

Gender Roles Depicted in Rock Art: A Case from Western Thailand

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INTRODUCTION

The study of gender has been recognized as an important part of anthropological research for many years. The study of gender roles has been of particular interest and has contributed to our understanding of broad anthropological questions such as the development of inequality and social complexity (e.g., Dahlberg 1981; Conkey and Spector 1984; Bacus et al. 1993). Cross-cultural comparative studies show that gender roles vary in groups with different environments, economies, and levels of social complexity (e.g., Johnson and Earle 1991). Generally, the study of gender roles has centered on identifying the characteristics of each gender and examining the dynamic interrelations of these in response to different conditions in their social and natural environments.

Unfortunately, it is not always easy to identify gender roles in the archaeological record. Besides mortuary evidence, rock art can assist archaeologists to understand social relationships between women and men in the past (e.g., Lewis-Williams 1983). Over the past three decades, numerous attempts have been made to study rock art in Thailand (e.g., Kanchanakom 1972; You-Di 1974; Na Nakorn Panom et al. 1979). However, this rock art research has focused mostly on typology, artistic technique, and design. In this research, very little attention has been paid to the study of gender roles.

This chapter attempts to examine gender roles in past societies through the examination of rock art in the late prehistoric period (4,000–2,000 years b.p.) in western Thailand. It will analyze the spatial distribution of rock art sites and will consider the designs themselves, allowing an investigation of the evidence for group-specific ritual performances. The rock art provides insights concerning the participation of women and men in a variety of activities.

This chapter is organized in the following manner. First, I will review the general concept of gender roles from an anthropological perspective. Second, I will present an overview of three rock art sites from western Thailand. Third, I will examine what can be learned about gender roles from this rock art. In this study, three questions will be considered: What tasks were performed by each gender, what was the relative status of women within the society, and what are the spatial relationships between the gender representations at these rock art sites?

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Before examining the depiction of gender roles in rock art, I will begin by briefly defining the terms used in this chapter. *Sex* is a biological difference between females and males. *Gender* is a cultural construct defining women and men. *Gender roles* are "the differential participation of men and women in social, economic, political, and religious institutions within a specific cultural setting. Gender roles describe what people do and what activities and behaviors are deemed appropriate for the gender category" (Conkey and Spector 1984: 15).

Gender Roles

In the past decade, the simplistic characterization of foraging "Paleolithic" societies as based on male domination in contrast to the agricultural "Neolithic" societies as based on female domination has been reevaluated (e.g., Dahlberg 1981; Leacock and Lee 1987). It is no longer valid to make these kinds of sweeping generalizations since variability in the division of labor and in gender roles has been observed ethnographically.

Generally, a division of labor linked to gender roles has been documented in all cultures. However, the particular tasks assigned to women and men do not always reflect differences in strength, status, and power.

Among non-food producing societies, women contribute about as much to the subsistence economy as do men. In the particular case of tropical environments, women play an important role in production (e.g., Murdock 1949; Eder 1984). The nature of work varies among cultures. Often, gathering is women's work; men usually hunt and fish. However, in some cases, women participate in all the subsistence activities that men do. For example, among the Agta of the Philippines, women do hunt and participate in trade (Griffin and Estioko-Griffin 1985). However, when there are differences in participation, the dominance of one gender in one sphere does not necessarily lead to dominance in

another since women and men do different things. This division of labor by gender is not visibly inequitable; both genders contribute to production in a complementary way. Children also assist adults in various activities.

In the political sphere, men participate more than women (e.g., Leacock and Lee 1987: 37). In non-food-producing societies, social roles are based on age; old people, especially males, often lead the groups. For example, among the Semang of Malaysia, a shaman, or medicine man, is "the most influential individual in the band. He wears a distinctive costume, observes special food taboos, carries an emblematic wand, and often receives a special burial" (Murdock 1949: 101). Social relations are egalitarian. Both women and men can play important roles in ritual performances (e.g., Griffin and Estioko-Griffin 1985). Furthermore, women as well as men participate in ritual ceremonies when large groups aggregate. Ceremonialism involves group ritual that serves to bring people together into larger aggregation (Tonkinson 1991: 155-62).

The development of food production may have led to changes in the division of labor by sex. However, foraging and hunting can still be widely practiced. In the tropics, for example, the Batek of the Philippines, men usually herd animals, clear fields, collect rattan, hunt, and fish, whereas women generally gather plants, cook, take care of children, and collect firewood and water (e.g., Eder 1984). In other words, men's tasks often relate to external activities, and women tend spend more time in household activities. Among food-producing groups, economic exchange or trade is a common phenomenon; for example, the Isabela Agta men often engage in trade with outsiders. Men increasingly spend a certain amount of time away from home (Rai 1990). A division of domestic and public sphere is gradually developed. However, some activities, such as cultivation, collecting rattan, and clearing garden (e.g., Kunstadter, Chapman, and Sabhasri 1978), are cooperatively carried by women and men.

