

PART 3

PREHISTORIC MARITAL NETWORKS

Introduction

The three papers in this section address the questions related to the reconstruction of prehistoric marital networks. Yet, prior to addressing this issue, one has to discuss a fundamental methodological problem: to what extent is archaeological evidence appropriate for the recognition of gender relations, including mate choice and marital networks?

Based predominantly on the female effigies dominating the prehistoric art, the Marxist-oriented Soviet archaeology in the 1930s viewed the Upper Palaeolithic society in Europe and Siberia as that of matriarchy, where women held a higher status and played a crucial role both in the ritual life and all spheres of social activity, the descent being reckoned through the female line (matrilineal).

Similar concepts with regard to Neolithic societies of the Near East and South-East Europe were developed by Maria Gimbutas. In view of the Lithuanian-American writer (Gimbutas 1989, xix-xx), the Neolithic Goddess-centered symbolism, being a direct descendant of the Palaeolithic one, reflected a social order, "with a striking absence of warfare and dominance... in which women as heads of clans or queen-priests, played a central part."

With the advent of relativism particularly apparent in the Post-Processualist school, these models became increasingly questioned. Hodder (1990: 308) writes about "the impossibility of direct interpretation of gender symbols," arguing that "the prevalence of female symbolism in the early Neolithic... probably mystified the subordinate position of women."

Archaeologists, in most cases, are able to recognise *archaeological cultures* and/or *styles*. Starting with Gordon Childe (Childe 1925) *archaeological cultures* were viewed as homogeneous assemblages of artefacts, which corresponded to stable social units. *Style* primarily defined basing on the similarities in the artistic production, was viewed by Gamble (1986) as the reflection of "alliance networks."

Significantly, both *archaeological cultures* and/or *styles* became clearly signalled in archaeological records beginning with the Upper Palaeolithic. Wobst (1976) views this as a reaction to the "rigours of the European climate under the extreme glacial conditions," which "necessitated co-operative actions, a more systematic network of contacts which ran counter to an earlier pattern of open breeding networks and forced a degree of social closure." Conkey (1985) developed a similar concept, arguing that "scalar stress" created by "closer aggregations" had to be "negotiated" and "formalized through ritual."

Stone Age society is now viewed as a mosaic of social networks brought together by mutually accepted "sense of continuity." As Whittle (1996) writes, this sense is "reaffirmed by periodic gatherings, gift exchange, sharing of food and drink, joint participation in rituals and a ever-present web of materiality." The functioning of the networks included the regular exchange of material symbols and females, ethnographically acknowledgeable in "Great Man" societies (Godelier 1986).

The three papers in this section are focused on one aspect of prehistoric mating networks, that of migrations. Schwarcz, based on the measurements of stable isotopes in fossil human bones indicative of the paleonutrition, provides direct evidence for large scale migrations of human groups and even individuals. In several cases it became possible to identify those whose past nutrition was different from that of other group members, implying their later integration into that group (through intermarriage?).

The papers by Marcel Otte and Pavel Dolukhanov discuss two different scenarios of early modern human dispersal in Eurasia. Otte, based on the occurrence of archaic elements in Upper Palaeolithic industries, argues for a lengthy survival of Neandertals in certain areas of Eurasia and for an intense social and cultural interaction between them and anatomically modern humans. Dolukhanov, using essentially the same evidence, suggests an earlier dispersal of modern humans, who, in certain areas of Eurasia manufactured archaic-looking industries. At the present state of our knowledge both hypotheses have a right of existence. Yet one may remark that considerable genetic distinctions established in the mitochondrial DNA shows that the Neandertals' genetic contribution to modern gene pools, if any, was very small. Consequently their active social interaction (and interbreeding) seem improbable.

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