

BOOK REVIEWS

Jana Esther Fries, Doris Gutmiedl-Schumann, Jo Zalea Matias and Ulrike Rambuschek (eds.), *Images of the Past. Gender and its Representations*. Waxmann 2017: Münster, New York, pp. 220, 65 colour illustrations. Frauen–Forschung–Archäologie Band 12.

Reviewed by Zuzanna Różańska-Tuta

The issue of gender in social sciences began to be a topic of interest at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s. In the field of archaeology, this subject appeared with a twenty-year delay. The term ‘gender archaeology’ was introduced to the scientific discourse by Margaret Conkey and Janet Spector in their article from 1984 (Gero and Conkey 1991: XI). This was closely related to the feminist critique of science, which negatively assessed previous research made from the androcentric point of view and expressed the need to place a woman in the role of a subject (Conkey and Gero 1991: 3–4). The tasks of archaeology of gender are primarily attempts to analyse ways of constructing gender identity in the past based on archaeological sources and passing this knowledge to a wider audience, but also criticism of structures and male bias in academic and museum reality (Conkey and Gero 1997: 430; Johnson 2013: 140).

The collective work *Images of the Past. Gender and its Representations* edited by J. E. Fries, D. Gutmiedl-Schumann, J. Z. Matias and U. Rambuschek in 2017 in Germany, published by the international scientific publisher Waxmann, is another interesting item in line with the mainstream of cultural gender research of the past. The considerations included in the publication primarily focus on the importance of visual content as a medium of information on gender identity used by authors of popular science books, computer game developers, or curators of exhibitions in archaeological museums. The book is divided into two parts: I. Images of the Past in Academia and Popular Media and II. Images of the Past in Museums. Each of them contains five articles, written in English or German, resulting from two scientific conferences: the ‘Gender in Museums’ session, which was held as part of the Nordwestdeutscher Verband für Altertumskunde Symposium in Lübeck in 2013 and the ‘Images of the Past: Gender and its Representations’ hosted at the conference of the European Association of Archaeologists in Istanbul in 2014.

In the first article: Chloé Belard (France), critically refers to the presentation of Gallic and Celtic women in publications from the late 19th to the first half of the twentieth cen-

tury. Female characters who were young and pretty, representing the type of beauty prevailing in a given era, were shown as perfect mothers and wives, looking after a household. This view has its roots in the social model of the nineteenth-century middle class. This type of depiction can also be found in many popular science publications from different fields even today. The author of the article proves that reliable analysis of archaeological material as well as Greek and Roman written sources, without neglecting the context of their creation, can allow us to change this way of thinking. The researcher mentions numerous examples of archaeological sources, both burials and individual products of material culture showing anthropomorphic performances, dated to the period that she discusses. The results of her analysis indicate that the opposing division into male and female did not exist, and the social structure of groups was much more complex.

Caroline Trémeaud (France) is the author of another article commenting on the subject, titled *How to Make Prehistory Attractive. Women's Representation of the Bronze and Iron Age*. It raises the issue of how women of the Bronze and Iron Age were presented. The researcher uses illustrations from scientific publications as examples. She comes to a similar conclusion as the author of the previously discussed article. Prehistoric women have been portrayed and are often still being portrayed through the prism of the aesthetic preferences of the times in which the illustration was made. In order to make the subject more attractive to the contemporary audience, gender stereotypes are reproduced, and the female characters are sexualised.

In his text, *'It has always been like that ...'* *How Televised Prehistory Explains what is Natural*, Georg Koch (Germany) analyses British, German and American popular science television programs that show life in the Stone Age. These films, which have a wider audience than archaeological publications, play an important social and political role. Prehistory appears as an argument in contemporary social discourse on what is 'natural' in human life. Interestingly, the programs created in the 1980s and 1990s are characterized by more scientific, analytical approach to the subject. Back then, filmmakers collaborated with scientists and put more emphasis on questioning gender stereotypes. A change took place around the year 2000. Newer TV programs emphasize a more emotional, narrative portrayal of life in the Stone Age. Instead of scientific thesis, they rely on apparent knowledge and attempts to explain phenomena and connect them with the present, duplicating stereotypes. For example, they depict an archaeologically unproven division of work into typically 'masculine' and 'feminine' in the Paleolithic.

Another article titled *Is it all Warfare and Treasure Hunting? Gender Roles and Representations in Video Games*, written by Rachael Sycamore (England) analysis video games of which the action takes place in Antiquity or the Middle Ages, or those in which the main character is an archaeologist. Sycamore comes to the conclusion that there is a much smaller number of female rather than male characters in such games. The females that are present have their image sexualized. In addition, heroes and heroines are the subject of sexual stereotypes in relation to both their social roles and a (modern?) ideal model of physical appearance. The

world itself is very much simplified. Enormous emphasis is placed in these games on warfare and combat, which highly distorts the picture of life in ancient communities.