Among food-producing societies, group ritual is associated with larger communities. Ceremonialism serves to define local groups and to maintain regional intergroup relations (Johnson and Earle 1991: 196). Generally, social relations are kin-based societies that have village headmen with limited authority. As was the case in foraging societies, elders, often males, are respected for their experiences and practical knowledge and diplomatic skills. Male leadership varies from headmen to bigmen. Men also lead ritual ceremonies (Rachman 1991: 311-31). However, in some cases, women also perform roles in ritual. For example, among the Kalinga, Abba, and Apayao of the Philippines, women perform the roles of shaman in sacrifice rituals (De Raedt 1991: 360).

In sum, variation in gender roles is generally found in nonstratified societies. There are differences in gender roles among groups, and in some groups,

women do the same things that men do. Among non-food-producing and food-producing societies, the tasks and activities seem to overlap one another. Gender roles vary, depending on economy, social structure, and degree of interaction with the outsiders (e.g., exchange or trade).

ROCK ART DISTRIBUTION IN WESTERN THAILAND

In this section, I will provide a general description of the rock art from three sites in western Thailand: Tham Ta Duang and Khao Plara in Kanchanaburi province and Khao Plara in Uthai Thani province (fig. 11.1). In order to analyze the paintings, the conventions of depicting humans are applied to

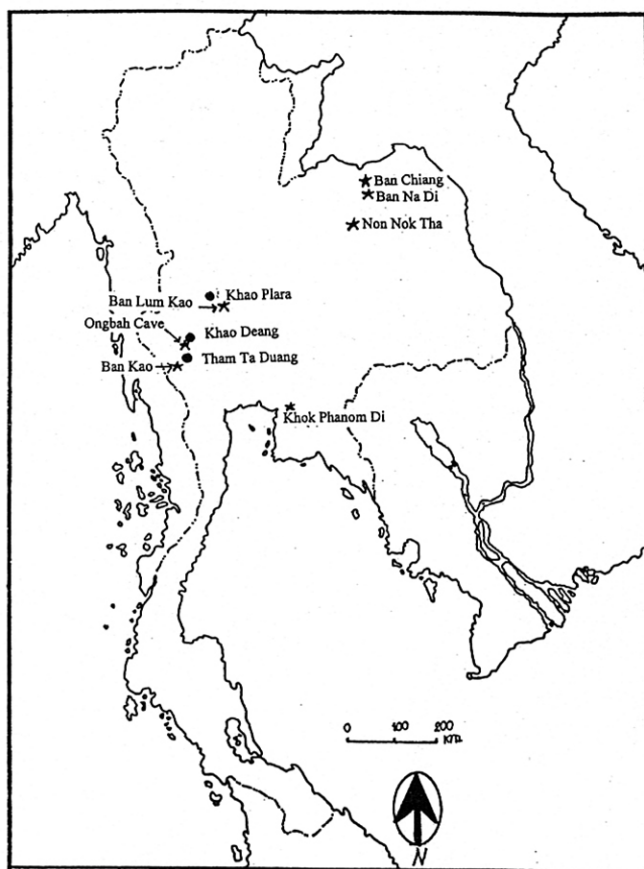


Figure 11.1. Location of rock art and archaeological sites in Thailand mentioned in text.

classify a male and a female, including a sexual organ and styles of hair and clothing.

Tham Ta Duang

Tham Ta Duang is a cave located within a limestone mountain about two kilometers from Khwae Yai River, Kanchanaburi province. Its altitude is 300 meters above sea level. Besides rock art, the site contains artifacts including flaked stone tools, waste flakes, animal bones, and sherds inside the cave (Fine Arts Department 1986, 1988b). The rock art consists of pictographs painted on the cave wall with red ochre that are located approximately two to four meters above the cave floor. The paintings include mostly human figures in silhouette representing a narrative story of a local group. A total of 51 figures are documented (Supakijwilekarn 1990). The paintings range in size from 30 to 45 centimeters.

Human figures are the dominant motif at Tham Ta Duang. There are three painted areas in the cave (figs. 11.2 and 11.3). The presence of two styles suggests that different groups created these paintings.

One style found in the first area is a group of 18 human figures, shown in profile, including men and women, walking in line and carrying two objects, possibly drums (Sangvichien 1974). Most of the figures are in dynamic postures as if they are walking in procession. Interestingly, two male figures are wearing headdresses. Below the previous painting, there are three groups of human figures in silhouette. First, there are human figures standing in line, wearing head-dresses and loin clothes. Next to these figures, there are stick figures of men,

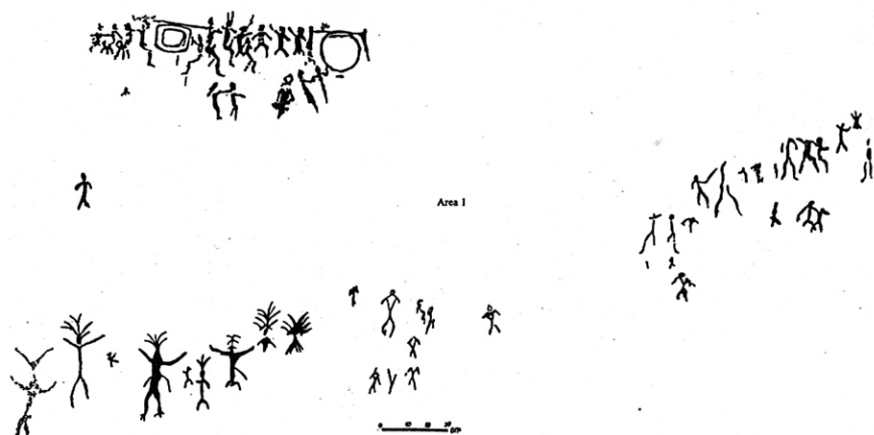


Figure 11.2. Pictographs at Tham Ta Duang, Kanchanaburi province, western Thailand (adapted from Srisuchat 1989; Supakijwilekarn 1990).

