

Women on the Move – The Scientific and Archaeological Evidence for Female Mobility in the Past

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Male mobility has been cited as a factor in the spread of prehistoric technology and material culture in Europe. The heroic travels of smiths, traders, warriors and seafarers has been seen as instrumental in the transmission of knowledge and the formation of connections between elite groups in different parts of the Old World. This viewpoint is emphasised in studies of European Bronze Age societies, for example. However the scientific evidence for female mobility is very strong. Both mitochondrial (mt) DNA analysis and strontium and oxygen isotopic analysis have shown that individual women also moved locations during their lifetime. Somehow there seems to be very little archaeological evidence for this movement in the material culture record. Is it a case of no-one looking for this evidence, are the traces left by women so ephemeral compared to males- or have archaeologists simply omitted female mobility as an explanation of material culture change? The archaeological study of female mobility is an under researched area compared to that of male mobility. Yet if there is one thing that the distribution of European mtDNA haplogroups shows us, it is that exogamy, involving the movement of women to new locations, has been taking place for millennia.

This session aims to present case studies of both scientific and archaeological evidence for female mobility, and to ask whether women were also involved in technology transfer, knowledge transmission and the formation of elite connections in the past.