

BOOK REVIEW: GENDER STEREOTYPES IN ARCHAEOLOGY: A SHORT REFLECTION IN IMAGE AND TEXT

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Gender roles are embedded at very diverse ways in the public mind. This topic is dealt with on 64 pages of the booklet edited by Laura Coltofean-Arizancu, Bisserka Gaydarska, Uroš Matić, and illustrated by Nikola Radosavljević. It might be the booklet definition is not really able to give back the importance of the work put into the volume, and its significant message. Since, the authors focus on the gender roles and the most characteristic stereotypes that existed in the communities of past and present societies and dispel those views on gender roles that are generalized and far from real (Fig. 1). The volume has no direct Hungarian relevance, but the general theoretical background and questioned gender stereotypes outlined in it provide an useful way of thinking and a practical approach for the Hungarian archaeological scientific community.

The publication was produced without scientific research funding, for which the editors asked researchers dedicated in the topic to write short, 250-word texts, specifically on one gender role. A poll provided additional assistance during the pre-editorial process in identifying topics to be emphasized in archaeological research. In this poll, the editors gathered information from academic workers, their own stories about gender and gender roles, especially on dealing with unfavourable and even clearly negative behavioural motives. The booklet focuses on 24 stereotypes, each organised in a short chapter-like structure, a joint contribution of 17 authors² (both men and women).

The short length does not give the opportunity to fully explain a gender role, but rather, to offer a statement, a summed-up thought, summarized beside illustrations. The graphics are also the result of an independent creative project rather than only including a pre-ordered visual representations. Thus, the publication is not a standard scientific monograph on gender archaeology, but a printed version of a long-standing discussion on the subject. The authors critically respond to, or even completely reject,

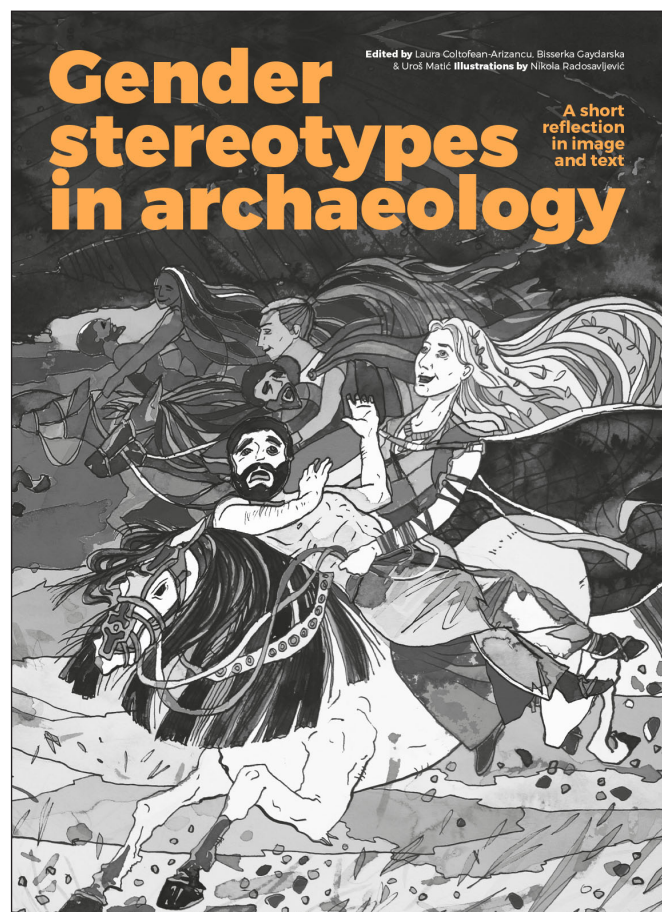


Fig. 1. The cover page of the booklet (source: <https://www.sidestone.com/books/gender-stereotypes-in-archaeology>)

Laura Coltofean-Arizancu, Bisserka Gaydarska,
Uroš Matić (eds.):

*Gender stereotypes in archaeology:
A short reflection in image and text.*

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² Including Bisserka Gaydarska, Laura Coltofean-Arizancu, Uroš Matić, Bettina Arnold, Marga Sánchez Romero, Katharina Rebay-Salisbury, Brigitte Röder, Agnès García-Ventura, Julia K. Koch, Sandra Montón-Subías, Pamela L. Geller, Alice B. Kehoe, Rachel Pope, Doris Gutmiedl-Schumann, Nils Müller-Scheeßel, Bo Jensen and Maria Mina.



Fig. 2. Main illustration of the Active Man - Passive Woman chapter, with the quote next to it: "... it is likely that women, working together with men, were instrumental in the experimentation that changed our relationship to plant foods, and the natural world in general, forever." (Coltofean-Arizancu, Gaydarska & Matić 2021, 14–15)