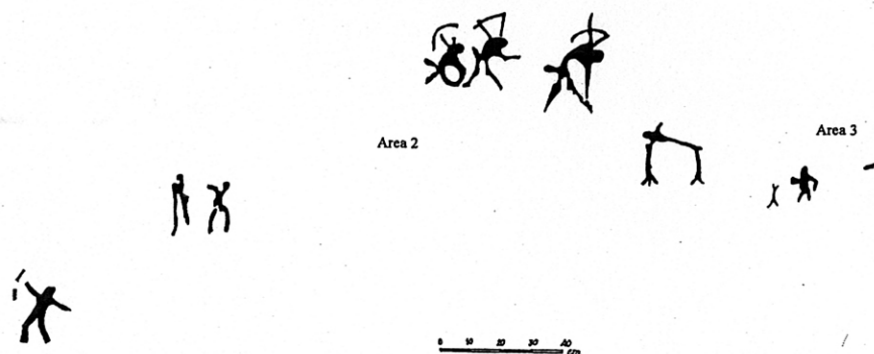


Figure 11.3. Pictographs at Khao Deang, Kanchanaburi province, western Thailand (adapted from Srisuchat 1989; Supakijwilekakarn 1990).

and in the last group there are human figures standing in line and these are in a bad state of preservation. Another style of painting is seen in the second area. Here, there are the poorly preserved human figures and three male figures shooting arrows. Finally, in the third area, there are a human figure, possibly a woman, with decorated shoulder, and fragmentary figures, also poorly preserved, that are possibly human.

Thai scholars suggest that the paintings at Tham Ta Duang depict a ritual procession; dancing possibly was a part of the ritual. Two interpretations of the rituals depicted have been suggested (Sangvichien 1974; Supakijwilekakarn 1990: 50). One idea is that this was a funeral ritual in which drums were used as part of the ceremony. The second suggestion is that this was a fertility ritual. Based on relative dating with Ban Kao and Ongbah caves in western Thailand (Sorensen 1974, 1988), this site dates to between 4,000 and 2,000 years b.p. (Supakijwilekakarn 1990).

Khao Deang

Khao Deang is a cave situated in limestone near the Khwae Yai River, Kanchanaburi province, and is approximately 50 kilometers from Tham Ta Duang. Its altitude is 450 meters above sea level. The rock art consists of pictographs painted on the cave wall with red ochre, located at a height of approximately 3 to 25 meters above the floor. There is a grinding stone made of sandstone found near the painted area (Fine Arts Department 1986; Srisuchat 1989). The rock paintings range in size from 10 to 60 centimeters. The painted forms include human and animal figures in silhouette, human and animal figures in partial silhouette, human and animal figures in outline, and nonfigures. They seem to be narrative. Out of a total of 75 figures, 11 human figures wore clothes, mostly shown in a front view (Supakijwilekakarn 1990: 54).

There are four painted areas along the wall (figs. 11.4, 11.5, and 11.6). The first location contains three human figures in dancing postures and poorly preserved figures.

The second location is the most outstanding rock art feature at Khao Deang. It is a group of people in dancing postures with elaborate dresses, playing musical instruments. This possibly represents a ritual ceremony. In addition, women and men have the long lines extending from the tops of their heads that might be headdresses. There are scenes in rock painting depicting possible family units. For example, women, men, and children have their hands raised as if participating in dancing ritual. Above these figures, in the second of the four main

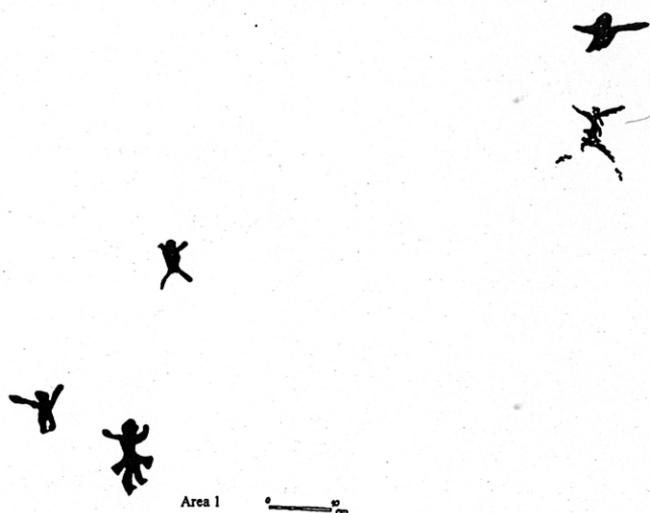


Figure 11.4. Pictographs at Khao Plara, Uthai Thani province, western Thailand (redrawn from Srisuchat 1990).

