particular facts. Whether or not this ultimately contributes to a refinement of this theory is not something that should unduly concern us.

To sum up, archaeology would not become a more mature discipline if it were to be subordinated to the aims and interests of the social sciences. On the contrary, I believe that it would be better if archaeology modelled itself upon a discipline of genuine maturity, namely history. History is a discipline which has long been possessed of a self-assurance and an authority that derives from a solid basis of methodological agreement, whatever the superficial superficiality of its doctrines or the shifting interests of its practitioners. It is a critical discipline which respects its subject matter and seeks to provide interpretations which are more than of contemporary relevance. In archaeology as in history, explanations should stand up to general methodological criteria. Does the explanation encompass all the relevant data? Does it 'fit the facts'? Does it manage to incorporate features which were seen to be inconsistent with alternative hypotheses? What are the logical consequences of such an explanation, and do they too fit and make sense of the evidence of which we are aware? It is to these questions that we should primarily address ourselves.

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References


An Appeal for Women in Archaeology

There is a need for more female archaeologists as well as a need to study prehistoric women and their role in history. In the following article I will address both of these aspects of women in archaeology and comment on their interdependence.

At first the ratio women:men in archaeology may not seem bad at all. In fact, of 89 first-year undergraduates at Cambridge University 48 are women. However, at the graduate level this changes dramatically. Cambridge has at present (Nov. 1986) 57 Ph.D. students, of whom no less than 48 are men. This means that less than one third are women. And these figures are even worse if we consider British students only. Of 37 British Ph.D. students only seven are women. Of the 20 foreign students, on the other hand, 10 (i.e. exactly one half) are women.

This disproportion in numbers increases when one examines, for instance, the research seminars. During 5 terms of seminars at Cambridge (from October 1985 to April 1987) — in all roughly 50 seminars — only two were given by women. (If I had counted the three terms of 1986 only, there would have been none!) Now Cambridge may, for various reasons, be an extreme example. However, looking back at the annual meetings of the Theoretical Archaeology Group (TAG) I think nobody would disagree that the disproportion is a conspicuous reality in archaeology. (At TAG 1985 in Glasgow there were approximately 80 papers, of which were given by women).

Before leaving this topic, I want to comment on the difference between British and foreign students, as mentioned above. The equal number of female and male foreign students may lead one to think that the underrepresentation of women is predominantly a national phenomenon, rather than an international one. A comparison with the Danish universities proves otherwise. At the Department of Prehistory, University of Aarhus, the archaeology course is a tripolar system consisting of two year modules, corresponding very roughly to BA, MA and Ph.D. (Bifag Hovedfag og Magisterkursen). The Ph.D. level is strongly dominated by women (probably a ratio of four to one).

However, a Ph.D. in archaeology may easily lead to unemployment. Most men (and luckily an increasing number of women) leave university after the MA to take up excavation or museum jobs. The female Ph.D. students are too often out of touch with practical archaeology, which is one reason why they opt for the Ph.D., which is usually conceived as more theoretical. Unfortunately, non-practical jobs in archaeology (teaching or pure research positions) are almost non-existent at the moment, so even though several women have a higher education than many of the men, they end up on the periphery.

In the University of Copenhagen, where only the BA and the Ph.D. are
taught, the Ph.D. is not conceived of as the theoretical superstructure to the more empirical MA, and the course is dominated by men. The conclusion must be that women again are in the minority in contexts leading up the ladder of the archaeological hierarchy. Needless to say, around 98% of all central and influential positions are occupied by men. The situation in Denmark is thus not dissimilar to the British scene although the circumstances differ.

