

Mara Floris

NARRATIVE KNOWLEDGE, ARCHAEOLOGY, AND GENDER ROLES: HOW WE USE TODAY'S STORIES TO MAKE SENSE OF THE PAST

Abstract

Using the Venus of Willendorf as a case study, I explore the interplay between narrative knowledge and the construction of gender roles in archaeological interpretation. Archaeological narratives, often developed from limited data and connected by speculative elements, significantly shape public perception and academic understanding. While these narratives aim to bridge gaps in the archaeological record, they inadvertently reflect contemporary societal structures, especially in the assignment of gender roles. This study examines the tendency within archaeology to project modern gender norms onto the past, frequently in the absence of definitive evidence. Such projections can result in reconstructions that not only misrepresent but also oversimplify the complex nature of past gender roles. By critically analysing these narrative practices and their reliance on cognitive biases, this research aims to uncover how historical gender roles are constructed and highlight potential inaccuracies in this process

1. Who's the artist?

In 1908, an archaeological discovery was made in the small village of Willendorf, in Austria's Wachau region. Archaeologist Josef Szombathy was conducting excavations at a site known as Willendorf II, an ancient terrace overlooking the Danube River. On August 7, 1908, a workman named Johann Veran, under the supervision of Szombathy and his team – which included archaeologists Hugo Obermaier and Josef Bayer – unearthed a small, intricately carved figurine made from oolitic limestone. This find would later become one of the most iconic and celebrated artefacts from the Palaeolithic era. The figurine, measuring just over 11 centimetres in height, depicted a woman with exaggerated curves and prominent features, such as large breasts, a rounded abdomen, and emphasised genitalia. The Venus of Willendorf, as the figurine came to be known, quickly

garnered attention for its remarkable craftsmanship and unique representation of the female form. The archaeological community was intrigued by the small yet powerful artefact, sparking debates regarding its significance and purpose. In the most widely accepted interpretation, the Venus of Willendorf served as a fertility symbol or representation of a mother goddess, given its emphasis on fertility-related features.

This statuette is one of many figurines depicting women from the European Upper Paleolithic, commonly referred to as “Venuses” or “Venus figurines” (Rebay-Salisbury 2023). The shape of these statues contributes to the aura of mystery surrounding these artefacts. As McCoid and McDermott (1996) observe, most of these depictions feature a distinctive anatomical arrangement that André Leroi-Gourhan (1968) described as the “lozenge composition”. This structural pattern stands out for its consistent departure from anatomical accuracy. Notable features include a faceless, typically downturned head; slender arms that either disappear beneath the breasts or cross over them; an unusually narrow upper torso; large, pendulous breasts; substantial fatty buttocks and/or thighs; a pronounced, seemingly pregnant abdomen, sometimes accompanied by a prominent elliptical navel aligned with the figure’s widest point; and often contorted, unnaturally short legs that taper to a rounded point or disproportionately small feet (Fig. 1). These deviations contribute to what M.D. Gvozdozer has termed “the stylistic deformation of the natural body” (1989: 79).

However, these apparent anatomical alterations no longer appear bizarre if we abandon the idea that we are observing a woman’s body sculpted by an external observer. If we instead imagine a woman viewing her own body from her own head’s perspective and compare this viewpoint with that of the statuette viewed from its head’s perspective, the result is surprising. The resemblance to the perspective of a pregnant woman looking down at herself is striking. As McCoid and McDermott (1996) argue, a comparison between these figurines and photographs simulating a modern woman’s self-perspective reveals notable parallels. Shapes that once seemed mysterious, far removed from a realistic representation of a female body, suddenly acquire new meaning. The “diamond” shape of the figurines may simply be an effect of perspective (Fig. 2; Fig. 3).

