

## ✧ Introduction ✧

# Gender and the Archaeology of the Southeast

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Written accounts by European men who traveled, traded, and lived among native groups in the southeastern United States from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries documented a world in which there were marked differences between the lives of native men and women (Braund 1993:3–25; Galloway 1995:1–2; Hudson 1976:260–69; Perdue 1998:17–40). These accounts indicate that boys and girls in native societies learned different sets of skills and that adult women and men often conducted their daily lives apart from each other. They also suggest that men and women tended to hold different leadership roles within their communities. Given the gender distinctions apparent in native Southeastern societies during the historic period, the careful consideration of gender dynamics should benefit the archaeological study of native Southeastern cultures. The essays in this book explore the archaeology of gender in the native Southeast (see fig. I.1).

### Studying Gender through Archaeology

Gender is related to but not determined by biological sex and age. It defines social categories such as men, women, boys, girls, and others like the *berdache* (a native North American who adopts an identity normally associated with the other sex). Cultural traditions about gender include significant expectations for the social roles and relationships that men,

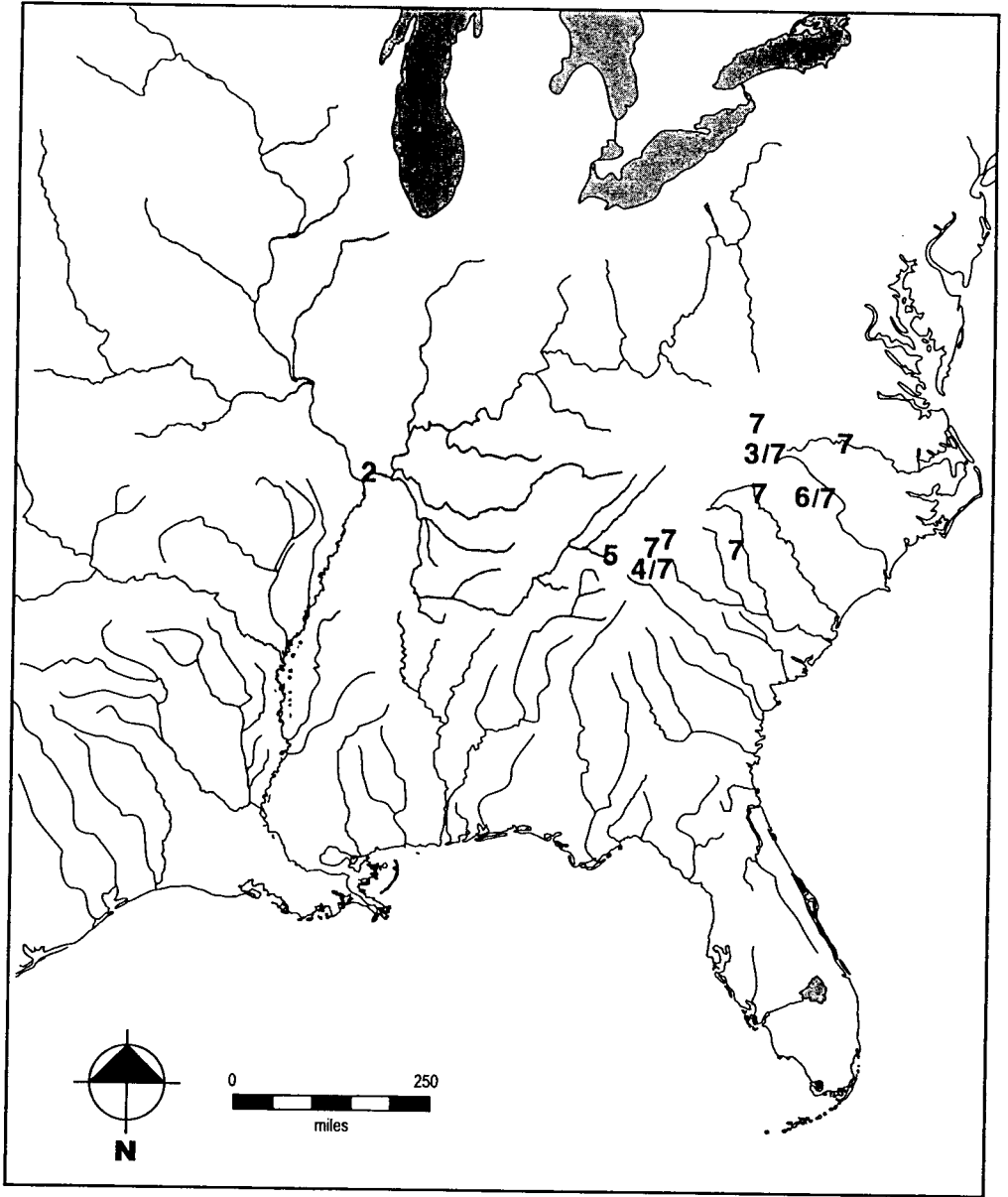


Fig. I.1. Chapter numbers placed at the locations of study areas in the Southeast.

women, and children should adopt at different stages of their lives. In their daily lives, people may choose to follow these traditions, or they may bend the rules. In either case, their gender roles and identities are formulated with reference to society's expectations. Our viewpoint is that a person's gender identity can change during the course of his or her lifetime. Gender identity is cross-cut by other factors such as a person's physical growth, development, and aging and also by progression through socially defined age classes. Gender and aging are interrelated, culturally defined processes, and the precise relationship between these processes varies from one culture and community to another.

Gender has become a prominent theme in archaeology during the past several years (Brumfiel 1992; Claassen 1997; Conkey and Gero 1991; Crown and Fish 1996; Joyce and Claassen 1997; Kent 1998a; Nelson 1997; Spector 1993; Spielmann 1995; Whelan 1995; N. M. White 1999; R. P. Wright 1996a). Archaeologists interested in gender commonly study gender roles, gender identities, and gender ideologies and how these aspects of gender are reflected in material culture. Gender *roles* refer to the differential participation of men, women, and children in activities within their communities. Gender *identities* refer to the social personalities and relationships adopted by men, women, and children at different stages of their lives. Gender *ideologies* refer to the status relationships between members of different gender categories, including all genders relevant in different cultural settings. These different components of gender have been outlined by Margaret Conkey and Janet Spector (1984:15) in their landmark essay about gender studies in archaeology. One major contribution of their essay and other archaeological literature about gender is simply the point that gender is constructed differently in different cultures and communities. Biological sex, while relevant, is not the sole determinant of gender.

