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Sarah Milledge Nelson, Myriam Rosen-Ayalon. *In Pursuit of Gender: Worldwide Archaeological Approaches*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2001. x + 433 pp. \$85.00 (cloth), \$34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7591-0086-2.



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Digging for Gender: Recreating the Dialogue between Theory and Methodology

Digging for Gender: Recreating the Dialogue between Theory and Methodology

In the past decade a number of texts that seek to illuminate the subject of gender from the archaeological record have been published.[1] Several of the authors in this new volume, *In Pursuit of Gender: Worldwide Archaeological Approaches*, have contributed to this research. Yet this new collection moves beyond the previous texts to interpret and reinterpret sites and cultures from the perspective of gender. *In Pursuit of Gender* advances the study of gender archaeology with detailed data, a worldwide scope and carefully reasoned conclusions that pave the way toward further research in gender-based theory.

In Pursuit of Gender, edited by Sarah Milledge Nelson and Myriam Rosen-Ayalon, is the "fruit of a conference at the Rockefeller Study and Conference in Bellagio, Italy, in October 1998" (p. ix). By focusing on gender ideology, gender roles and gender relations the authors seek a "social archaeology that considers the agency of men and women beyond their purported artifacts" (p. x). The authors are not searching for a universal truth, but rather "nuanced local meanings" (p. 10). This is evident since

the chapters in the book represent archaeological work in China, Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, Andaman Islands, Egypt, South Africa, southwestern Asia, Italy, Germany, France, Argentina, Brazil, Central America, and eastern and western North America. An array of time periods and societies is represented, ranging from the Lower Paleolithic to the early historic Philippines and including hunter-gatherers, early horticulturists, incipient and well-developed states, and historic communities as well as primate studies. Rock art, the domestic use of space, ethnohistoric documents, prehistoric DNA, burials and their content and context are all sources of data.

The articles in this volume are diverse in their theoretical and methodological approaches as well as their focus areas and time periods. This can be a distraction, yet Milledge Nelson's introductions give the volume cohesion. The text is organized into three sections: "Gender Ideology," "Gender Roles," and "Gender Relations," yet the permeability of these categories is acknowledged and demonstrated by the writings of each author. In order to demonstrate the diversity of methods and theories for approaching gender, I will discuss the text by section.

According to Milledge Nelson, gender ideology “subsumes both gender identity—how individuals perceive their own gender—and societal correlates of possible gender identification” (p. 10). Each article in the first section addresses a facet of gender ideology. Ruth D. Whitehouse concentrates on southern Italy during the Neolithic Period, using a combination of types of evidence including burials, cult caves with paintings, anthropomorphic figurines, and architecture and space. Centering around 3000 BC, women in predynastic Egypt are the subject of Fekri Hassan and Shelley Smith’s article. The two examine grave goods, figurines, palettes, and iconography to discern the inner logical fabric of a culture; they examine the symbols, meanings, metaphors, and tropes in order to understand the culture and their ways of structuring thought and transforming it into bodily experiences. Karen Rubinson tackles the theoretical question of the meaning of mirrors in central Asia, about 5000 B.C. By examining the distribution of mirrors in graves she shows that mirrors cannot have the same meaning or function throughout the vast territory despite the fact that people share many of the same traits. She concludes that mirrors are specific to each culture and need to be treated accordingly. Rosemary Joyce relies on images and documents to discuss what she calls “appearance cues,” ways that clothing, ornaments, artifacts, and body modifications mark and call attention to various significant aspects of a person chosen to delineate significance in a given culture. John Parkington’s article focuses on South African rock art in which men and women are depicted doing different tasks in separate settings; he relates the scenes to folktales that were recorded by early European settlers. His article shows how differences between the sexes are naturalized and projected into objects that have no inherent gender. Although the articles in this section utilize various methods and theories, and focus on differing time periods and regions, they illuminate what different people may think about gender and how gender can be an organizing principle of a culture.

