

# backfill

## WOMEN IN ARCHAEOLOGY CONFERENCE: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF ARCHAEOLOGY

Hilary du Cros and Laurajane Smith

The conference was held at Charles Sturt University, Albury, between 8 and 11 of February. There were 102 registrations. Overseas visitors included Dr Meg Conkey (USA), Dr Joan Gero (USA), Dr Alison Wylie (Canada), Chris Jenkins (NZ), Pamela Russell (NZ), and Beverly Parslow (NZ).

Thirty-eight papers were given in eight sections:

- \* Gender as a Dimension in Archaeological Theory
- \* The Pleistocene and Physical Anthropology: Removing the Stereotypes
- \* Concurrent sessions: Gender Case Studies in Prehistory and Historical Archaeology
- \* Concurrent sessions: Cultural Resource Management and Gender Issues and Gender and Art Studies
- \* Women in the Archaeological Career Structure
- \* Women in the Archaeological Workplace

Meg Conkey's paper 'Feminism and Interpretation in Archaeology' made points about the dangers of borrowing feminist social theories without ensuring archaeological input into the development of those theories. Nevertheless, Meg maintained that feminist thought should be used to re-define the canons and underpinnings of every area of archaeology and every archaeological theory.

Joan Gero's paper 'The Social World of Prehistoric Facts: Gender and Power in the Knowledge Construction' discussed how the mechanics of knowledge construction in academia are a gender issue. Alison Wylie's paper 'Gender/Archaeology: Sociopolitics and Relativism' tied the major points made by Meg and Joan together and stated that gender considerations have implications not only for archaeological theory, but also for the way archaeological data are collected, analysed, conserved and presented to the various publics served by archaeology. She argued that rather than compromising the integrity of research practice, the explicitly political standpoint of a feminist archaeology can greatly enrich the discipline.

Papers given by Antipodeans also considered, discussed and applied these issues to Australian and New Zealand archaeology. The level of scholarship in many of the papers indicated that these issues has been percolating for a while under the surface of mainstream archaeology.

Three workshops were held as well as the formal papers. The workshops were:

- \* Student Aspirations and the Hard Realities: Policies and Strategies for Student Support
- \* Policies and Strategies for Dealing with Discrimination in the Workplace, (which Alison Wylie called the 'Chilly Climate Syndrome')
- \* Gender Theory and Research Strategies: Where to in the 1990s?

When we began organising the conference there were many who feared that the workshop sessions would consist of personal accusations against specific individuals. These criticisms were unfounded as discussion in the workshops centred around general issues of discrimination, particularly the principles and concepts of equal opportunity and equality. As a result of the first workshop, student networks were established and policy statements developed. The second workshop, organised by Alison Wylie and Jillian Comber discussed the 'Chilly Climate Syndrome' and generated principles and strategies for dealing with discrimination in the workplace. The discussion in this workshop was cathartic for many participants. A number of important resolutions were made by people openly and privately at this workshop. During the final workshop, reading groups were established and various co-ordinated research projects were mooted and decided. Some of these research projects will be conducted internationally.

We have only been able to report very briefly on the nature and contents of the papers and workshops. However, we are now editing a comprehensive proceedings of the conference. This will be published by the Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian

National University and be available by the end of the year or early 1992. A second *Women in Archaeology Conference* will be held in 1993 at the University of New England, Armidale, NSW.

During the run-up to the conference, the Women's Congress was established. The Congress keeps in touch via a Newsletter, which is also a forum for the discussion of theoretical and workplace issues in archaeology. Subscriptions to this Newsletter costs \$5.00 per year and can be obtained from:

The Editors  
Women's Congress Newsletter  
Charles Sturt University – Murray  
PO Box 789  
Albury NSW 2640

The commitment to an engendered archaeology that we witnessed at the conference surpassed all our expectations. Personally, we felt proud, inspired and EMPOWERED to be associated with this event and the response it has illicited. Finally, we would like to thank those who attended the conference. Thank you for

participating constructively in discussions and providing a supportive, personal and yet professional atmosphere which allowed a non-confrontationalist examination of archaeology. We wish all conferences could be like this – and thank you for the flowers.

### Suggested Reading

- Conkey, M. and J. Spector 1984 Archaeology and the study of gender. In M. Schiffer (ed.), **Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory** 7:1–38. Academic Press: New York
- Gero, J. and M.W. Conkey 1991 **Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory**. Blackwells: Oxford.

1. **du Cros and Associates  
Archaeological Consultants  
14 Niringa Avenue  
Aspendale Vic. 3195**
2. **Charles Sturt University  
Albury NSW 2640**



The last day of the conference