

Book Review

Opening the Gates to Gendered Pasts: A Comprehensive Review of The Routledge Handbook of Gender Archaeology

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CITATION

Qiu Y. Opening the Gates to Gendered Pasts: A Comprehensive Review of The Routledge Handbook of Gender Archaeology. *History Archives*. 2025; 1(2): 173.

<https://doi.org/10.63808/ha.v1i2.173>

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Abstract: This review appears to focus on The Routledge Handbook of Gender Archaeology, as edited by Marianne Moen and Unn Pedersen. The handbook seems to offer what might be characterized as a comprehensive overview of current theoretical discussions, notable methodological advances, and key findings in the field of gender archaeology. It is comprised of six thematic sections, which appear to explore feminist pedagogies, critiques of feminist theory, identity and personhood, marginalization, gendered experiences, and what might be considered body politics. Within this broader analytical framework, the handbook ostensibly illustrates how gender archaeology appears to have evolved. What seems to emerge from these findings is a shift away from simply correcting male-centered

narratives toward becoming what appears to represent a more advanced framework for analyzing complex social relationships in past societies. The editors seem to have successfully integrated interdisciplinary perspectives and a range of international viewpoints. What appears to emerge from this evidence, therefore, is a volume that offers valuable insights to researchers, students, and professionals alike. It also seems to promote an archaeology that engages more actively with contemporary social issues. This review tends to point toward the handbook's strong theoretical grounding, its apparent methodological innovation, and its relevance to current debates. What this seems to suggest is that the handbook can be positioned as a particularly important resource for anyone interested in understanding recent trends and potential future directions in gender archaeology.

Keywords: gender archaeology; feminist theory; intersectionality; archaeological methodology

1. Introduction

Over the past fifty years, the discipline of archaeology has experienced quite substantial changes. Among these transformations, gender archaeology has seemingly emerged as a particularly influential field of study. Initially developed as what was largely a corrective measure to address predominantly male-centered narratives, gender archaeology has since evolved into what appears to be a comprehensive analytical framework. Given the complexity of these theoretical relationships, this framework tends to challenge, in many respects, traditional interpretations of past societies and their underlying social structures.

Edited by Marianne Moen and Unn Pedersen (2025), *The Routledge Handbook of Gender Archaeology* appears at what seems to be a critical moment. It is at this particular juncture that the discipline appears to need both a synthesis of established knowledge and innovative pathways for future research (Moen and Pedersen, 2025). What appears particularly significant about this rather extensive volume is that it seems to go beyond merely compiling contemporary scholarship. Instead, it tends to function as what might be characterized as a declaration advocating for the ongoing relevance of gender-informed approaches to archaeological inquiry.

By including contributors from diverse geographical contexts, varied theoretical orientations, and differing methodological approaches, the editors appear to ensure a broad representation. What appears to follow from this analysis is that the handbook addresses multiple scholarly audiences while largely upholding academic rigor. What also seems significant in this context is that the importance of this volume appears to extend well beyond the confines of archaeology alone. Indeed, from this particular interpretive perspective, it seems to serve as a highly valuable interdisciplinary bridge, tending to connect archaeology with anthropology, history, and gender studies.

2. Structure and Organizational Framework

Moen and Pedersen appear to have organized the handbook into what might be characterized as six carefully defined thematic sections, with each section addressing seemingly separate yet interrelated dimensions of gender archaeology. What this



structure appears to tend to suggest is the editors' perspective that gender archaeology should perhaps be considered a comprehensive approach, one affecting the majority of areas of archaeological study. The sections themselves include feminist methodologies and pedagogies, critical reflections on feminist theory, identity and personhood, the analysis of marginalization, gendered experiences, and body politics. Collectively, these sections appear to form what seems to be an ostensible progression from theoretical underpinnings to methodological practices and detailed case studies.

3. Feminist Pedagogies, Methodologies, and Transformative Potentials

The handbook begins by ostensibly outlining the theoretical and methodological basis for contemporary gender archaeology. What appears to warrant further interpretive consideration is Hannah Cobb's chapter (2025) on feminist pedagogies, which argues rather convincingly for substantial changes in archaeological education. She appears to advocate for incorporating feminist values—including inclusivity, reflexivity, and critical consciousness—into teaching practices. Cobb (2025) does not simply suggest minor adjustments to existing curricula; rather, she seems to propose a comprehensive rethinking of educational methods. What this tends to indicate is a vision that directly confronts and challenges the hierarchical and patriarchal structures that have for so long shaped archaeological education.

Given the multifaceted nature of this evidence, Cobb (2025) emphasizes intersectionality as a key element in archaeological education. This emphasis is especially important, considering a common issue within gender archaeology where researchers have often tended to isolate gender from other social identities in their analyses. What the evidence appears to reveal is Cobb's argument (2025) for teaching approaches that acknowledge how gender intersects with race, class, sexuality, and other social dimensions. What appears to emerge from this evidence, therefore, are clearer guidelines for educating archaeologists seemingly capable of more fully addressing the complexities of past societies (Cobb, 2025).

