

WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM WOMEN ARCHAEOLOGISTS WORKING IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA?

EVA LARSON
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Women bring considerable value to the study of archaeology. Their life experiences influence how they look at the archaeological findings in that they look at archaeology through the eyes of a woman. Much of the time they consider how women contributed to the archaeological record. The efforts put forth by women in previous societies, e.g., gathering and preserving food for future use, are notable in the archaeological record, but only if one looks closely. Also, women archeologists pay close attention to the role of children in prehistory. Of course, many male archeologists are aware of women's work and children in prehistory, but these areas often have been underemphasized.

Women archaeologists are plentiful these days. As was noted by Bardolph (2014) when she was an undergraduate, her field class was more than 85 percent female (with a male professor leading the project) and the archaeology courses were disproportionately female. However, women are still underrepresented in university professorships and as first authors on journal publications. As suggested with Bardolph's (2014) findings, "backyard archaeology" is where the majority of female activities are focused in "geographical vicinity of their families and institutions because of the structural constraints of gender on their careers."

These trends were not always the case. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, women rarely worked in archaeology. At that time, a woman's role was considered to be within the home and caring for family; furthermore, it wasn't considered an appropriate field of study for a young lady. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, ladies could obtain a university education, but only if their families had money, or if they were from the upper classes of society. As such, the early years of archaeology were unquestionably a man's domain. Early women archaeologists encountered barriers prohibited in attending classes in the sciences and they were often unable to go into the field to conduct research, even if they managed to take the appropriate classes.

Despite these barriers, several noted women archeologists made major contributions to archeology (as noted in Claassen 1994). These include Gertrude Bell (1868–1926) who was an English archaeologist and was considered to be the 'mother of Mesopotamian archaeology'. After completing her degree in Modern History, Oxford, she excavated sites in Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Gertrude Caton-Thompson (1888–1985) was born into a wealthy family where she attended private schools in Eastbourne and Paris. She attended Cambridge University to take courses in anthropology and prehistory. Her interest in archaeology resulted from a trip to Egypt with her mother in 1911 and she subsequently went on to lead an interdisciplinary project of survey and excavation in Egypt. In addition, from 1928 to 1929 she led an all-female excavation of the famous ruins at Great Zimbabwe, Southern Rhodesia. Anna Shepard (1903–1973) was an American archaeologist who became a specialist in Mesoamerican and Southwestern archaeology and ceramics. Most of her work was done from a laboratory in her home, and she rarely went into the field, but this didn't impede her productivity as she was widely published. Shepard was widely admired in her profession and published a classic work, *Ceramics for the Archaeologist* (Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1956). Annette Laming-Emperaire (1917–1977) was an active archaeologist was a part of the French Resistance during the German occupation of Paris. After the war, she found her calling in archaeology. She began her PhD by studying the significance of paleolithic art at the cave site Lascaux, which preserves beautiful cave art 20,000 years old. She is credited for establishing the foundations for the study of cave art around the world and would look at cave paintings as to *how* they were displayed, not *why*, looking at gender of species, number of species, orientation, symbols and locations. This meticulous approach to understanding cave paintings is a method used by archaeologists today.

Women working in archaeology did not only need to know scholarly content, but also how to overcome the barrier of working in a male-dominated field, including many men who did not think women

belonged there in the first place. We have a good historical record of women working in the archeology in the twentieth century, but what barriers do female women archaeologists face today? What experiences did they have and what obstacles did they have to overcome to work in the field? To start to answer this question, seven female archaeologists who worked in Southern California Archaeology were interviewed for a presentation at Society of California Archaeology. They include:

- Brittany Bankston, MS – National Park Service
- Colleen Delaney, PhD – California State University Channel Islands
- Lynn Gamble, PhD – University of California Santa Barbara
- Nicole Kulaga, BA – National Park Service
- Desiree Martinez, MS – Cogstone Resource Management, Inc.
- Wendy Teeter, PhD – University of California Los Angeles
- Barbara Tejada, MS – California State Parks

These women all work in Southern California Archaeology and range in experience from newly minted BA or MA's to seasoned veterans in their fields. I asked five questions of each of them:

- 1) What events in your personal life made you interested in archaeology?
- 2) Who encouraged you to continue down this path to study archaeology? Who were your role models?
- 3) What obstacles/barriers did you encounter as a female archaeologist?
- 4) How has the view/treatment of women archaeologists changed over the last 20 to 30 years?
- 5) Do you think women archaeologists bring a complementary perspective to the study of archaeology? If so, why?