We are now faced with two competing theories to explain the shape of the statuettes: (1) they could have been sculpted by a male artist, perhaps for votive purposes, or (2) they could have been sculpted by women looking down at themselves. If we accept the first theory, we are confronted with the fact that the statuette has an unrealistic shape, a characteristic shared by many similar figurines. Although this could be an artistic choice, it remains unexplained why statuettes found in distant locations exhibit this specific diamond shape. If, on the other hand, we accept the second theory, the shape of the figurines is explained by the unique perspective of those who sculpted them, with nothing in the carving itself revealing this perspective. The archaeological data, at least for now, do not allow us to determine the artist’s gender. However, if we consider

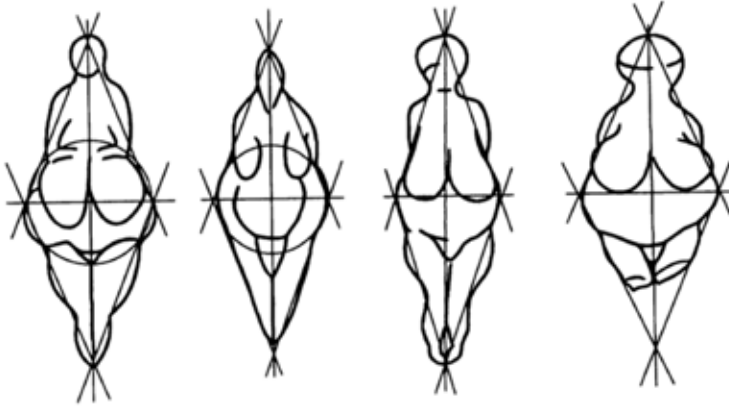


Fig. 1. Examples of the lozenge shape from McCoid, McDermott (1996).

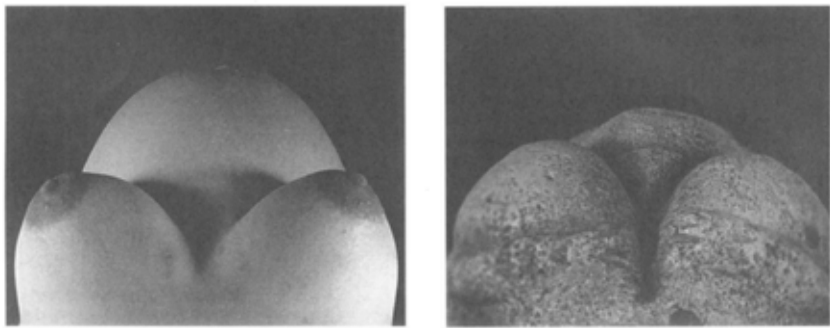


Fig. 2. Frontal view, comparison between 26-year-old pregnant woman and Venus of Willendorf from McCoid, McDermott (1996).

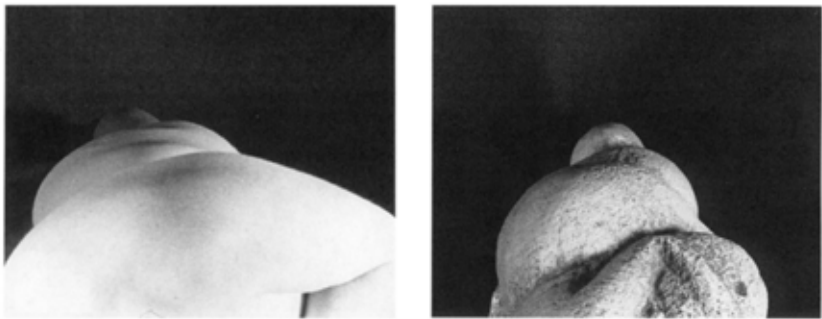


Fig. 3. Lateral view, comparison between 26-year-old pregnant woman and Venus of Willendorf from McCoid, McDermott (1996).

the second theory, it arguably has greater explanatory power, in the terms of the philosophy of science, as it accommodates more data – namely, the shape of the figure – without requiring additional hypotheses. Specifically, we do not need a separate hypothesis to account for the widespread occurrence of the diamond shape across various archaeological sites. The idea that these figurines represent a subjective viewpoint offers a simpler explanation. It is plausible that, since their discovery, our examination has simply been influenced by an incorrect viewing perspective.

