

People are always shouting they want to create a better future. It's not true. The future is an apathetic void of no interest to anyone. The past is full of life, eager to irritate us, provoke and insult us, tempt us to destroy or repaint it. The only reason people want to be masters of the future is to change the past. They are fighting for access to the laboratories where photographs are retouched and biographies rewritten.

Milan Kundera, 1980 The Book of Laughter and Forgetting, p.22.

Towards an Archaeology of Women

The study of women has never figured prominently within archaeological research. Recently, however, sporadic events point towards a development in this field - a sudden interest which is not accidental, as it reflects actual developments within our society.

Men's dominance in research and in society in general has greatly limited the range of prehistoric subjects accorded social importance and value. The position of Woman in prehistory is a subject treated till now only by women, and few women at that. Presently the problem is how this interest is to move from its present precarious position to an integrated and accepted part of archaeological research. This problem is closely connected with the existing concept of Woman in general, as well as the fact that women, in spite of formal equality and access to education, are still generally accorded a subordinate position in our society.

A major obstacle to the serious study of the status of women (or rather the relation between the sexes) in prehistoric or so-called primitive societies, is the concept of Woman which has

characterised the Humanities. The concept of Woman which is held by our Capitalist, Bourgeois society is as obstructive to research as any other form of ethnocentrism.

Recognition of the total separation of production and reproduction under Capitalism is essential for understanding the position we ascribed to women in prehistory. Until fairly recently, women in the industrialised countries have been more or less separated from production, and have been exclusively relegated to bearing children and to what is commonly known as 'the domestic sphere', i.e. reproductive functions. The result is the well known Bourgeois ideal of the 'protected mother and housewife' -- an ideal which is directly transferred to women in prehistoric contexts.

The division of human labour into paid productive labour and unpaid private reproduction has resulted in devaluation of 'domestic' work -- in other words domestic work/reproduction is considered unproductive, and therefore of no social significance.

Although it is no doubt correct that a substantial part of a woman's daily work was con-

centrated in childbearing and activities on or near the settlement, women have also taken part in primary production processes as gatherers, agriculturalists and, especially, through the preparation of raw products derived from hunting and rural production (leather, wool, milk, cereal etc.). Nevertheless, the division characteristic of Capitalist society is directly transferred to the prehistoric context. This means that work supposedly undertaken by women is classified as domestic and therefore not considered productive.

In this context it is striking to note that work ascribed to women is classified as 'domestic chores' while the same work, when undertaken by men, is elevated to the status of 'handicraft'. In this way pottery is not considered as a handicraft until undertaken by male 'professional' potters in the Middle Ages. The same can be applied to weaving. On the other hand, the production of flint implements is considered a handicraft from the beginning and consequently of social importance; it is therefore the object of serious technological analysis. As a result, reproduction has been negated as an active and creative part of human life, and through this separation of production and reproduction Woman is eliminated from human history.

In Archaeology, this idea of a fixed pattern of sexually determined roles and positions is, for example, reflected in interpretations of grave finds where, contrary to other find categories, sex and social status are assumed to be clearly discernible. It is taken for granted that a rich male grave indicates a high social position for the buried man himself, while a rich female grave automatically is interpreted as a sign of her husband's social

standing (that is: woman exists only through man).

Women's struggle for equality has, amongst other things, resulted in a search through the many layers and manifestations of the oppression of women and Man's domination through time and space. This has, in recent years, created a growing awareness of the suppression of the history of women. Although there has been no radical change of attitude, few scholars are wholly unaffected by this debate. Within our profession the reaction has been one of general reservation, and research continues in those areas that do not apparently involve Woman as an active element within prehistory, e.g. technology, trade strategies, social organisation and so on. In short women are made invisible. That Woman is accepted as a gatherer and participant in the agricultural process, and therefore the retainer of some influence, is of no matter: her position is automatically interpreted as subordinate to that of Man.

A growing interest in modern ethnographic and anthropological studies and methods is integrating prehistoric women into various systems of exchange between prehistoric communities. However, the lack of concurring data in the archaeological source material, and our general concept of Woman, reduces her position in this context to one of an object, and thus a unit in mechanical models of relations between prehistoric communities. The fragmentary character of the archaeological source material may be the reason why historians, anthropologists and ethnographers are the ones who raised the question of women's position and role in prehistory, and not archaeologists.