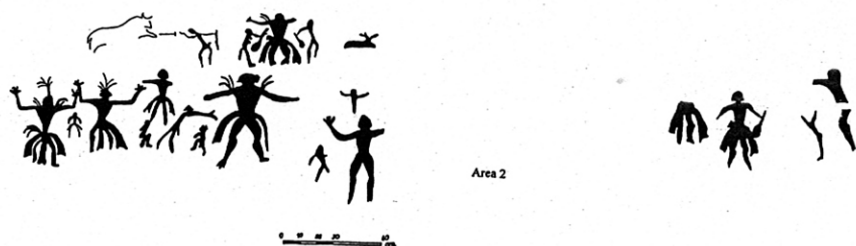


Figure 11.5. Pictographs at Khao Deang, Kanchanaburi province, western Thailand (adapted from Srisuchat 1989; Supakijwilekarn 1990)

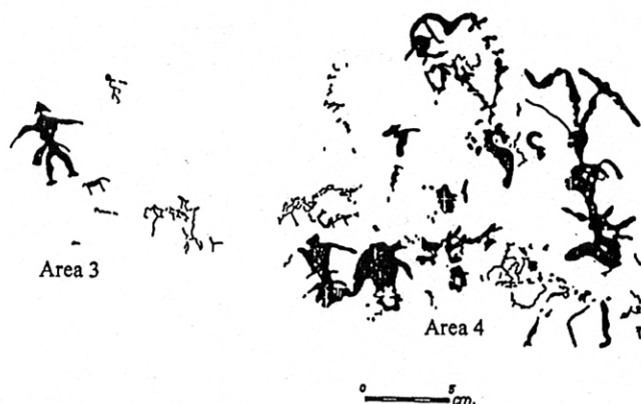


Figure 11.6. Pictographs at Khao Deang, Kanchanaburi province, western Thailand (redrawn from Srisuchat 1989)

areas, there is a figure of a man throwing a spear at a single head of cattle or buffalo. The panel next to the hunting scene contains approximately three individual figures standing separately. There is a larger human figure, possibly a man, who is elaborately dressed. On both sides of this larger figure is a smaller-size person, possibly a child, holding a musical instrument. On the left side, the figure, possibly a girl, is holding a musical instrument in one hand. On the right side, a boy also holds a musical instrument. Below these paintings is a human figure, possibly a woman. Finally, the right end of this location is composed of human figures. Only one can be identified as a female figure wearing loin clothing and her left hand holding a musical instrument.

The third location consists of a group of human figures. Two standing figures are each associated with an animal. A possible female is with a dog, and a male is with a single head of cattle or buffalo. The fourth location is in a bad state of preservation, which makes it difficult to identify.

The majority of the scenes in the rock art at Khao Deang are depicting dancing in ritual ceremony. It is believed that the paintings were part of fertility rituals (Srisuchat 1989: 73). Based on style and subject matter, the paintings at this site possibly were created at the same time by the same groups. Certain styles of loin clothing and headdress in the rock art at Khao Deang are similar to those at Tham Ta Duang, suggesting a relationship between these two sites.

Recently, based on evidence from bronze drums found at Ongbah cave (Sorensen 1974, 1988), Wongthes (1994) suggested that the ritual processions at Tham Ta Duang and Khao Deang might relate to the "Dong Son" culture, an Iron Age culture in Southeast Asia, dated approximately to 500 B.C. He proposed that the objects found in the scene at Tham Ta Duang cave could possibly be Dong-Son drums, and the depictions of humans with elaborate dresses and headdresses are similar to the decorations on Dong-Son drums.

The figure of the dog suggests this might be a food-producing society since dogs are often found in archaeological sites associated with agriculture (e.g., Fine Arts Department 1986, 1988a). In addition, the picture of a man throwing a spear at a head of cattle depicts hunting. It is important to keep in mind that hunting was a part of the subsistence economy in food-producing societies in this region. Based on relative dating from Ban Kao, the site dates to between 4,000 and 2,000 years b.p. (Srisuchat 1989: 73).

Khao Plara

Khao Plara is located in a limestone mountain range in Uthai Thani province, which is north of Kanchanaburi province about 180 kilometers and about 100 kilometers from Khao Deang. Its altitude is about 597 meters above sea level. The rock art consists of pictographs painted on a cliff wall with red ochre or hematite. There is a polished stone adze found at the site. The pictures are located at a height of four to seven meters above the floor and are arranged in a horizontal line. The paintings range in size from 10 to 100 centimeters. The painted forms include human and animal figures in silhouette, human and animal figures in partial silhouette, human and animal figures in outline, stick figures, sketched figures, and nonfigures. The paintings appear to be a narrative story. Out of a total of 40 figures, 30 are human figures. Animal figures include dogs, cocks, a turtle, a frog, deer, and cattle or buffalo (Srisuchat 1990).

