

GENDER ARCHAEOLOGY IN ROMANIA**CRISTESCU Cătălin*****ABSTRACT**

THE FOLLOWING CONTRIBUTION WAS CONCEIVED AS A SHORT OVERVIEW OF THE INTERNATIONAL AND ROMANIAN LITERATURE ON GENDER ARCHAEOLOGY, WITH THE PURPOSE OF UNDERLINING THE IMPORTANCE OF BOTH THEORETICAL STUDIES AND CHANGE OF MENTALITIES IN ROMANIAN ARCHAEOLOGY. USING MAINLY THE ANGLO-SAXON BIBLIOGRAPHY, I HAVE OUTLINED THE IMPORTANCE OF PERCEIVING GENDER ARCHAEOLOGY AS ANOTHER ALTERNATIVE IN DISCUSSING SOCIAL RELATIONS IN ANCIENT SOCIETIES, AND NOT AS A BIASED TOOL IN FINDING WOMEN IN THE PAST. SADLY, THE ROMANIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SUBJECT ARE ALMOST ABSENT, BUT THERE IS A GROWING CONCERN RELATED TO GENDER RELATIONS IN THE ANCIENT WORLD, DR. NONA PALINCAȘ BEING THE FRONT (WO)MAN IN THIS DIRECTION OF STUDY.

KEYWORDS: GENDER ARCHAEOLOGY, GENDER STUDIES, ARCHAEOLOGICAL THEORY, ROMANIAN ARCHAEOLOGY

1. Introduction

Recent archaeological literature explores a fruitful variety of research directions. One of those is the study of Woman's History and, more profoundly, the study of Gender in archaeology. In this effort, not only new questions are being raised and new paths are opened, but disciplinary boundaries are exceeded as well¹.

This paper² focuses in defining the basic terminology of gender in archaeology. Unfortunately, the bibliography I used is quite feeble: most of the theoretic analysis of gender is based on the work of Sarah Milledge Nelson³. I will also discuss the state of

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¹ Pauline Schmitt Pantel, "Women and Ancient History Today", in A History of Women in the West I. From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1994), 464.

² This paper was presented at the National History Students' Conference held at the "1 Decembrie 1918" University, Alba Iulia (24th-26th of November 2006). I wish to thank assoc. prof. dr. Gelu Florea ("Babeș-Bolyai" University Cluj-Napoca) and dr. Florin Gogâltan (Institute of Archaeology and Art History Cluj-Napoca), who kindly made observations on the text during that time. However, the errors and flaws are entirely under my responsibility.

³ Sarah Milledge Nelson, Gender in Archaeology. Analyzing Power and Prestige (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1997).

gender research in Romanian archaeology and the directions I think that should be followed in consequence, not only in theory, but also in field work and academic teaching.

2. Defining Gender in Archaeology

The *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (International Student edition, 2002) defines gender as “the fact of being either male or female,” so it is considered a synonym to “sex”. Nelson shows that this definition of gender does not fit into archaeological scientific tread: “sex is a given, gender is constructed”, meaning that one comes under one gender or the other according to the mechanisms specific to a certain culture⁴. Thus the definition, gender research does not focus on finding women in the past⁵, but understanding female-male relations in ancient times⁶.

Pantel finds in gender “an analytic category”, useful for identifying and understanding social organization of the relation between the sexes⁷. The author finds this term more adequate than “sexual asymmetry” (differences of the sexes based on the power and values of each sex) or “social relations between the sexes”⁸. However, she is aware that the term “gender” must be used in a clear way and in a particular context, avoiding ambiguity and faked formalism⁹.

3. Benefits of Gender Archaeology. The Western Approach

Not all authors consider gender archaeology the way depicted above. The feminist literature, especially since the 1970's, states that the focus should only be on the Woman. However, a pertinent approach is considering both male and female relations together. As

⁴ Sarah Milledge Nelson, *Gender in Archaeology. Analyzing Power and Prestige* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1997), 15.

⁵ Margaret W. Conkey and Joan M. Gero., “Programme to Practice: Gender and Feminism in Archaeology”, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997), 415.

⁶ Sarah Milledge Nelson, *Gender in Archaeology. Analyzing Power and Prestige* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1997), 15.

⁷ Pauline Schmitt Pantel, “Women and Ancient History Today”, in *A History of Women in the West I. From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1994), 467.

⁸ Pauline Schmitt Pantel, “Women and Ancient History Today”, in *A History of Women in the West I. From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1994), 466-468.

⁹ Pauline Schmitt Pantel, “Women and Ancient History Today”, in *A History of Women in the West I. From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1994), 467-468.