The question of women's history has mainly been formulated by women, and it consists very

simply of two main approaches: a biological/physiological approach, which will not be commented on **here; and an evolutionary approach** that seeks the origin of Man's dominance in some remote stage of human development. It has often been postulated that the process of organising the hunting of larger animals developed Mankind's (Man's) intelligence and ability for social organisation. This interpretation is reputed by several female anthropologists who argue that women, through their daily work with children and through the planting and gathering of food, must have played an important part in the development of social organisation. Meanwhile, an important part of this discussion seems to be the search for a proof of woman's original dominance, leading up to a search for 'the event' that caused a drastic change in the balance of sexual power. The idea of 'Womans Historic Defeat' is thereby introduced. The 'father' of this idea is Engels, whose work 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State' has been decisive for all later conceptions of the role of the sexes in prehistory. Engels, much inspired by Morgan and Darwin, defined Woman in relation to the family, society and kinship only on the strength of her biological role. Deeply rooted in the norms of the Victorian Bourgeoisie, Engels did not see Woman as a producer at all. His theory was in short as follows:

In a hunter society Man provides the food and thereby owns the means of production (implements etc.). Descent is, however, matrilineal. The transition from hunter to pastoralist society resulted automatically in the ownership by men of the cattle and for the first time, men owned an object of value worth passing on. It became therefore in their interest that their children should inherit from them. To attain this they needed

full control over reproduction, which could only be achieved through the subordination of Woman. **In this way Woman became the object -- the property -- of Men.**

Time has shown that Engels was mistaken in many aspects. However, no one has seriously attempted a re-evaluation and criticism of the cornerstone of his theories: namely, the coupling of a fully developed patriarchy with private property (it should be noticed that he does not relate the actual development towards patriarchy with material production/property). Thereby he condemns not only Woman but also the results of her production to being the property of Man. In such a context, women's own position in history is not only uninteresting, but also almost impossible to work with.

Women are, however, not objects although they are perceived and treated as such. They are human beings.

The organization and division of labour, as well as the various social roles appointed to each sex, are not preordained but rather the result of the social organization characterising a society and instituted in a network of rules, rituals and symbols. Using this context as the background for understanding the organisation of labour means that the relations between the sexes gain not only interest and significance but also substance, availing the subject for archaeological study.

Approaching the organization of production and reproduction as a coherent whole, where the different aspects are mutually conditional and where both sexes are implicated, may enable us to study prehistoric societies in more interesting and fruitful ways.

Linda Boye, Bente Draiby, Kirsten Hvenegaard-Lassen, Vibe Ødegaard,

and translation by Susan Holten-Dall.

The Women's Group, Department of Archaeology, Copenhagen, Denmark.

* * * * *

Archaeologists For Peace

Amongst the variety of archaeological groups, societies, and clubs, a new one has recently been founded: "Archaeologists For Peace" (AFP). This group differs from most other archaeological associations insofar that Archaeology is not the focus and combining theme for the group, but rather archaeologists as a group within society. Thus moving the focus from our shared interest in the past to our shared responsibility for the future.

The group describes itself as a pressure group of archaeologists working for nuclear disarmament. In the statement produced by the group at its initial meeting it is further stated:

"Archaeologists cannot separate themselves from the political and social system they live in, and

major political issues affect our lives and work. As students of human society, archaeologists have a viewpoint on nuclear weapons. They could feel pessimistic, since human societies have destroyed themselves and each other throughout the past. They could feel that from the archaeological time perspective, political actions are insignificant. They could feel that campaigning on the issue would bring them into disrepute or conflict with their employers. AFP would acknowledge these views, seek to answer them, but would not be deterred from its aims."

"Archaeologists are trained in studying political and social organisations in the past: they also ought to look at the future of our society and take responsibility for that future."

AFP hopes to be established in time to be represented at the CND rally in October 1984, and further information can be obtained from The Treasurer: Hilary Major, 57A South Street, Braintree, Essex, CM7 6QD.

* * * * *

The Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles

Another aspect of potential archaeological involvement in the present is, of course, the issue of restitution of cultural properties. Within this context the discussion and policy-making concerning the Parthenon Marbles is extremely interesting. Following on our

previous coverage of this debate, we call attention to the decision in April this year of the British Government to reject the request from the Greek Government for the return of the Marbles to Greece. The rejection was mainly explained by references to legislation which, according to the Government, prevents the British Museum from disposing of its objects. The