, 2003). This pattern highlights cultural continuity with the Near East while exemplifying adaptive use of the island's resources—such as locally sourced limestone for building walls.

A substantial architectural transformation occurred during the New Neolithic phase, around

[18]. Mureybet: An important archaeological site in northern Syria belonging to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period (approximately 9500 to 8500 BCE). This place is one of the earliest prehistoric rural settlements where evidence of communal living, early agriculture, and domestication of plants and animals has been found. The findings at Mureybet include stone tools, remains of simple architecture, and evidence of the transition of humans from hunting and gathering to farming, playing a significant role in understanding the cultural and economic developments of Neolithic humans.

[19]. Aşıklı Höyük: One of the important archaeological sites in Turkey dating to the Neolithic period (about 8,000 to 6,000 years ago). This site holds special archaeological significance as one of the oldest known rural settlements in the Anatolian region and provides valuable information about early human life, early architecture, agriculture, and animal husbandry.

4000 BCE. At Kissonerga, houses evolved into rectangular structures featuring mud walls reinforced with pebbles and plastered floors. This architectural evolution coincides with profound social changes, including the rise of nuclear family units and the privatization of domestic spaces (Clarke *et al.*, 2007). Concurrently, Choirokoitia, one of the largest Neolithic settlements in Cyprus, displays densely packed circular houses enclosed by massive stone walls, likely constructed for defensive purposes (Le Brun, 1994).

5-3-2. Spatial Organization and Socio-Gender Trends

a) Residential Structures and Daily Activities

At Kalavasos-Agios, clear spatial segregation within residential buildings is evident. Large grinding stones, typically placed in the northern or eastern corners, together with stone mortars, denote grain processing activities. Use-wear analyses confirm these tools were used to grind wild grains such as emmer wheat and einkorn (Knapp, 2013). In broader Near Eastern Neolithic contexts, including sites like Çatalhöyük in Anatolia and Abu Hureyra in Syria, such grain processing tasks are usually attributed to women (Hodder, 2006). However, the absence of organized cemeteries containing human remains in Cyprus makes direct gender associations speculative.

Central hearths in Kissonerga houses, serving for cooking and heating, were often located near grain storage areas. A spatial pattern resembling Levantine sites such as Tell al-Rimah[20] suggests food resource management largely by women (Watson, 1995). Conversely, activities related to sickle blade production, which are linked to agriculture, tend to be attributed to men (Le Brun, 1994). This apparent spatial segregation could reflect an early gendered division of labor, although the lack of osteological data prevents definitive conclusions.

b) Public and Ritual Spaces

Unlike sites in the Near East such as Göbekli Tepe[21] in southeastern Anatolia—renowned for its monumental ritual complexes dating from 9600 to 8200 BCE—Cyprus lacks similar large-scale ceremonial architecture. However, at Kissonerga, archaeological excavations uncovered a circular building with thick walls and a plastered floor, interpreted as serving a symbolic or ritual function. Within this structure, numerous small clay figurines bearing human and animal features have been found, likely used during ritual ceremonies (Steel, 2004). Interestingly, these figurines do not exhibit distinct gender characteristics, which may suggest a diminished emphasis on gender differentiation in symbolic or religious beliefs within Neolithic Cypriot society (Talalay, 1993).

6. Gendered Division of Labor in the Construction of Architectural Space

In archaeological analyses of architectural practices, the role of women has often been overlooked. House construction is typically viewed as an exclusively male endeavor, with limited data addressing the involvement of all participants at different stages—from raw material collection to construction. Lorenzon (2020) rightly observes that this male-biased narrative persists because architecture is often seen as a passive place rather than an active social agent.

A common misconception about gender in ancient societies is that men and women engaged differently in technology, production, and exchange. Traditional interpretations confine women to domestic roles like food processing and pottery production. However, construction activities—encompassing material gathering, building, and finishing—involved significant labor contributions from men, women, and children alike. Archaeological and ethnographic research supports this, revealing that although gendered roles vary culturally and within groups, house and settlement construction generally included both men and women (Amadio, 2023).

Modern analogies show that labor divisions in construction often arise from social conventions rather than inherent capabilities; women tend to perform "simpler" tasks such as raw material collection, flooring, and plastering, while men undertake more physically demanding work like digging and erecting walls and roofs. In some societies, women's greater aptitude for precision explains their role in selecting and preparing

[20]. Tell al-Rimah: An important archaeological site in northern Mesopotamia, excavations of which began in the 1960s, is especially famous for the discovery of cuneiform tablets. These tablets provide valuable information about the history, culture, and economy of the region in the second millennium BCE and are considered reliable sources for studying the ancient history of Mesopotamia.

