

## ‘Overly simplistic’: Women may have been more than just ‘gatherers’ in ancient times, studies suggest

Sexual divisions of labor characterized ancient societies, but were not as rigidly enforced as has often been assumed, [two] new studies suggest. “The traditional view [in anthropology] of ‘man the hunter and woman the gatherer’ is likely flawed and overly simplistic,” says forensic anthropologist Marin Pilloud.

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[128 skeletons of 5,000-year-old Californian] hunter-gatherer women display damage from arrows and sharp objects such as knives comparable to skeletal injuries of 289 presumed male warriors, Pilloud and her colleagues found. Whether those women fought alongside men or carried out other dangerous battle duties, such as sneaking up on enemies to cut their bow strings, can’t be determined from their bones.

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A second skeletal analysis suggests that nomadic herders in ancient Mongolia, bordering northern China, trained some women to be warriors during a time of political turbulence and frequent conflicts known as the Xianbei period, says anthropologist Christine Lee of California State University, Los Angeles. The Xianbei period ran from 147 to 552.

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Lee now plans to look for skeletal evidence of female warriors in more Mongolian tombs dating to as early as around 2,200 years ago.

“Badass women may go back a long way in northern Asian nomadic groups,” she says.

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