

KİTAP İNCELEMESİ

- K Anne Pyburn. *Ungendering Civilization*.
- Rosemary A. Joyce Thames & Hudson. *Ancient Bodies, Ancient Lives: Sex, Gender, and Archaeology*, Reviewed by Suzanne M. Spencer Wood. *Inceleyen, Suzanne M. Spencer Wood*

- **Ungendering Civilization**
- **Ancient Bodies, Ancient Lives: Sex, Gender, and Archaeology**



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K Anne Pyburn. 2004. *Ungendering Civilization*. New York: Routledge, ISBN 0415260582, 9780415260589.

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These two books both advance the critique and correction of the projection onto the past of the Western patriarchal gender dichotomy between dominant, strong, active, powerful, public men and subordinate, weak, passive, powerless, domestic women as the natural, biological, and universally primary division in all societies. Both books provide evidence that the public and private spheres were not really separate in ancient civilizations because women held public as well as domestic roles that were important in economic, political, and/or religious systems. Further, both books provide evidence that some elite women in many prehistoric civilizations held powerful positions as rulers, wives of rulers or nobles, priestesses, government officials, or warriors. Both books (Pate's chapter in Pyburn's volume) address multiple genders in a number of European and American prehistoric societies. Joyce further critiques the assumption of heteronormativity in the gender dichotomy and presents corrective evidence of multiple sexualities in some ancient

societies. Both books discuss the problems of ethnographic analogy, and Pyburn discusses sources of male bias in colonial records, modern ethnographies, and cross-cultural research. Both provide short summaries of the rise of feminist research in prehistoric archaeology, but neither cite Sally Linton's 1971 foundational critique of the man the hunter construction of hominid evolution. Pyburn briefly but interestingly relates feminist and archaeological theories, and critiques the widespread tautological method of interpreting evidence to support the assumed universal subordination of domestic women in civilizations. Joyce's book ranges from early prehistoric figurines to historical civilizations. Pyburn's volume includes chapters on several major civilizations, some with legible documents.

Pyburn was inspired to gender Wolf's *People without History*, pointing out that his critique of the construction of culture as biologically based and ahistorical applies equally well to the cultural construction of gender, although Wolf only rescues men from essentialism and leaves women timeless without history. The purpose of Pyburn's book is to challenge the interpretation of all evidence to support the universal assumption that civilizations were dominated by strong public men while women have always been by nature essentially subordinate, domestic, passive, weaker, less well organized, less important, and less powerful than men. Yet Pyburn essentializes that women have always owned property (Pyburn 2004, 14), although Western wives in Europe and its colonies could not legally own property until sometime in the 19th century.

Chapters in Pyburn's volume aimed to test Engels' widely accepted contention that the rise of economic classes in states must involve male domination of women as a class. Chapters critique the interpretation of all kinds of evidence to indicate women's subordination. They reanalyze data collected and analyzed with androcentric questions that assumed women were always subordinate. It is pointed out in contexts from burials to buildings that material luxuries associated with men are interpreted as indicating their high status and powerful roles, while similar evidence associated with women is attributed to family wealth and status. Evidence of men's status and powerful roles is expected and accepted at face value, but similar kinds of evidence that women held powerful high status positions is ignored, questioned, or dismissed. In general, chapter authors found no clear evidence of universal subordination of women in civilizations defined by, and renowned for, status distinctions, including Sumer, predynastic Egypt, the Minoans, the Harrappans, Great Zimbabwe, the Vikings, the Moche, the Maya, and the Mississippians at Cahokia. Each chapter analyzes how interpretations of a civilization are biased by projecting the Western gender dichotomy. Biases are corrected with evidence that some women held gender roles, leadership roles, and powers identified as masculine. Largely the same grave goods were found with women and men among the Mississippians, the Maya, Harrappans, and Vikings. In the case of the Mississippians some of this similarity was explained by two-spirit people who combined male and female roles. Chapters in Pyburn's volume provide evidence time and again for women's diverse public roles and the public importance of their domestic roles in a wide variety of civilizations. The inescapable conclusion is that in many, perhaps most, civilizations, the evidence disproves Engels' theory that women

universally lost status with the development of classes. Instead, the evidence indicates that some women gained status with the rise of many civilizations.