[21]. Göbekli Tepe, located in the Germuş Mountains in southeastern Anatolia, is a complex of circular, oval, and rectangular megalithic structures built by hunter-gatherers during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period between 9600 and 8200 BCE. These buildings were likely used for religious ceremonies, especially rituals related to burial.
(https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1572/ [Access date: 05.05.2025])

materials for plaster and decoration (Eyifa-Dzidzienyo, 2012). Despite useful frameworks from modern contexts, they cannot be directly projected onto ancient societies, which exhibited greater flexibility and diversity (Sinopoli, 1991).

In the Neolithic Middle East, gender-based labor divisions in constructing residential and ritual spaces provide insight into social, cultural, and economic structures. Studies suggest that construction was a collective, participatory process with fluid, diverse gender roles (Amadio, 2023).

Women appear to have played prominent roles in decorative activities, painting interiors and exteriors with natural pigments like ochre. Such work required skill and precision and held cultural and symbolic significance beyond aesthetics. If further evidence confirms this, it underscores women's active social and cultural participation in Neolithic communities.

Overall, Neolithic construction and economic activities were founded on collaborative labor involving men, women, and children, with no group fully excluded from production (Hodder, 2006).

Table 1 summarizes the main architectural features and gendered activity patterns observed at prehistoric sites in Southwest Asia. These findings enhance our understanding of flexible and shared gender roles in the spatial organization of Neolithic domestic environments.

Table 1. Key Architectural Features and Gendered Activity Distribution in Neolithic Sites of Southwest Asia

Site Name	Architectural Feature	Primary Gender-Associated Activity	Key Observations on Gender Roles
Iran (Chia Sabz Sharghi)	Simple geometric multi-room units	Food preparation and household tasks (commonly female-associated)	Flexible gender roles; shared domestic activities
Iran (Chogamish)	Complex residential and workshop complex	Tool production (mixed gender), food preparation	Complex spatial organization reflecting flexible gendered labor
Levant (Ain Ghazal)	Multi-room houses with storage	Grain storage and processing (women), tool manufacture (men)	Evidence of collective labor; socially constructed gender roles
Cyprus (Kissonerga-Mylouthkia)	Circular and rectangular houses	Craft production and household maintenance (shared)	Spatial organization indicates collaborative and fluid gender roles

As illustrated, domestic spaces were not strictly gender-segregated but characterized by flexible, overlapping, and collective gender roles, supporting contemporary gender archaeology perspectives.

7. Conclusion

In gender archaeology, gender is considered a central element for analyzing the social structures of ancient societies. Simply put, having a gender approach means attributing the artifacts found at archaeological sites to men, women, or other gender identities.

Human-made spaces have a reciprocal relationship with the construction of gender identities. Interpreting architectural spaces through the binary gender ideology lens has often led to viewing domestic and interior architectural structures as women's domain. While women undoubtedly engaged in activities and responsibilities within household spaces, excluding men from this sphere reflects modern societal preconceptions projected onto archaeological findings. In early sedentary communities, residential structures were multifunctional sites where various activities-from tool-making to cooking-were carried out, involving men, women, children, and other gender identities alike. Thus, all groups shared participation in these spaces and their associated tasks. Associating women exclusively with the domestic sphere reflects modern stereotypes that undoubtedly influence the perspective of contemporary archaeologists. However, to study the past, these biases must be set aside, as the past cannot be reconstructed based on present-day ideologies and beliefs. Dividing spaces into domestic and public and attributing each to the work domains of women and men not only misguides research on architectural structures and the understanding of residential spaces in archaeological sites but also reinforces the notion of a strict gender division of labor

among ancestors. This, in turn, leads to overlooking women's roles and professions in ancient societies and results in an incomplete and inaccurate interpretation of our ancestors.

If we examine the archaeological sites of Iran, especially the challenges of gender interpretation in these sites, we will see that, due to the absence of Neolithic cemeteries in Iran, which would allow for DNA analysis or bone pathology, it is not possible to study gender differences in work patterns or other aspects. On the other hand, many previous studies have focused on pottery classification and have paid less attention to social analysis. The current architectural evidence of Neolithic Iran, although rich, has paid little attention to gender dimensions. It is suggested that future research utilize environmental DNA (eDNA) analysis from floor sediments of structures, which contain skin cells, hair, or saliva of inhabitants, to identify the presence of different genders in specific spaces (such as milling or storage areas) and explore their relation to labor division. Furthermore, studying isotopes in stone tools and their association with gender can reveal whether certain tools (like sickle blades) were predominantly used by one gender, and how their exchange patterns might reflect gender roles. For example, in Anatolia, obsidian tools from specific sources are often found in spaces associated with women. By analyzing plant and animal remains in activity areas, consumption patterns can be traced; differences in plant remains (such as cereal grains versus wild fruits) or small animal bones (like rabbits) in the interior and exterior spaces of houses. For instance, at Kissonerga-Mylouthkia, the concentration of snail shells in particular corners of houses may indicate gathering activities by women. Through 3D reconstruction and spatial modeling, it is also possible to reconstruct movement patterns within houses to identify "female" or "male" spaces based on access to tools or resources.

