

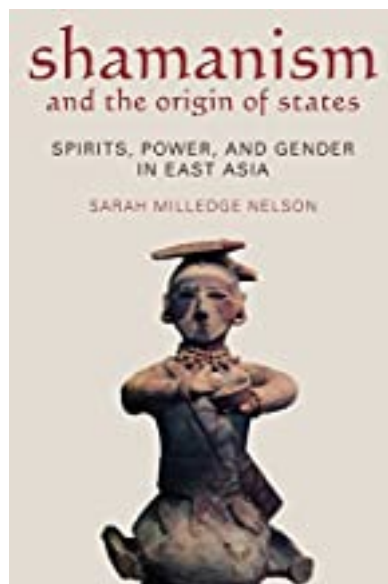
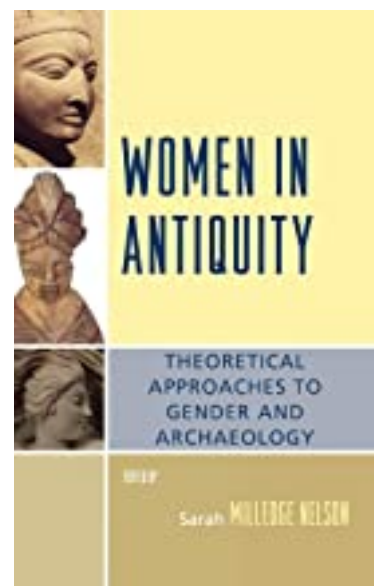
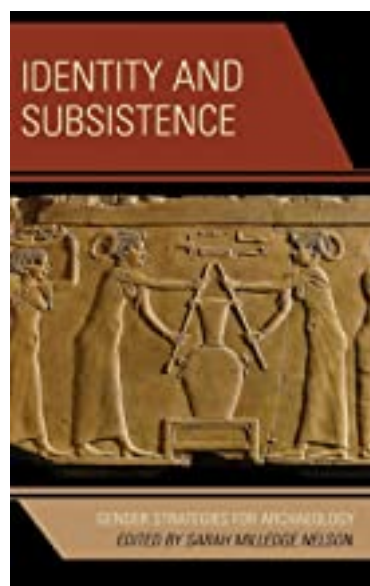
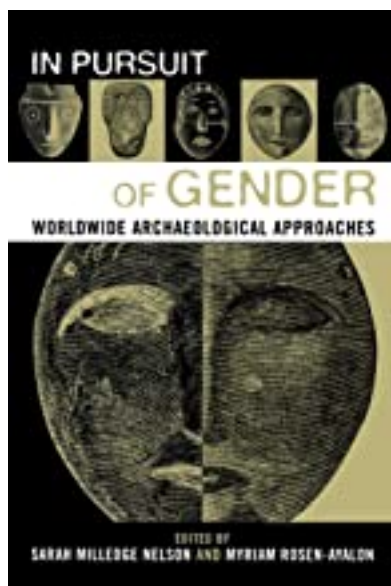
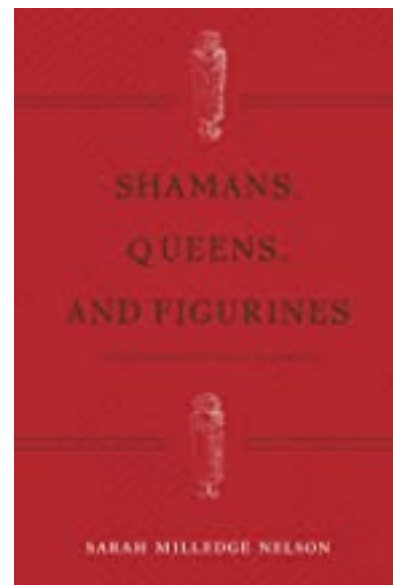
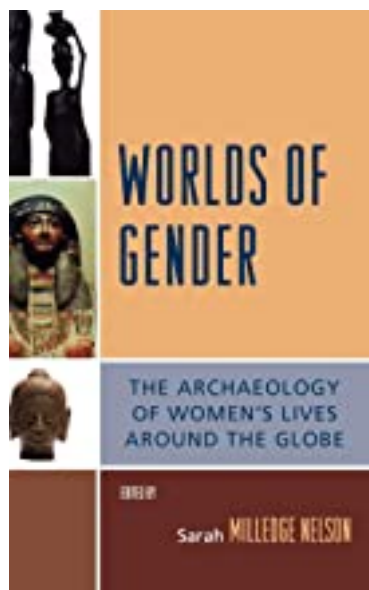
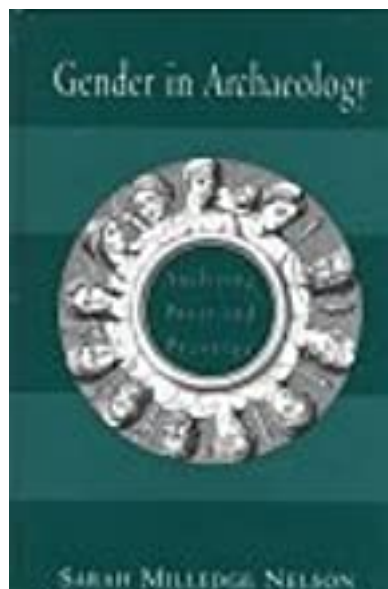
## Sarah Nelson: A Mind and Spirit That Could Not Be Curbed