Rachel J. Crellin's chapter (2025) on post humanist feminist archaeology appears to represent one of the handbook's most innovative theoretical contributions. Crellin (2025) critically examines the anthropocentric viewpoints that have predominantly



dominated archaeological thought. From this particular interpretive perspective, she questions traditional assumptions about the interactions between humans and their surrounding material and natural worlds. What her analysis tends to support is an advocacy for approaches that recognize the active roles played by non-human entities, such as animals, plants, landscapes, and objects. What seems to result from these considerations is an expansion of archaeological interpretations toward more inclusive and potentially more detailed understandings of past social relationships (Crellin, 2025)

Jane Eva Baxter's contribution (2025) on emotional archaeology similarly seems to present substantial theoretical insights. What appears especially noteworthy in this analytical context is how Baxter (2025) seems to challenge archaeology's traditional emphasis on objectivity and what could be seen as emotional detachment. She appears to advocate for incorporating emotion as a potentially valid analytical tool within archaeological interpretations. Her position tends to mirror broader trends in the social sciences that increasingly acknowledge the importance of emotions in shaping human experiences. By adopting this emotional lens, archaeologists may gain new ways to understand past societies, especially where conventional methods often fall short in capturing what seems to be the subjective experiences of historical individuals (Baxter, 2025)

What appears to warrant further interpretive consideration is Anna S. Agbe-Davies's chapter (2025) on intersectionality, which adds considerable theoretical depth to the handbook. Her detailed discussion appears to suggest what seems to be the way in which intersecting identities shape both personal and group experiences. This approach seems to provide a valuable framework for interpreting the complexities of gender in archaeological contexts. What Agbe-Davies (2025) appears to demonstrate is how intersectionality may uncover patterns of inequality and exclusion that more traditional methods might miss.

4. Critical Reassessment of Feminist Thought

The handbook's second section critically reviews what might be considered the evolution of feminist thought in archaeology. Roberta Gilchrist and Karen Dempsey (2025) discuss what appears to be a central question: whether feminist approaches



have become largely accepted within mainstream archaeological scholarship. What seems to emerge from their analysis is a highlighting of ongoing, and at times substantial, resistance to feminist methods, even as they acknowledge what appears to be important progress in establishing gender archaeology as an institutionalized field.

In her work, Margarita Díaz-Andreu (2025) explores what might be characterized as the “Matilda Effect”, offering a substantial critique of how women’s contributions in archaeology have historically been marginalized. What seems to emerge from her work are apparent patterns of gender discrimination that appear to have influenced archaeological knowledge production. Specifically, Díaz-Andreu (2025) seems to generally indicate how the accomplishments of women archaeologists have often been credited to their male peers or predominantly overlooked. From this particular interpretive perspective, this analysis appears to provide what may be considered a crucial historical background for current discussions about gender equality in archaeology.

Within this broader analytical framework, Kelley Hays-Gilpin and Linea Sundstrom (2025) provide a critical examination of the “male gaze” in rock art interpretations. Their chapter appears to tend to suggest how feminist theories can substantially impact practical archaeological analysis. What the evidence appears to reveal is that male-centered assumptions have historically influenced understandings of ancient artistic traditions. What appears to emerge from this evidence is that these biases typically result in overlooking or misunderstanding artistic expressions by what seem to be women and non-binary individuals. What appears to warrant further interpretive consideration is their critique, which seems to lend support to the importance of challenging these assumptions to achieve more inclusive interpretations of archaeological evidence.

5. Identity, Personhood, and Archaeological Interpretation

The third section of the handbook explores key questions surrounding how identity and personhood are constructed within archaeological research, focusing especially on burial practices and symbolic representations. What seems particularly significant about these findings, Marie Louise Stig Sørensen’s chapter (2025) offers a careful critique of interpreting prehistoric burials strictly through a binary gender lens.



She argues for approaches that tend to view gender as fluid and varied, presumably shaped by specific cultural contexts. What this tends to indicate is an encouragement for archaeologists to move beyond rigid categories and to recognize the apparent complexity of gender in the past.

Considering the nuanced nature of these findings, Diane Bolger (2025) examines fragmented figurative artifacts and human remains from prehistoric Cyprus. Her work illustrates how certain theoretical ideas might be applied in real archaeological research. Bolger (2025) uses innovative methods to explore the links between gender, identity, and social change. What the analysis tends to support is that gendered identities were not fixed but were seemingly negotiated and expressed through material culture. What this pattern seems to suggest, therefore, is a clear example of how gender archaeology appears to provide evidence that may support deeper insights into past societies (Bolger, 2025).

Chris Fowler (2025) investigates how kinship, personhood, and gender appear to intersect within specific archaeological contexts. What his analysis appears to suggest is that these categories seem to influence what might be characterized as both individual and group identities. Fowler (2025) tends to emphasize the need to see gender within the wider framework of social organization, and he also highlights how gendered identities are typically shaped by kinship systems and practices.