2. Available narratives

Imagine being the researcher trying to uncover the ancient use of these statues. Someone must have sculpted them, possibly with a specific purpose. But who? The existing data – such as the historical era in which the artefact was created and its physical characteristics – provides only limited insights. You seek to find purpose in the object. In other words, you are looking for a story to tell: who sculpted it and why, information that goes beyond the object itself. To comprehend the function of the object before you, it's essential to offer an explanation of its use, to integrate it into a narrative. In the process of reconstructing the object's history, gaps emerge: its form alone offers no clues about its potential creators or purpose. When trying to imagine who sculpted the statuette, it's natural to envision a person observing a woman's body, perhaps like a model. The narrative we construct to fill these gaps may unconsciously draw on prevailing stereotypes and gender roles. It then becomes easy to imagine that the sculptor could have been an external observer—and perhaps male. The mental image most readily accessible is that of male artists depicting female bodies, a notion that comes effortlessly to mind.

An example of the narrative surrounding the purpose of the Venus of Willendorf appears in the relevant article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which describes it as follows: “It has been suggested that she is a fertility figure, a good-luck totem, a mother goddess symbol, or an aphrodisiac made by men for the appreciation of men” (Kuiper 2024). This type of knowledge is inherently narrative: it does more than provide information on the statuette's size or material; it reconstructs possible scenarios for its use. Furthermore, it draws upon the most readily available narratives, as understood by Tversky and Kahneman (1973): an image is more readily available the more easily it comes to mind. Popular culture and art history are full of similar scenes, from iconic moments like Leonardo DiCaprio sketching Kate Winslet in *Titanic* (1997) to masterpieces by artists such as Édouard Manet with *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (1862-1863) or *Olympia* (1863), Francisco Goya with *La Maja Desnuda* (1790–1800), and Pablo Picasso with *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907), among others. The history of art is replete with famous examples of male artists portraying nude women.

While instances of female artists depicting the female body do exist, they are notably less prevalent.

In this context, the narrative that effortlessly comes to mind does not falter, even with the detail of the missing facial features – a feature that arguably challenges the idea of the figurine as the work of an artist reproducing another person's body by observation. Yet, until McCoid and McDermott's (1996) proposal that it might represent a woman looking at herself, this detail raised little doubt. The absence of the face evokes a contemporary phenomenon where women are depicted faceless on billboards, reduced to bodies without heads (Schroeder and Borgerson 1998). Finally, the term "Venus" itself carries implicit connotations. Venus was the Roman goddess of love, beauty, and fertility, identified in Greek culture with Aphrodite, the goddess born from sea foam. Aphrodite/Venus was central in various myths and symbolised love, passion, and aesthetic harmony. This association imbues the term "Venus" with cultural and symbolic significance that can influence interpretations and perceptions beyond its literal meaning.

3. Gender roles and archaeological reconstructions

If the Venus of Willendorf stood alone in its significance, it might be dismissed as a singular curiosity. However, its importance grows when we consider the theory that it was crafted by a woman, intimately familiar with her own form – a theory that offers greater explanatory power than the conventional narrative of a male sculptor creating a fertility votive. Though this alternative theory remains underdetermined by the available data, it challenges the established narrative. Numerous cases illustrate how gender bias can influence interpretations of gender roles. For example, Wylie (2017) highlights well-known instances involving assumptions about labour distribution in agriculture and, more broadly, the role of women in the economy; here are some examples:

(1) Watson and Kennedy (1991) critically challenge the marginalisation of women's contributions to the development of horticulture in the Eastern Woodlands of North America. They document the early domestication of native plants, such as sumpweed, sunflowers, maygrass, chenopodium, squash, and corn, which occurred independently of Mesoamerican influences. Contrary to historical assumptions that women primarily engaged in foraging and early plant cultivation, Watson and Kennedy highlight a persistent tendency in theoretical models to exclude women from significant roles in the transition from foraging to farming. They critique hypotheses suggesting that plants adapted to human-modified environments or were domesticated by men for ritualistic purposes, arguing instead that women, with their extensive botanical knowledge, played a crucial role in domesticating these plants for agricultural use.