Alice Kehoe

Although the U.S. Civil Rights Act had been passed in 1964, as late as the 1980s, Anthropology professors were advising women grad students that to work in the field, they needed to marry a man in the profession, assist him in his work but not expect to be recognized as a professional. Even in the 1990s, married women grad students were advised to postpone having children until they were established Ph.D.s. Those few of us who disregarded the advice, were permitted to sit in classrooms, write papers, take exams, but neither mentored nor funded.

Sarah could not be repressed. She even created her own press, RKLOG Press (say "*Archaeolog*") to publish her novels *Spirit Bird Journey* and *Jade Dragon*.





The Blackfoot, whom I have been working with for many years, would say *inawa'sioskitsipaki* to describe Sarah Nelson: a "leader-hearted woman". Leader-hearted women are matrons of families, strong, hard-working and skilled, intelligent, well-spoken, generous and kind. They aren't eager to lead; people turn to them because they have both vision and a good sense of reality. They listen. They praise others; they don't boast. They are doers, not talkers.

Others in this session will tell about Sarah's pioneering work in Korea. She later wanted to expand her research territory into northeast China, and I remember her recounting how she got off the train at the local station where the Chinese colleague was to meet her. After a few minutes, there was no one else in the station but her and a man apparently waiting for someone else. After nearly an hour, she told me, the man finally got up and approached her, asking whether she knew about the foreign archaeologist due to arrive that day, a Doctor Sarah Nelson. He was astonished that "Sarah" is a feminine name, and Doctor Nelson was the woman before him. The Chinese project didn't work out, for several reasons, which illustrates the multiple barriers and quicksands that Sarah faced as she led her significant, eye-opening archaeological projects in Asia and also in Colorado—people in Colorado knew "Sarah" would be a woman, but even at University of Denver, were not prepared to recognize the strong scientific mind behind the warm womanly smile.



Sarah in China — photo with her 2010 lecture on Hongshan

A woman who, like Sarah, is a leading archaeologist and retired from academic leadership in her university, received her B.A. in Anthropology from University of Michigan at the time Sarah entered graduate work there. This woman led her class as a senior, yet was denied entrance to

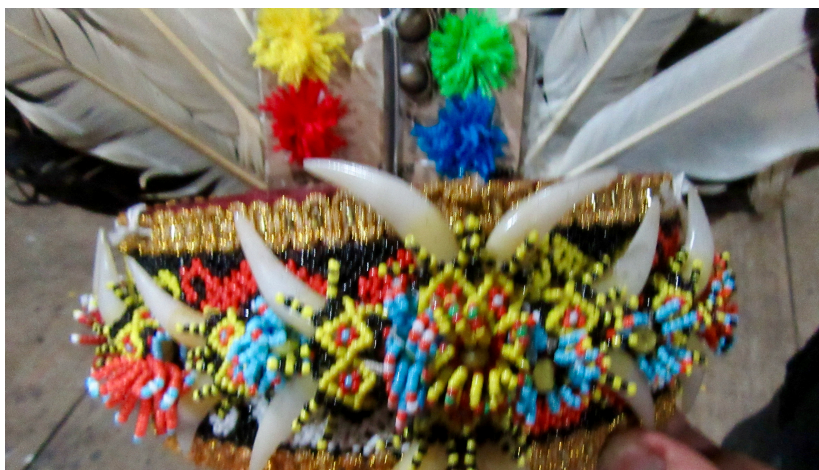


the graduate program. As a single bright woman, she apparently was too much a threat to the dominance of men in archaeology. Sarah, a doctor's wife with three kids and a sweet smile, was admitted to the so-called "benign neglect" endured by women who played "nice". Thinking over Sarah's situation when she entered graduate school; her dissertation and subsequent work in a very foreign country with its own machismo cultural pattern; her struggles at Denver with university administration that for years resisted her efforts to strengthen Anthropology and support women faculty and students; and her compliance with much of the doctor's wife role, I believe Sarah Milledge Nelson accomplished more, against greater odds, than any other woman of our generation. And always graced by that beautiful smile.

What Sarah Faced during her life:



She deserved a queen's crown



—Dayak, Kalimantan