There are 12 sets of paintings along the same cliff wall (figs. 11.7 and 11.8). This description of paintings starts from the left and moves to the right. The first is a single human bending forward. The second is composed of three human figures in dancing postures. The third is a single head of cattle in X-ray style. The fourth includes two human figures in dancing postures. The fifth consists of two human figures. One, possibly female, is wearing loin clothing and a headdress. The other is a male figure in X-ray style wearing loin clothing, associated with two dogs, undoubtedly domesticated. This male figure is much larger than the female figure. The sixth area includes a human figure, possibly a woman with elaborate loin clothing and a headdress, pulling a string over an animal, possibly a head of domesticated cattle. The seventh area contains a group of three human figures associated with animals. The left figure is a possible male, wearing elaborate loin clothing and a headdress, bending forward. The middle figure is a person with a chicken on an arm. The third is seated and is possibly a pregnant woman. This figure is associated with a frog and a turtle. The eighth area is composed of possibly a male figure, with loin clothing and elaborate headdress, in a dancing position. The ninth contains two male and animal figures, including possibly a deer or a dog with a headdress and a domesticated dog superimposed, on sketchy human stick figures. One figure of a man is in a dancing pose, raising two hands, whereas another figure is a man, elaborately dressed and with



Figure 11.7. Pictographs at Khao Plara, Uthai Thani province, western Thailand (redrawn from Srisuchat 1990)



Figure 11.8. Pictographs at Khao Plara, Uthai Thani province, western Thailand (redrawn from Srisuchat 1990)

a headdress, pulling a head of cattle that is depicted in X-ray style. The 10th set of figures consists of four outline and abstract figures of possible men; one of these figures is giant sized and superimposes on an X-ray figure of cattle that superimposes on sketchy abstract figures. The 11th contains pictures of a man fighting with a bull, a male figure wearing loin clothing and an elaborate headdress in dancing pose, possibly three male figures, and animal figures of cattle drawn in outline form. Finally, the last set of paintings includes a man drawn in outline form wearing loin clothing and a headdress in a bending-forward position and abstract figures drawn in outline form.

The painting at Khao Plara records important events occurring in the past. According to Srisuchat (1990: 84), the scenes represent ritual performances and hunting expeditions. She suggests that the paintings represent communal art for ritual purposes. Further, this was a fertility ritual that occurred in an agricultural context, based on the depictions of cattle. Hunting scenes record successful hunting activities. The figures of humans with elaborate headdresses and loin clothes are similar to the paintings at Khao Deang by the same prehistoric groups. The many superimposed figures and differing scenes depicted indicate that this site was visited on many occasions over a period of time. Based on relative dating from Ban Lum Kao in Uthai Thani province, central Thailand, the site dates to 2,000 years b.p. (Napintu 1988).

ANALYSIS

I now turn to the questions posed earlier: What tasks were performed by each gender, what was the relative status of women within the society, and what are the spatial relationships between the gender representations at these rock art sites? To address these questions, the chronological relationships among these sites must be sorted out. Once a basic chronological framework has been established, I will analyze the rock art data in terms of style, the activities associated with genders, and gender roles in ritual ceremonies. Finally, I will consider site function.

Chronology

In western Thailand, there is evidence of continuous human occupation beginning in the Late Pleistocene (e.g., Shoocongdej 1996). Because of the lack of absolute dates, it is difficult to determine the age of any particular group of paintings from these three sites. Archaeological excavation has not yet been undertaken at any of these sites. Here, dating is based on the dates associated with surrounding sites and the depictions of domesticated animals and people wearing clothing among the rock art figures. These lines of evidence suggest that these sites date to between the Middle and Late Holocene (or "Neolithic" to "Metal" ages) from 4,000 to

2,000 years b.p., the period when animal husbandry was adopted (Sangvichien 1974; Srisuchat 1989, 1990, 1991; Supakijwilekakarn 1990).

In western Thailand, the earliest evidence of domesticated dogs, pigs, and chickens is reported from the Ban Kao site, based on carbon-14 dates, which dates to approximately 4,000 to 3,000 years b.p. (Sorensen and Hatting 1967: 160). Domesticated cattle and dogs were found at Ban Lum Kao in Uthai Thani province, which dates to 2,000 years b.p. (Napintu 1988) and at Non Nok Tha in northeastern Thailand, dating to 3,000 years b.p. Buffalo were found at Ban Chiang and Ban Na Di in northeastern Thailand in a later period, dating to approximately 2,500 years b.p., when iron was introduced (Fine Arts Department 1986, 1988a). Although animals were already domesticated, prehistoric people continued to hunt wild animals, such as deer, wild pig, and fowl (e.g., Sorensen and Hatting 1967; Fine Arts Department 1988a; Napintu 1988).

Domesticated cereals have not yet been discovered in situ from the archaeological sites in western Thailand from this time period. However, evidence of rice was found at Khok Phanom Di, a contemporaneous coastal site in eastern Thailand (Higham and Maloney 1989; Higham and Thosarat 1994). As for clothing, evidence of prehistoric textiles is found from Ban Chiang, dating to 4,000 to 3,500 years b.p. A fragment of fabric attached to bronze bracelets has been identified as silk and hemp (Aranyanak 1985: 47–54). From the rich archaeological evidence, it is reasonable to assume that during the Middle Holocene, prehistoric people in Thailand had a knowledge of plant and animal domestication.

Furthermore, a relative rock art sequence can be developed on the basis of the superposition of figures, spatial associations suggesting that figures were part of the same scene or painting episode, similarities in style in the rock art, and associated material culture (Srisuchat 1989, 1990). There seems to be a strong link between the three sites; it is clear that the rock art designs might have been part of a continuous tradition. Based on subject content and spatial association. Tham Ta Duang and Khao Deang might have been occupied concurrently, while Khao Plara might date to a slightly later period.