Overall, despite the existing challenges, combining methods such as eDNA, isotope analysis, and digital modeling can compensate for the limitations caused by the absence of cemeteries. The key to success lies in integrating archaeological, genetic, and ethnographic data within an interdisciplinary framework.

Bibliography

Adams, R., 1981. *Heartland of Cities*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Agrest, D., 1988. "Architecture from without: Body, Logic, and Sex", *Assemblage*, 7: 29–41.

Alizadeh, A., 2003. *Excavations at The Prehistoric Mound of Chogha Bonut, Khuzestan, Iran* (OIP 120), Chicago: The Oriental Institute.

Amadio, M., 2023. "Gendered Labor and Architectural Processes in Prehistoric Societies", *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, *30* (1): 67–70.

Banning, E. B., 2002. "Spatial and Architectural Aspects of Neolithization", *Current Anthropology*, *43* (4): 505–530.

Banning, E. B., 2004. "Changes in the Spatial Organization of Transjordanian Settlements", in H. Gebel *et al*. (eds.), *Central Settlements in Neolithic Jordan,* Ann Arbor, Michigan: ex oriente, pp. 215–232.

Banning, E. B., 2010. "Houses, Households, and Changing Society, *Paléorient*, *36*(2): 49–87.

Banning, E. B., and M. Chazan, 2006. "Structuring Interactions, Structuring Ideas: Domestication of Space in the Prehistoric Near East", in E. Banning and M. Chazan (eds.), *Domesticating Space: Construction, Community, and Cosmology in the Late Prehistoric Near East,* Berlin: ex oriente, pp. 5–14.

Bolger, D., and R. P. Wright, 2013. "Gender in Southwest Asian Prehistory", in D. Bolger (ed.), *A Companion to Gender Prehistory,* Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell., pp. 372–394.

Braidwood, R. J., and B. Howe, 1960. *Prehistoric Investigations in Iraqi Kurdistan* (Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization, No. 31), Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

Brami, M., 2014. "House-related Practices and Neolithic Expansion", *Българско е-Списание за Археология*, *4* (2): 161–177.

Byrd, B. F., and D. Kirkbride-Helbæk, 2005. *Early village life at Beidha, Jordan*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Carter, T., *et al*., 2005. "Changing Materialities at Çatalhöyük", in I. Hodder (ed.), *Çatalhöyük perspectives,* Ankara: McDonald Institute, pp. 345–398.

Clarke, J.T., C. McCartney, and A. Wasse, 2007. *On the Margins of Southwest Asia: Cyprus during the 6th to 4th Millennia BC*., Oxford: Oxbow Books.

Darabi, H., 2014. "The Chipped Stone Industry of East Chia Sabz, Seymareh Dam: Technological Changes from Transitional Neolithic to Aceramic Neolithic Time in Western Iran", *Iranian Archaeological Research*, 3 (5): 7–24 (in Persian).

Darabi, H., 2016. "Stone Tools and the Issue of Food Production and Preparation at the Eastern Chiasbuz Neolithic Site", *Iranian Archaeological Research*, 6 (10): 7–26 (in Persian).

Düring, B. S., 2001. "Social Dimensions in the Architecture of Neolithic Çatalhöyük", *Anatolian Studies*, 51: 1–18.

Eyifa-Dzidzienyo, G. A. M., 2012. "Gender Roles in Traditional Building Practices", *Ethnographisch-Archaeologische Zeitschrift*, 53 (1/2): 86–101.

Ferguson, T. J., 1996. *Historic Zuni Architecture and Society*, Arizona: University of Arizona Press.

Gero, J. M., and M. C. Scattolin, 2002. "Beyond Complementarity and Hierarchy", in S. Nelson and M. Rosen-Ayalon (eds.), *In Pursuit of Gender: Worldwide Archaeological Approaches*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 155–171.

Gimbutas, M., 1989. *The Language of the Goddess: Unearthing the Hidden Symbols of Western Civilization, New York:* Harper & Row.

Hastorf, C.A., 1991. “Gender, Space, and Food in Prehistory”, in J. M. Gero and M.W. Conkey (eds.), *Engendering archaeology: Women and prehistory*, Oxford and Cambridge: Wiley-Blackwell, pp.132-159.

Hernando, A., 2002. *Arqueología de la identidad*, Madrid: Ediciones Akal.

Hernando, A., 2016. “Sobre identidad/alteridad y el estudio del pasado”, *Arkeogazte*, *6*: 29–36.

