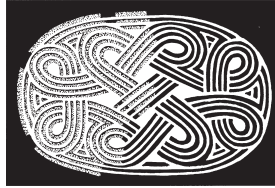


1



Women in Southeastern U.S. Archaeology

NANCY MARIE WHITE

Archaeology is catching up with the rest of anthropology in examining two of the hottest subject areas lately: the history of the discipline and gender issues. After a few early efforts (Williams 1981; Conkey and Spector 1984; Kramer and Stark 1988), there is now much more exploration of gender, both in the archaeological record and in the recovery, analysis, and interpretation of it. It has been a long wait. In *Engendering Archaeology*, Gero and Conkey (1991: Preface) express their amazement that by the late 1980s such topics as gender dynamics in prehistory and sexism in archaeology were not commonplace, given their emphases in other social sciences. Recognition that it was time to see women in the whole field of anthropology came earlier (for example, Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; Friedl 1975; Kessler 1976; Morgen 1989; Gacs et al. 1989; Levine 1991; diLeonardo 1991; Ortner 1996). Perhaps the situation is analogous to that in the natural and physical sciences, where a slow trickle of early work (for example, Mozans 1913 [1974]) has been followed in the 1990s by an explosion of studies (among the best are Bleier 1984; Fausto-Sterling 1985; Harding and O'Barr 1987; Haraway 1989; Schiebinger 1989; Stolte-Heiskanen 1991; Kass-Simon and Farnes 1990; Brush 1991; McGrayne 1993; *Professional Geographer* 1994; Rossiter 1995 and 1982; Sonnert 1995; Pycior et al. 1996; Wylie 1997; Eisen-

hart and Finkel 1998; and *Science's* 1992, 1993, and later "Women/Gender in Science" section and responses). The postmodern/postprocessual concern with critical theory and the viewpoint and circumstances of the investigator have become increasingly of wider interest than just in obscure biographies after the scientist dies (though postprocessual archaeology has really paid less attention to women and gender than is claimed; see Engelstad 1991).

Gender in Southeastern Archaeology

Conferences on gender in archaeology have included at least four held in the southeastern United States, including one in which we offered a preliminary description of the research in this volume (White, Marrinan, and Davis 1994; Sullivan 1994; see also Gero and Conkey 1991; Claassen 1992; Claassen and Joyce 1997). Other important conferences/compilations include Walde and Willows 1991; Siefert 1991; Bacus et al. 1993; duCros and Smith 1993; Nelson, Nelson, and Wylie 1994; Balme and Beck 1995; Wright 1996; Hays-Gilpin and Whitley 1998. Only a few papers in these volumes pertain to southeastern U.S. archaeology, however. Other, much-needed works on women in the field (for example, Irwin-Williams 1990; Bender and Parezo 1994; Conkey and Gero 1997) do not deal with the region in proportion to its importance in the history of archaeology; only one mentions a few southeastern U.S. studies (Nelson 1997, citing Bridges 1989; Claassen 1991). Yet the Southeast, with its many ethnographic examples of matrilineal and matrilocal societies, elaborate ceremonialism, sports and warfare, powerful chiefly politics, and prehistoric socioeconomic stratification, not to mention its role as an early center for archaeological theory, should be prime archaeological territory for exploration of material correlates of gender and of the gender roles of the people who explore them.

Southeastern archaeology has been viewed as lagging behind in theoretical development recently (Dunnell 1990; Peebles 1990; Johnson 1993), even though the Southeast was originally an area of major advances such as the first regional culture history syntheses. From a materialist/cultural ecological perspective, one might say that much of the data-oriented nature of archaeology in the Southeast may be because of the emphasis on fieldwork. The climate permits more of it, and fieldwork was emphasized during the early decades of this century because of public works projects (Willey and Sabloff 1993; Lyon 1996; Fagette 1996). It continues to be important with the Sunbelt development boom that necessitates so much cul-

tural resources management (CRM). The good-old-boy tradition could be said to encourage physical, outdoor (not to mention male-oriented) activity such as fieldwork, which, if done often, leaves less time for theorizing. Even outsiders, “carpetbaggers” (Johnson 1993:212) who have ended up doing southeastern archaeology, have been bewitched by this tradition. Its advantage (Watson 1986, 1990; Dunnell 1990; Peebles 1990; Johnson 1993; White 1995) is that it has allowed us to stay out of the fray a bit (whether New archaeology vs. Old, processual vs. postprocessual, scientific vs. humanistic), not worry about the torturous prose of postprocessual theorizing (the “cabalistic code that can be deciphered only by the fully initiated” [Watson 1991: 274]), and get a lot of good work done. As Sabloff has noted (1992:267), most American archaeologists are really still doing culture history anyway.

None of this implies that there is no appreciation in the Southeast of major trends in our discipline, including critical or Marxist or symbolic archaeology and gender studies; there has been renewed interest in theory-building lately, and some exploration therein of gender (for example, Claassen 1997:68–71). One example is Sassaman’s (1992) work on early fiber-tempered ceramics, with implications for women’s and men’s roles (though such gender hypotheses are just as impossible to test [so far] in southeastern prehistory as elsewhere). Claassen’s studies of Archaic shell mounds also address the possibilities of changes in labor by gender at the end of the Pleistocene epoch, as well as symbolism in connection with male and female activity areas (Claassen 1991, 1996).