6. Addressing Marginalization and Social Justice

The fourth section seems to address archaeology's responsibility to confront contemporary social inequalities and amplify marginalized voices. Laura McAtackney's (2025) exploration of gendered institutions in Irish archaeology appears to offer a powerful demonstration of how feminist methodologies can reveal hidden or suppressed histories, while also illustrating what seems to be archaeology's potential as a force for social justice. What McAtackney's work (2025) appears to tend to suggest is how archaeological research can contribute to understanding and addressing contemporary inequalities. What also appears significant in this context is how it appears to suggest what seems to be the way archaeological knowledge can support or challenge existing power structures.

Kristen D. Barnett's (2025) chapter on Indigenous feminist perspectives seems to lend support to what may represent a crucial critique of colonial legacies within archaeological practice, advocating for more ethically engaged approaches to research. What the analysis tends to support is how traditional archaeological approaches have often perpetuated colonial power relations, frequently marginalizing Indigenous voices while appropriating Indigenous knowledge.

7. Gendered Lives and Archaeological Practice

The fifth section appears to broaden gender archaeology's scope by examining diverse experiences of what might be characterized as gendered lives. Katharina Rebay-Salisbury's chapter (2025) on motherhood seems to represent one of the handbook's most innovative contributions, exploring how archaeological evidence might illuminate maternal experiences, social roles, and cultural expectations that have been historically overlooked in conventional archaeological narratives. What appears particularly significant about these findings is that Rebay-Salisbury's work (2025) addresses a substantial gap in archaeological research, where motherhood has often been marginalized or largely reduced to biological functions.

Pedersen and Kristoffersen's discussion (2025) of public outreach appears to address another crucial dimension of contemporary archaeological practice: the discipline's responsibility to engage with broader public audiences. Given the multifaceted nature of this evidence, their chapter showcases innovative strategies for disseminating gender archaeological research beyond academic contexts, while also appearing to demonstrate the potential for public engagement to enrich archaeological interpretation.

8. Bodies, Politics, and Critical Reexamination

The handbook's final section offers what appear to be critical examinations of bodies, identity politics, and various feminist reinterpretations. Within this broader analytical framework, Taylor Peacock's discussion (2025) of skeletal sex estimation seems to provide a substantially important critique of methodological biases that appear inherent in traditional osteological practices, while advocating for more



nuanced understandings of sex as what might be characterized as a culturally and biologically complex phenomenon.

Uroš Matić's critique (2025) of binary frameworks in ancient Egyptian gender and sexuality studies provides another compelling example of the handbook's apparent commitment to challenging conventional interpretations. What Matić's work (2025) appears to suggest is how imposing contemporary Western binary categories onto ancient Egyptian evidence has largely obscured the complexity and diversity of gender and sexual expression in that particular society.

9. Methodological Innovations and Contemporary Relevance

Throughout the handbook, contributors present new methods that appear to define the contours of modern gender archaeology. These methods ostensibly go further than simply applying feminist theory; what seems to emerge from these findings is a shift in how archaeologists might conceive of their work and interpret their findings. Considering the nuanced nature of these findings, the volume includes new ways to study objects, with approaches that tend to see objects as active in the formation of social identity. It also introduces new methodologies for analyzing space, which may help show how people of different genders typically used landscapes. Some contributors use digital tools to find patterns in data that were seemingly hidden before. What also appears significant in this context, given the multifaceted nature of this evidence, is the handbook's inclusion of writers from many countries and backgrounds. This mix seems to generally indicate that gender archaeology is a global field, and it also appears to show how people in different cultures think about gender in what might be considered unique ways. What appears to emerge from this evidence is the book's engagement with new challenges as well.

10. Conclusion

What appears to follow from this analysis is that The Routledge Handbook of Gender Archaeology seems to lend support to what may represent gender archaeology's maturation into a sophisticated and robust field. Given the complexity of these theoretical relationships, Moen and Pedersen (2025) offer a resource that



appears to combine new theoretical directions with practical, methodologically-grounded advice. What seems especially noteworthy is that the handbook includes both global viewpoints and local details, seemingly keeping strong academic standards while staying connected to real-world issues. What this tends to indicate is that the book makes it ostensibly clear that gender archaeology now appears to represent a tool for studying the full complexity of past societies, not just what might be characterized as a reaction against predominantly male-centered views.

Within this broader analytical framework, the chapters appear to explore a range of substantially important questions regarding how we can know the past, how history appears to connect with the present, and what seems to constitute appropriate archaeological practice. What seems to emerge from this analysis is an indication that archaeology may have the potential to support social justice initiatives while still maintaining a commendably rigorous research approach. For researchers, students, and professionals alike, this handbook seems poised to substantially help shape the discipline's future trajectory. Given the complexity of these theoretical relationships, as archaeology continues to grapple with ostensibly new challenges like decolonization and interdisciplinary collaboration, works of this nature will presumably help guide its evolving growth. This handbook, therefore, appears to represent a key work for almost anyone seeking to understand the nuanced connections between gender, power, and social identity in historical contexts.

Conflict of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

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