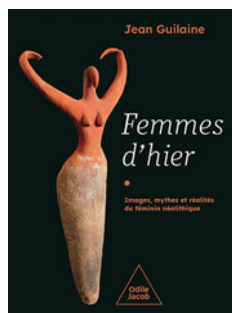


scientific advisor Sophie de Beaune, for furthering discussion of prehistoric women and their lifeways.

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JEAN GUILAINE. 2022. *Femmes d'hier: images, mythes et réalités du féminin néolithique*. Paris: Odile Jacob; 978-2-7381-5777-5 paperback €29.99.



Femmes d'hier: images, mythes et réalités du féminin néolithique focuses on the depiction of anatomical female bodies in the form of figurines, anthropomorphic stelae, rock art and anthropomorphic vessels from prehistoric South-west Asia and Europe. Culturally, the evidence encompasses the early agricultural societies of the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age in the Near East, 10 000–3000 BC, and Europe, 7000–2000 BC. Rock art from the Saharan region is also included to highlight the great variety of anthropomorphic imagery. Guilaine's aim is to present the diversity of ways in which anatomical female bodies are rendered in different media, with a view to addressing questions concerning the sexual division of labour, the position that women held within their families and wider community, and the symbolism associated with women.

The book consists of 10 chapters organised into two sections of unequal weight. The first, shorter, section, 'Neolithic iconography of the female body', provides a general, descriptive introduction to the iconographic evidence of anatomical female bodies. The first three chapters detail the general typology of female imagery, the rendering of anatomical features and the modelling of gestures and postures. The female iconography discussed, ranging from Iberia and Northern continental Europe to Crete, Anatolia and the Near East, is immensely diverse.

The second section, 'Discourse, images and realities of the Neolithic woman', consists of six chapters. The section starts with a critical overview of the different approaches of scholars to the interpretation of female figurines and the associated stereotypes surrounding sexuality, motherhood, fertility and divinity. The following chapters focus on aspects of figurine interpretation. Chapters 4 to 8 examine the positions held by women in agricultural economies, aspects of gender and social status, and the debate concerning womanhood and divinity. In

the two final chapters, Guilaine discusses the possible prehistoric uses of figurines and offers ‘portraits’ of 10 representative ‘ladies’ from diverse chronological and regional contexts.

Summing up, the author stresses that the variety of ways in which the female body was portrayed reflects the figurines’ multiple associated meanings across time and space and their use in different situational contexts, sacred and profane. It is proposed that the evidence reveals the prominent role of women in agricultural activities, while also demonstrating a clear connection with the domestic arena. Conversely, the association of weapons and tools with male imagery is interpreted to indicate that men played the leading role in hunting and ploughing. It is also suggested, based on a combination of select burial evidence and iconography, that the advent of patrilocality in the Early Bronze Age—in connection with technology such as the plough—conferred on men higher social status, relative to women, in the public domain.

Figurine studies is a field of archaeological research which remains vigorous, particularly through new cross-disciplinary approaches that aim to extend the boundaries of enquiry. One wonders, therefore, whether another book on Neolithic female imagery, which largely reiterates existing hypotheses concerning the status of women in agricultural societies and the possible uses of figurines, advances our existing knowledge. Although the volume provides a wide-ranging overview of the varied ways in which the anatomical female body was modelled in the Neolithic, ironically, it is the same lumping together of disparate evidence across time and space which is its weakest quality. Such a broad corpus of material could be justified were the author’s sole intention to demonstrate the diversity of female imagery; it cannot, however, facilitate a meaningful analysis or interpretative hypotheses across such a vast geographical area, over the course of several millennia.

Guilaine does state that the scope of the book is not to put forward a single interpretation regarding women’s place in early agricultural societies. The questions posed in the second section and the hypotheses formulated therein, however, result from the study of these disparate datasets. Moreover, overarching assumptions cannot be extended across all the cultural groups considered. Greater attention to the finds’ archaeological contexts would also question some sweeping statements and would enable us to better appreciate the variations in the use and meaning of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age figurines across time and space.

Another point of criticism is that the book does not engage with current debates in gender- and body-focused archaeological research. For example, the author assumes anatomically female bodies to be representations of women, without justifying the conflation of biological sex with gender. Nor does the book acknowledge the new materialist argument that embodied experiences, rather than cultural constructs of sex or gender, should inform our understanding of past social identities. The modelled gestures and postures are assumed to communicate the same meanings cross-culturally, and the author approaches representational art as almost photographic renderings of the social position of women. Consequently, the manifold intentions behind the manufacture of figurines, and their own agency, are left unaddressed.

Femmes d’hier serves as a useful and well-illustrated handbook of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age figurines from a broad geographical area and a wide range of cultural contexts. The author seeks to challenge the male bias inherent in figurine studies, but implicitly reinforces

gender stereotypes (e.g. man/woman, culture/nature) through a selective use of the archaeological evidence. To conclude, while the book lacks the theoretical rigour and the detailed treatment of its disparate evidence necessary to advance a convincing new interpretation, it nonetheless succeeds in highlighting the diversity of ways in which the anatomical female body was modelled in the early agricultural societies of Europe and the Near East.

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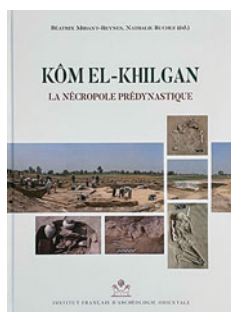
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BÉATRIX MIDANT-REYNES & NATHALIE BUCHEZ (ed.). 2021. *Kôm el-Khilgan: la nécropole prédynastique*. Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale; 978-2-724707-717 paperback €94.



The volume under review presents the results of the French campaigns in Kôm el-Khilgan, a site located in the province of Dakahlia (Eastern Delta, Egypt). The excavations, undertaken on behalf of the Institut français d'archéologie orientale, have unearthed the remains of a Predynastic cemetery (c. 3800–3100 BC) and Hyksos occupation levels from the Second Intermediate Period (c. 1700–1550 BC). It is the former data that are discussed in this report, which provides new data and interpretations on the funerary practices and development of a society that is still little-known: the Lower Egyptian Culture (LEC), previously known as Ma'adi-Buto Culture.

The book is divided into two main parts. The first concentrates on the presentation of Kôm el-Khilgan and discussion of the results. After a succinct introduction to the site, Chapters 1 and 2 describe the geoarchaeological context and the general stratigraphy, respectively.

Chapter 3 focuses on the data analysis, outlining the methods used to identify the chronological phases of the site, and providing analysis of trends in burial practices linked to chronology and the age and sex of the deceased. The exceptional multiple burials are also discussed here, along with the overall organisation of the graves (e.g. position of the corpse, placement of grave goods) and their spatial distribution in the necropolis. The chapter closes with a description of the ceramic and lithic remains deposited in the graves. Chapter 3 deals with a great many themes—too many to discuss here in depth—but it is worth underscoring the clear division of the cemetery into age groups; as is seen in other LEC cemeteries,