

WOMEN IN PORTUGUESE ARCHAEOLOGY*

by

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Abstract: There has been a gradual growth in the presence of women in all fields of Portuguese archaeological activity (in the universities, state services, museums, etc.) since the 1970's. However, although there is a greater number of female students in Prehistory and in Archaeology in general, only lately women have become similarly represented at a professional level. Museums were the first institutions in which women archaeologists, some of known prestige, began to work. In universities, contributions by women in master thesis or Ph.D.'s have provided interesting new approaches in recent years. Finally, as distinct from other European countries, in Portugal survey archaeological units are still limited in number. In the future this is a field where a large number of women will be involved.

Key-words: Portugal. Archaeology. Women.

1. WOMEN IN THE PORTUGUESE LABOUR MARKET, ESPECIALLY IN TECHNO-SCIENTIFIC PROFESSIONS

Sousa Santos (Santos, 1990) has repeatedly characterized Portugal as a "semi-peripheral country", that is, a country whose development occupies an intermediate position between the central societies (the so-called "first world") and the peripheral societies of the "third world". According to the same author, this situation implies that in Portugal elements of pre-modernity may coexist with others which are typical of the modernity or even of "post-modernity". Traditionally, what we have had in Portugal is not the "welfare state" in the technical sense, but rather what is named by Santos a "welfare society". This

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means that kinship, neighbourhood, community ties of mutual help and assistance are here in action, in place of the modern state. The state has been, in our country, mainly authoritarian, favouring situations of "clientelism" and populism, in contrast with formal centralized and autonomous ways of organization (with well defined sectorial interests), typical of the central countries. One of the consequences of this kind of "pre-modern" state is the difficulty of putting into practice some socio-political options, the distribution of benefits being selective and subject to particularistic criteria, and therefore creating relations of domination and subordination, which have been sometimes very subtle indeed. The reality is, as always, a changing, contradictory, and complex one, but this characterization of Portugal by Santos (namely the "privatization of the state" - to use his words - which consists in the use of public resources by groups of individuals for particularistic interests) is still valid, even if we only consider the limited field of Archaeology.

In her contribution to the book "Portugal: A Peculiar Picture" (Santos, 1993), Virgínia Ferreira (Ferreira, 1993) has underlined the fact that the increase in the sexual division of labour is a function of a higher degree of industrialization. Sex segregation in the employment is less relevant in Portugal than in other countries of the E.U. where the process of industrialization was initiated earlier; but women, in Portuguese society, tend to occupy the less qualified posts and to remain in that situation for a longer time than men. Their periods of employment are shorter than men's and their wages are lower. Obviously, this is not the right place to analyse all the situation in detail.

Anyway, as far as techno-scientific professions are concerned, we find a scenario which could seem, at a first glance, paradoxical, but which fits the situation described above: high rates of female labour (55% in 1989), and a high percentage of females in graduate (university) courses, archaeology being no exception. To understand this, we need to remember, as Ferreira stresses, our semi-peripheral condition. In industrialized countries women face more difficulties in their participation in the structures of research, because in those countries there is a stronger articulation between these activities and the productive system, therefore these activities have a greater economic power. Portuguese university level of education is less massified and more elitistic than in other countries of the E.U. It is enough to say that in Portugal only 3% of the active population has obtained a university degree; and only 11% of young people (1981) is receiving a university education. According to Ferreira, in the more elitistic societies, like the Portuguese one, women have the tendency to occupy positions which, in less elitistic communities, would be occupied by men of the more unfavoured social groups having reached the upper levels of school preparation. The same author stresses that in semi-peripheral countries like ours, social class

relations are more important than sex social relations for the access to certain prestige jobs. So, it is not surprising to observe, in teaching for instance, high rates of female presence. In 1984/85 the female university personnel was 31% - which is relatively high. In March 1991, in our Faculty (Faculty of Arts of Oporto University), of a total of teachers (247) 50% were females (125).

In conclusion, due to the fact that Portugal is in a place of transition between the "developed" and the "third world" countries, sexual segregation in employment is not so accentuated as in other European countries, and there is a significant "feminization" (% of women) in the teaching system (both at the teacher as well as at the student levels).

