

SITUATING GENDER IN EUROPEAN ARCHAEOLOGIES

Edited by

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Front Cover Illustration

Gold foil from Rogaland in western Norway showing a man and a woman,
often interpreted as the Nordic Vanir god Freyr and his wife Gerd
from the family of Giants. 7th–8th century AD.

(Photo: Svein Skare. © Bergen Museum, University of Bergen, Norway.)

Back Cover Illustration

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Situating Gender in European Archaeologies: Case Studies

SANDRA MONTÓN-SUBÍAS – MARGARITA SÁNCHEZ ROMERO

Approaches to gender theory and the research history of gender archaeology are emphasized in the papers in the first part of this book. In this section, we present seven papers that explore case studies in which situated knowledge (“situatedness”) is implicit in the national traditions and other regional approaches to archaeology that are represented. From Spain to Russia through Norway and Cyprus, these studies address gender relations in different chronological periods and from particular standpoints, and they illustrate the need for alternative approaches to archaeology for each of the areas and periods under consideration. They stand as good examples of how an epistemological standpoint combined with the choice of source material direct – but do not determine – the issues addressed.

Natalia Berseneva, Irina Shingiray, and Lourdes Prados present studies based on burial analyses. They consider respectively the Sintashta culture (the Middle Bronze Age of the South Urals), different groups of the Northwestern Caspian region during the Early Middle Ages, and the Iron Age in the Iberian Peninsula. All three authors demonstrate a rather “processual” attitude to the archaeological sources but combine this with somewhat unconventional, value-laden questions.

From an Anglo-American perspective it is apparent that Berseneva writes from within a relatively monolithic East European archaeological tradition that combines culture history and nomothetic “scientific” ideals that are coloured by decades of Marxist ideology followed by recent years of primarily economic liberalism. Yet her work also reveals an opening towards Western academic influences. Focusing on children may be seen as a step towards introducing diversity and even individuality into the collective past of this tradition of interpretation. Berseneva emphasizes the contribution that children may have had in past societies. In the academic context of Russian archaeology, this issue has long been overlooked, as has gender. With her paper Berseneva aims at beginning to fill this gap by showing how children become adults in frameworks of specific gender stereotypes and gender identities.

In many ways, Shingiray’s paper relates to this same Eastern European academic tradition, but as a student at an American university, her relationship to Russian scholarship is different. She writes from outside that tradition and can draw freely from a wide range of approaches without having to stay within the

limits of a very strict archaeological regime. On the other hand, she has American academic standards to meet. The result is a new and interesting way of seeing the cultures of people living in the Caspian region in the Early Middle Ages. *Value* is the aspect she addresses and uses explicitly to interpret her findings as she claims that the study of the Turk/Khazar state-organized nomadic societies needs to embrace new cultural approaches that reassess the roles of kinship, religious paradigms, ethos, and value systems together with gender, identity, and materiality. In tune with these new lines of inquiry, she shows how gender/ritual arrangements in the mortuary record display how these societies operated and transformed.

Lourdes Prados also deals with burials but differs from the previous two papers by exploring the association between grave goods and the sex of the deceased in Iberian Iron Age cemeteries. In a framework of profound social and economic changes, she analyses the transformations reflected in the rigid and hierarchical burial system that took place during the 5th–4th centuries BC. To her, a change of mentality accompanied a shift in the representation of women, portraying aristocratic status through elaborate dress and jewellery, both in iconographic representations and in the richness of the objects that were deposited in their tombs. One of Prados' focal points is the "Dama da Baza", which refers to a statue found in the grave of an approximately 30-year-old woman buried in the beginning of the 4th century BC and accompanied by the largest collection of weapons ever found in an Iberian funeral. The Dama da Baza burial along with several other cases of weapons in women's aristocratic graves from the same period allow Prados to challenge the ruling paradigm of associating weapons with men only. Thus, in this way a conventional mortuary analysis when supported by alternative theoretical approaches – in this case gender – can open avenues for new interpretations of social and ideological gender roles.

The next four papers draw from disparate types of evidence. The first assesses gender assumptions concerning the iconographic analysis of artistic expression, the next two examine domestic artefacts and spaces in an attempt to understand gender relations, and the final paper is an ethnoarchaeological investigation of power relationships. These case studies range from Bronze Age Cyprus, to medieval Norway, Bronze Age Spain, and contemporary Brazil.

