

Representing the Past: A Historical Analysis of how Gender Biases Influence the Interpretation of Archaeological Remains

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Abstract

The cultural and temporal context that any archaeologist is a part of will necessarily bias the way in which he or she interprets material remains. While interpretation is a crucial part of the archaeological process, the preconceived notions an archaeologist may hold can colour their interpretation of the society in question. Through examples such as the excavations at Knossos in Crete, the effect such biases can have on archaeological interpretation and discourse is studied.

The interpretation of material culture has been an important issue in archaeological discourse for some time. Archaeologists are human and inevitably carry with them a certain set of preconceived notions or ideological biases—to which their cultural context has disposed them—which can and do affect the conclusions reached about the artifacts they unearth. Of the many political, economic and social aspects that interfere in the interpretation of archaeological remains, gender seems to be one of much debate among archaeologists today. This is largely because gender is a concept which can seem exceedingly natural to individuals, as it is a tacitly learned method of categorization in many societies.¹ When a concept such as gender—the definition and meaning of which is determined by the specific cultural context—becomes a subconsciously

naturalized aspect of one's ideological mindset, "it colours our labeling of the world around us, and it affects both discursive and practical actions."²

The emergence of feminism and the subsequent construction of gender archaeology forced archaeologists to look at the androcentric (male centered/dominated) biases that were questioned in the interpretation record. A new discourse was born, which included the call for the re-analysis of previously excavated material remains, as well as for an understanding of these gendered biases in order to avoid them in the future. Case studies that exemplify the androcentric biases interfering with the interpretation of material remains, before issues of gender came into public discourse, will be examined. This will be followed by an analysis of how addressing this issue changed the interpretation and understanding of ancient peoples. Potential flaws in feminist archaeology will also be discussed, in order to demonstrate how the reaction to one bias can result in another one forming. This discussion will demonstrate how the archaeologist will always have biases of some sort, which have become an intrinsic part of their understanding of the structure of societies. These biases develop throughout life and are a result of the particular cultural context. The issue of importance for archaeologists here is not to attempt to eliminate subjectivity completely: such a task would be impossible. The issue is that there be a continued understanding and re-evaluation of the archaeologists' interpretations of

material remains, so that ever emerging biases may be addressed, identified, and understood. It is in this way that the interpretation of archaeological data can be truly culturally relativistic towards ancient cultures and remain as objective as possible.

The dynamics of archaeological interpretation are contingent upon many cultural aspects, and it is this articulation between the explanations produced and the material remains excavated that one finds a complex array of issues.³ Though archaeology can be described as further away from the social sciences and closer to other “knowledge producing fields studied by ‘science studies,’” it is unlike ‘science studies’ because of “its reliance on internally structured, situated, conventionalized, and contingent (constructivist) inquiry and knowledge claims.”⁴ As Joan Gero points out, archaeologists are required to “engage more heavily in ‘constructed’ dimensions of practice and...put forward more heavily constructed ‘facts’ than other scientists.”⁵ Here, Gero is discussing the aspect of interpretation which is inextricably linked to the archaeological process. It is here, with the interpretation of the excavated material culture that one finds the setting of where gender issues arise.

In another publication, Gero notes that many contemporary archaeologists attempt to keep gender biases in mind during excavation and interpretation. She states that:

...every phase and feature of archaeological research requires archaeologists to make difficult or even impossible interpretive decisions on the basis of incomplete, unfamiliar, indeterminate or bewilderingly complex evidence.⁶

Material remains of past societies do tell of the culture's past, and it is primarily through the remains of material culture that contemporary society may learn about societies no longer in existence. Artifacts portray a material representation of the past, and as such do not have an explanation of use, potential symbolic meaning, method of production or other information attached as explained by the individuals who used and created them. For this reason it is the job of the archaeologist to analyze the artifacts within the context of the site and to interpret and explain the structure of a society which no longer exists. In doing so, archaeologists often take for granted their own set of preconceived notions, and it is here that the problem of interpretation lies. These preconceived notions can then bias the representation of past societies' ideas about political structure, methods of production, economy, subsistence, social stratification and gender.