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF PORTUGUESE ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE SPECIFICITY OF ITS PRESENT SITUATION

In a previous paper (Jorge & Jorge, 1995) we defined four major periods in the history of Portuguese archaeology, which, very schematically, are:

- 1 – Origins – late 1850s, 1860s of the nineteenth century.
- 2 – First Development – from the 1870s of the nineteenth century to the late 1920s of our century.
- 3 – Backwardness, Dependency, Anachronism – from the 1930s to the 1960s of the twentieth century.
- 4 – Second Period of Development – from the 1970s to the present.

We will take into consideration here only the third and the fourth periods, because it is during them that most women make their appearance in Portuguese archaeology.

During the third period, the community of Portuguese archaeologists was small (as it is still today): at that time, around one hundred people, for the most part amateurs. The state organization of archaeology was very weak, and the central office necessarily inefficient (through lack of means and personnel); there was no systematic survey of the territory, every record of findings or sites was made in a personal manner and on an occasional basis. This situation means that the areas most known were those more accessible to the few archaeologists available. The inner regions of the country remained for the most part isolated, difficult to access because of the bad roads, far from the few culture centres concentrated at the coast. For a long time, Portugal was made up of "two countries", with the cultural elites settled in Lisbon, Porto and Coimbra and their surroundings. With the exceptions of the Roman town of Conimbriga, near Coimbra, and of some projects by Eduardo Serrão and his collaborators in

Prehistory, no systematic scientific excavations were carried out by Portuguese archaeologists. It is significant that the most important field work was conducted by foreigners, like Henry Breuil or Jean Roche for the Palaeolithic/Mesolithic (in collaboration with the Portuguese Geological Service in Lisbon), and Georg and Vera Leisner for the megalithism, Hermanfrid Schubart & Edward Sangmeister for the Chalcolithic, etc. Also, it was from abroad that the main reference books reached the country, namely those by the Spaniard Pere Bosch-Gimpera and his disciples Luis Pericot and Alberto del Castillo, or those by Julio Martinez Santa-Olalla. Therefore it is not surprising that the culture-historical paradigm was the dominant one, as in many other places of the world.

In fact, the main tendency of Portuguese archaeology at the time was a strict empiricism and descriptivism, with very scarce essays on methodological or synthetic grounds. Some concern with problems of interpretation is noticeable in the writings of Eduardo Serrão, influenced by Gordon Childe, some of whose books have been translated, although they were silenced by the majority of active archaeologists.

At the start of the 1970s, some important transformations may be noted, even before the democratic revolution of April 74, and the consequent collapse of the authoritarian regime which had reigned in Portugal for several decades. That regime was ultimately responsible for the methodological and theoretical backwardness and anacronism of our archaeology since the 1930s. The above mentioned transformations gained a new strength after 1974, when several new jobs and opportunities for work were created, in particular in the universities. Here a new generation of archaeologists, concerned with methodological and theoretical issues, played an important role in opening new perspectives of research. But let us consider this last, fourth period of our archaeology in general, pointing to some of its main innovations, which are far from having overcome most of the structural problems of the archaeological system.

We may start by mentioning the first rescue projects, funded by the state and/or by the Gulbenkian Foundation, like in the Sines industrial area (since 1972) or in the important rock art complex of the Tagus Valley (1971/73). For the first time, team work was viable in large areas, trying to record as much archaeological information as possible.

This kind of systematic survey would be extended later (mainly during the 1980s) to other significant parts of the territory (like the extreme north or south, and the east), although in general conducted under the pressure of the university system, namely the need for a docent to present a Ph. D. dissertation to ensure progress in his/her career. At a different level, so, archaeological initiative continued until today very much under the dependency of more or less distinguished individuals. This is perhaps one of the most significant symptoms

of a more general illness of the Portuguese situation: on the one hand, the weakness of the state to organize this activity, whose importance is not fully taken into consideration by most of the authorities (a "pre-modern" feature); on the other hand, the incapacity of the archaeologists to organise themselves in order to improve their professional status, and to demand conditions of work and remuneration compatible with their technical know how. Individual dependency on the meagre funds granted by the state or the municipalities, and very hard competition among people or small groups in the permanent fight to obtain the minimum appropriate work conditions, diminish the possibilities for archaeology in Portugal to acquire a status of public respect. The archaeologist is still seen today by lay-people as a romantic "free-lancer", searching for exciting discoveries and being rewarded through his/her own enthusiasm. The overturning of this situation is the most important challenge which the young people who are now approaching this field face.