The study of any of these aspects of gender through archaeology does not necessarily demand new methodologies, but it does demand new approaches. Archaeologists already are well attuned to identifying and evaluating patterns in material culture. Gender can affect these kinds of patterns significantly. By becoming informed about how gender influences the lives of people as they form households and community groups, archaeologists can prepare themselves to recognize clues in the material record that are indeed related to gender in the past.

Although we are advocating an approach to archaeology that is sensitive to the impact of gender differences on patterns in the archaeological record, we do not suggest that every shred of archaeological evidence is

laden with gendered meaning and insight about gender in the past. But if archaeologists discount the archaeological record as relevant to this anthropological topic at all, they never will notice the patterns in archaeological evidence that indeed are pertinent. Archaeologists are accustomed to designing research projects to generate meaningful data sets to answer a variety of questions. Explicitly considering what roles and relationships men and women and young and old might have held within their communities, rather than making untested assumptions about their gender roles and identities, can enrich archaeological reconstructions of the past.

Gender as an archaeological topic is embedded within topics that archaeologists traditionally have studied and will continue to investigate in the future. As Conkey and Gero (1991:15) have noted, "An engendered past addresses many long-standing concerns of archaeology: the formation of states, trade and exchange, site settlement systems and activity areas, the processes of agriculture, lithic production, food production, pottery, architecture, ancient art—but throws them into new relief. *An engendered past replaces the focus on the remains of prehistory with a focus on the people of prehistory; it rejects a reified concept of society or culture as an object of study, does away with the earliest, the biggest, the best examples of prehistoric forms, and concentrates instead on the continuities and dialectics of life, the interpersonal and intimate aspects of social settings that bind prehistoric lives into social patterns*" (our italics). The consideration of gender enriches archaeological approaches to topics that are and have been major topics of interest in the field.

Another contribution of gender studies to archaeology relates to the way in which archaeologists write about the past. People are active agents in their own lives and therefore actively affect the ways their lives enter into the archaeological record. Archaeologists need heuristic devices like "phases" and "cultures" to sort archaeological evidence in analytically meaningful ways and to communicate with one another about them. Archaeologists nevertheless are interested in the experiences of people and not solely the history of different kinds of material culture. It is not uncommon to read archaeological essays about adaptive systems or settlement patterns. It is worth remembering that people constituted those systems and created those patterns.