The changing ideological landscape regarding gender issues has influenced the reinterpretation of material remains which have been previously excavated. 'Second wave feminism' in the United States began in the mid-1960s and was a movement which advocated for gender equality within many different mediums including sexuality, workplace and society. The spread of these

ideas into the public sphere caused a great deal of discussion and publication, and the effects of these changing ideologies affected archaeology as well. Most notably, the effects were seen in the desire to find women in history, and to recognize them as active agents, rather than simply passive individuals.⁷ The onset of this new way of looking at history will be discussed later on. These changing ideologies also affected sites which had previously been excavated. As issues of gender equality in then-contemporary society were actively discussed, an attempt to move away from an androcentric bias became the focus for reevaluating aspects of past archaeological interpretation. The ratio of male archaeologists to female ones also became a point of discussion, as this could influence who was being represented in the archaeological record.⁸ As Marie Sørensen aptly states:

“increased awareness of androcentric biases, fuelled by debates in social anthropology in particular, and discussions within the social sciences generally and in society at large...began to reveal how interpretations of women had automatically downgraded her in terms of her contributions, ability and importance.”⁹

Sørensen goes into great detail on anthropological and archaeological academic discourse and the assumptions pointed out in the analysis portions of publications.

She gives the example of pottery production discourse. When such a task was associated with the women of the society it was inseparably linked to the domestic sphere, whereas when evidence emerged that pottery production

was an industry in the society, the production was attributed to the male gender.¹⁰ While issues of gender are commonly described as coming late in archaeological consideration, by the 1980s the aforementioned example and many other instances being brought to light in archaeological discourse were impossible to ignore and with the driving forces of the new “need to rewrite and reinterpret prehistory. A new version of our past was demanded.”¹¹ Sørensen argues that it was at this point in archaeology that the difference between sex and gender was taken into consideration; gender became recognized as a cultural construct and thus was not only separate from notions of biological sex, but was also dependant on the cultural context within which it was formed. Since knowing how a past society organized their gender categories—whether it was a dualistic binary such as in the West or contained many different and distinct gendered groups—is unknowable in its entirety. As Sørensen points out, gender was something that could not have been static, the need for a new way of looking at the archaeological remains of past societies became necessary.¹²

The response to considerations of gender in archaeology did not always result in the search for women in the archaeological record. There were many instances when androcentric constructions of the past simply had women’s domestic roles added to them. This is more commonly known as the “add women and stir” approach.¹³ However, it is because “historical archaeology

drew on the dominant ungendered cultural paradigm...in which elite men's roles, activities and viewpoints were represented as the genderless norm" that hasty attempts like the "add women and stir" approach at solving the gendered interpretation problem failed.¹⁴ The bias of archaeological interpretation prior to second wave feminist ideologies not only excluded women as active agents, but also did not take gender into account as an important aspect of past society. Gender organization was naturalized in the minds of archaeologists and so questioning the role of men versus women was not addressed. Society remained concretely ungendered, yet essentially riddled with the androcentric biases of an overwhelmingly patriarchal society. Suzanne Spencer-Wood goes on to discuss an article by James F. Deetz written in 1988 entitled *Material Culture and Worldview in Colonial Anglo-America*. Spencer-Wood summarizes that in his article, Deetz creates what he reasons is an ungendered evolutionary explanation of the progressive track of seventeenth century architecture and ceramics into the nineteenth century.¹⁵ However, as Spencer-Wood points out, Deetz's progressive organization of chaotic to orderly architectural stylistic choices neatly parallels the gendered dichotomy of chaotic, natural women and rational, cultural men.¹⁶ According to Spencer-Wood, Deetz was not only aware of the sexism within his paradigm, but justified it "with a structuralist argument that binary thinking is universal and natural."¹⁷ This is one of many case studies outlined by Spencer-Wood that illustrates how archaeologists have traditionally dealt

with the emergence of gender issues in interpretations and how the emergence of this new ideological landscape brought to light the ways in which an archaeologist's own biases—rooted in their own culture—can severely alter the objectivity and cultural relativism they bring to their explanation of the past.

