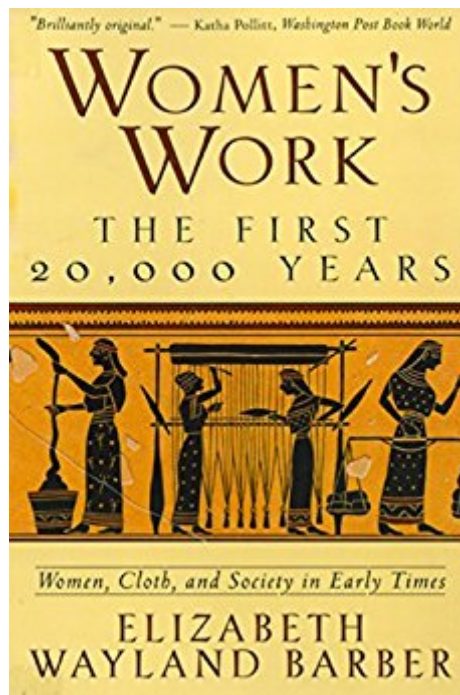




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# Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years Women, Cloth, And Society In Early Times



## Synopsis

"A fascinating history of [a craft] that preceded and made possible civilization itself."

•New York Times Book Review  
New discoveries about the textile arts reveal women's unexpectedly influential role in ancient societies. Twenty thousand years ago, women were making and wearing the first clothing created from spun fibers. In fact, right up to the Industrial Revolution the fiber arts were an enormous economic force, belonging primarily to women. Despite the great toil required in making cloth and clothing, most books on ancient history and economics have no information on them. Much of this gap results from the extreme perishability of what women produced, but it seems clear that until now descriptions of prehistoric and early historic cultures have omitted virtually half the picture. Elizabeth Wayland Barber has drawn from data gathered by the most sophisticated new archaeological methods—methods she herself helped to fashion. In a "brilliantly original book" (Katha Pollitt, Washington Post Book World), she argues that women were a powerful economic force in the ancient world, with their own industry: fabric.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I have the hard back copy first edition and I wanted a portable version so I purchased it for my Kindle and smartphones. This is a fantastic well written book detailing the early history of textiles and their role in history. Its interesting to read and easy to understand. This book isn't just for women but for everyone as it gives you a great understanding into the labor intensive process of early textile production.

This is a wonderful book about the history of textiles. After reading this, history will never be the same. For thousands of years, an overwhelming portion of human labor revolved around textiles. Who knew? Anyone interested in anthropology, archeology, women, or clothes will love this. It is one of those books that you can never forget.

This book was referenced in Maggie Casey's Spinning One class. I became intrigued by the question: How did textiles/cooking/home become "women's work." I snuggled up to this book and was unprepared for the scope of the book, as well as the temporal and geographic romp I would be carried into. The romp starts 30,000+ years ago. I am easily bored, and this book was so gripping I made it half way through on the first sitting. Barber manages to weave together the disciplines of Archeology, Anthropology, History and Literature into a cohesive core that does answer the question. The scope of this book is amazing. I highly recommend this book!

A tantalizing glimpse into the tools and history of those who worked with fiber and made cloth, and how they wore it. The first part of this book is as exciting as when I recently saw two strand thigh spinning. Thousands of years before spinning wheels, there was thigh spinning. Thousands of years before tee shirts and jeans there were string skirts. A woman from Ghana once told me her little girls wear a string around their waist. Connecting the dots from 20,000 year old woman carvings adorned with string to a tradition still practiced today is amazing to contemplate.

This book has changed my perspective on textiles. Maybe I should say it has given me a perspective on textiles. Cloth and clothing are so common in our lives that we never think of their history and everything that went into developing them. This book corrects that. It's a terrific read on a fascinating topic. I especially love the chapters on "The String Revolution" and "Behind the Myths". This book is an important contribution to women's history as well as the history of textiles. HIGHLY recommended.

As a woman who weaves, though I do not yet consider myself a weaver, I was intrigued by the premise of this book: that with fiber arts, even 20,000 years ago, women were economically important within their societies. Knowing that spinning and weaving are not simple tasks, but finding little information on the economic importance of these activities, I turned to Barber's work, which is well-researched and thoughtful. She writes easily, including photographs and diagrams which further help explain her points. And, kudos, she includes maps!!! Drawing on her own knowledge of and experience with weaving, she sets the work of medieval and early modern women into the history and culture of their times. Readable, accessible, and fascinating: I'm delighted to have run across this book, and recommend it to those interested in the often untold story of the contributions of "women's work" to the economy of their communities.

This is a fascinating book. The author delves deeply into linguistic connections between various early civilizations to pinpoint the place and time of certain innovations and cultural connections in textile making as women's work. This scholarly work then goes on to cover the rise of textiles as an industry in early trade, and economic power when, of course, men became much more involved in it. It is a little dry in the beginning and might put a non textile aware person off, but get through that, and it becomes much more accessible.

I ran across this book almost by accident. I was feeling rather glum one day, and I asked my wife to recommend a book for me - something that was out of the ordinary and would cheer me up. She recommended "Women's Work". I was a little skeptical that it would appeal to a techie guy like myself, but soon I was absorbed in Elizabeth Wayland Barber's storytelling. "Women's Work" tells the story of textiles in human history. In nearly every society, spinning, weaving, and sewing have been done almost exclusively by women, so the history of textiles is also a history of women's work - or one important part of it. That's still reflected in our language, for example, when we refer to the "distaff side" - a distaff being a stick used to hold fiber for spinning. Wayland Barber tells her story with wit and clarity. And more than that, she tells the story of the story - that is, she traces not only what we know about textiles in ancient times, but describes how we know it. So, this is not only a fine history, but it's a fine, readable treatise on historiography as well. I can warmly recommend this book to anyone interested in textiles, or women's history, or how history is written, or who has the blues and just wants to read a darn good book.

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