Gender studies thus encourage archaeologists to concentrate their efforts toward reconstructing the activities of *people* in the past. They encourage archaeologists to carefully consider aspects of social roles and identities that *people* adopt during their lifetimes. They demonstrate that

gender is not immutable but rather is a dynamic dimension of communities and cultures which shapes the lives of *people* and is shaped by them.

The archaeological study of gender is not about women exclusively, even though many early archaeological studies of gender did concentrate on women. As Sarah Milledge Nelson (1997:15) has written, "Given this definition of gender, it follows that a gendered archaeology considers both women and men, and any other culturally constructed genders (for example, *berdache*). Gender is not a code word for women, and gendered archaeology is *not* another way of finding women in prehistory disguised with a more neutral and inclusive term. Both women and men—people as individuals as well as in groups—become more visible in studying gender. Other constructed roles, activities, and behaviors, such as ethnicity, age, and class, may also become visible in the course of researching gender in archaeology" (*italics in original*). Gendered perspectives in archaeology enrich knowledge about the lives of people in the past and their interactions with people in other gender groups in their communities.

The early gender studies in archaeology have served to outline gender bias in archaeological interpretation and to remedy its traditional emphasis on patterns attributed to the lives and activities of men (Wylie 1991a:38–41). The recognition of gender as a significant topic for archaeological investigation certainly owes much to feminist scholarship and its critique of archaeological thought and practice (Gilchrist 1994:1–8). Nevertheless, archaeologists need not espouse feminist theory to find valuable insights offered in archaeological writing about gender.

Our reading of feminist anthropology and archaeology in the 1980s and 1990s has led to our recognition that a consideration of gender is a vital part of reconstructing the past. The consideration of gender has enhanced our efforts to understand social structure, social dynamics, and belief systems in the past. The studies presented here are all indebted to the ground-breaking scholarship of feminist writers and theorists, even though the authors in this volume do not write from an overtly feminist perspective. None of the case analyses focus more intently on the lives of women than on those of men or children. These chapters simply present archaeological case studies, focused on Native American cultures of the southeastern United States, that are based on the perspective that gender differences held significant meaning for these native peoples. The authors pursue many different questions about the past with reference to different kinds of archaeological evidence, but all are bound by this shared premise.

The interpretations presented in the chapters that follow are all enriched by a careful consideration of the impact that gender differences may have had on the lives of people in the past. Their reconstructions are peopled with men, women, and children who developed patterns of work, play, and ritual that reflected their gender statuses, and whose lives followed particular courses due in part to gender. The authors in this volume have all successfully embedded an explicit consideration of gender into their studies of the past, enhancing their perspectives on a variety of topics.

The chapter by Cheryl Claassen identifies several problem areas for gender studies through archaeology in the Southeast. Claassen (1992, 1997) has long championed gendered perspectives on the past. Her knowledge about gender in the past and present spans the scholarly literature about native peoples of the Americas and many other continents. In this chapter she applies that global familiarity to the tasks of learning about the past lifeways of native southeastern peoples. Her contribution to this book challenges archaeologists to revamp their perspectives about the place of men, women, and children in native southeastern societies.

The essay by Larissa Thomas compares and contrasts the gender division of labor in late prehistoric communities of southern Illinois. Thomas describes archaeological evidence of household organization at Dillow's Ridge near Mill Creek and compares it to intrasite patterning at the Great Salt Spring along the Saline River. She reconstructs patterns of hoe production as one part of Mississippian household economies at Dillow's Ridge. She contrasts this pattern at Dillow's Ridge with evidence for different forms of task specialization at the Great Salt Spring locality. Thomas thus adds a significant voice to the debate among scholars about the structure and diversity of Mississippian economies in the North American midcontinent (Cobb 1989, 1996; Muller 1984, 1986, 1997; Pauketat 1987, 1989, 1997; Prentice 1983, 1985). Archaeologists may find evidence of very different gender divisions of labor in Mississippian communities elsewhere in the Southeast, and here Thomas makes a case that archaeologists need to explore actively this aspect of Mississippian economies.