Southeastern Archaeological Conference (SEAC) programs now include symposia on gender, beginning with one organized in 1991 by Kathleen Marie Bolen and Ruth Troccoli (much impetus for this study has come from graduate students). The 1991 symposium included Pat Galloway’s crowd-pleaser, “Where Have All the Menstrual Huts Gone?” which noted the male establishment’s squeamishness in recognizing archaeological traces of what was doubtless a common building at many native settlements. Galloway’s slides portrayed that squeamishness with scenes from sanitary products commercials in which *blue* liquid is poured over absorbent pads, and beautiful women are pictured wearing *white*. Her paper (Galloway 1997) emphasized ideological and social concepts about prehistory that we should be more interested in investigating.

Blood symbolism, biological/calendrical cycles, red pigment, and comparative female and male power are anthropological topics now drawing enormous interest among sociocultural theorists (for example, Buckley and Gottlieb 1988; Knight 1991), and occasionally material evidence for things

such as menstrual huts is indeed being sought (Crown and Fish 1996). One study suggests that women's synchronous monthly cycles and accompanying beliefs were the very bases for scheduling Native American subsistence behavior among hunter-gatherers (Buckley 1988).

Among settled agriculturalists, "simple" farmers and horticulturalists have high rates of matrilineality and consequent female equality of power or status (for example, Lepowsky 1994); the shift to (supposed) male dominance comes when intensive mechanized (plow) agriculture takes over (for example, Boserup 1970; Martin and Voorhies 1975; Sherratt 1981; Ember 1983; a good example of an archaeological test of this model is Robb 1994). But in the Southeast and elsewhere in the New World there was no shift to mechanized farming. Is this why matrilineality and the retention of women's status was possible? (And what happens with the emergence of male-dominated states based on non-plow agriculture in the rest of the New World?) The stereotypical example of simple but intensive agriculture is always the Iroquois, thanks to Louis Henry Morgan (1877) and his supposed confirmation of that matriarchal stage in the human past first proposed by Bachofen (1861; Martin and Voorhies 1975:146–55). Standard gender-in-anthropological-perspective textbooks do *not* mention aboriginal southeastern U.S. societies, which were presumably more complex than northeastern ones (such as the Iroquois) and which were classic examples of (matrilineal) chiefdoms based on intensive but nonmechanical agriculture (Hudson 1976).

These are not just questions of idle interest. Matrilineal, matrilocal societies with "simple" agriculture (without domestic animals or plows) are thought to be *politically* very different, more peaceful, or at least having greater internal political stability because of the breakup of related males as they marry out into other households (Martin and Voorhies 1975:220–29). Furthermore, as anthropologists are putting to rest the notion of universal male dominance among human cultures (Leacock 1981; Mukhopadhyay and Higgins 1988; Higgins 1989), many gender systems, especially in matrilineal societies, can be understood not in terms of dominance and subordination but of duality and complementarity, even in the physical, material record (Spain 1992:59).

The new striving to see the individual in prehistory making adaptational choices has inspired work such as that of Watson and Kennedy (1991), who object to the notion (from Smith 1987) that plants "domesticated themselves" in the eastern United States. They suggest that, if divisions of labor during Archaic times *did* resemble those of much later historic groups (a big "if" and not yet testable), women's familiarity with plants led directly to their increased

control over them. Some theorists have entertained such ideas for years, but others cannot accept them. At the 1983 SEAC meeting, Lewis Binford's keynote address, on the origins of food production in the Southeast, went right from models of men controlling hunting to men controlling food production (tied somehow into his ethnoarchaeological research with the Nunamiut in the Arctic). I asked the obvious question, phrased as "What about the place of woman the gatherer in this model?" His incongruous answer was that, being a man, he had not been able to observe women's roles among the Nunamiut. This is interesting because an absence of empirical data has not prevented him lately from speculating on Neanderthal women's and men's roles, and how their separation (and women's use of different, simpler tools) led directly to their conquest by incoming modern *Homo sapiens* (Shreeve 1995:159–66, 330–31; Fischman 1992).

Recent research on biological evidence of sex in the archaeological record, including skeletal remains (for example, Bridges 1989; Armelagos and Hill 1990; Cohen and Bennett 1993) and beyond (in coprolites: Sobolik, Gremillion, Whitten, and Watson 1996; Sobolik 1996) promises exciting data for testing gender hypotheses concerning diet, health, nutrition, and divisions of labor. Yet when it comes to exploring southeastern prehistoric socioeconomic stratification, political economy, and even ideology, in all the latest works (for example, Dye and Cox 1990; Barker and Pauketat 1992; Pauketat 1994; Scarry 1996; Muller 1997), ideas of gender or even political implications of matrilineal kinship or matrilineal residence are invisible (exceptions are Widmer 1994; Galloway 1995), even though there is conservative to wild speculation about everything else.

This lack of a gendered perspective is noteworthy because matrilineality, matrilocality, and control of production are all contexts in which women are likely to be particularly politically influential (for example, Mukhopadhyay and Higgins 1988; Stone 1997). When theorists "discuss power in archaeology, class not gender is their concern" (Engelstad 1991), even though gender is the most ubiquitous basis for stratification/differentiation throughout human cultures. Even a couple of male archaeological theorists have recently admitted that "[g]ender may be the central structuring principle of human social and cultural life, the ground upon which everything else is built" (Preucel and Hodder 1996:418).

While we do not intend this volume to be a rabid radical feminist polemic (though those are occasionally healthy for any science), we do wish to bring up, in the context of the lives of the women described, ideas for serious consideration in southeastern archaeology. Many now realize "that, more than any other approach within the human sciences, feminism does fundamental