gender stereotypes embedded in the public mind, of which we can usually find many examples in both archaeological interpretation and professional practice. The division of labour, traditional male and female activities, their rigid, impenetrable rules are inherent topics. Many archaeological interpretations are based on the assumption that in prehistory, household activities clearly indicate female roles, which were related to the house, to the space within the settlement, or were limited to an area very close to it. On the other hand, the specialised activities of men (hunting, metallurgy, metalworking, etc.) could mean a great (spatial) distance, thus, not only special skills were required, but also distance had to be overcome with Odyssean challenges (Fig. 2). For example, Bettina Arnold and Marga Sánchez Romero dispel this topos in their short texts. At the same time, the stereotypes of data-hunting (male, fieldwork) and data-fishing/gathering (female, office work) activities in archaeological research are critically dissected as a kind of modern (self)reflection. This is just one example of how gender-segregated activities are reflected in our recent society too, just think of the invisible and completely undervalued childcare and nursing care of elder people. Marga Sánchez Romero and Katharina Rebay-Salisbury questioned this modern example, because they show precisely that, both today and in the past, it was the duty not only exclusively of women but of the whole community to nurture the people in need of care. Besides the settlements and in addition to activities related to everyday life, burials provide endless narratives about how, where, and who was buried, most of which strongly reflect the European model of the Christian nuclear family. The huge amount of data provided by ancient DNA (aDNA) research is completely transforming our understanding of the role of kinship and social communities (texts of Julia K. Koch, Katharina Rebay-Salisbury, Sandra Montón-Subías). Thus, we must be cautious about the obvious explanation that in a grave with multiple human skeletons, would be a male-female love couple or an entire family (mother, father, child) were laid to rest. Our questions and research methods must therefore be built from this critical approach and with more and more natural scientific research.

I have deliberately highlighted only a few examples, as the booklet is short but provocative in a completely positive sense, pinpointing stereotypes that existed in the past and are with us also in the present.

There is no negative content in the booklet, it is not offensive and, with its rich imagery, it is a particularly good basis for common thinking.

It relates to the entire story of the booklet which goes far beyond the text and imagines and also enhances the social value of the publication. The entire publishing costs were obtained by crowdfunding, the editors used Kickstarter's platform to find potential donors³. The actuality and usefulness of the topic is demonstrated by the fact that instead of the planned one-month fundraising campaign, the amount needed to cover the costs of the booklet was raised in just 6 days. In the publication of the booklet, one of the most important supporters is the Leiden-based Sidestone Press (specialising primarily in the editing and publishing of archaeological works), that offered its support in various tasks from technical editing to distribution. In a completely unusual way, the booklet is available to read and download for free on the Sidestone Press website⁴. The active support and involvement of the European Association of Archaeologists and its community *Archaeology and Gender in Europe*⁵ was also essential, with which they managed to build and mobilize a broad professional and social base. It is a membership-based, non-profit organisation for archaeologists and organisations from Europe and beyond. The prior objective of the *Archaeology and Gender in Europe* community is to create a formal and permanent European network on gender equality in archaeology. Another objective of the workgroup is to communicate archaeological research on gender equality to both scientists and the general public (Fig. 3). The project participants organised an online book launch on 20th December 2021, which was a round table discussion with the editors and authors. The audience were able to listen several details about the idea of the booklet, editing, dissemination, and the feedback received so far. The booklet was also praised by Eszter Bánffy, the new and first female president of the EAA. The EAA has published the entire virtual launch of the booklet "Gender Stereotypes in Archaeology" on the Youtube video sharing portal⁶.



Fig. 3. The logo of Archaeology and Gender in Europe Community at the European Association of Archaeology (source: https://www.e-a-a.org/EAA/EAA/Navigation_Communities/Archaeology_and_Gender.aspx (2021.01.13. 13:51)).

The professional and social benefits of the publication:

- (1) together with stories and rich illustrations, the booklet actively helps to challenge, dispel and/or refute one-sided perceptions of gender roles;
- (2) highlighting examples of past and present gender stereotypes helps to emphasise the relevance of the topic;
- (3) deconstructs and redefines traditional gender roles and refutes the naturalness – sometimes described as lawful and unchangeable – of gender-based social inequality;
- (4) a bottom-up, crowdfunded project sets a good example for cultural professionals who struggle by shortage of money;

³ The fundraising profile for the cost of publishing this booklet is on Kickstarter: <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/lauracoltofean/gender-stereotypes-in-archaeology> (accessed 13.01.2021, 13:51). Kickstarter is a U.S. public benefit corporation that promotes and provides a common platform for raising the funds needed to budget for international creative projects, spread the idea and connect the people needed to implement it.

⁴ The booklet can be downloaded free of charge from the website of Sidestone Press: <https://www.sidestone.com/books/gender-stereotypes-in-archaeology> (accessed 13.01.2021, 13:51).

⁵ Link to the online contact details of the Archaeology and Gender in Europe /AGE/ community at the European Association of Archaeology /EAA/: https://www.e-a-a.org/EAA/EAA/Navigation_Communities/Archaeology_and_Gender.aspx (accessed 13.01.2021, 13:51).

⁶ The virtual book launch is available on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uditAv448Mk>

- (5) is not exclusively intended for people involved in archaeology-history-cultural anthropology, thus the target audience for this booklet is a broad social group;
- (6) the booklet is completely free to access and download;
- (7) the English language and the illustrations together form a common point for discussing the topic, for both English-speaking and non-English-speaking readers, or for those who are merely pondering over the images.

In presenting this volume, it is also worth noting that the Archaeolingua Foundation and Publisher has also published a selected volume on the topic of gender and archaeology (DOMMASNES ET AL. 2010). In this book we can read about the history of research on gender-based social inequality in different case studies from several continents. For this reason, the review of “Gender stereotypes in archaeology: a short reflection in image and text” perhaps can reach the public most effectively in this Journal.

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