Most archaeologists will acknowledge this and agree that more female archaeologists would, indeed, be of no harm to archaeology, but many would argue that the lack of women in archaeology is a matter of concern for women only, as it has no effect on archaeology as a discipline or on the quality of the interpretations. In anthropology, however, where so-called "feminist" approaches started in the early seventies, it has been demonstrated that the dominance in the subject of middle-class white males has produced a biased and distorted picture of women's position in society. This picture has, partly through what Conkey and Spector term "the tyranny of the ethnographic record in structuring archaeological work" (1984, 1), and partly through the similar male dominance in archaeology, been the accepted one also for prehistoric societies. In general the contributions, activities, perceptions and perspectives of females are trivialised, stereotyped or simply ignored" (Conkey 1984, 1). In several cases, where female anthropologists on later occasions have carried out fieldwork in the same areas, they have had a very different experience of women's role in society. This does not mean that they were better anthropologists or that their views were not as biased, but simply shows the need for women and women's perspectives in both anthropology and archaeology to balance the present records and interpretations.

But, you may say, now that men are becoming aware of the need to study the role of women, surely they can carry out the analyses just as well as women? Randsborg's recently published study (1986, but published 1985) "Women in Prehistory: The Danish Example" shows that this is unfortunately not always the case.

Although Randsborg is aware of the need to study women's roles and he makes references to critical studies of androcentrism and of gender relations, his article is an example partly of the tyranny of the ethnographic record and partly of inference from the researcher's own society and perspective. For instance, in interpreting women's role in the mesolithic, he notes that ethnographic information "presents woman as man's helper in the processing of the kill, e.g. in hide working, as collector of plant foods etc" (Randsborg 1986, 147). This view he apparently accepts, as he makes no attempt to evaluate the importance of these activities, for example, the value of soft hides, or the contribution of plant foods to the diet. Neither does he ask why this should be the case; it is, with references to pregnancy and childcare (Randsborg 1986, 44), simply accepted as a natural and universal order.

In relation to the later prehistoric periods Randsborg comments "The wives of high status men were after all themselves the daughters of other high status men, and in both their own and their old families could act as links through which property could be inherited, particularly if there were no male relatives" (Randsborg 1986, 146). Further, "Women were only important when married" (Randsborg 1985, 152) and "Social stratification seems to have 'pulled' a group of women up to a particular level, with marriage alliances presumably being of great importance" (Randsborg 1986, 150). According to this men seem a priori to have a higher status than women. We are not informed why this is so, in what way this status differentiation was established or how it was maintained. The study is based on the number of male and female graves in any period and the accompanying objects. But even in the periods where there is a clear number of graves and particularly rich female graves, women are still automatically seen as obtaining their status from fathers or husbands.

Randsborg's interpretations of women's position in the various periods of the Danish prehistory could well be correct. They are presented however, as conclusive statements without details of prior analysis, which make them appear as statements and assumptions rather than carefully deduced interpretations.

Randsborg puts great emphasis on the role of marriage alliances. Many archaeologists (though not Randsborg) in this connection refer to "exchange of women" within or between societies. This is, and no doubt was, an important way of contact in many places. The problem is that the "exchange of alliances" has been twisted so as to portray women as objects. However, as Marilyn Strathern (1984) shows, this is a projection of the western white male perspective onto other societies. In, for instance, the New Guinea Highlands there is no subject-object relationship. Women may be equated with wealth, but wealth is not conceived of as a passive object. In fact, in many New Guinea Highland groups women's position in the alliance network is what makes them powerful (John Make, pers. comm.).

We must try to avoid androcentric and ethnocentric assumptions and universal generalisations in our interpretations of the positions of, and relations between, women and men. I object to studies that present women as passive, inferior beings without a role in the construction and reproduction of the fabric of society. Women may in some or even many societies have been without influence in economic and political life, but in no societies are women idle and completely unproductive. All activities are more important or meaningful than others, and women's roles must be investigated on equal terms with male activities.

Let me emphasize that I do not want to interpret all prehistoric societies as patriarchal, nor am I interested in projecting the present day gender struggle onto the past. What I would like to see are studies of gender that genuinely question the archaeological data, trying to discover the role of women and men in the past; studies that investigate the background for the division of labour in the specific societies and how it was maintained; studies that analyse the role of women in the reproduction of society; in short, studies that recognize and represent all human beings with
different cultural roles.

