Archaeology

Also relevant for: Ancient History, Antiquity Studies, Cultural Anthropology, Sociology, Gender Studies

Course: Archaeology
Group of courses: Humanities
Provided by: Dr. Uroš Mati?
Last edit: Uroš Mati?

Table of contents

Course objectives 2
Teaching content/subject-specific gender studies content 2
Integration of gender studies content into the curriculum 3
Degree Stage 4
Basic Literature/Recommended Reading 4
Journals 4

Course objectives:

Course objectives include:

- **Gaining an overview of culture-specific concepts of body and gender in various ancient societies** (e.g., prehistoric societies, ancient Egypt, the ancient Near East, ancient Greece, ancient Rome, late antiquity, and the early Middle Ages in Europe). Students acquire the ability to recognize and critically reflect on the plurality of gender concepts and the resulting social norms. They should be able to critically analyze discriminatory processes and potential misuse in ancient societies.
- **Becoming familiar with special features of archaeological gender studies with a focus on material culture and human remains** (including bioarchaeological methods for the chromosomal and skeletal determination of sex and gender, e.g., analysis of ancient DNA, peptide analysis, and skeletal morphology). Students acquire fundamental knowledge of archaeological methods for examining sex and gender that can be applied to related disciplines, such as physical anthropology and bioarchaeology in Master's and doctoral programs.
- **Acquiring the ability to critically analyze gender representations in museum exhibitions and to develop best practices for integrating current research into museum programs.** Students should develop critical and solution-oriented skills that can be applied to related fields, such as museology and cultural heritage studies, in their future studies.
- **Developing the ability to critically reflect on prevailing gender stereotypes in archaeology and finding strategies to overcome these in research and scientific communication.** Students will gain skills in public archaeology and scientific communication, especially in the context of gender studies.

Teaching content/subject-specific gender studies content:

Description of specialist fields:

- **Gendered funerary archaeology** deals with the gender norms expressed in the burial practices of ancient societies. The basic assumption is that the deceased are buried by the living, who project their own gender norms onto the deceased. Previously, archaeologists assigned gender to buried individuals based on modern notions of typical grave goods (e.g., jewelry for women, weapons for men). Today, archaeologists avoid such assumptions and combine bioarchaeological methods with an analysis of the associated grave goods. These aspects should be taught already at Bachelor's level, as fieldwork brings students into regular contact with funerary practices.
- **Gender bioarchaeology** examines the effects of gender and gender norms on the course of life in past societies. Various scientific methods for determining sex and gender, which have their origins in human biology and physical anthropology, are discussed. Stable isotope analysis and DNA analysis are used to examine the relationship between sex/gender, nutrition, and mobility. Physical anthropology also explores the connections between gender/sex, activities (occupations), and experiences of violence. Students should be introduced to fundamental elements of these methods at Bachelor's level, as they will work with human remains during excavations. These methods represent the current state of research in all archaeological disciplines and are particularly relevant for the job market. Solid knowledge can be further enhanced at Master's level in physical anthropology and bioarchaeology and prepare students for individual doctoral projects.

- **Settlement archaeology** in relation to gender deals with issues of gender and everyday life, occupations, division of labor, use of space, and livelihoods. Given that there are no human remains to be studied, this is a particularly challenging field of research. Therefore, the subject critically analyzes written sources on gender-specific activities and their visual representations and draws on ethnoarchaeology, which examines the emergence of archaeological findings in real time. Students should be introduced to fundamental elements of these methods at Bachelor's level, as they come into contact with material culture during field internships and often assign gender-specific connotations to it without being aware of potential biases.

Methodological and theoretical approaches:

The archaeology of gender is an explicitly multi- and interdisciplinary subfield of archaeology. It benefits from a multidirectional transfer of knowledge and draws on methods from physical anthropology (bioarchaeology), material culture analysis, art history, history, cultural anthropology, ethnology, and ethnoarchaeology. The field is also influenced by feminist research, gender studies, and queer theory in philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and literary studies. Approaches range from evolutionary and poststructuralist theories to queer theories and posthumanist perspectives. Various archaeologists distinguish between sex and gender or consider both to be the result of performative practices that naturalize gender differences (influenced by Judith Butler). Gender theories that include intersexuality and transsexuality have only recently been introduced into archaeological discourse. Additionally, the field is increasingly shaped by the concept of intersectionality (Kimberlé Crenshaw), which indicates that oppression affects multiple axes simultaneously.