Nelson argues, this is the only way in which a gendered archaeology can be an improved archaeology¹⁰.

The Anglo-Saxon literature identified 3 metaphors that sustain gender research. The first describes “the Lenses of Gender”, actually directions in archaeological/historical theory that distort the appropriate image of gender in the past¹¹. These lenses would be: androcentrism, gender polarization and biological essentialism. Androcentrism sees in male the natural, the normal, the central, the standard. Gender polarization reveals a major and fundamental difference between man and woman, difference that should be found in the entire social fabric. At last, biological essentialism imposes certain roles and restrictions for women, thus the discrepancy in gender roles is universal. In this case, gender would be the only removal of these lenses, although this is hard to prevail on.

Archaeological research seen as a “mirror” is the second metaphor in question. The image reflected is the past, but this image is constructed by the way the mirror is held: politics, society, culture, even present time. The mirror also distorts the images, in the sense that every image possesses a partial truth; gender may help blend these images together.

The third metaphor depicts gender itself, as a “prism”. Its colors represent the innovations, the new, the invisible before in archaeological research. Thus, the prism gives us a distortion-free image of the past societies.

Gender theory in archaeology starts with critique and sometimes this is the core of a gender research. No theory and no methodology escaped this critique, whether it is the Marxist archaeology or the Middle Range Theory¹². The conclusion, for 1997, was that gender wasn't an important issue in archaeology, although in other research fields it had already a growing strong position¹³.

¹⁰ Sarah Milledge Nelson, *Gender in Archaeology. Analyzing Power and Prestige* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1997), 13.

¹¹ Sarah Milledge Nelson, *Gender in Archaeology. Analyzing Power and Prestige* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1997), 25-27.

¹² Margaret W. Conkey and Joan M. Gero., “Programme to Practice: Gender and Feminism in Archaeology”, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997), 416-420; Sarah Milledge Nelson, *Gender in Archaeology. Analyzing Power and Prestige* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1997), 49-53.

¹³ Margaret W. Conkey and Joan M. Gero., “Programme to Practice: Gender and Feminism in Archaeology”, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997), 412-416; Sarah Milledge Nelson, *Gender in Archaeology. Analyzing Power and Prestige* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1997), 13, 48, 53.

Beyond all the discussions, the struggle for engendering archaeology was doubled by another issue: the male bias in archaeology and the position of women-archaeologists¹⁴. This bias is not only visible through institutional acts, such as restricting woman access to scientific groups or key positions, but also through harassment, irony or superior behavior. They were forced and also encouraged to work in laboratories and to stay as much as possible off the field. Kent Flannery published this phrase in 1982: "Archaeology is the most fun you can have with your pants on". There is also a report about a woman-archaeologist who did not receive permission to place her soda in the refrigerator because it served beer-cooling purposes only, although it was the only one under a hot-summer sun¹⁵.

Of course, women did strive in western archaeology, there were even biographies written about some of them¹⁶. Yet others did not pay much attention to gender studies or the movement behind it. It is no wonder that the feminists had/have such a radical position in archaeological theory: some state that being a woman is enough to accomplish a gender research or that being a feminist confers a superior insight¹⁷. At any rate, Nelson's conclusions on the matter seem pertinent: adopting male styles is not an option; women's work isn't often recognized; confrontations lead to poor results (as necessary they may be).

I consider it important to discuss here the way gender is perceived at a lower level: university classes. The internet provided me several examples, but I have chosen the course of study from the Oneonta College, State University of New York, in order to depict the fact that, even in a common teaching facility, new approaches in archaeology are highly treasured and experienced.

In short, the course "Gender and Archaeology" has two goals: to make relevant the study of gender in archaeology and to "foster critical thinking and analysis." Subjects like "Gender Hierarchy", "Division of Labor" or "Gender Negotiations" should offer the expected results and it happened only two years ago.

¹⁴ Sarah Milledge Nelson, *Gender in Archaeology. Analyzing Power and Prestige* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1997), 39-48.

¹⁵ Sarah Milledge Nelson, *Gender in Archaeology. Analyzing Power and Prestige* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1997), 44, 46.

¹⁶ Margaret W. Conkey and Joan M. Gero., "Programme to Practice: Gender and Feminism in Archaeology", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997), 415.

¹⁷ Sarah Milledge Nelson, *Gender in Archaeology. Analyzing Power and Prestige* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1997), p. 38.

“In sum, a gendered archaeology is a more nuanced one, asking new questions, finding new data and partitioning the old data in new ways.”¹⁸

4. Gender Archaeology in Romania: The Facts

The political and social changes that Romania encountered since December 1989 left relatively no trace in archaeological writing. The data were collected, sometimes published, specialists focusing on materials, rarely on the people that they witness for¹⁹.