(2) Fritz (1999) further examined the issues of agency highlighted by Watson and Kennedy, focusing on the domestication of squash. She noted a considerable time gap between the initial appearance of squash in the archaeological record of the Northeast and its development into a staple food crop with desirable traits. Fritz proposed that the early domestication of squash might not have been for consumption but rather for practical purposes, such as containers or net-floats in fishing, diverging from theories that attributed its cultivation to male ritual practices.

(3) Hastorf's study (1991) provides a fresh perspective on gender dynamics within households during the Inca empire's expansion into the Sausa region of the central Andes. Through an analysis of burial sites, botanical remains, and artefacts, Hastorf identified a notable shift in maize consumption patterns among males and females following the Inca conquest – a pattern not observed previously. Men exhibited increased maize intake, attributed to their conscription for *corvée* labour by the Inca, who supplied maize and corn beer as sustenance. This shift suggests a redefinition of female roles within households, with women possibly taking on additional responsibilities to support the male-dominated social and political activities of the period.

Recent studies, including that of Macintosh *et al.* (2017), support earlier research on women's roles in agriculture, revealing that agricultural advancements often result in decreased physical activity and bone density over time, with men experiencing more pronounced changes than women. In ancient Central European female farmers (circa 5300 BC to 850 AD), men showed a significant decline in shin bone strength, while women exhibited consistently low shin bone strength, little to no change over time, and high variability. When comparing the bone strength and structure of these ancient women's arms and shins to those of modern European women, both athletes and non-athletes, the study found that ancient women's shin bone strength was comparable to that of modern sedentary women but lower than that of modern athletes. Remarkably, their arm bone strength exceeded that of modern athletes for the first 5,500 years of farming, suggesting a dominance of upper body labour. The limb strength ratio of women from the Neolithic, Bronze, and Iron Ages closely aligned with that of current semi-elite rowers, indicating that manual labour played a more significant role in prehistoric European women's lives than mobility, surpassing the intensity of modern women's activities.

Among recent studies, Elliott *et al.* (2022) revisit and question the theory that Neolithic societies in northern Europe were organised along patrilineal lines. This reassessment stems from an examination of male burials within megalithic tombs, challenging earlier claims made by Cassidy *et al.* (2020). Elliott's team expanded the dataset and applied statistical analysis to both skeletal and genetic data from various regions, casting doubt on the notion of a uniformly male-

dominated society, particularly outside Ireland. While findings in Ireland may suggest a distinct, male-oriented social structure, the broader evidence does not conclusively support a general trend of patrilineal dominance, with limitations due to incomplete skeletal data and limited genetic sample sizes. Numerous examples in the literature point in the same direction: the role of women in the past has been underestimated and downplayed.

4. Narratives in archaeology

Archaeological investigations typically require a confluence of excavation, artefact analysis, and contextual scrutiny to generate inferences about past human societies. The interpretative framework necessitates careful consideration of various factors, including cultural, social, economic, and environmental dimensions. For example, the discovery of artefacts – ranging from pottery and tools to distinctive burial practices – provides archaeologists with the means to infer aspects of technological skill, economic activities, or cultural norms within a given community. The spatial arrangement of artefacts at a site may reveal insights into architectural layouts, domestic arrangements, or the ritual significance attributed to specific locations (Carver 2011). Environmental analyses, such as studies of pollen or soil composition, are invaluable tools for deducing historical climates, land use, and agricultural practices (Dimbleby and Evans 1974). Extracting meaningful insights from historical remnants relies heavily on the skilful application of inferential reasoning. This approach involves forming logical conclusions or well-founded hypotheses by carefully analysing the available archaeological data, as historical records rarely provide a complete and unambiguous account. As archaeologist Mark Edmonds states:

We start with two basic premises. First is the centrality of the imagination in the study of the past. Archaeologists excavate material traces from the ground and generate vast amounts of data, but these must be transformed into information and knowledge through a fundamentally creative process (Edmonds 1999: x).

