To Tender Gender
The Pasts and Futures of Gender Research in Archaeology

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Ing-Marie Back Danielsson & Susanne Thedéen (eds)
Almost thirty years have passed since gender studies entered archaeological discourse in earnest. What is the current status of gender research? One of the aims of this book is to contribute to answering this and other related questions. Another is to shed some light on the pasts and possible futures of gender research.

Contributions deal with publication statistics in journals over the last thirty years, neo-realist discussions of Mayan body-politic, intersectional analyses of current Swedish museum exhibitions and Viking Period box brooches, masculinities in practice at a cultural heritage site, Viking period bodily abilities and disabilities and experiments regarding how once-lived bodies and lives may be materialized.
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Gender Questions

Ing-Marie Back Danielsson and Susanne Thedéen

Almost thirty years have passed since gender studies entered archaeological discourse in earnest. What is the current status of gender research? How are the theoretical and analytical insights from feminisms used within archaeological research? Have these insights been adapted to the archaeological discipline, have they been developed and deepened? What about other subjects in academia, academic disciplines close to archaeology, how have feminist theories and methods developed here? Can archaeologists find stimulation there, or is it time for archaeology to find new prominent figures and/or new inspirational theories? If the latter, what would they be?

This book does not answer these questions fully. However, one of its goals is to contribute to the answers, and hopefully also shed some light on the pasts and possible futures of gender research within archaeology. To us, it seems that the gender perspective has lost some of its aura of creativity and innovation with the passing of time. This is an observation that other archaeologists also have deplored (e.g. Voss 2009; Alberti 2012). One possible explanation could be that the concept of gender is often conflated with that of sex. Few archaeological studies have disregarded sex-dualism and discussed more than two genders. Equally importantly, an interest in genders by extension also engenders a focus on sexuality (Voss 2009), which is acknowledged far too rarely. The dualistic, doubly sex-oriented nature of gender has left other facets of identities and becomings unattended and therefore invisible to a certain extent.

Sprung from and indebted to feminism, the very concept of gender quickly evoked discussions on what the premises and the postulates were for what is considered normal, what is specific, what is general, etc. Gender theory, via queer theory, brought with it a chance to scrutinize this normalcy and highlight the normative as a pervasive, dominating principle with structuralist effects in past and present times. However, queer studies seemingly have been left to study exceptions or focus on cross-borders. Or at least, this is what some researchers say that queer theory has done, or created (Jagose 2009:158), whereas others have emphasized that its applicability cannot be
predefined (Halperin 1995:62; Dowson 2000). Others yet argue that both positions create “a form of disciplinary orthodoxy around the use of queer and a space in which new questions may be raised” (Alberti 2012, p. 89 our emphasis). Decidedly working against gender archaeology, and any of its belonging, and used, -isms or theories, is also the fact that research within archaeology is trend-sensitive when it comes to favouring or disregarding certain analytical concepts (Back Danielsson this volume). Concepts are considered trendy, exciting, and are perhaps not fully grasped or even explored or applied to their fullest on archaeological materials when they “suddenly” one day are found to be inadequate, boring, or even unscientific? One example of a fairly newly (for archaeology that is) embraced analytical concept is masculinity (cf. Engström this volume). Whereas this is a much-needed, imperative and welcome addition to gender archaeology, we cannot help to point out this concept’s late entrance into archaeological research. At the same time, it is unavoidable not to point out that the possible topic of femininities is seemingly absent throughout the archaeological field of research, although discussed within other academic disciplines (e.g Schippers 2007). Researchers within studies of masculinity have themselves called for increased research and theory on femininities (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005:848). This lack of interest is even more surprising since female masculinities were theorized as early as the 1990s (see Halberstam 1998). Racialized, subordinate and hegemonic femininities have been discussed within other academic disciplines (e.g. Pyke & Johnson 2003, cf. Bünz this volume; Thedéen this volume). Equally, work has been carried out elucidating the necessity of conceptualizing multiple femininities and hegemonic femininities as “central to male dominant gender relations” (Schippers 2007, p. 85, emphasis in original).

Although gender from its incipience indeed has been, and is, a relational concept, relations and relationality have been the flavour of the month for quite some time in, for instance, new materialisms (e.g. Coole & Frost 2010, cf. Normark this volume, Fahlander this volume). Matter and material(ity) are naturally of the greatest interest for archaeologists, but have gained renewed attention with the criticism of, for example, the earlier pervasive cultural construction model (e.g. Ingold 2007; Olsen 2010; Hodder 2011, cf. Conneller 2011 on new material relationships in prehistory). However, an employment of a Latourian neo-materialist perspective (cf. Latour 2005), where the social is seen as entanglements of relations in rhizomatic networks, runs the risk of neglecting asymmetrical power relations (Fahlander forthcoming; Colls 2011). Further, a recognition of the agency of materials does not automatically imply that the ontology of bodies and sex is challenged, something that queer materialism is capable of doing (Alberti 2012:101; see also Barad 2003; 2007; Alberti and Marshall 2009; Dowson 2009; cf. Arwill-Nordbladh this volume). Facets of queer materialism include a focus on becoming, instead of static being, and equally a focus on

