

Review of: Coltofean-Arizancu, L., Gaydarska, B. & Matić, U. (eds) (2021). Gender stereotypes in archaeology: A Short Reflection in image and text. Leiden: Sidestone Press. 64 pages, 35 illustrations (B&W). ISBN 9789464260250. Open Access: <https://www.sidestone.com/books/gender-stereotypes-in-archaeology>

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"Gender stereotypes in archaeology: A Short Reflection in image and text" is an edited volume of 24 reflections from a range of scholars that seeks to address gender stereotypes in archaeological thought and professional working culture, primarily from a European perspective/tradition. The publication grew as a collaboration between the editors at the virtual 26th meeting of the EAA, during a meeting of the Archaeology and Gender in Europe Community (AGE).

The format of the volume consists of an explanatory introduction, followed by the 24 'reflections', each between 250-300 words in length. The introduction neatly sums up the work – "do not assume anything about the past and the people who study the past". Each section is accompanied by an illustration from the Serbian artist Nikola Radosavljević. The editors have produced a free volume (the book is available as a free e-book download), accessible to a general English-speaking audience.

Each of the 24 reflections offers two or three pieces of recommended further reading, in addition to a general bibliography on the topic of gender stereotypes in archaeology. The intent is to direct the reader towards ever deeper consideration of the themes involved, and hopefully the incorporation of these insights into both their research and their daily working life. The work does not claim to be authoritative, and is broad rather than deep in its treatments. The authors don't claim to be the first to highlight the various issues in archaeological text and image, but are perhaps presenting these issues in a manner and format not extensively explored previously; from the inception of the book at a virtual conference, to its crowdfunded origins on the Internet website Kickstarter, and its open, free dissemination – this is a very contemporary production. As a whole, this feels like it should be regarded partly as an archaeological manifesto and partly as an artistic manifest.

I believe the two groups who will benefit most from this publication are undergraduate students, and those wishing to pursue professional archaeological illustration. In the former case, the

publication would make an excellent focus for debate and discussion amongst those newly studying archaeology; to help students understand their own biases, consider alternative interpretations, and critique the history of archaeological thought. For archaeological illustrators it could help them think about the conscious or unconscious representation of their images. In many ways the volume is a practical reaction to the issues raised by Melanie Wiber (2010) and others, who said we must consider the image not as a subsidiary to the text, but an active part in the information transfer. For the general reader outside of these groups, there is still much to take from this volume; in particular, the very useful bibliography, as well as the important issues raised in relation to equal opportunities for career progression (Reflection 23), and issues of harassment and bullying in work cultures (Reflection 24).

The combined use of image and text is comparable to other digital innovations presenting academic archaeological work in a non-traditional digital format, such as the recent graphic novel *Hollis Croft: A Matter of Time* (Rajic & Howarth, 2021). Though *Gender Stereotypes in Archaeology* is not quite a graphic novel, the combined comic/graphic novel format has previously been used successfully (if sporadically) for both archaeological education (for example *Loubser*, 2003), and for the exploration of explicitly political themes in archaeology, as in Rutu Modan's recent graphic novel *Tunnels* (2021). The role of comic imagery in archaeology has been explored in detail by Swogger, appropriately in the form of a 10-page comic within an academic journal (Swogger, 2017). *Gender Stereotypes in Archaeology* can be very favourably seen as a further development of this format, in the propagation of archaeological ideas.

The preoccupation with contemporary themes in society, the strongly political tone, and the call for liberation from past paradigms are reminiscent of the long history of art manifestos; from the Futurists in 1909, to the present day. In terms of the gender politics of this work, one is reminded of the manifesto of *Rivolta Femminile* (1971), *On Women's Absence from Celebratory Manifestations of Male Creativity*, or Valie Export's *Women's Art: A Manifesto* (1972). In relation to the issues of racial and social politics one thinks of the themes promoted in *The Organisation of African Unity's Pan-African Cultural Manifesto* (1969), *Suliman Esa and Redza Piyadasa's Towards a Mystical Reality* (1974), or Aimé Césaire's *Négreries: Black Youth and Assimilation* (1935). Works which sought to call out bias, gatekeeping,

and privilege, while calling for new paradigms untethered from establishment consensus. The manner in which I read this as a manifesto is due to its explicitly political aims; the editors make it clear they are seeking to actively counter what are seen as illiberal global trends, particularly “radical-right and ultra-conservative ideologies and beliefs across the globe”.

I appreciate that 250 words is a very limited space to explore complex themes, and therefore I do not wish to critique individual reflections. However, one general issue is that in some cases the text relies on linguistic hedging and modality, i.e. not committing fully to a position (as understood by *Bloor & Bloor*, 2013), rather than clear statements about what we know, and do not know, about the past. When confronting illiberal/ultra-conservative or radical-right elements in society one must not only question these groups' claims about the past, but also present viewpoints in a language and vocabulary that actively challenges, rather than addresses, their position. Past societies are complex and diverse, however, those who utilise the past for justification of their contemporary political positions are not burdened by consideration of this complexity (*Bonacchi et al.*, 2018; *Brophy*, 2018). The volume is an excellent resource for those already interested and concerned about gender in archaeology, and with a social and political position already in line with the authors. To counter those who maintain socio-political views at odd with the authors – i.e. those with radical right or ultra-conservative ideologies – in my opinion a different language and vocabulary is needed, which would be understandable to their world view. I accept, however, that this might be a very different publication.

I see this book as a liberation manifesto for the artist, as it opens all sorts of possibilities for imagining the past; demonstrating the limits of archaeological information, while also highlighting the breadth of the human experience. The work may have benefited from a short closing statement, addressed directly to archaeological illustrators, to help them frame discussions with their clients. The perpetuation of stereotypical images of the past must also occur when artists feel they need to give their 'client' (whether this be an individual, an organisation, or an institution), the sort of image they think the latter wants. The artistic possibilities raised by the book, particularly for illustrations in prehistory, are immense. It is my hope these possibilities will be taken up by artists illustrating the past.

The editors and contributors have produced a very useful resource, and proven the potential of crowdfunding and digital dissemination to create and spread innovative messages. Moreover, they are to be congratulated for a work that succinctly demonstrates how gender in archaeology is not a sub-specialism, rather a pervasive presence that has influenced, and is still influencing, archaeological thought, practice, career opportunities, and working culture.

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