

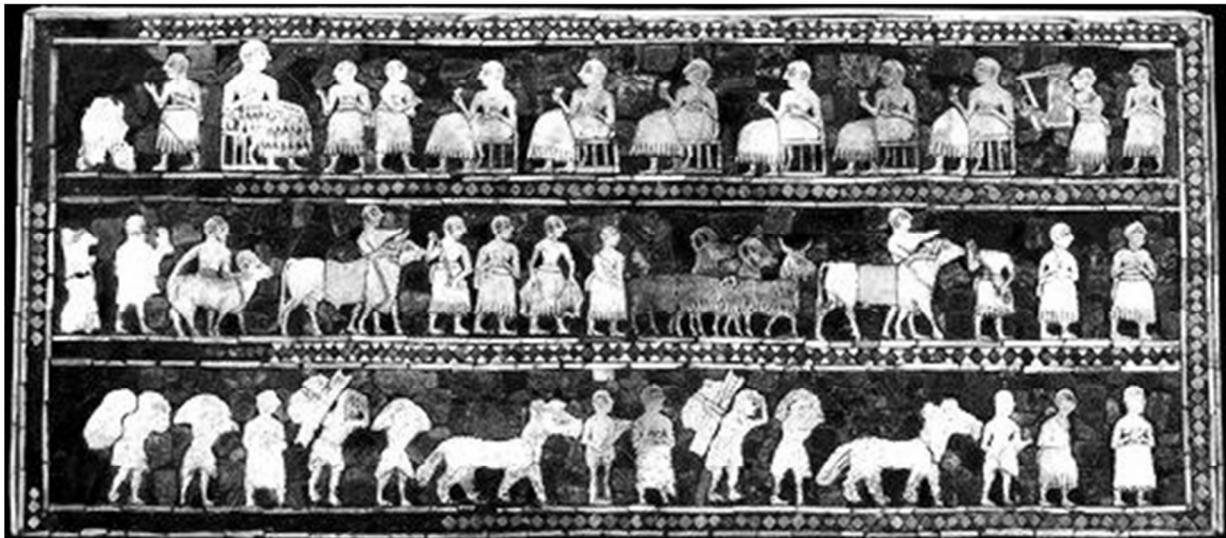
Based on the following documents, how did ancient cultures reinforce that women's status was subordinate to men's status? What evidence is there of women's power or authority in these patriarchal societies? Explain what additional types of documents might be helpful in making these assessments.

Historical background: All of the first complex societies were patriarchal (dominated by males). Scholars can only speculate on the reasons for this social structure. One theory is that in urban areas with specialized labor, men had specialized (public) tasks and women were assigned to childbearing and domestic responsibilities (private tasks). The following documents represent some of the first written documents of the first civilizations.

1. The Gilgamesh Epic, ca. 2800 BCE

The city of Shurippak, a city which, as thou knowest,
Is situated on the bank of the river Euphrates. That city
was corrupt, so that the gods within it
Decided to bring about a deluge, even the great gods,
As many as there were: their father, Anu;
Their counsellor, the warrior Bel;
Their leader, Nimurta; Their champion the god Enlil.
But Ea, the lord of unfathomable wisdom, argued with
them.
Their plan he told . . . saying . . . "Pay attention!
Thou man of Shurippak, son of Ubara-Tutu,
Build a house, construct a ship;
Forsake thy possessions, take heed for thy life! Abandon
thy goods, save (thy) life,
And bring living seed of every kind into the ship."

2. The Royal Standard of Ur, ca. 2600-2400 BCE "Peace" Panel



3. Advice of lord [nobleman] Ptahhotep to his son, ca. 2200 BCE

If you are a wise man, bring up a son who shall be pleasing to Ptah [a god]. If he conforms his conduct to your way and occupies himself with your affairs as is right, do to him all the good you can; he is your son, a person attached to you whom your own self has begotten. Separate not your heart from him. . . . But if he conducts himself ill and transgresses your wish, if he rejects all counsel, if his mouth goes according to the evil word, strike him on the mouth in return. Give orders without hesitation to those who do wrong, to him whose temper is turbulent; and he will not deviate from the straight path, and there will be no obstacle to interrupt the way.

If you are wise, look after your house; love your wife without alloy. Fill her stomach, clothe her back; these are the cares to be bestowed on her person. Caress her, fulfill her desires during the time of her existence; it is a kindness which does honor to its possessor. Be not brutal; tact will influence her better than violence; . . . behold to what she aspires, at what she aims, what she regards. It is that which fixes her in your house; if you repel her, it is an abyss. Open your arms for her, respond to her arms; call her, display to her your love.