One demonstrative case study of the androcentric bias that affected the interpretation of archaeological remains is Sir Arthur Evans's excavation of Knossos in Crete in 1900. Evans worked on Knossos for some time, and died in 1941, nearly two decades before the onset of second wave feminism brought gender biases into the discursive foreground. The site of Knossos remains today an important archaeological site of a Cretan civilization which Evans termed Minoan. At first, he believed that the town was the remains of a Mycenaean society, based on similarities between certain artifacts that his colleague Schliemann had excavated in Mycenae, but upon closer inspection he realized that he was excavating a distinct society.¹⁸ The following analysis of the excavation is an exploration of how one's cultural biases can interfere with objectivity and cultural relativism. It is important to begin this analysis by saying that "Evans opened a window into the Minoan past, and scholars, students, and tourists will always be eager to peer through that window."¹⁹ Evans's publication became "a record of Cretan archaeology, grouped around Knossos as its central point," and the impact of Evans's work is invaluable to the archaeological discourse concerning

ancient Crete.²⁰ Ultimately, “Evans’s discoveries at Knossos stimulated archaeological interest in Crete and rewrote Aegean prehistory by revealing the existence of an unsuspected civilization.”²¹ Though Evans’s biases will be explored here, it is important to clarify that such a discussion does not undermine the significance and ongoing effect of his work at Knossos.

Among the many amazing finds that Evans unearthed—including the grand staircase and the intact *pithoi* (large, half buried storage jars) —the two main discoveries that will be discussed include the frescoes and the space which Evans termed the ‘throne room.’²² The frescoes found by Evans were well preserved, even if only in fragments. Restoration was an indispensable goal for Evans as he “wanted people to be able to catch a glimpse of a long-dead culture.”²³ Evans “hired artists to paint new frescoes on many of the walls at Knossos based on surviving fragments of the ancient frescoes, which were carefully removed and preserved.”²⁴ The issue of interest here is that during the restoration, Evans gendered the animals depicted in the frescoes and made the gender categories he assigned to them correlate with whether the room belonged to the Queen or King. For example, the throne room contained frescoes of griffins, a decidedly more masculine animal, whereas the fresco with dolphins was designated more feminine. By imposing his own gendered associations onto ancient images, Evans consequently mapped out the space of the palace in terms of gender, thus skewing the

understanding of how the ancient palace was organized during its use. Based on the many instances of personal reflection found in Evans's four volume publication that spanned 1921-35, it becomes clear to the reader that Evans had a distinct view of the Minoans who occupied the palace. He refers to the clothing women would have worn, and talks of flounces, tight girdles and corsets.²⁵ The imaginative vigor that Evans brought to the excavation at Knossos is quite markedly the reason his work is so impressive, as his creativity and enthusiasm is refreshing and palpable through his writing. However, it is the bias of his imagination—as illustrated through something as constantly shifting as clothing—that altered the ways in which he viewed the past society of Minoans, which can riddle the presentation of that society to the contemporary public with error and misrepresentation.