Gender roles, the topic of the second section, reflect the economies of gender—what women and men are expected to do in their daily lives, how and where they do these things and with what tools (p. 7). In this section, the article by Joan Gero and M. Cristina Scattolin is one of the most thought provoking. Gero and Scattolin analyzed gendered household activities at Yutopian in Argentina to argue that gender is not a thing but a series of relationships—a process, a performance. At the site, the gender system could be classified as a “gender complementarity” or a “gender hierarchy,” but the authors

show that divisions of labor and integrated household labor are present as shown by food production and copper reduction at the same hearth. Both forms of labor serve to produce social cohesion. Therefore, it is important to think about gender roles along a continuum rather than as binaries. Margaret Nelson, Donna Glowacki and Annette Smith consider women’s impact on household economies among the Maya. In this ethnoarchaeological study, the authors sought material correlates of women’s work that could be applied to archaeological sites. Rather than looking at men’s productive activities, they analyze women’s contribution to households and the relative wealth of households as it relates to women’s contributions. They examine the organization, special facilities and tools, and whether work done there may have an impact of the material goods of the household. How to ask gender questions where little else is known of the culture is the subject Zarine Cooper addresses. Since the disposition of artifacts in the midden fails to reveal the division of labor by gender, Cooper turns to ethnographic accounts to consider gender in her sites in the Andaman Islands. Rasmi Shoocongdej examined three rock art sites in the late historic period in western Thailand. She considers both the spatial distribution of the sites and the content of the scene depicted. Cheryl Claasen discusses the time constraints of women’s work and the likelihood that children’s labor was called on especially for the care of younger children. Using data from the Middle Woodland Period in the American Midwest and bioarchaeological data, she considers time management by women. I found this section to be the most enlightening. It offered new ways to think about gender roles and showed how we think about gender roles can influence how we think about gender relations and gender ideology as well.

The third section, titled “Gender Relations,” discusses ways to approach the politics of gender, or the negotiation of power between men and women (p. 7). Bettina Arnold takes up the topic of Iron Age burials in Germany and France. She describes in detail the problems of using sex in burials as a proxy for gender and comes to the conclusion that the importance of the sex/gender distinction for archaeologists is in perceiving it as a continuum rather than as binary opposites of male/female and man/woman. This makes the interpretation of sex and gender in burials much more difficult but opens up possibilities for better understanding of a culture. Kathryn Landuff examines women’s graves in Anyang, the last capital of Shang China about 1200 B.C. Myriam Rosen-Ayalon describes the context of paintings in early Umayyad times. She examines the particular place-

ment of paintings in buildings dedicated to pleasure and to administration. Elisabeth Bacus provides a new understanding of women in the political economy of the Visaya region of the Philippines in early historic times. Using documents, especially Spanish accounts, combined with archaeology, she finds the most significant social categories are elite and nonelite rather than male and female. Fumiko Ikawa-Smith examines strange humanoid female-like figurines that are found unevenly in time and space through the Jomon period in Japan. A. C. Roosevelt takes a different approach as she reviews sociobiological literature on human evolution and concludes that gender inequality did not exist before the Holocene.

In Pursuit of Gender attempts to recreate the dialogue between theory and methodology and shows how differing theoretical perspectives and methodologies can be utilized in the search for gender in the archaeological past. As a graduate student in Women's Studies with a BA in Anthropology and a background in Archaeology, the text offered me new ways to consider the study of gender and archaeology. The articles in this volume

help show how women may differ within a single culture by age, class, marital status, presence or absence of children, and the kinds of work they do. With its emphasis on worldwide perspectives and gendered interpretations, this text would be great for introductory courses as well as graduate courses in archaeological theory, methodology and, of course, gender.

Note

[1]. See Joan Gero and Margaret Conkey, eds., *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*. Social Archaeology Series (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991); Cheryl Claassen and Rosemary Joyce, eds., *Women in Prehistory: North America and Mesoamerica* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); Kelley Hays-Gilpen and David S. Whitley, eds., *Reader in Gender Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 1998); Tracy L. Sweely, ed., *Manifesting Power: Gender and the Interpretation of Power in Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 1999); and, Bettina Arnold and Nancy L. Wicker, eds., *Gender and the Archaeology of Death*. Gender and Archaeology Series (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2001).

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