Hodder, I., 2006. *Çatalhöyük: The leopard's tale*. New York: Thames and Hudson.

Hollimon, S. E., 1997. “The Third Gender in Native California”, in C. Claassen and R. Joyce (eds.), *Women in prehistory,* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 173–188.

Hosseinzadeh, Sh., 2016. *Excavation Report of Tel Atashi*, Tehran: Cultural Heritage Organization (Unpublished Field Report) (In Persian).

Irigaray, L., 1993. *Je, tu, nous*, New York and London: Psychology Press.

Kadowaki, S., 2006. “Ground-Stone Tools and Implications for the Use of Space and Social Relations at 'Ain Abu Nukhayla, a PPNB Settlement in Southern Jordan”, in E. Banning and M. Chazan (eds.), *Domesticating Space*, *Construction, Community, and Cosmology in the Late Prehistoric Near East,* Berlin: ex oriente, pp. 53–64.

Knapp, A. B., 2013. *The Archaeology of Cyprus: From Earliest Prehistory Through the Bronze Age*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Le Brun, A., 1994. *Khirokitia: The Neolithic Settlement*, Paris: CNRS.

Leroi-Gourhan, A., 1971. *Évolution et Techniques*, vol. 1, Paris: Albin Michel.

Lorenzon, M., 2020. “Architecture and gender: lessons from building archaeology in Africa” in Nitschke, J.L., Lorenzon, M. (eds), *Postcolonialism, Heritage, and the Built Environment: New Approaches to Architecture in Archaeology*, Cham: Springer, pp.13-25.

Matthews, W., 2004. “Micromorphological and Microstratigraphic Traces”, *Archaeological Dialogues*, 11 (2): 195–206.

Mohammadi Qasrian, S., 2021. “Social Structure and Complexities of Neolithic Societies in Western Iran”, *Iranian Archaeological Research*, 29: 7–32 (In Persian).

Mohseni, M., and M. Bastanfard, 2020. “Study of Cross-Pattern Archetypes in Iranian Architecture”, *Arman-Shahr Architecture and Urbanism*, 13 (31): 125–143.

Molleson, T., 2016. “Bones of Work at the Origins of Labour”, in S. Hamilton *et al.* (eds.), *Archaeology and Women*, New York: Routledge, pp. 185-198.

Murdock, G. P., and C. Provost 1973. “Factors in the Division of Labor by Sex”, *Ethnology*, 12 (2): 203–225.

Peltenburg, E., 2003. *Shillourokambos: A Neolithic Settlement in Cyprus*, Paris: CNRS.

Peterson, J., 2010. “Domesticating Gender”, *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 29 (3): 249–264.

Peterson, J., 2016. “Woman’s Share in Neolithic Society”, *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 79 (3): 132–139.

Pullar, J., 1978. “Excavations at Tepe Abdul Hosein”. *Iran*, 16: 1–20.

Rawes, P., 2007. *Irigaray for Architects*. New York and London: Routledge.

Renfrew, C., 1975. “Trade as Action at a Distance”, in J. Sabloff and C. Lamberg-Karlovsky (eds.), *Ancient Civilization and Trade.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, pp. 3–59.

Robb, J., and O. J. Harris, 2018. “Becoming Gendered”, *American Antiquity*, 83 (1): 128–147.

Rollefson, G. O., 1998. “Ain Ghazal”. *Biblical Archaeologist*, 57 (1): 2–8.

Sinopoli, C. M., 1991. *Approaches to Archaeological Ceramics*. New York: Springer.

Sørensen, M. L. S., 2000. *Gender Archaeology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Steel, L., 2004. *Cyprus before History: from the Earliest Settlers to the End of the Bronze Age*, London: Duckworth.

Stevanovic, M., and R., Tringham, 1998. “The BACH 1 Area”. *Çatalhöyük 1998 Archive Report.* https://www.catalhoyuk.com/archive_reports/1998/ar98_04.html

Talalay, L., 1993. *Deities, Dolls, and Devices: Neolithic Figurines from Franchthi Cave, Greece,* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Vale, A. M., 2019. “The Construction of Space and Gender in Prehistory. An Approach to the Chalcolithic Walled Enclosures of Iberia”, in S. Hamilton *et al.* (eds.), *Gender Transformations in Prehistoric and Archaic Societies,* Leiden: Sidestone Press, pp. 477–491.

Wilson, P. J., 1988. *The Domestication of the Human Species*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Watson, P. J., 1995. “Explaining the Transition to Agriculture”, in T. Price and A. Gebauer (eds.), *Last Hunters, First farmers: New Perspective on the Prehistoric Transition to Agriculture*, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, pp. 21–37.

Wright, K. I., 2000. “The Social Origins of Cooking and Dining”. *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 66: 89–121.