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Pyburn, K. Anne, editor. *Ungendering Civilization*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

This book is a collection of essays which, as the author states, began as a seminar at Indiana University. It addresses the issue of cultural evolutionism in archaeological work.

The two major points of the book are: 1) it provides a scrutiny of the role of women in the evolution of states, critically addressing traditional views of male and female roles; and 2) it demonstrates that archaeologists, many of whom would characterize themselves as feminists, inadvertently support a sexist view of the world by labeling poorly tested assumptions as science.

All but one of the contributors are or were all affiliated with Indiana University where the author, Anne Pyburn, is an Associate Professor of Anthropology. She is the director of the Chau Hiix Project which investigates the political economy of an ancient Maya community. There are nine contributors including Pyburn, all of whom are involved with archaeology -- five PhD candidates, one PhD graduate, one who studied for a time at Indiana University and one professor from the University of Mississippi. Each performed research in a different part of the world for a particular group, so the archaeological data comes from Zimbabwe, Peru (Moche), pre-dynastic Egypt, Sumer, North America (Cahokia), India (Harappan), Mediterranean (Minoan), Scandinavia (Vikings), and Central America (Maya). The individual authors do not provide data on the size of the groups, either by population or geography.

Pyburn's goal was to look at the evidence of status distinctions when they are first recognizable in the material record and test the assumption that women constituted a subordinate class. As the participants worked through the literature and their own data, it became clear that that assumption, when related to ancient cultures, provides an excellent example of how the typological reasoning of cultural evolutionary explanations predetermines and limits what we can know about the past. This collection shows that cultural evolutionism is not benign; it sustains political views about gender, race, and political economy that are not supported by research.

The authors have each taken a distinct body of archaeological data in order to determine what the available data may or may not really show about past societies. They discovered that there is not absolute evidence of the long-assumed male dominance/female subordination that has characterized archaeological study. The cross-cultural parallels found in the status and treatment of women are more the result of history than of human nature or human biology. Many researchers look at the evidence with pre-determined assumptions in mind, interpreting the data from the viewpoint of women's subordination and imposing more recent conditions on early societies. Some of the essentialist assumptions are: men as public producers, women as

private reproducers; men as actors, women as acted upon; men as innovative, women as static; men as central, women as incidental (50).

Factors that the authors looked at using the archaeological data were wealth, activity level, opportunity, ceremonies, food, labor, sexuality, and politics. Research and interpretation by them indicates that there is evidence for the agency of women, gender equality, un-gendered economies, ornamentation, women's work and roles as leaders, healers, and laborers. The contributors critically address traditional views of male and female roles and argue for the possibility that the root cause of gender subordination in the modern world was the loss of kin-based power structures during early state formation, rather than "innate" tendencies to domesticity and child-rearing in women and leadership and aggression in men.

Therefore, many assumptions made about social organization and division of labor in ancient societies are not correct or at least should be studied more with the evidence available. All researchers bring their own biases to their work and I wonder if, to some degree, these authors were preconditioned to look at the evidence in a certain way. Nonetheless, the encouragement to examine or re-examine archaeological data from various views is important to the broader intellectual discussion.

Pyburn provides a good introduction titled, "Rethinking Complex Society". She refers to Wolf's book, *Europe and the People without History*, which is about cultural essentialism. She states that "Wolf's critique of anthropological constructions of culture works perfectly as a critique of anthropological constructions of gender." Pyburn critiques the notion that the status of women, though clearly not uniform across time and space, is nevertheless thought to be uniformly subordinate throughout human history.

Just as historians and cultural anthropologists have sought to study women in more objective and reflexive ways, now archaeologists are encouraged to do it more in their work. As Joe Watkins from the University of New Mexico states, "Contemporary archaeologists should use this excellent volume as an example of the direction archaeology should go to maintain its relevancy to existing societies" (back cover).

Connie Lamb