Throughout the period, we notice an increased influence of researchers from abroad, be they French (collaboration of Jean Roche with the University of Porto, after 1974, for instance), German (creation of the German Archaeological Institute in Lisbon in 1972), British - it was Hubert Newman Savory (Savory, 1968) who wrote the first popular modern synthesis of Iberian Prehistory - or, more recently, North American. The positive influence that these researchers had on the orientation of the generation who is now at work is visible in the significant improvement in the quality of archaeological activity during the last two decades, mainly in scientific terms. The development of consistent and durable regional projects; the improvement of rescue archaeology; the systematic study of certain main themes, namely in Ph.D. dissertations - like the Upper Palaeolithic and the Mesolithic, the process of neolithization, the megaliths, the Chalcolithic hill-forts, the rock art, the Bronze Age settlements, the Iron Age and Roman hill-forts, the study of Roman towns and villae, the medieval and industrial archaeology -; the producing of the first good synthesis of our Prehistory and Roman Archaeology; and the organization of some important meetings, all these are signals that Portuguese archaeology has reached a dignified status and that it begins to be operational. Let us refer, in particular, to the holding, in October 1993, at the University of Porto, of the 1st Congress on Iberian Archaeology, which was attended by about 800 people, and whose most visible out-put was the publication of 8 volumes of Proceedings, with more than 500 pages each. Portugal is no longer an isolated country; and, in this respect, it is crucial for us to establish permanent grounds for collaboration with our neighbours and to create stable conditions for dialogue with other European countries, like our partners in the E.U., and others. Portuguese researchers have started to participate regularly in international forums, and it is now vital that foreign colleagues also make an

effort to know and quote the papers and books produced in the last decades - and not only old-fashioned works, which are now completely out of date. Given that any Portuguese archaeologist needs to understand a minimum of English, French, German, not to mention Spanish or Italian, to do his/her work, it is not acceptable that some of our European partners interested in Iberian archaeology maintain their sovereign ignorance of Portuguese (the 7th most widely spoken language in the world). In this respect, a more egalitarian system is needed in order not to marginalize researchers from the smaller countries, and their recent achievements - an obvious truth, too often forgotten.

So, the Portuguese archaeological situation is, in many aspects, contradictory. Some important developments have occurred lately, but they are too much dependent on individual efforts. A large educational movement is needed in order to establish archaeology as a public service and as a humanistic discipline based on clear, negotiated, rules of procedure. This does not mean that we argue for an homogeneity of interpretations - on the contrary. In our opinion nobody, or any particular approach, has the right to monopolize the access to "the past". As a social production, as the result of a political and ideological option, the "past" must remain open to a plurality of perspectives. In this line, we oppose any totalitarian tendency of any form of thought to invade the entire field. Working in a periphery of Europe, where the academic archaeological system has not yet had the time and the means to organize itself in a very strong hierarchical basis, those who occupy influential posts have the moral obligation to struggle side by side with the younger generations for which permanent appointments are still difficult to obtain, in order to renew perspectives and methods, to open new opportunities of work for others and to subject themselves to a permanent constructive criticism. Only in this tolerant environment may our archaeology achieve new progress and overcome its endemic, traditional dependence on certain "charismatic" individuals, to institutionalize itself as a public service and as shared knowledge.

The important female component in our archaeology has indeed a role to play in this programme, which will be nothing but a well-meaning and naive set of intentions if it is not able to generate a distinct praxis. We are thinking of all levels of archaeological practice, including the interpretative one.

3. WOMEN'S SITUATION IN PORTUGUESE ARCHAEOLOGY

Today, the Portuguese community of archaeologists continues to be small: about 150-200 people. If we consider as "archaeologists" those who are carrying out field work authorized by the National Heritage Institute ("Instituto Português

do Património Arquitectónico e Arqueológico”) we have around 160 people, about 1/3 of whom are women. The most numerous group corresponds to prehistorians (about 60), and here we find again the same percentage of women (about 1/3). An interesting disparity seems to exist in the domain of mediaeval archaeology, where the number of men exceeds the number of women four times.

Also, the academic qualification of our archaeologists is, for the moment, still very low; in general, they all took an university degree (normally in History), but in 1993 only 17 people had a Ph.D., 4 of them being women. Among those 17 Ph. D.'s, 4 had been obtained abroad; and 3 were in the field of Natural Sciences, although these people may be considered as archaeologists, as they have directed, or are directing, excavations. This means that actually only 11 Ph.D. theses in archaeology were completed in Portugal, but indeed many others are in the course of preparation. And we should not forget Master's dissertations, some of them with a quality and an extension corresponding to a Ph. D. abroad.