The integration of narrative knowledge into archaeological methodologies is a widely debated topic (e.g., Evans 1989; Terrell 1990; Pluciennik 1999, 2015; Van Helden, Witcher 2019). This type of knowledge influences archaeology in at least two significant ways. Firstly, it shapes research hypotheses by influencing the circulation of archaeological knowledge within the academic community. Secondly, narrative forms of knowledge are essential for the dissemination of archaeological findings to a broader audience, as they underpin how these discoveries are communicated and understood by the public.

Regarding the first aspect, narrative knowledge serves as a crucial catalyst in developing research hypotheses, engaging scholars in the intricate task of

reconstructing the lives of ancient civilisations. This process transcends simple historical recounting, delving into the complexities of societal evolution over time. Salmon (1982) suggests that archaeologists' goals extend beyond merely documenting events; they seek to unravel the complexities of lives represented in the archaeological record. This exploration encompasses pivotal transformations, such as the transition from hunter-gatherer communities to agrarian societies, or the rise and fall of great civilisations, thus broadening our understanding of human behaviour. For instance, reconstructing the narrative behind an artefact – a process whose validity may occasionally be questioned – inevitably employs narrative elements typically reserved for describing factual events. In the case of the Venus of Willendorf, for example, hypothesised uses of the statuette, such as its function as a votive offering for fertility or as an object made for male appreciation, extend far beyond what can be directly inferred from the available data. We know details about the material and the sites where they were found, and some statuettes display signs of wear on particular sides (McCoid, McDermott 1996; Rebay-Salisbury 2023), suggesting they may have been worn. However, the remainder is left to narrative reconstruction, which, as in many other cases, appears to draw heavily from narratives pervasive in contemporary society.

This issue exemplifies the broader challenge of making inferences from limited data, a task that poses significant difficulties in archaeological research. The problem is particularly acute when attempting to reconstruct past behaviours and practices, where the available evidence is often fragmented and incomplete. This challenge is especially evident in the study of Neolithic burial habits. Despite the vast expanse of Neolithic Europe, archaeologists have excavated fewer than a hundred Neolithic burial sites to date. This number is minuscule when juxtaposed with the potentially thousands of burials that existed but remain undiscovered (Whittle 1996; Sánchez-Quinto *et al.* 2019). The temptation to generalise and reconstruct burial practices from this limited dataset is high, yet it poses methodological dilemmas. Such generalisations cast doubt on the representativeness of these excavated sites for the broader Neolithic population, highlighting the complexities and uncertainties inherent in constructing narratives from fragmentary evidence.

The role of narrative knowledge in archaeology extends beyond research hypotheses to significantly impact the field's dissemination practices, underscoring the dominance of 'Grand Narratives' within the discipline. This trend, which transcends archaeology, is exemplified by influential works such as Yuval Noah Harari's *Sapiens* (2011), Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (1997), and David Graeber and David Wengrow's *The Dawn of Everything* (2021). These authors endeavour to provide comprehensive views of human history and societal evolution, striving to balance the simplification of complex narratives for public understanding with the preservation of historical intricacies. The debate around grand narratives—sweeping stories intended to bring coherence to the

disparate elements of history and archaeology – highlights their effectiveness in constructing our collective memory, yet also points to their methodological flaws. Critics like Landau (1993) have noted the tendency within palaeoanthropology to cast the scientific narrative of human evolution in the mould of folk tales, a practice she argues simplifies and distorts the underlying scientific processes. Stoczkowski (2002) expanded on this critique, identifying implicit narrative structures in archaeology that reflect contemporary Western values, traditions, and attitudes.

5. How to fill the gaps

Thus far, I have shown that archaeology intrinsically relies on narrative knowledge, both as a means to guide academic research and as a method for broader scientific communication. The nature of the data archaeologists work with, characterised by its scarcity and fragmentary state, naturally lends itself to the employment of narrative forms in knowledge construction. This approach helps bridge the gaps inherent in the evidence. However, this raises critical questions: how are these narratives crafted, and upon what sources do they draw to complete the missing pieces? A widely used yet contentious approach involves drawing parallels with so-called ‘modern primitives’, observing their subsistence practices to infer ancient ones (e.g., Engels 1984). This method raises significant concerns about the accuracy and reliability of such parallels. It may more accurately reflect characteristics of the present rather than provide an authentic glimpse into the past.