The last article included in the publication's first part is by Katji Fält (Finland) and is titled, *Armour Fetishism, Homosociality and Masculine Display. The Representations of Medieval Knights and Viking Men in Illustrated Non-fictional Books for Young Readers*. The author analyses selected items published in the last 25 years in terms of how the masculinity of knights and vikings is represented. She finds that this is clearly characterized by a male perspective. In both cases, books about Vikings and those about medieval knights, the activities of the male community are focused on physical strength and fitness. Women are presented very rarely, in separation from the masculine world, and their depicted role in society is diminished. Both groups are presented as an impersonal whole. Male collectives are of a military nature and masculinity appears as a world of relations between the members of these collectives.

The second part of the book is opened by an article: *The Image of Women in Spanish Archaeological Museums during the last Decade. A Gender Perspective*, by Lourdes Prados Torreira and Clary Lopez Ruiz (Spain). The aim of the article was to analyse the way in which women have been presented in recent archaeological exhibitions in Spanish museums. Even though women quite often make up the majority of museum staff members and hold important positions within museums, there are still very many archaeological exhibitions that treat this social group marginally. They popularise stereotypes suggesting that gender roles have remained unchanged throughout the ages and between cultures. The researchers also cite positive examples of exhibitions where female activities were presented on an equal footing with those of men. Educational reconstructions, where there is no archaeological evidence that a given activity was typical only for women or men, show people of both sexes, for example in the case of pottery or painting in caves.

In the next text, under the title *Archäologie und Geschlecht im Germanischen Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg*, Claudia Merthen (Germany) comes to similar conclusions regarding museum exhibitions. The researcher also draws attention to the issues of unequal opportunities in the archaeological career development for women and men.

The article by Kirsten Eppler (Germany): *Frau-Mann, Jung-Alt, Arm-Reich. Museet Darstellung und visualisierung frühmittelalterlicher Gesellschafts- und Gender (re) konstruktionen im Landesmuseum Württemberg* describes part of an exhibition concerning the Early Middle Ages, exhibited at the Landesmuseum Württemberg in Stuttgart. The author focuses on the role of Exhibition design and visual performances in Attempts at (re) constructing gender in the Middle Ages. Eppler suggests that the choice of flat, grey silhouettes - 'shadows', as a background for archaeological objects, despite binary (female-martial, young-old, etc.) presentations leave more space for imagination and the personal interpretation for visitors, therefore broadening the perspective in thinking about gender roles.

In the following text, by Christina Jacob (Germany), titled *Horkheim, Klingenberg, and Talheim. Geschlechterrollen in der Archäologischen Sammlung der Städtischen Museen Heilbronn*, the author (who is a museum worker) describes how the manner of displaying archaeological

objects has changed over the past 25 years. She refers in more detail to a fragment of Neolithic exhibition, the mass burial of Talheim. The researcher concludes that the results of anthropological analyses, such as the state of teeth, and archaeological relics themselves provide little evidence for discussions about gender roles, and this issue should be the subject of guided tours and museum workshops.

The last article of the reviewed publication, titled *Man the Hunter? Zur Konzeption von Geschlechterrollen im paläolithischen, Forschungs- und Erlebniszentrum Schöninger Speere*, is written by Gabriele Zipf (Germany). The author presents the innovative concept of an exhibition built around the discovery of Middle Paleolithic wooden spears from Schöningen (Germany). The exhibit, consisting of many artistic reconstructions showing the activities performed by contemporary people, is an example of one that displays male and female characters and children equally, without an imaginary division of their tasks based on gender.

In summary, the visual image is an extremely important tool for propagating and understanding archaeology. Reconstructions, made with the use of various techniques, enrich scientific and popular science publications, museum exhibitions, presentations accompanying lectures or archaeological television programs. The authors of the articles contained in the reviewed book focus on the ways of presenting female and male sexes in such reconstructions. In their texts they clearly show that gender stereotypes are still ubiquitous in both popular and scientific activities related to archaeology, and their impact on the perception of social roles in the past and archaeology itself is definitely negative.

I think that the articles published in *Images of the Past. Gender and its Representations* are interesting and important items that should prompt reflection among archaeologists employed in scientific and museum facilities. I can especially recommend it to Polish researchers, due to the fact that the issues of gender in the past are basically absent in the archaeological discourse in Poland.

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