In the third millennium A.D. we are eager to overcome the theoretical and methodological gap that separates us from North America or Western/Northern Europe²⁰. Still, there are specialists who made their way to foreign academic institutions and try to implement the paradigms they have experienced. Thus, articles about theory in Romanian archaeology started to be published, although the ideas they postulate have a restricted public.

In 2005, after a visit at Stanford University/California (2001), Nona Palincaş makes the debut in Romanian gender archaeology, with a paper on the Late Bronze Age at Popeşti, Giurgiu county²¹. The article is intended to create a new image of the above mentioned period, but the starting point is based on the same archaeological evidence that serves the culture-historical interpretation²².

The artifacts in discussion are of two kinds: prestige metal weapons²³ and gynomorphic vessels²⁴, objects that seem to appear at the same time, under the influence of the Mycenaean/Aegean world. The weapons are a halebard, 4 rapiers (one of gold), 4 ceremonial scepters and several swords, proofs of a ranked society (“chieftaincy”)²⁵. The vessels, named gynomorphic after the representations of woman breasts they feature, form

¹⁸ Sarah Milledge Nelson, *Gender in Archaeology. Analyzing Power and Prestige* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1997), 176.

¹⁹ Mircea Anghelinu, “De ce nu există teorie în arheologia preistorică din România”, *Sargetia* XXX (2001-2002), 41.

²⁰ Mircea Anghelinu, “De ce nu există teorie în arheologia preistorică din România”, *Sargetia* XXX (2001-2002), 47.

²¹ Nona Palincaş, “Social Status and Gender Relations in the Late Bronze Age Popeşti. A Plea for the Introduction of New Approaches in Romanian Archaeology”, *Dacia (N.S.)* 48-49 (2004-2005), 39-53.

²² Mircea Anghelinu, “De ce nu există teorie în arheologia preistorică din România”, *Sargetia* XXX (2001-2002), 40-41; Nona Palincaş, “Social Status and Gender Relations in the Late Bronze Age Popeşti. A Plea for the Introduction of New Approaches in Romanian Archaeology”, *Dacia (N.S.)* 48-49 (2004-2005), 39.

²³ Nona Palincaş, “Social Status and Gender Relations in the Late Bronze Age Popeşti. A Plea for the Introduction of New Approaches in Romanian Archaeology”, *Dacia (N.S.)* 48-49 (2004-2005), 41-43.

²⁴ Nona Palincaş, “Social Status and Gender Relations in the Late Bronze Age Popeşti. A Plea for the Introduction of New Approaches in Romanian Archaeology”, *Dacia (N.S.)* 48-49 (2004-2005), 44.

²⁵ Nona Palincaş, “Social Status and Gender Relations in the Late Bronze Age Popeşti. A Plea for the Introduction of New Approaches in Romanian Archaeology”, *Dacia (N.S.)* 48-49 (2004-2005), 43.

a new ceramic category in the site's material and were named the Fundeni-Govora pottery²⁶. The pots appear in deposits, but also in settlements; rarely, birds and animals enrich the decoration²⁷.

Palincaș concludes that this separation (weapon deposits – vessel deposits) refers to social realities: a military elite, rich, with political authority, and a religious elite, women's exclusive caste²⁸. According to a Cartesian interpretation (focused on the analysis of the objects and the relations between them)²⁹, these vessels indicate the recent access of women to religious functions, due to economical and social changes caused by the southern influences³⁰. In a non-Cartesian approach (keeping in mind not only the object and its medium, but also the medium of the analyst, society in this particular case)³¹, the representations of breasts on the vessels is to be translated into women's presence, by means of ritual action regarding lineage³², but still an opposite for the weapon deposits, interpreted as the end of the lineage.

However, the author rejects in the end the two directions mentioned above, related to postmodern sociology, in favor of an interpretation emerged from the sociology of the body³³, in which the object's materiality is vital. The objects themselves lack in meaning, but it was the people who empowered them with social, maybe ritual potential.

It is surprising, if not weird, that the final interpretation was based on the body-sociology, criticized as it is nowadays. The result however seems to overlook the very heart of gender research: an improved archaeology, with no distorting lenses (as shown

²⁶ Nona Palincaș, "Social Status and Gender Relations in the Late Bronze Age Popești. A Plea for the Introduction of New Approaches in Romanian Archaeology", *Dacia (N.S.)* 48-49 (2004-2005), 44.

²⁷ Nona Palincaș, "Social Status and Gender Relations in the Late Bronze Age Popești. A Plea for the Introduction of New Approaches in Romanian Archaeology", *Dacia (N.S.)* 48-49 (2004-2005), 48.