Beyond historical interactions with “modern primitives” – an approach that has now been discarded – archaeology often reflects contemporary societal norms in its storytelling. This is particularly evident in the discipline’s focus on figures of authority, or “chiefs”, and its broader interest in power dynamics within ancient civilisations. Such narratives frequently mirror present-day social structures and values, highlighting the impact of modern viewpoints on the interpretation of historical societies. The concept of the “myth of the chief”, as discussed by Brück and Fontijn (2013), exemplifies how current understandings of power and status can influence our perception of ancient communities. These accounts tend to prioritise individual authority and dominance, overshadowing a more comprehensive perspective that acknowledges the significance of communal relationships and consensus in shaping ancient societies.

Brück and Fontijn (2013) demonstrate how the portrayal of a Bronze Age chieftain mirrors characteristics esteemed in the contemporary Western concept of the individual. Drawing from post-Enlightenment ideologies, they describe the individual as a rational, self-governing entity, detached from and superior to the natural environment. This narrative, with reference to Fowler (2004), paints the individual as a singular, constant source of authority, commanding power over a

depersonalised “other”. Predominantly masculine, this figure is characterised by a competitive drive for power and prestige. The desire to dominate nature for economic profit is validated by a worldview that sharply distinguishes between self and other, as well as between culture and nature.

Over the past two centuries, this conceptual model of the individual has laid the foundation for profound societal, economic, and political shifts, including the establishment of hierarchical class systems, the advent of mercantile capitalism, and the pursuit of colonial expansion. The uncritical application of this conceptual framework to interpretations of the Bronze Age has significantly shaped our understanding of past economic and political structures, emphasising the impact of contemporary biases on the study of history.

Lund *et al.* (2022) contribute to the ongoing discourse on power within archaeology by challenging prevailing reductionist views that predominantly conceptualise power as individualistic, coercive, and gendered – typically aligned with male dominance and the modern nation-state’s monopoly on violence. They critique this historically situated interpretation, which emphasises command and obedience, as not only limited but also misrepresentative, especially in prehistoric contexts where state power was absent, unconsolidated, or contested. The authors advocate for a more nuanced understanding of power, highlighting the importance of collective and consensus-based forms that are often marginalised. This perspective aligns with current critiques of the evolutionary elements in prehistory studies (Graeber, Wengrow 2021), suggesting that a re-evaluation of power can reveal the diverse societal structures and constellations that existed throughout prehistory. By acknowledging the roles of collective power, agency, and material affects, Lund *et al.* propose a shift in social archaeological studies towards a broader, more integrated view of prehistoric social and political organisation.

6. *Where narratives on gender roles come from*

Similarly to how narratives of power and hierarchical figures – including their gender attributions – are shaped by comparisons with contemporary societies, the portrayal of gender roles in archaeological interpretations is also influenced by modern perspectives. In her recent work, *L’homme préhistorique est aussi une femme* (2020), Patou-Mathis highlights that women have historically been depicted in a subordinate position, characterised by a passive and peripheral biological role. They have been systematically excluded from activities such as hunting and the crafting of artefacts, and are not acknowledged as contributors to significant social developments like the advent of agriculture. This oversight is facilitated by the fact that we are often unable to deduce the gender of individuals involved in activities such as stone carving or grave digging based on the artefacts discovered; these aspects of history require imaginative interpretation.

The marginalisation of women in the historical context of archaeology is a complex process that can be understood through a series of assumptions, each varying in their degree of substantiation. These assumptions allow us to identify three primary mechanisms, each characterised by distinct levels of misogyny:

1. A gender imbalance within the academic realm leading to a predominance of androcentric perspectives. This issue reflects the disproportionate representation of men in archaeological studies and discourse, which inherently biases interpretations and narratives towards male experiences and viewpoints (for a comprehensive chronology of the feminist revolution in archaeology, see Wylie 2017). The initial stage of understanding involves recognising the deliberate exclusion of women from the historical narrative of archaeology and their relegation to ancillary positions. For a considerable time, archaeology was dominated exclusively by men, underscoring a significant gender imbalance within the field. This gender disparity has not gone without criticism, as evidenced by a wealth of meta-theoretical discussions focusing on women's roles within the archaeological discipline at an academic level (e.g., Kramer, Stark 1994; Levine 1994; Nelson *et al.* 1994). It cannot be excluded that the predominance of men in this field contributed, at least in its early stages, to the marginalisation of female figures (Kelvin, Hodgetts 2020). How extensive this phenomenon is would require further investigation.