Jane Eastman explores evidence for gender differences during the life cycle of Siouan-speaking peoples who occupied northwestern North Carolina and southern Virginia during the late prehistoric period. She examines the distribution of mortuary items in burials from seven village sites in the region, and her study reconstructs the dynamic relationship between gender and age in these communities. First, gender distinctions

appear to have been recognized among children from a very early age. Second, gender identities changed in different ways for men and women as they aged. The gender representation of older women in mortuary contexts differed from the treatment of adult women who died at a younger age. In contrast, gender representation of men remained consistent throughout their lifetimes. The evidence examined here indicates that Siouan women may have experienced more dramatic changes in gender roles and identities throughout their lives than did men in their communities.

Chris Rodning reviews archaeological and ethnohistoric evidence about gender ideology in Cherokee communities of southern Appalachia. Historic and ethnographic evidence about the Cherokee of the eighteenth century indicates that towns and clans in Cherokee communities gave men and women alternative tracks towards prestige among their peers. This evidence guides Rodning's interpretations of mortuary patterns at a council house and village in the upper Little Tennessee River Valley of southwestern North Carolina that likely date to the late seventeenth or very early eighteenth centuries.

Lynne Sullivan considers power relations communicated through mortuary ritual at the late prehistoric town of Toqua in eastern Tennessee. She concludes that reconstructions of hierarchical social relations within the Mississippian chiefdoms of the upper Tennessee Valley may have overstated the rigidity of these hierarchies. She argues that mortuary patterns in the upper Tennessee Valley reveal a duality in gender roles and identities that is not at all compatible with European traditions about public and private spheres of social life. More appropriate models to test archaeologically in the Southeast can be derived from a careful reading of ethnohistoric literature about Creek and Cherokee communities.

Elizabeth Monahan Driscoll, Steve Davis, and Trawick Ward review spatial patterns of graves at the site of Occaneechi Town, a native village in north-central North Carolina dating to the late 1600s and very early 1700s. Occaneechi Town was a multiethnic community deeply enmeshed in the geopolitics of the deerskin trade and English colonial expansion across the Piedmont region. Mortuary goods and demographic profiles of spatial clusters of graves reveal the structure of kinship and community at this native village on the Eno River. This study of mortuary patterns at the site of Occaneechi Town has implications for understanding changes in the social composition of eastern Siouan groups and the changing Piedmont landscape (Davis and Ward 1991:50–53;

Ward and Davis 1999:233–60). The patterns reconstructed in this chapter provide interesting opportunities for comparison with those at earlier native settlements in northern and central North Carolina.

Pat Lambert reviews bioarchaeological evidence of ceremonial practices among late prehistoric and protohistoric native communities in North Carolina. She interprets bony growths in the auditory canals of several individuals as clues about the participation of different people in sweat lodge ceremonies. Ethnohistoric evidence about these rituals indicates that after sweat baths native people would thrust themselves into nearby rivers or streams. The dramatic and rapid changes in temperature and pressure experienced during these activities could cause the kinds of growths visible on some skulls. Lambert notes that these growths are found more commonly on adult males than females. She compares this pattern to ethnohistoric evidence about the greater participation of men than women in these kinds of rituals. Her paper is one of the few published pieces that links gender-related patterns in bioarchaeological evidence to the ritual lives of people in the past. Many scholars who have explored gender-related patterns in the bioarchaeological record have concentrated on health and activity patterns rather than ceremonialism (Bridges 1989, 1991; Larsen 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1997). This essay adds a valuable voice about the ritual lives of native peoples in southeastern North America.

The epilogue by Janet Levy draws the book to a close by relating these chapters to broader issues in archaeological thought and practice, and it notes the rich corpus of archaeological and ethnohistoric material from the native Southeast relevant to the study of gender in the past. It complements well the chapter by Cheryl Claassen about regendering our understanding of prehistory, for they both chart a challenging course for further study of gender in native southeastern societies.

Our opinion is that a gendered archaeology of the Southeast is compatible with the topics that archaeologists have studied for many years. The essays here concentrate on mortuary patterns, divisions of labor, craft production and specialization, and ceremonialism. Other topics whose archaeological correlates are related to gender are settlement patterns at local and regional scales, the architecture and composition of household groups, iconography, foodways, health, demography, and patterns of interactions with close and distant neighbors. We hope this book will alert southeastern archaeologists to archaeological patterns that may reflect the ways in which gender was constructed in native societies of the past.



### **Editors' Note**

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