In the case of the dolphin fresco, “experts [today] are reexamining these originals and finding that some of Evans's interpretations were wrong.”²⁶ During the course of restoration, Evans “placed [his reconstruction of it] above a doorway in the Queen's apartments” and it “is now thought to have been part of a collapsed plaster floor.”²⁷ Evans first gendered the dolphins feminine, thus discerning which space in the palace was for the Queen, and based his interpretation, reconstruction and analysis of the Minoan palace upon such organizations. One issue must be addressed here: the concept of archaeological stratigraphy was a relatively new concept

that Evans was attempting to implement.²⁸ While the use of this method did allow Evans to relatively date a significant amount of material remains and occupation levels, it was a concept in progress, and it is not surprising that mistakes were made. Crete is and has been seismologically susceptible to earthquakes and the destruction of levels of the palace could easily have resulted in the frescoes falling into areas and levels of the palace where they may not have been during the palace's use. The issue here is not that Evans mistakenly placed the dolphin fresco on the wrong level, but rather that in gendering the image according to his preconceived notions about gender from his own cultural and temporal context, his representation of the Minoan palace was altered: portraying a *Queen's* chamber where there may not have been. The issue of Evans's keen interest in restoring the palace can also be examined here as "some scholars feared that inaccurate reconstructions might obscure the site's true meaning."²⁹

Turning now to what he termed the 'throne room,' this space was of great significance to Evans throughout the excavation and restoration process. Evans went through a series of interpretations on this room. Initially, "Evans leaped to the conclusion that this 'seat of honour or throne' had been made for a woman's full skirts and that the chamber must have belonged to the Queen. He called it 'Ariadne's bath.'³⁰ Again one can see the preconceived notions about clothing that Evans unknowingly projected onto the ancient Minoans: the

women wore long skirts, and the men wore some other type of clothing that differed. However, upon analysis of the frescoes in the room (depicting griffins) he decided that the throne belonged to a king, and eventually came to the conclusion that it was the throne of King Minos himself. Shortly after this shift in interpretation, he began to refer to this area at Knossos as the Palace of Minos, based on the evidence of colored plaster indicating wealth and potentially royal apartments.³¹ In terms of reconstruction, “Evans rebuilt and redecorated the Throne Room three times in all as he changed his ideas about how the Minoans had used the room.”³² The recovery of a fresco fragment in the throne room with pieces of what appeared to be a human form went from being classified as unambiguously depicting a female (when it was Ariadne’s bath) to depicting a male (when it was the room of King Minos).³³

Many archaeologists, when looking at the ways Evans chose to interpret the archaeological data, critique that “he filled in many gaps” which led “some experts to suggest that the image is more Evans than Minoan.”³⁴ Another common critique of Evans’s work is that he romanticized the Minoans. He depicted them as a playful, wealthy and active society, based on the frescoes of dolphins swimming and bulls leaping. He also believed “that the Minoans had had no military or defensive architecture, but Greek archaeologists have found the remains of Minoan-era stone forts across the Cretan countryside” which indicates that some form of

defense or war was happening.³⁵ Excavations in 1979 have explored the evidence of the presence of human sacrifice in Minoan Crete society: possibly including the sacrifice of much younger individuals.³⁶ While a portion of the new views on Minoan society are attributed simply to continued excavation, one can still see how Evans had his own set of understandings about the structure of the society which had become naturalized to him, and therefore affected how he saw the ancient Minoan society he was unearthing.

While Evans used his own imagination, and by extension his own biases, to interpret the archaeological remains of Knossos, one could apply this same argument, in varying degrees, to any archaeologist. As previously discussed, the cultural context one is from will influence the development of certain biases and the naturalization of socially constructed understandings of the world and society. Furthermore, individuals, including Evans, are products of their time. The androcentric, clothing related and other biases that Evans brought to his analysis of Knossos are arguably the result of the temporal context within which he was raised and studied archaeology. Gender archaeology emerged as a result of women's liberation movements in the 1960s which surpassed the previous ones that dealt solely with legal issues. The emergence of a new consciousness about the potential inequalities regarding gender in archaeology did not become a part of the discourse until then, and Evans having done the majority of his work in the early to mid

1900s, was clearly not affected by this new ideological landscape. Thus, it is not a critique of the integrity of the archaeology that is being presented through the examination of Evans's work at Knossos, but rather the examination of how one's biases must be consistently under evaluation. If the issue of identifying and understanding one's own subjectivities is constantly under scrutiny, then the objectivity of the archaeologist can in be maximized. To have one's own set of biases is not only normal, but essential to the interpretive process. Without preconceived notions of some sort the archaeologist would have a difficult time interpreting material culture, as it is one's familiarity with the workings of a human society in general which enables them to speculate about another society. The case study presented of Evans and Knossos is illustrative of the ways in which one's biases, left unchecked, can potentially cause the most abstract part of archaeology (the interpretation of the material remains) to become the area where the accurate representation of the past fails.