2. An availability heuristic (Tversky, Kahneman 1973), where the narratives that come to mind most easily are those that are frequently repeated and accessible. This effect biases our understanding and recounting of history towards stories and perspectives that are most prominent and reinforced within our cultural and academic environments, often sidelining women's contributions and roles. Even without an intentional desire to reproduce narratives in which women occupy subordinate positions, it is easy to imagine that these narratives are the ones that most readily come to mind because they are the ones we are immersed in. Just as in the case of the Venus of Willendorf, it might be automatic to imagine a man depicting the naked body of a woman; similarly, it may be more straightforward to envision men in positions of prominence or engaged in hunting.

3. A “default male” cognitive bias, wherein there is an automatic inclination to perceive an unspecified gender as male. This bias manifests in the tendency to assign male attributes to individuals whose gender is not explicitly mentioned, further entrenching male-centric narratives and interpretations in the field. It goes beyond the simple availability heuristic, operating as a more instinctive process. The majority of research in this area stems from cognitive science, which has experimentally demonstrated that, historically, philosophical, sociological, and linguistic frameworks have positioned men as the “default” humans, relegating

women to deviations from this norm. Empirical studies in psychology support the notion that, in the realm of individual concepts, there is a default assumption equating people with men. For instance, when asked to envision examples of people, participants are more likely to cite men over women. Similarly, men are more frequently chosen to symbolise humanity as a whole, and associations between men and general human descriptors are made more swiftly than those involving women. This tendency underscores a systematic bias where men are perceived as the universal representation of the human species, a conclusion supported by a body of research (for a comprehensive review, see Bailey *et al.* 2019). As to the extent of this bias in accounts such as archaeological ones, we can only speculate. However, it cannot be ruled out that phenomena often occur whereby there is an assignment of male gender even in contexts where the available finds do not allow for assumptions about sex – for example, cave paintings in which the gender of the depicted individuals is often unclear (cf. Patou-Mathis 2020).

7. *Concluding remarks*

Using the Venus of Willendorf as a starting point, I showed how archaeological reconstructions frequently incorporate intrinsic narrative components. These narratives are crafted from the limited data available, supplemented by connective elements, essentially adding narrative layers. Gender roles occupy a unique niche within these reconstructions due to the frequent inability to deduce them directly from archaeological finds. In the absence of clear evidence to assign gender, archaeologists have, for more than a century, imposed contemporary gender roles onto archaeological reconstructions—sometimes baselessly and often erroneously.

This examination serves as an exemplary case study for standpoint theory, a pivotal framework in feminist philosophy of science that accentuates the role of individuals' social positions, or "standpoints", in shaping their experiences, knowledge, and viewpoints. Emerging from the Marxist concept of the proletariat's standpoint, feminist theorists adapted this notion to underscore the impact of gender, along with other socio-political dimensions, on our perception of the world (Harding 1986; Longino 1990).

The question remains open regarding the effects of these narratives – from which women are often excluded or relegated to caregiving roles – on contemporary discourse. As Lund (2022: 33) states, "Whether we like it or not, the past is often used as a template for the present. At the same time, contemporary society's preconceptions are regularly projected onto the interpretations of past societies". For instance, how do these narratives contribute to reinforcing androcentric views related to power, the use of force, and participation in labour?

It seems likely that existing narratives about the past have long constrained the range of possible current narratives, often hiding behind the supposed objectivity of science. This reflection raises critical questions about the impact of historical narratives on contemporary understandings of gender roles, power dynamics, and societal structures. By examining the ways in which past narratives influence present-day perceptions, we can begin to uncover the underlying mechanisms that perpetuate gender biases and inequalities.

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