We think it is important to point out that feminists have long since pointed to the delimiting ontological and epistemic norms that underlie and prefigure archaeological practice in all forms. These norms include the impulse to seek closure and equally to reduce ambiguity and complexity (Wylie 2007:212-213 with references). This criticism also echoes within what has become known as non-representational theories, or more-than-representational theories (Cadman 2009:7; see also Dewsbury et al. 2002:438 and Lorimer 2005), where efforts are made to avoid the leap towards an overarching meaning, interpretation and/or representation (e.g. Back Danielsson forthcoming). Anderson & Harrison (2010:10) instead describe things as taking place; the recognition of the movement and change of things, and how an increased focus on practices and events result in discovering “new potentialities for being, doing and thinking”. From a feminist point of view, the focus on the lived present as an open-ended and generative process (Harrison 2000:499) is attractive (see for instance Harding 1987; 1993; Longino 1994:483). This means that practice is not downplayed to the extent that the objects, or events, of study become more or less embalmed, ‘drained for the sake of orders, mechanisms, structures and processes’ (Dewsbury et al. 2002, p. 438). Whereas non-representational, or rather more-than-representational, theories have been in use within geography for quite some time, the relevant criticism against representational theories within archaeology has not yet been addressed to any greater extent, although exceptions exist (e.g. Alberti, Jones & Pollard forthcoming).

This volume starts discussing the pasts of gender archaeology as it is reflected through published gender articles in important and influential archaeological journals. Ing-Marie Back Danielsson gives hard core facts on how small the number of published gender papers is in comparison to mainstream archaeology throughout time in her paper *Much Ado about Nothing*. It is also highlighted that gender papers have certain characteristics that differentiate them from “mainstream” archaeological published work, and discuss why this is so.

Can gender archaeology, its pasts rather lugubriously sketched in the first contribution, head towards a brighter future? We would like to think that subsequent papers provide clues as to what may comprise such a future. Elisabeth Nordbladh’s contribution *Ability and Disability* discusses bodily variations and bodily possibilities in Viking Age myth and image. She emphasizes the necessity of searching for, and developing, new analytical entrances in our studies of prehistoric materials. Her standpoint in this matter is a situated and commented one, and she discusses bodily variations with a
special focus on visual ability. She elegantly demonstrates how this bodily ability was negotiated within an ability/disability axis of power.

Susanne Thedéen’s paper *Box Brooches beyond the Border* focusses on the relevance and importance of empirical intersectionality studies in archaeology. Her study explores the intersections between gender, ethnicity and social status by analyzing the contexts and connotations of a characteristic female Gotlandic brooch found outside of Gotland mainly at sites known as trading places or early towns. The author draws the conclusion that altered contexts for the brooches did not change the association to a female gender. However, their marker of ethnicity was lost, probably in processes of creolization and/or the creation of new identities tied to a cosmopolitan dress.

Elin Engström’s contribution, *Gender in the Making*, clearly highlights that archaeology and culture heritage management is a gendered and structuring practice. Through the perspective of masculinity, she explores how a cultural heritage site, the hill-fort Eketorp on Öland, is an arena for performing both contemporary and prehistoric gendered practices. The author also suggests that the practices performed at the site by museum staff and visitors support a wider understanding of masculinities and social identities, rather than merely working as a platform for discussing men and maleness in past or present times.

Annika Bünz’ contribution *Is It Enough to Make the Main Characters Female?* reveals a number of fascinating observations of the current prehistoric exhibition at the National Historical Museum in Stockholm, Sweden. She demonstrates how facets of identities in the form of age, gender, appearances, etc. are relational to one another and further that this relationality also is dependent on the chosen prehistoric time sequence. She gives an example from the Stone Age of a powerful woman whose facial and bodily characteristics are those of an old, and ugly, woman. As time goes by, men enter the prehistoric scene to a greater extent and during the Iron Age they dominate the exhibition in the sense that they are displayed in more prominent ways and are also reflected as men with power. They may be of mature or older ages whereas women have become younger, prettier and less powerful.

Johan Normark’s *Road of Life* shows a pathway concerned with a neorealist approach. The author argues that future gender studies in archaeology will have to relate to the current neorealist approaches in philosophy. The author uses Manuel DeLanda’s assemblage theory and John Protevi’s framework of bodies-politic to show how neo-realist approaches can unite the somatic and the social through synchronic and diachronic perspectives. As a case study the author focuses on the lives of a Maya ruler and his daughter in Guatemala; lives that were conceptualized as roads along which certain events took place. Common in the hieroglyphic corpus are dates of birth, accession, marriage and death of male and female rulers. During their roads of life they encountered several thresholds that created their unique assemblages and bodies-politic.
Fredrik Fahlander rethinks gender in a new innovative way in his contribution *Facing Gender: Corporeality, Materiality, Intersectionality and Resurrection*. A neomaterialist standpoint in combination with an intersectionality perspective is advocated in the article. In order to resurrect decaying bodies, forensic anthropology is called upon, with whose help the versatility of once-lived bodies and lives may materialize.

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We are most grateful to excellent photographer Edvard Koinberg for letting us use his wonderful portraits of daylilies in different life cycles (*Hemerocallis* in Latin). We see the photo on the front cover as the pasts of gender research, while the photo on the back cover is connected to its future – promising tripod seeds of daylily.

Lastly, we would like to express our deepest gratitude to the Berit Wallenberg Foundation for its generous funding of the printing of the current volume “To Tender Gender – The Pasts and Futures of Gender Research in Archaeology”.

References