The androcentric bias which was very present in past archaeological practice has been discussed. The responses to dealing with this issue have been largely dominated by gender/feminist archaeological methodologies and innovations. Today there is a vast amount of academic literature published about the importance of, and the problems with, attempting to find women in the archaeological record, or at least

attempting to avoid concepts such as essentializing, and gendering without proof.³⁷ The main goal of such a discourse has been to introduce revolutionary ways of looking at the archaeological record so that one might acquire a truer picture of the past, a picture that includes women. The problem with this approach is that in attempting to correct and compensate for the male bias, a new bias has been born: “feminists have also noted that the focus of research has more exclusively centered on women than on gender.”³⁸ Here Rita Wright refers to the tendency of gender studies in archaeology to function as a medium to overcompensate for the lack of representation of women in the past. This tendency is leading to the archaeological reinterpretation of sites which controls for the androcentric bias, but neglects to focus on the bias which predisposes archaeologists to stretch interpretations to indicate the importance and status of females where perhaps there simply was none. Several illustrative examples here include the case study of Marija Gimbutas—a revolutionary archaeologist in the field of gender archaeology—as well as the debate about female figurines that has been affected by the onset of gender archaeology. The resurgence and revitalization of a previously fringe spirituality movement known as the ‘mother goddess’ belief ideology will also be discussed.

Prior to the 1960s, there was an inclination in archaeology to interpret the past as though “history happened to (women), while men made it happen.”³⁹ The changing ideological landscape called for a renegotiation

of ideas so that concepts which were by no means natural facts would no longer be taken for granted. Marija Gimbutas was interested in looking at the Neolithic period in Greece. There has been an overwhelming interest regarding the Neolithic period and goddess spirituality, and Gimbutas' main goal was to look at the symbol of women in the spiritual realm, their importance there and the significance of female figurines. Gimbutas is referred to as an archaeologist who revolutionized the study of this topic, and she is known as "one of the most important and controversial figures in the study of gender and women in archaeology."⁴⁰ For some time Gimbutas's research on "goddess symbolism in Neolithic religion" was ignored.⁴¹ Carol Christ attributes this to a fear of women as primary actors in history and above all, a fear of how, for a time, God may have been a woman. She argues that this sort of major change in conceptualizing the past threatens cultural habits that have existed for an especially long time, and thus a change of this magnitude is a difficult topic to introduce.⁴² Christ is not alone in her belief that Gimbutas' work can cause the paradigmatic shift needed; Gimbutas not only introduces a framework which pushes cultural and religious temporal boundaries backward in the standard time frame, but she also rejects most notions of "androcratic warrior societies" which gives her take on the past a refreshing and intriguing perspective.⁴³ It is because Gimbutas looked at the archaeological record to learn about women's spiritual roles that her work is of interest to so many. Her excavations and

subsequent interpretation of the material culture she finds adds to the discipline of religious studies, archaeology and gender. Furthermore, her work did not only impact feminist studies in archaeology, but had a significant effect on popular culture as well.⁴⁴