Style

Here, style is used in a broad sense to refer to any aspect of the rock art that conveys information relating to group identity (Hegmon 1992). The style of the rock art includes the form of the painted figures, such as silhouette, partial silhouette, outline, stick figure, and sketched figure. Other aspects of the figures, such as the ways in which loin clothing and headdresses are represented, are also included as a part of the style. Particular styles can be associated with individuals or social groups.

The representations in this rock art are more or less abstract (table 11.1). Admittedly, it is frequently very difficult to determine the sex of the human figures when

they are poorly preserved or if there is insufficient detail. Despite the fact that human figures cannot clearly be sexed biologically, they can still be assigned to gender categories on the basis of particular styles in a given context, such as styles of hair or clothing. For instance, in the rock paintings at Khao Deang, figures of women have a very distinctive head style that is triangular in shape, and dresses. At Khao Plara, figures of women appear to be fatter than figures of men. Children can be identified by the size of the figure in any given context.

In general, figures of both men and women are commonly found at all three sites. Animal figures, found at two of the sites, include dogs, turtles, cattle, buffalo, possibly deer, and chickens. Table 11.2 shows the numbers of figures of humans, animals, and others at the three sites. Because of the poor preservation of most of figures, the number of unidentified figures is quite high.

Table 11.3 shows that the human and animal figures of red color in the form of silhouettes, outline, sticklike figures, and sketched figures are found only at all three sites. The X-ray style and superimposed paintings are only found at Khao Plara. The paintings from these three sites included the repetitive use of simple design elements. The X-ray style found at Khao Plara seems to be more elaborate than the others. However, it is possible that the use of any particular style had particular symbolic meanings.

Table 11.4 shows that three distinct views of the figures are found in the rock art; they appear in profile, in frontal view, and in a twisted perspective. It should be emphasized that the twisted perspective is found only at Khao Plara.

A characteristic feature of the human figures is large legs and elaborate decoration or dress, especially headdresses with feathers. These features are found in rock art throughout the northwestern mountains in Thailand during late prehistory, suggesting that this was a regional style of prehistoric groups at this time.

There are many variations in the postures and actions of the human figures, including sitting, jumping, playing musical instruments, dancing, shooting arrows, plowing, herding, and standing. Movement is emphasized; in the typical representation of dancing, the figure is standing straight with arms up and hands raised or with arms extended to the side.

Additional types of human figures include (1) women and men with elaborate headdresses and wearing loin clothes resembling skirts with an end falling down in the back and sides, (2) women and men wearing loin clothes like skirts

Table 11.1. Types of Figures Found at Three Rock Art Sites

Site	Female	Male	Animal	Unidentified Human and Other Figures	Total
Tham Ta Duang	9	14	—	28	51
Khao Deang	12	5	3	55	75
Khao Plara	6	12	11	11	40
Total	27	31	14	94	166

Table 11.2. Stylistic Variation in Figures











Site	Women	Men	Children	Animal
Tham Ta Duang				
Khao Deang				
Khao Plara				

Table 11.3. Painting Techniques at Three Rock Art Sites

Site	Silhouettes		Outline		Sticklike		X-ray	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Tham Ta Duang	3	6	—	—	6	8	—	—
Khao Deang	12	5	—	—	—	—	—	—
Khao Plara	6	4	—	6	—	—	—	2

Note: Unidentified sex is excluded.

Table 11.4. Painting Views Depicted in Rock Art

Site	Profile		Frontal View		Twisted Perspectives	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Tham Ta Duang	6	8	3	6	—	—
Khao Deang	2	2	10	3	—	—
Khao Plara	1	2	1	2	4	8

Note: Unidentified sex is excluded.

with an end falling down in the back and side, (3) women and men with head-dresses, and (4) nude men and women. Types I, II, and IV were found at all three sites. Type III was found only at Tham Ta Duang (table 11.5).

At Khao Plara, figures of women and men are depicted wearing dresses and ornaments, and various animals are associated with them, such as dogs, cattle or buffalo, a frog, a turtle, a deer, and a cock. Cattle or buffalo and dogs outnumber the other types of animals. It should be noted that dressed figures of women and men are found in dancing contexts, while nude figures appear mostly in hunting scenes. At Tham Ta Daung, sticklike figures of types I and III are found together in a procession; those of type IV are depicted shooting arrows. Finally, at Khao Deang, the three types (types I, II, and IV) of human figures outlined previously are found in a dancing context. A nude figure of man is found in a hunting scene.

Activities Associated with Genders

The major subsistence activities depicted in the rock paintings are hunting, fighting with wild buffalo or bulls, pulling a head of cattle or buffalo, possibly plowing, and possibly herding. Nonsubsistence activities include walking, dancing, and participating in ritual ceremonies.

Table 11.6 shows various activities that are associated with figures of men and women. Women, men, and children are depicted in a variety of activities. Men are represented in more diverse activities than are women. Hunting is the most frequently depicted. Other activities involving men include shooting arrows, holding cattle or buffalo, fighting a bull, carrying objects, and dancing. Women were not depicted in hunting scenes. Women figures frequently are shown associated with men. Women engage in various activities, such as

Table 11.5. Types of Human Figures Found at Three Rock Art Sites

Site	Type I		Type II		Type III		Type IV	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Tham Ta Duang	—	—	—	—	3	5	7	10
Khao Deang	1	1	8	1	—	—	2	3
Khao Plara	3	6	3	2	—	—	—	3

Note: Unidentified sex is excluded.