Joyce's book argues against the methods of binary gender attribution of artifacts, identifying "archaeological signatures" of the Western gender dichotomy, and otherwise forcing artifacts into only two idealized uniform heterosexual sex-gender categories or identities. Joyce argues instead for considering biological sex as a continuum, and interpreting individuality and the variety of potential meanings of things, including non-binary constructions of gender, multiple forms of masculinity and sexuality, differences within gender categories, and the possibility that other social groupings such as class, ethnicity, race, age, status or skill may be more important than gender in some societies. This last argument creates a false binary opposition between gender and other social variables as monolithic wholes, leading to either/or thinking and research results such as Joyce's finding of stronger correlations between patterns of grave goods and age rather than gender in Tlaltico burials. Joyce followed the procedure she critiques of only categorizing the artifacts into two biological sex categories, and did not consider the possibility that the weak gender correlations could be due to the existence of an additional gender or two that combined male and female roles, although she critiques heterosexual bias in archaeology and discusses documented two-spirits and manly-hearted women in Native American tribes, as well as controversial evidence of multiple masculinities, valuing of young men's beauty, and possibly homosexuality by Bronze Age Europeans and the Classic Maya. Joyce also accepts a heterosexist interpretation of brothels and does not consider the possibility of bisexual or homosexual brothel services or activities among prostitutes (Spencer-Wood 2009, 48). Joyce argues that elite women had more in common with elite men than with lower-class women, though she also implicitly takes a third-wave feminist approach in analyzing how gender and class intersected in the lives of elite Classic Mayan women.

Joyce argues that the focus on interpreting female figurines as fertility symbols, evidence of goddesses, or of women's high status or domination of societies, has led until recently to the neglect of other kinds of important information that can be interpreted from figurines, such as age, actions, selective representation, methods of production, their possible use in ritual performances, evidence of textile use, or of some women's status as skillful textile producers. In Chapter 2, Joyce further argues for analyzing individual differences as contested images, or grouping figurines by whether or not they depict textiles. However, she falls into spurious either/or binary reasoning (Spencer-Wood 1995, 129-30) in arguing that the presence or absence of textile representations on early prehistoric female figurines is not a difference of sex because one male figurine was interpreted with a possible textile representation. The fact that few female figurines represent textiles suggests that textiles were only associated with some women, maybe high status women, rather than all women. But textile representations are still associated very predominantly with female rather than male figurines. Therefore, feminist both/and thinking (Spencer-Wood 1995, 129-30) is needed concerning the meaning of the intersection between textile representations and women. Archaeologists identify the role of priest as a male role in societies where only a few men were priests and even when there is evidence that one or two women were priests. In this case Joyce is making an

argument on the basis of defining women as a homogenous uniform group, the definition of women that she is critiquing. All women or men do not have to perform a role for a society to identify it with one of these genders. Genders are polythetic sets in which the members share some but not all experiences (Spencer-Wood 1994, 178). Joyce (54) also makes contradictory statements that male figurines are identified by lack of female biological traits, and figurines lacking male traits are defined as female.

Although the audience of this book is not specified, it is written at the upper undergraduate level. However, for those of us who are teaching students the academic practice of finding and citing precedents to their ideas in scholarly publications, it is an inadequate textbook model because some whole paragraphs of new information lack any citations. Further, Joyce gives the false impression, no doubt inadvertently, that she is the originator of previously published ideas and theoretical models by not citing Meskell's *Archaeologies of Social Life* (1999) for the model of biological sex as a continuum, or Kehoe's 1991 article in *Antiquity* for demonstrating that some early prehistoric figurines represent male genitalia. There are also precedents to Joyce's critique of the projection of the Western gender dichotomy onto the past with either/or thinking that makes modern gender inequalities seem inevitable (Spencer-Wood 1992, 98-9; 1995, 129-30). Joyce's book also often uses general terms for artifacts such as "luxury goods" instead of specifying them, which makes much of the book so abstract that it would be difficult for an instructor who is not an expert in several different prehistoric societies to answer student requests for details. Identification of luxury goods and their sources is important to analyzing the size of trade networks in which women participated.

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