Although the number of the teaching/research personnel working in universities or similar institutions has grown considerably since April 1974, only 65 people exist in this specific activity, and, at the moment, the possibilities for future expansion are very limited. In this universe, women (20) are more than 1/3 in relation to men; 1/4 of these women have a Ph.D. and 14 of the 20 have a post-graduate degree. That shows a good level of training when compared to men's.

Private universities have boomed recently in Portugal; in spite of being expensive, they grow at the cost of the public ones, where there is a low number of places available for students wanting to get training in the field of archaeology. The private universities in Portugal only have 13 teachers in the area of archaeology, 4 of them being women.

Trying to look now at other indicators of Portuguese archaeological activity, we may consider the number of papers published by men and women since 1935 (Oliveira, 1984, 1985). Between 1935 and 1970, the disparity of female and male activity at this level is enormous, and most significant if we consider the number of people who have published 5 or more papers (that is, people who carried out more substantial or continuous work). That disparity clearly diminishes during the seventies, but to a certain extent maintains itself if again we only consider the authors having published 5 or more papers. To be more precise, in this last case the rate is of 1 woman to each 5 years in the period between 1935 and 1970 (35 years), and of 6,5 women to each 5 years in the seventies. Women's presence as authors grew, in fact, but not so much as could be expected. Anyway, if we had numbers for the 1980s - perhaps the best moment of Portuguese archaeology this century - and the beginnings of the 1990s, the picture would be very different, favouring women. Throughout this last period, we estimate that the number of

male authors has doubled, and the women's one has quadrupled.

The rates of attendance at scientific meetings by women is another sign of their growing interest in archaeology: 15% in 1962 (2nd Oporto Archaeological Conference), 21% in 1966 (5th Oporto Archaeological Conference), 43% in 1990 (4th Conference of the Association of Portuguese Archaeologists, Lisbon), and 60% in 1993 (1st Congress on Iberian Archaeology, Oporto University). Among the 110 Portuguese who submitted a paper to this last Congress, 50 were women (about 45%); about 65% of the Portuguese audience (people having presented no paper, including many students) were female.

In fact, the importance of women tends to grow in all spheres of our archaeological activity, from the education level as undergraduate students to the post-graduate level and, finally, to their productivity as authors of papers or books.

This statistical importance has not been followed, until now, by a corresponding interest in themes such as Gender or, in more general terms, by epistemological questions raised by some kind of feminist approach. In the "plurality of pasts" we talked about earlier, the voices of women are still weak. Understandably, women had been occupied in getting positions in a very competitive and hard system, in which the lack - or the precarity - of working posts forces everyone into a constant struggle, pushing the few people in activity to an almost inhuman rhythm, if they want keep doing archaeology. For instance, the rarity of good public libraries with easily available new and provocative books makes that theoretical and epistemological issues - such as feminism itself - are actually almost the monopoly of a very restricted elite with acquisitive capacities, with the time and money - and moreover, the cultural motivation - necessary to develop a certain critical consciousness of the complexity of the archaeological procedure. This state of affairs tends to generate a new division between two "classes" of archaeologists.

In the often confused situation of Portuguese archaeology we do not see, *a priori*, any obvious discrimination against women. So, it is expected that they will be able, whatever their present situation, to overcome a mere search for their own job or for their own "territory" of work, in order to take further new steps. We need more audacious challenges to modify the current kinds of approach to "our past", alternative views to the traditional, indeed androcentric one. As long as this one is revered in silence and not confronted and questioned, it will be the hegemonic one. Women, like men, need to enter more deeply the terrains of "theory" and to prepare themselves on philosophical, sociological, anthropological grounds, in order to help overcome the traditional empiricist trend of our archaeology.

The basic perverse dichotomy "theory" versus "practice" still makes some naive archaeologists think that "let's first recover and record the data, and later

we will see what is the best we can do with them." "Them", the so-called data, are being built by each of us now, in our imagination. They are products of our intuition, validated or not by our institutionalized practice. They will reproduce themselves if they are not formalized and called into question. In this field, there is a lot to do in Portuguese archaeology, and, having this target in mind, the initiative of female archaeologists may be important for a new archaeological consciousness of which their colleagues, men, will also be the beneficiaries.

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