Gimbutas' excavation in Thessaly, Greece in 1973-74 was one of the instances where she found hundreds of figurines. Her main argument consisted of a rejection of earlier explanations of figurines—Cycladic, Venus and so forth—which attributed them to the realm of magic or fringe areas of the dominant male centered religious beliefs that were believed to be held at the time. Gimbutas advocated that the figurines were not only material representations of the symbolic importance of women in past societies, but that they were proof that society in the past may have been matriarchal and that religion was dominated by a female goddess.⁴⁵ Needless to say, Gimbutas' theories have sparked much debate. Archaeologists who agree with her believe her to be a key figure in opening the door to a new and controversial truth that should be explored. In contrast, archaeologists who disagree with her, believe that theories such as this take the opposition to previous tendencies of androcentrism too far. Critiques of Gimbutas' theories include the notion that she takes European mythology and archaeological remains from many different times and places and suggests that they all indicate the same ultimate conclusion: that women were in power societally and spiritually to a substantial

extent.⁴⁶ This method of grouping assumes that “gender roles and domestic relations [are] a stable (natural) substrate of social organization” which is not the case.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the focus on the female figurines in such a manner not only overemphasizes the intrinsic aspects of fertility and motherhood to what it means to be female (as the figurines are usually naked and voluptuous) but it also disregards the more than common instance of male figurines in the archaeological record. In addition to the presence of male figurines, there are also many with no sexual distinction shown whatsoever, as is seen in Cycladic figurines for example.⁴⁸ Gimbutas’ analysis of female figurines accredits females a place of significance in the spiritual realm based on the very existence of the figurines and as a result moves women into the political and economic sphere as significant agents. By not allowing male and asexual figurines the same level of access, the flaws with Gimbutas’ interpretation of the archaeological record becomes readily apparent.

Gimbutas’ theorizing has sparked a renewed interest in what is termed ‘mother goddess’ spirituality. Her portrayal of European Paleolithic and Neolithic societies as resembling neo-paganist ideals, with peaceful and matriarchal organization have “sparked the imagination of adherents” and inadvertently “promise the possibility of a return to such values.”⁴⁹ The exploration of how this affected popular culture becomes a key issue. By advocating a female centered history, Gimbutas gave women a place of agency and significance in the

archaeological record. It is because this niche was created in a realm inextricably linked with the religious realm, that the already existing neo-pagan movements, which advocate a closer connection to nature and aspects of femininity, were strengthened. Gimbutas' research allowed adherents of such ideological viewpoints a concrete connection to their beliefs through the interpretation of archaeological remains.⁵⁰ Popular discourse exploded with the revitalization of goddess spirituality beliefs, and artifacts that had been uncovered in the 1920s such as the female figure with snakes around her raised hands—found by Evans at Knossos—were reemphasized and titled as the 'Minoan Snake Goddess' to name one example.

The impact of Gimbutas' work not only prompted new literary discourse, but infiltrated the media realm as well. For example the film *Goddess Remembered*, made in 1989. This film portrays the beliefs that sprung from theories of a female centered past as explained through archaeology. The in depth exploration of Venus figurines in the film leaves much to be desired in terms of objectivity. Goddess spirituality seems to use the archaeological record as interpreted by excavators, such as Gimbutas, as a source for historical justification of their beliefs. This issue is an important dilemma inherent in the use of archaeological remains. As Sørensen discusses, the archaeological record in terms of gender should be used to challenge our understandings of interpretation (the how and the why) rather than for self-

justification.⁵¹ Professor Richard Ellis comments on the film and says that he has “no argument with spirituality or the benefits people derive from it, but the ‘goddess movement,’ as typified by this video, relies on guesses and assumptions that are not borne out by any real data that we have about prehistory.”⁵² The problem with theorizing about these figurines in a female-centered manner means that assumptions and claims made throughout the film serve to strengthen belief, yet do not accurately portray the archaeological evidence. Also brought into question is the idea that understanding the significance of gender relations within a complex ancient society is an extremely difficult task for the archaeologist. The assumption that the presence of female figurines indicates a material expression of the role of significance for women is inherently flawed.⁵³ Above all, the film mirrors the issues which are critiqued by Hays-Gilpin’s book on ambiguous images in rock art in that the revitalization of the goddess movement in contemporary society is overemphasizing the female role based on a certain interpretation of a group of artifacts.⁵⁴ In this way, the response to androcentrism in the past is creating another polarized viewpoint which has become riddled with its own array of interpretive biases.