Fields of action and practice:

Gender archaeology criticizes androcentrism and sexism within archaeology, challenges stereotypes and gender biases, and promotes reflection on perspectives, self-reflection, and the recognition of a pluralistic range of lifestyles and experiences. It uncovers varied understandings of gender in past societies and critically examines gender evidence beyond binary thinking, queer forms of expression, and the questioning of social norms in the past. In the 1990s, gender archaeology inspired the emergence of an explicitly queer approach to archaeology.

Professional aspects:

Gender archaeology advocates for gender equality within the professional field of archaeology. It takes a stand against gender pay gaps, sexism, and homophobia, and critically examines the history of archaeology, especially regarding the contributions of women and other minorities. Gender archaeology is also dedicated to preventing and opposing harassment and bullying within the discipline.

Integration of gender studies content into the curriculum:

Gender archaeology can be integrated into various ancient history disciplines, such as prehistory and early history, Egyptology, Coptic studies, Assyriology, classical archaeology, Roman and provincial Roman archaeology, and medieval archaeology. It can be offered as a stand-alone module or integrated into existing modules such as funerary archaeology, bioarchaeology, settlement archaeology, monument preservation, and museology. Although gender archaeology is often neglected, it should be an integral part of comprehensive gender studies.

Examples of specific course and module titles and their implementation:

- **“Gender and archaeology”** – a study session in the Introduction to Archaeology course. Bachelor’s students should gain an understanding of key concepts and methods through illustrative examples which can be chosen freely from the subject area (e.g., prehistory and early history, ancient Egypt, ancient Greece, ancient Rome, and medieval Europe).
- **“Archaeology of genders”** is a course offered at both Bachelor’s and Master’s levels. I provides an overview of three central subject areas: funerary gender archaeology of gender, bioarchaeology of gender, and settlement archaeology of gender. The course is open to students from other disciplines.
- **“Archaeology of genders: Interdisciplinary approaches”** – Master’s module covering several courses related to gender archaeology, e.g., funerary and bioarchaeology of gender, settlement archaeology of gender, and gender, cultural heritage and museums.

Degree Stage:

At Bachelor’s level (introductory):

- **Overview of culture-specific understandings of body and gender in various past societies.** Students are introduced to different conceptions of gender and body, as well as their cultural contexts. The focus is on understanding the body in relation to gender within specific societies, depending on the respective archaeological field of (in-depth) study.
- **Basic principles of archaeological gender studies with a focus on material culture and human remains.** Students learn to apply fundamental methods and concepts relevant to the analysis of gender in archaeological contexts.

At Master’s level (in-depth):

- **Critical analysis of the representation of gender in museum exhibitions.** Students acquire the ability to critically examine museum exhibitions regarding their gender-related content and to critically take current research findings into account.
- **Critical reflection on prevailing gender stereotypes in archaeology.** The focus is on identifying and overcoming stereotypes and promoting a reflective approach to gender issues in research.
- **Gender and public archaeology.** Students analyze the role of gender in communicating archaeological knowledge to the public and develop concepts for gender-sensitive scientific communication

Basic Literature/Recommended Reading:

Bolger, Diane, Hrsg. 2013. A Companion to Gender Prehistory. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell

Díaz-Andreu, Margarita and Sørensen, Marie Louise Stig, Hrsg. 1998. Excavating Women. A History of Women in European Archaeology. London and New York: Routledge

Geller, Pamela. 2016. The Bioarchaeology of Socio-Sexual Lives: Queering Common Sense About Sex, Gender, and Sexuality. New York: Springer

Gero, Joan M., and Margaret W. Conkey, Hrsg. 1991. Engendering Archaeology: Women and

Prehistory. Oxford: Blackwell

Gilchrist, Roberta. 1999. Gender and Archaeology: Contesting the Past. London: Routledge

Joyce, Rosemary. 2008. Ancient Bodies, Ancient Lives: Sex, Gender, and Archaeology. London: Thames & Hudson

Mati?, Uroš., Gaydarska, Bisserka., Coltofean, Laura and Diaz-Guardamino, Marta, Hrsg. 2024. Gender Trouble and Current Archaeological Debates. New York: Springer

Meskell, Lynn. 1999. Archaeologies of Social Life: Age, Sex, Class et cetera in Ancient Egypt. Oxford: Blackwell

Moen, Marianne and Pedersen, Unn, Hrsg. 2024. The Routledge Handbook of Gender Archaeology. London and New York: Routledge

Sørensen, Marie Louise Stig. 2000. Gender Archaeology. Cambridge: Polity Press

Journals:

American Journal of Archaeology

Archaeological Dialogues

Cambridge Archaeological Journal

Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire

Current Anthropology

European Journal of Archaeology

Journal of Anthropological Archaeology

Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory

Journal Social Archaeology