²⁸ Nona Palincaș, "Social Status and Gender Relations in the Late Bronze Age Popești. A Plea for the Introduction of New Approaches in Romanian Archaeology", *Dacia (N.S.)* 48-49 (2004-2005), 48.

²⁹ Nona Palincaș, "Social Status and Gender Relations in the Late Bronze Age Popești. A Plea for the Introduction of New Approaches in Romanian Archaeology", *Dacia (N.S.)* 48-49 (2004-2005), 40.

³⁰ Nona Palincaș, "Social Status and Gender Relations in the Late Bronze Age Popești. A Plea for the Introduction of New Approaches in Romanian Archaeology", *Dacia (N.S.)* 48-49 (2004-2005), 48-49.

³¹ Nona Palincaș, "Social Status and Gender Relations in the Late Bronze Age Popești. A Plea for the Introduction of New Approaches in Romanian Archaeology", *Dacia (N.S.)* 48-49 (2004-2005), 49

³² Nona Palincaș, "Social Status and Gender Relations in the Late Bronze Age Popești. A Plea for the Introduction of New Approaches in Romanian Archaeology", *Dacia (N.S.)* 48-49 (2004-2005), 50-51.

³³ Nona Palincaș, "Social Status and Gender Relations in the Late Bronze Age Popești. A Plea for the Introduction of New Approaches in Romanian Archaeology", *Dacia (N.S.)* 48-49 (2004-2005), 52.

above). “The dominant masculine” and “the submissive feminine”³⁴ continue to remain engendered in Late Bronze Age Popești.

I have to point out at this moment two more items: women archaeologists in Romania and gender archaeology in universities. Regarding the activities of female-archaeologists in our country, I am proud to say that they are generally very good specialists, no matter the period they deal with. Some tend to focus on areas not quite explored before them, such as mentalities, quotidian aspects of life, alimentation or personal hygiene etc. The potential exists, but it hasn't been directed towards gender studies; lack of bibliography, mocking or (even worse) lack of material forbid such an analysis.

It has to be said that no course of study I encountered at my university mentioned the term “gender” at all or in correlation with archaeology. In fact, we students lack basic theoretical and methodological support; the absence of a subject devoted entirely to this problem makes a strong impact on our capabilities to read, understand and write archaeology.

I must not forget the treatment some of my colleges receive just because they are women: explicit sexual comments, misogynist tasks, irrelevant work assignments. The authors of these actions are us, the students, the professors, the workers, the people passing by, even some women who crossed on the other side, in “the boy's club” (as named by Sarah Nelson)³⁵. The 21st century is enough itself for this practice to be stopped.

5. Towards an Engendered Romanian Archaeology

I reached the hardest part of my paper, in which I should propose strategies and prepare the path for future research. Like I stated above, the bibliography I used doesn't allow me to venture in this direction.

Still, some things could be done. At first, a more enthusiastic student movement, fruitful in papers, readings, conferences and meetings with specialists. Contacts with international students should be improved in order to obtain some basic bibliography and

³⁴ Nona Palincaș, “Social Status and Gender Relations in the Late Bronze Age Popești. A Plea for the Introduction of New Approaches in Romanian Archaeology”, *Dacia (N.S.)* 48-49 (2004-2005), 52.

³⁵ Sarah Milledge Nelson, *Gender in Archaeology. Analyzing Power and Prestige* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1997), 45.

study directions. Universities should import not only the teaching system in the West, but also its achievements in depicting notions, concepts, methodology and fieldwork.

Research after graduation should be directed not only in the old directions, but also in the new ones, to raise specialists in DNA analysis, cloth, food or cosmetics, in order to conceive an interdisciplinary approach on gender, the only one sure to provide pertinent and useful info.

The example of Nona Palincaş needs to be followed³⁶. It is hard to imagine a gender archaeology without both genders involved, especially women. The struggle for “getting equal with the men” makes it harder for gender enthusiasts to sustain a certain project; gender archaeology is not for man, nor for woman: it’s for both. And, most important, it isn’t another way to reflect our present social dysfunctions, but a way to discover the past and its realities.

³⁶ This text was written in 2006, so it does not make note of the papers published afterwards. Even so, my knowledge of recent articles discussing Romanian gender archaeology is limited to only two articles: Nona Palincaş, “Public Patriarchy in Contemporary Romanian Archaeology and the Image of Women in the Romanian Neolithic and Bronze Age”, *Studii de Preistorie* 5 (2008), 159-170 and Lóránt Vass, “Women in a Man’s World? Female Related Artefacts from the Camps of Dacia”, *Marisia* XXX (2010), 127-152.

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