In my opinion, women today are in a better position to initiate such studies. Due to present day gender relations we do see the other side of the coin. Few women see themselves as "men's helper", and more women than men recognize the importance of adequately training everyday tasks separated from national economy and politics. Also, more women than men are outside what is in our society the most influential and powerful positions, be it in business, university or government. Our perception of power, what it is and how it can be used, is therefore bound to be different from that of many men, not least those who are at present constructing and interpreting this notion, whether in archaeology, anthropology or other disciplines.

Women thus have a great potential for contributing to a fuller and more balanced picture of the past. Unfortunately we have not yet used this potential. But it is important that we start employing it, because if we are constantly presented with a picture of passive, inferior women, that is what we will become.

Charlotte Dunn

References


The Sweet Smell of the Past


The British Museum's exhibition must be seen as the most important revelation of British archaeology within this decade: since its opening in July it has constantly attracted visitors -- archaeologists, the public, reviewers alike -- all in search of the "facts", all fascinated by the idea of an archaeology greatly improved and revolutionised, which since its static, even moribund days before the 2nd World War has evolved into a "scientific" discipline, ready to compete with any branch of physics or chemistry in terms of accuracy and technique. Such ideas as a) science is progress, b) progress is good, and c) therefore to become properly acceptable in the enlightened 1980s archaeology must unlift itself and be proud to be defined as science, are inherent in this exhibition.

When I first, briefly, visited "Archaeology in Britain" I was disappointed to find that "New Views of the Past" did not mean an exhibition reviewing, for instance, recent Marxist perspectives or gender studies in archaeology. Its begetters appeared conservative people who desired to make out of the exhibition a well-behaved child who would inherit their knowledge and be loved by the masses. It seemed that in giving a sample of archaeological work to the public the Museum staff had decided to mostly ignore theoretical advances and not for Aristotle's wisdom, that "probable impossibilities are to be preferred to improbable possibilities". I had an idea that I was having an important revelation about the minds of British archaeologists today: the assumption that archaeology should still be viewed as merely field and laboratory work can only be a direct inheritance from our pre-war precursors.

The second time I visited (for much longer) this disputably lovely child, I began to grow much more attached to it. I also began to appreciate the massive amounts of time and effort invested which had, in fact, led to the creation of a fascinating, well-informed and creatively presented exhibition. After three hours I had travelled a route following over eight thousand years of British time and was still little more than half-way through the galleries.

Roger Miles, an employee of the Natural History Museum, notes that "the first rule of successful exhibition design is to ensure that, to as great extent as is possible, the exhibition is a generally convivial occasion for the people who visit it" (Miles 1982, 23): the B.M. appears to have taken heed of this to the minor point of allowing for visitors' lapsing concentration or fatigue before coming to the end of what can only be described as a gargantuan presentation, by permitting any amount of coming and going on one day.

Moving along broadly chronologic lines, the exhibition attempts to show how advances in various techniques have led to the discovery of a mass of clarified information about Britain in the last 10,000 years. In true New Archaeological style, great emphasis is placed on the importance of interrelating disciplines such as palaeoethnobotany, zoology and the earth sciences.

The importance of aerial photography is readily apparent, with examples of such photographs appearing continually. Aerial reconnaissance, in fact, becomes reified as an ominous being, without which, it is implied, British archaeology would still be in the Dark Ages.

Dividing the exhibition into 16 sections, the B.M. attempts to introduce the visitor to various forms of natural preservation by the use of specific case studies. Thus we see how recent appreciation of the archaeological potential of wetlands has led to the discovery of exciting new clues to past life in the Somerset Levels and the Fens. One criticism here could be that by stressing the idea of "A Way of Life Preserved", from 4000 to 1200 BC, the exhibition perhaps leaves the visitor believing that this was the only period to be