Maria Mina questions female and male identities and roles on the basis of a small group of Early Bronze Age anthropomorphic figurines from the Cyclades. She focuses especially on hunter-warrior figurines and shows how current gender stereotypes influence the interpretation of archaeological findings and perpetuate

androcentric assumptions about Aegean prehistoric society, paying special attention to the anatomical ambiguities present in the figurines. In so doing, she, like Prados, challenges the exclusive association between men and warfare/hunting, and thereby also confronts recent interpretations of European Bronze Age societies based on seafaring warriors. Since gender identities have not been seriously questioned in Cycladic archaeology, highlighting the problematic foundation of current models has potentially wide-reaching consequences.

The following two papers emphasize the potential contribution that the study of relations between artefacts and spaces that are connected to everyday contexts and maintenance activities can offer for understanding gender relations. Gitte Hansen makes use of the well-known but often disregarded mass material from urban settlements in order to identify women and their work in 12th-century Bergen on the west coast of Norway. In contrast to macrostructural approaches to social interpretation, attention is given to actors and politics at the everyday level of society through a reassessment of food production remains – namely, sausage pins – traditionally considered an insignificant category of material culture. However, she shows that a closer analysis of the spatial distributions of these items may reveal a new urban trade in early Bergen based on a reorientation of the activities of migrant rural women who entered the urban setting.

In a case study from southeastern Spain, Eva Alarcón and Margarita Sánchez Romero illustrate the archaeology of maintenance activities, as grounded in the theoretical contribution by Sandra Montón-Subías in the first section of this book. They analyse the connection between daily life spaces and material culture found in the Bronze Age settlement of Peñalosa (Baños de la Encina, Jaén, Spain). Alarcón and Sánchez Romero target reconstructing the everyday life of a particular family unit in the site, studying the range of maintenance activities that took place in a single household. To achieve this goal, they focus on social practices such as storing, preparing, and cooking food; textile production; fixing and maintaining tools and utensils; and children's socialization and learning practices.

The papers by Hansen and by Alarcón and Sánchez Romero both stem from academic environments where gender studies in archaeology are now generally well established. Hansen, however, writes from the margins of such a context, as urban archaeology in Scandinavia has traditionally focused on the “big questions” of *where* and *why* urban settlements emerged or developed. Tracing *who* was involved has often been restricted to studying kings or churches as the primary agents in these urban locations. Bringing ordinary people into the process is definitely a move into a new and potentially very productive direction. The

Spanish situation is different. Here, Bronze Age settlements have been one of the focal points of the development of the “maintenance” approach to an archaeology of gender, in which the authors of the above-mentioned paper have also taken part but which is still relatively unknown in the context of Anglo-American gender studies. In both papers, we again see conventional methods applied to new questions giving fresh insights.

Finally, from an ethnoarchaeological perspective and with a special focus on task differentiation, Almudena Hernando suggests that studying gender and gendered relationships in societies without functional divisions of labour or work specialisation may ultimately help us understand how patriarchy was developed. She examines gender and kinship among the Awá from Maranhão, Brazil, and analyses the structural correlation between the categories of gender and affinity/consanguinity in order to understand how such societies construct their relationships. The great advantage of anthropology and ethnoarchaeology compared to traditional archaeology is that researchers within the former disciplines have direct access not only to material culture but also to the ways that the people in question think about themselves. This verbal communication is of course constrained by differences in language and conceptualisation. Even so, such studies provide a varied set of models through which we can understand relationships between material and immaterial culture in pre-industrial societies. Therefore, this contemporary example from outside Europe is presented as a case study against which to consider our assumptions and the conclusions that we draw as archaeologists situating gender in the multiple archaeologies of Europe.

While gender archaeology is considered mainstream in some circles, the studies presented here are in their individual ways situated at the edges of conventional Western archaeological gender studies and in most cases also in relation to their local archaeological climates. However, the goal of this publication is to contribute to the integration of these various approaches into what we think of as gender studies and, ultimately, also to change the seemingly gender-blind academic traditions that still exist within archaeology.

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