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The Norwegian Case

- Gender archaeology at a mature stage?

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Norway has one of the most equal societies in the world in most measurable ways. This is due to a long struggle for equality that started in the 60 'ties and caused major changes in the society during the 70'ties and onward.

Parallel to this the first Norwegian studies in women in prehistory were published, and thus Norwegian archaeologists have studied women and gender for almost 40 years now.



Figure 1 Participants at an average excavation, E18 Vestfold 2005, © KHM, UiO .

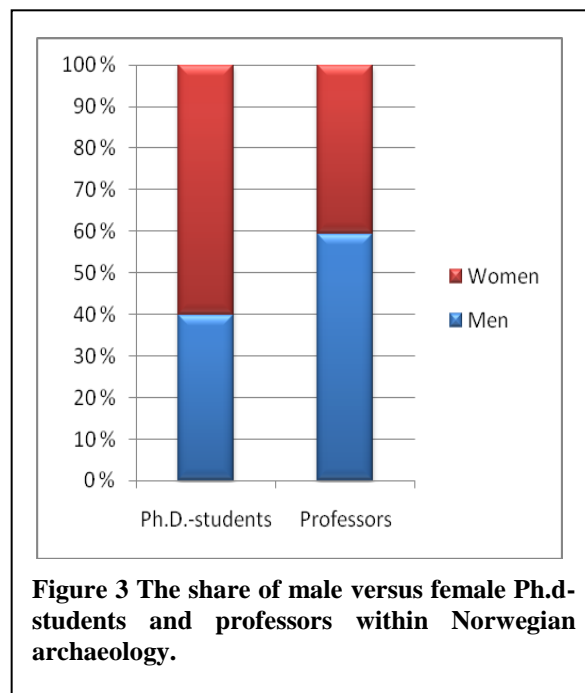
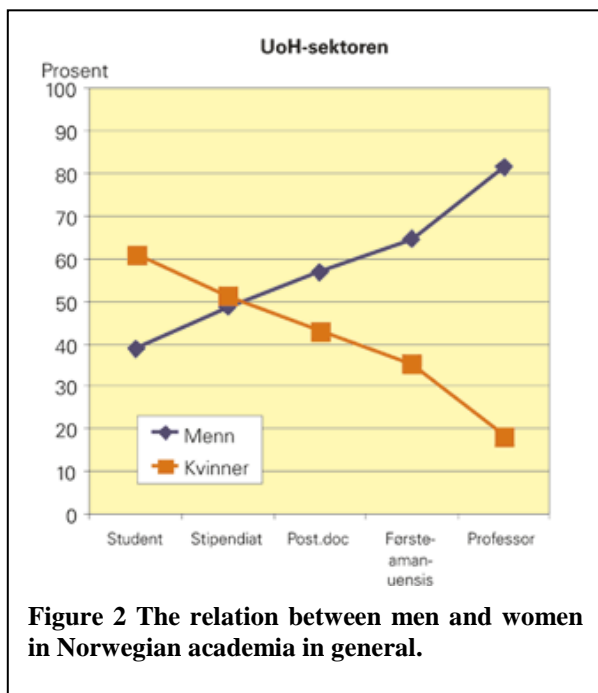
Figure 1 shows the participants at an ordinary contract excavation, and you may notice there is a clear majority of girls. So I'll start with a brief account of the professional situation of women archaeologists in Norway.

I guess the chart in Figure 2 is familiar to many. It illustrates the share of men versus women from students to Ph.D and post.doc, to associated professors and the very right as professors in universities in Norway in 2008.

If we turn to Norwegian archaeology in particular (see figure 3) the picture resembles, but the female decrease is

not nearly as dramatical. According to the web pages of the Nordic Graduate School in Archaeology (<http://www.hf.uio.no/iakh/forskning/dialpast/index.htm>) 60% of the Ph.D.students in archaeology in Norway are women per September 2009.

A quick count on the lists of employed at different archaeological institutions in Norway changes the picture a little. Of the 27 professors in archaeology I could find, 40 % are at the moment female.



When it comes to fieldwork it is more difficult to give any accurate estimation as most people are temporarily employed, but the picture in Figure 1 still illustrates an overall trend, that the majority of archaeological fieldworkers are women. It should be added, I think, that with a few exceptions it is illegal to use unpaid workers in excavations in Norway. Working hours are regulated and the wages are on the same level as comparable jobs within academia. It is thus perfectly possible to live by and as an archaeological fieldworker even if you have a family and children.

Today gender studies are established in most fields of social science and humanities and there are separate institutes of gender research at all the main universities in addition to several independent institutes or centres.

Norwegian archaeology has been strongly influenced by post-processual archaeology, and several have argued that this is an important reason why gender archaeology has gained what at least some claim is an influential position.

This spring separate courses in gender and archaeology were held in 2 of the 4 universities providing studies in archaeology. Further many archaeological studies have gender, if not as their main perspective, then at least as an important variable or aspect of interpretation. However, as far as I know, I am the only Norwegian Ph.D.-student at the moment with an explicit gendered perspective.

I will assert that it is not controversial to study gender in Norway, neither in general nor in archaeology. To a certain degree I will say gender has become a part of mainstream Norwegian archaeology, whatever that may be, and as such it has perhaps become even too conventional?

Gender archaeology does not provoke anyone anymore, and I keep wondering, shouldn't it!?

I think that if we want to disseminate gender archaeology to a wider public it has to be considered relevant for archaeology in general.

Some have argued that gender archaeology should strive for the mainstream, be accepted and dissociate from feminism. I am not sure this is a wise choice, because what we see is that as Norwegian gender archaeology is no longer clearly linked to the fight for female rights, when it is no longer considered to be overall important to find women in prehistory, gender archaeology has become predictable and uninventive. In Norway gender has become one of many variables, one of several aspects but this does not bring gender archaeology any further. Of course there are positive sides of such an approach; we obtain more knowledge of gendered structures in the past, and prehistoric women are not that invisible anymore, but we can and we need to do so much more.

If gender archaeology is to be relevant beyond gendered case studies I think it should be provocative. Provocative in the sense of questioning established truths, about gender, about power, about categories, methods, and about archaeology as a discipline.

It should be critical to archaeology as science, as practice and research.

And it should develop theories of gender, materiality and long term changes and new ways of studying the past. To do this we obviously need feminist theory. In that sense we need a feminist archaeology.