Do that which your master bids you. Twice good is the precept of his father, from whom he has issued, from his flesh. What he tells us, let it be fixed in our heart; to satisfy him greatly let us do for him more than he has prescribed. Verily a good son is one of the gifts of Ptah, a son who does even better than he has been told to do. It is finished, from its beginning to its end, according to that which is found in writing.

4. Hammurabi's Law Codes, ca. 1780 BCE

137. If a man wishes to separate from a woman who has borne him children, or from his wife who has borne him children: then he shall give that wife her dowry, and a part of the usufruct [use] of field, garden, and property, so that she can rear her children. When she has brought up her children, a portion of all that is given to the children, equal as that of one son, shall be given to her. She may then marry the man of her heart.

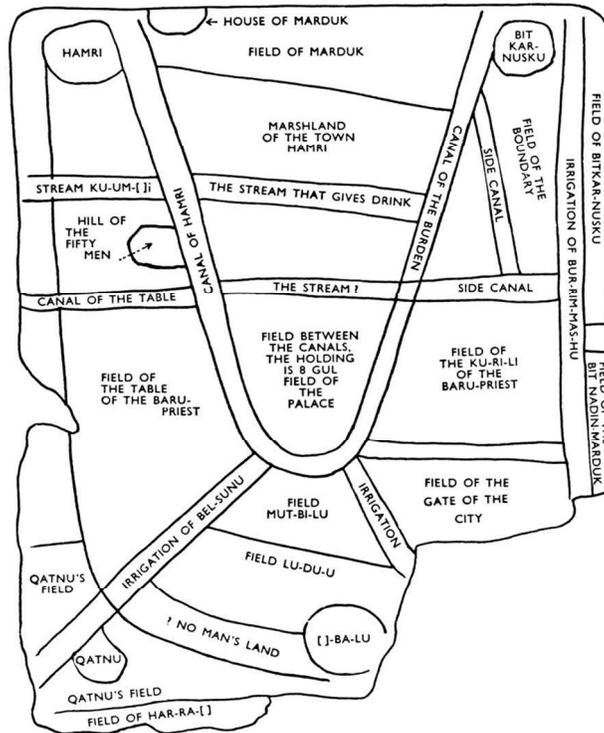
2. If a man wishes to separate from his wife who has borne him no children, he shall give her the amount of her purchase money and the dowry which she brought from her father's house, and let her go.

138. If a man take a wife, and she bear him no children, and he intend to take another wife: if he take this second wife, and bring her into the house, this second wife shall not be allowed equality with his wife.

145. If a man take a wife and she give this man a maidservant as wife and she bear him children, and then this maid assume equality with the wife: because she has borne him children her master shall not sell her for money, but he may keep her as a slave, reckoning her among the maidservants.

147. If she have not borne him children, then her mistress may sell her for money.

5. Mesopotamian Map, ca. 1300 BCE



6. Book of Exodus, ca. 8th century BCE

Do not covet your neighbor's household: you must not covet your neighbor's wife, his slave, his slavegirl, his ox, his donkey, or anything that belongs to him...

When you purchase a Hebrew as a slave, he will be your slave for six years; in the seventh year he is to go free without paying anything.

When a man sells his daughter into slavery, she is not to go free as a male slave may. You must not wrong a widow or a fatherless child. If you do, and they appeal to me, be sure that I shall listen; my anger will be roused and I shall kill you with the sword; your own wives will become widows and your children fatherless.

7. Shihjing, or Book of Songs, ca. 900-600 BCE

I beg of you, Zhong Zi,
Do not climb into our homestead;
Do not break the willow trees we have planted.
Not that I care about the willows,
But I fear my father and mother.
You, Zhong Zi, are to be loved,
But the words of my parents,
Are also to be feared.

I beg of you, Zhong Zi,
Do not climb over our wall;
Do not break the mulberry trees we have planted.
Not that I care about the mulberry trees,

But I fear the words of my brothers.
You, Zhong Zi, are to be loved,
But the words of my brothers,
Are also to be feared.

I beg of you, Zhong Zi,
Do not climb into our garden;
Do not break the sandalwood trees we have planted.
Not that I care about the sandalwood trees,
But I dread the talk of people.
You, Zhong Zi, are to be loved,
But the talk of people,
Is also to be feared.