Table 11.6. Activities Associated with Genders

<i>Site</i>	<i>Women's Activities</i>	<i>Men's Activities</i>
Tham Ta Duang	Walking in line Dancing	Walking in line Carrying objects Shooting arrows Dancing
Khao Deang	Dancing Playing musical instruments Sitting	Dancing Hunting a wild buffalo or cow
Khao Plara	Dancing Sitting Plowing with one head of cattle	Dancing Pulling with a buffalo or cow

sitting, walking, dancing, plowing, and playing an instrument. Children also participate in playing musical instruments and dancing at Khao Deang.

Table 11.7 shows that there seems to be a very complex association between cattle or buffalo as well as dogs and humans, which might be related to the subsistence economy. In general, the animal figures depicted were part of the local fauna in the region that was contemporaneous with the prehistoric artists. These animals are commonly found in archaeological sites (e.g., Sorensen and Hatting 1967; Napintu 1988; Pookajorn 1984). Interestingly, animals are shown not in herds but as individuals. It is important to note that cattle or wild buffalo and dogs seem to play major roles in the region's ritual and symbolic animism. Cross-cultural data show that cattle or buffalo and chickens are commonly sacrificed in various ritual ceremonies. For instance, for the Lua of northwestern Thailand, buffalo are sacrificed for rituals of the major earth spirit, for communal agricultural ceremonies, for the funerals of important persons, for curing a serious illness, and for a guardian spirit of the village. In addition, the Lua eat dogs on ceremonial occasions, and chickens are sacrificed in combination with larger animals during the major agricultural and communal ceremonies (Kunstadter et al. 1978: 101–2). Among the Zhuang of southern China today, frogs are sacrificed in rainmaking ceremonies accompanied by the beating of bronze drums similar to the “Dong Son drum” in order to warrant sufficient rainfall and fertility (Wongthes 1994).

Table 11.7. Associations between Genders and Animals

<i>Site</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
Tham Ta Duang	None	None
Khao Deang	Dog	Cattle or buffalo Dog
Khao Plara	Turtle Cock Frog	Cattle Buffalo or bull Dog Deer

Figures of men are often associated with dogs, cattle, wild buffalo, and weapons, while figures of women are associated with dogs, turtles, chickens, and frogs. Chickens and turtles appear to be associated only with women. Wild animals, such as buffalo and deer, seem to be associated with men. Dogs and cattle are found with both women and men. In the prehistoric food-producing societies in Southeast Asia, cattle played an important role in the subsistence economy since they were used for preparing fields, for a food source, and for transport. Unfortunately, there has been no analysis done on the use of cattle or buffalo from surrounding archaeological sites in the region.

The data indicate that both genders as well as children are equally involved in the ritual ceremonies; this is was not a predominantly male activity. Interestingly, domestic activities are not shown at the three sites, suggesting that these paintings were made for ritual purposes. Here, domestic activity means work carried out within the camp or household.

Gender Roles in Ritual Ceremonies

The different sizes of the human figures wearing loin clothes that end falling down in the back and sides with highly elaborate feathered headdresses and ornaments imply status, authority, or position within the society. At Khao Plara, a figure of a man was depicted in a twisted perspective with two dogs, one on each side (fig. 11.8), possibly symbolizing authority or high status. This man might have been a headman. A figure of a woman with an elaborate headdress and loin clothes is dancing next to him. In addition, there are figures of men and women, painted in X-ray style, wearing bracelets or ornaments, and pulling cattle. These could have symbolized important roles in ritual performances.

At Tham Ta Duang, the figures of men wearing headdresses in the middle of a procession might represent people with authority in the ritual ceremony. In this procession scene, men carried both drums and women walked along in line. Following the first group, another group appears in which all have elaborate headdresses and loin clothes, possibly including both women and men who also played important roles in the procession. They are in dancing postures. The last group appears in nude style and played the least roles in the performance, also in dancing postures.

At Khao Deang, the human figures involved in ritual performances include (1) larger-size figures with highly elaborated dresses and headdresses, indicating that they played important roles in the ritual, especially a larger-size figure of a woman standing in the front; (2) smaller-size figures of men and women with highly elaborate dresses and headdresses, indicating that they played less prominent roles; and (3) nude figures of men and women, implying that they played the least-significant roles.

There is some other evidence that these kinds of social distinctions existed

at this time in this region. At Ban Kao site in Kanchanaburi province, there was a burial of an old man with elaborate and distinctive grave goods compared to others from the site, suggesting that he held a position of high status, possibly a shaman (Sorensen and Hatting 1967: 142).

In addition, there are a few symbolic human figures with animal heads and human bodies, possibly of men, found at Khao Plara. In addition, human figures of undetermined sex with animal feet are documented at Tham Ta Duang. These figures might symbolize a form of shaman who merged with the animals.