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS

The seven women interviewed provided a wide range of information for this paper. There was no one direct path to becoming an archaeologist for any of them; instead there were several different paths. Some just loved being outdoors and “looking for cool rocks or fossils;” some knew from an early (e.g., in childhood) that they wanted to be an archaeologist, whereas others came to the field later in life. One archaeologist recalls that it was when she was told as a young girl by a museum docent that there Mission Indians were not alive today—a striking statement to her because she was a member of a Mission Indian tribe.

On the path to becoming an archaeologist, role models, parents, and mentors were important to these women. Mothers were generally strong supporters for their daughters' career goals; although parents were concerned whether their daughters could support themselves in the field of archaeology. Grandparents and community Elders were also supportive, which provided the women with a generational view of what they could accomplish. Friends, colleagues and professors were instrumental in keeping the women on track and helping them progress toward their goals by reviewing their papers or writing them letters of recommendations. The support from community leaders strongly influenced the Native woman archaeologist who was interviewed; she felt she could assist the tribe by bridging the world of archaeology to her tribe's culture and build a bridge that provides support to their oral cultural stories and history.

Despite the loving support of families and generous support of mentors, the women still encountered obstacles and barriers. As much as their parents wanted them to find a job to love, they were concerned that daughters would struggle to support themselves in archaeology. Parents often preferred that their daughters get married, have a family, and adopt a more traditional lifestyle of creating a home environment; as opposed to the risk of being unemployed as an archaeologist. The women also encountered biases and stereotype attitudes on the job and/or in the field. For example, one woman related a lunchroom conversation when she was told that she would “not make a good archaeologist because I was too small.” Furthermore, there was sexual harassment on the job. The interviewees reported being harassed by male

archeologists during field projects, such as being pursued romantically or receiving unwanted flirtatious comments, leading to a stressful working environment. The fact that women were saddled with more of the family duties on the home front made it harder for them to go to remote regions for extended periods of time to conduct research, which then placed them at a professional disadvantage.

In response to the question of whether women bring a complementary perspective to archaeology, the responses were a very clear affirmative. “Women’s archaeologists tend to focus on things that male archaeologists have overlooked in the past” and “We’ve a heightened awareness of gender and the role of women in the archaeological record,” were echoed by the women interviewed. Others commented that being female meant that roles of women and children in the archaeological record were more likely to be considered. Thus, their female gender helped them to consider other possibilities and think outside of the typical approaches.

CONCLUSIONS

Early women archaeologists had limited options to train and work in archaeology; which is no longer the case as women are well represented in undergraduate and graduate levels. However, women are still underrepresented in the academic sphere such as professorships, tenure, and first authorship in papers or research grants. Women developed ways to work within archaeology where it was limited to them by not directly competing with men in the field. For example, women worked in areas such as museum curation and in specialty areas (as Anna Shepard did with ceramics, Crown, 1991:385) where they could make their mark on the world of archaeology. Their work as curators helped to define the field of Museum Studies, and not competing directly with men in archaeology.

Based on these interviews, there appear still to be obstacles for women entering archaeology, such as biases (females do not belong in the field), stereotypic (females are too small for the role), and antiquated perceptions (females would want to be pursued romantically) of what defines an archaeologist and a woman. Nonetheless, it was consistently agreed upon by the interviewees that the pathways for advancement in archaeology are getting better for women archaeologists.

Of the seven women interviewed, only one was Native American Indian. An interesting follow up to this study would be to include more Native American Indian women working in archaeology both in California and outside the state. Such a study focused on Native American women would provide valuable insight about academic and traditional obstacles and challenges they encountered and how they addressed them. Education extends outside of the classroom for Native people, and traditional Native education is often taught orally and handed down from one generation to another in a Native community by individuals taught by the previous generations. Overall, my study highlighted how women archaeologists have approached their work from the influences of their gender and life experiences; using their skills and knowledge they have acquired to work in the field of archaeology.

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