

Humans and animals in the making of gender

Gender archaeology has analyzed gender based mainly on material artifacts, from production processes to various contexts of use and discard (of objects as well as built structures). Nevertheless, the theory of practice argues that the construction of gender as well as the negotiation of gender roles presupposes a process of socialization of the biological and of biologization of the social by means of which history is transformed in “nature”. This means that alongside and entangled with material artifacts, elements that pertain to the realm of (our) nature are made use of, and that specific concepts of “the cultural”, of “the natural”, and of the relation between them are produced. This session – acknowledging the fact that there is still much left to be done in the study of gender through material artefacts - suggests tackling an aspect that is closer to the “natural” side: that of the relation between gender and animals. “Animal” is a cultural concept. What roles are animals made to play in the making of gender?

The fact that animals are not merely made use of by humans, but that they themselves can shape human life has been recognized for some time in archaeology. Nevertheless, in many respects this approach is still at the beginning. As far as gender archaeology is concerned, probably the most important way it could expend in this direction is by following the lead of feminist and post-humanist theories, with their inclusive recognition of animal agency. Opening up for a variety of “others”, beyond one normalized type of agent, and likewise opening for multiple points of view, allows us to ask a whole new range of questions about gender in archaeological contexts.

The purpose of the session is two-fold:

1. To investigate how people make use of animals to construct and negotiate specific gender configurations. What connection is there between gender and animal related activities (hunting, animal husbandry, processing of animal materials, consumption, etc.)? Given that references to animal social life were often made to justify (human) gender relations, what roles are attributed to animals in symbolic violence?
2. To investigate how animal agency works in the construction of gender. Fundamentally, animals should be recognized as a separate kind of being by their ability to directly act upon, and have an impact upon the world (agency). What are the consequences of attributing animals with agency in this sense – i.e. bringing in a new type of agent --, from

a gender perspective? What could the significance be of this dynamics on gender construction?

While outlining the problematic of this session from particular perspectives (theory of practice, feminism, post-humanist theory), the organizers of this session welcome contributors representing any other stance, with the conviction that our inquiry into gender-animal relations could only benefit from a variety of approaches.

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