Site Function

Based on archaeological evidence found at these three rock art sites, the sites were used occasionally for the performance of communal ritual activities and as temporary camps by prehistoric people. Interestingly, these three sites are located at prominent vantage points that could have contributed to their value as sacred places for specific ceremonies.

Most of the pictographs are on the plain rock surface of the cliff or cave walls. The height of painted locations at Khao Deang and Khao Plara is selected for painting the ritual events. These sites might have been used only for ritual purposes, though the sites might have been visited several times in the past. Tham Ta Duang is more suitable for use both as a temporary camp by foraging populations, as indicated by the presence of pebble tools, and as a ritual site by a food-producing population, as suggested by the presence of pottery and the presence of the painting of the procession.

DISCUSSION

This chapter has explored gender roles in late prehistoric societies in Thailand by examining the depictions of roles and relative status of women and men in rock art. Similarities in style in the paintings at these sites suggest that there was a relationship among these rock art sites. This is especially seen in the identical human figures with elaborate dresses and headdresses, possibly of feathers, found at all three sites. Technically, red is used throughout the western region. Figures were commonly shown as silhouettes, outlines, stick figures, and sketched figures.

The three sites are distributed in a line running in a north-to-south direction. The paintings at Tham Ta Duang and Khao Deang might be contemporaneous. The paintings at Khao Plara appear to have been made during a later period. However, they probably are in the same tradition since the rock paintings share similarities in style and composition, including figures of men, women, and animals, such as dog and cattle.

Clearly, these rock paintings may be generalized representations of the

from these sites appear to be narrative stories. All three sites were possibly used for temporary camps and for ritual purposes, and they appear to have been related, as indicated by the similarities in style in the rock art.

The rituals perhaps served the social function of promoting solidarity among groups. They also could have helped to symbolize ethnic identity among local groups who were brought together to participate in the same ceremonies.

The scenes seem to be formal, stylized, and repetitive. Two identical rituals are found: a ritual procession at Tham Ta Duang and ritual dancing at Tham Ta Duang, Khao Deang, and Khao Plara. One interpretation is that these are fertility rituals (possibly related to rainmaking), which are commonly observed in food-producing societies. Rain brings fertility to crops and other agricultural products. The presence of depictions of cattle, buffalo, chickens, fowl, and turtles might support this interpretation (Srisuchat 1989, 1990; Supakijwilekarn 1990). In particular, the figures of a frog and a turtle are associated with a pregnant woman. In Thailand today, fertility rituals are usually practiced during times of crisis, for example, a drought. This ritual incorporates song, music, and dance (Vallibhotama 1993: 153–63). Furthermore, buffalo is the most important animal for subsistence economy and affects social status in the food-producing societies in Southeast Asia today, and it is often killed in important ritual ceremonies, such as funerals and communal rituals (e.g., Condominas 1977). However, the nature of rituals in late prehistoric Thailand needs to be investigated further through the archaeological study of sites in the region.

In terms of activities associated with genders, there is no archaeological evidence of associations between particular artifacts and individuals of specific genders from these sites because of the limited nature of the archaeological evidence. However, the rock art provides evidence of activities being performed by individuals of each gender, although domestic activities are rarely depicted at these sites. The most common scenes depict hunting associated with men, indicating that men's roles were still closely associated with this activity. Herding was also a man's activity. Plowing appears to have been associated with women, suggesting that women played a prominent role in subsistence economy. Communal rituals such as dancing are well represented in the rock art paintings, which indicate that both women and men participate in rituals such as dancing and playing music. In certain ritual performances, women would play major roles, while men would have important positions in other ritual ceremonies, as is commonly observed in food-producing societies.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the roles of women and men through the study of rock art from three sites in western Thailand. General conclusions can be

First, there is very little available and reliable archaeological evidence related directly to these rock art sites. Therefore, we have poor chronological control and little information regarding subsistence and settlement. Consequently, it is extremely difficult to place these sites into an absolute time frame and to understand the past cultural system. However, various lines of evidence suggest that the rock paintings were probably created by food-producing populations. Based on relative dating from Ban Kao, Ongbah, and Ban Lum Kao from the same region, these sites could possibly date to between the Middle and Late Holocene, or 4,000 to 2,000 years b.p. AMS (accelerated mass spectrometry) dating technique might be used in the future to define the chronology more accurately. For the present, relative dating has provided a chronological baseline for studying the rock art.

Second, from an economic perspective, men's activities appear to relate to hunting large animals, such as wild buffalo or bulls, and herding cattle. Women might possibly participate in agricultural activities, such as plowing and herding activities. Among other activities, women and men as well as children participated in dancing in ritual performances.

Third, regarding the relative status of women in these societies, women played important roles in ritual performances and the subsistence economy. In these early food-producing societies, there was not a sharp division between the domestic and the public sphere. Women's roles and status were equal to men's, and they could participate equally in ritual ceremonies, although the lack of representations of the domestic sphere makes it difficult to know how much men participated in this realm. Furthermore, children participated in dancing and playing instruments in ritual performances.

Fourth, cattle and dogs possibly had a symbolic meaning in fertility rituals in food-producing communities since they are important animals in subsistence economies. Finally, the nature and variability of gender role should be further investigated archaeologically in Southeast Asia. In particular, it would be interesting to examine the relationships between the genders and various animals in mortuary ritual.

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