Gimbutas’ theories were not taken into consideration for some time. What changed to cause the swift accreditation of her theories in popular and academic discourse? Arguably, the changing ideological landscape

not only initiated the field of gender archaeology, but created an ongoing process of strengthening feminist archaeological values. These values call for such theories: those that provide historical and artifactual justification to desired paradigmatic shifts in contemporary society. Similarly, Evans's hypotheses about Knossos called for a reliance on the naturalized androcentrism in order to classify and explore the structure of the palace. His speculations were the result of his contemporary beliefs, and Gimbutas' theorizing was a result of hers. While Evans's interpretation of Knossos paved the way for more research about Minoan Crete, Gimbutas' interpretation of female deities as represented opened the door to feminist theorizing and the strengthening of popular religious belief.

The ideological landscape before the 1960s in archaeology has been described in terms of its limitations regarding androcentric biases. Subsequently, the response to the overturning of these ideas shifted archaeological assumptions with the onset of gender archaeology. The limitations of androcentrism and female centered biases have been explored. Today, many more issues are being raised about potential biases regarding gender. Authors such as Sørensen explore new and intriguing ideas concerning how "the cultural construction of gender is assumed to exist as a possibility within any society."⁵⁵ She discusses the emerging criticism that deals with questions of whether or not past societies recognized the existence of gender at all. These types of

discussions portray how “archaeology is uniquely placed for considering the origin or coming into being of gender as an effect of human interaction.”⁵⁶ In this way, the limitations of the archaeological assessment of gender and the gendering of sites and artifacts gain yet another layer of complexity. It is clear that the reevaluation of archaeologists’ biases are being considered on many levels today. Such an ongoing analysis is essential as it allows for the maintenance of cultural relativity. Furthermore, Sørensen speculates on how to recognize the gendered object in the archaeological record at all. Since material culture is the medium through which cultural values of the past are expressed, it is desirable and arguably possible to decipher how ancient societies organized gender roles. However, the ever present biases of the archaeologist (as Sørensen argues) may make the attempt impossible.⁵⁷ By raising such issues new questions surrounding cultural ideology in the archaeological record are unfolding today. New doors of inquiry are opening as a result of the history of the archaeological pursuit of gender.

The history of archaeological interpretation has been surveyed by using the changing ideological landscape of gender studies. Beginning by looking at the androcentric bias present before the onset of second wave feminism, and moving through to the female-centered bias which developed as a response to this, it has been shown that the interpretation of archaeological remains can be, and is, highly subjective. The interpretation of material culture

can be used as historical justification for contemporary movements in politics, religion and spirituality, and can also be a means of unraveling the mysteries of a society like the Minoans, whose societal structure needed to be initially constructed. Each archaeologist carries a unique set of preconceived notions that influence his or her interpretation of the material remains. This impact on interpretation is not always negative, without it no inferences could be made at all. However, assumptions about gender in the past made from within an overwhelmingly patriarchal context have been shown to result in many problems which subsequent discourse has to contend with. The examination of Gimbutas and goddess spirituality juxtaposes the interpretation trends of Evans at Knossos in order to illustrate how responses to one ideological mindset can result in the creation of a new gendered bias. The proposed medium for the compromise between the archaeologist's inherent biases and the need for interpretation in archaeology is a continued assessment and discourse on identification and understanding of potential biases that may alter the representation of the archaeological record. It is through this consistent analysis that problems of subjectivity can be minimized and cultural relativity is maximized. While total objectivity is impossible, ensuring that the archaeologist's culturally dependant biases remain in the foreground of inquiry, the task of interpretation can move further away from the realm of the abstract, and become more credible as a means of speaking for the past.

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- ²⁸ Ibid., 30.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 29.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 20.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Ibid., 28.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 36.
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