

1995

Book Review: The Archaeology of Gender: Separating the Spheres in Urban America by Diana diZerega Wall

Lorinda B. R. Goodwin

Follow this and additional works at: <http://orb.binghamton.edu/neha>



Part of the [Archaeological Anthropology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Goodwin, Lorinda B. R. (1995) "Book Review: The Archaeology of Gender: Separating the Spheres in Urban America by Diana diZerega Wall," *Northeast Historical Archaeology*: Vol. 24 24, Article 8.

<https://doi.org/10.22191/neha/vol24/iss1/8> Available at: <http://orb.binghamton.edu/neha/vol24/iss1/8>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in Northeast Historical Archaeology by an authorized editor of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.

Book Reviews

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF GENDER: SEPARATING THE SPHERES IN URBAN AMERICA by Diana diZerega Wall 1994, Plenum Press, New York. Foreword by Stanley South, 241 pages, 17 plates, 33 figures, 37 tables, 5 appendices, \$37.50.

Reviewed by Lorinda B. R. Goodwin

If the change be not from outward circumstances, it must be from within...

Jane Austen, *Persuasion*

With *The Archaeology of Gender: Separating the Spheres in Urban America*, Diana diZerega Wall has made a significant contribution to historical archaeology and to the study of gender in the archaeological record. In this carefully written volume based on her dissertation (1987), she examines the relationship between the separation of the home and workplace in New York City between 1780 and 1840, and the emergence of separate men's and women's spheres, resulting in social and material changes that are visible from the landscape to the dining room table. Her hypothesis is based on the concurrent trends of elaboration in family meals and the reshaping of the home with the removal of the workplace from the house. The coincidence of these two trends, according to Wall, indicates that women were active agents in developing the new, separate spheres and in creating a source of influence for women through the new operations of social reproduction outside the affective ties of the family.

The author takes the reader from a discussion of the broad historical trends immediately following the American Revolution through the changes that are wrought on business and trades and how these in turn affect the size and shape of domestic household populations and compositions, and shape the landscape and architecture of New York's neighborhoods. Finally, the sensibilities expressed as a result of these changes are also examined in the artifactual record, by looking at table settings (specifically archaeologically recovered ceramics) and the meaning of family meals as

rituals, intended to reinforce the preeminence and sanctity of the family in an increasingly alien and unfriendly economic world. This is compelling because she sees the meaning as more than the acquisition of place settings: it is the creation of social order. Despite the diminution of both gender roles (women newly restricted from the public arena, men playing more restricted roles in the private world) that result from this new social order, both groups are responsible (Wall 1994: 163).

Wall quotes Anne Elliot in Austen's *Persuasion*, "Men have had every advantage of [women] in telling their own story...the pen has been in their hands" (Wall 1994: 13). This bias against domestic life, particularly in city directories, tax records, and censuses, hasn't deterred Wall; rather she combines what relevant data she has gleaned from the documentary evidence with the carefully scrutinized archaeological record in the best tradition of our field. Her extensive documentary research and the archaeological materials recovered from 11 assemblages from six sites in lower Manhattan are included in the work as appendices. Wall scrupulously takes the reader through every step of her work and the reasoning behind each step.

The scale at which she approaches the work is admirable, effectively linking individual families with class and culture. The decision to research on the scale of city neighborhoods, with a survey of a number of middle-class sites, makes Wall's arguments even more convincing and allows the incorporation of other levels of interrelated data (i.e., domestic and public architecture, the role of public transportation, the development of manufacturing technology, and the politics of international trade) often left out of studies that are restricted to the household level. Furthermore, the inclusion of this seemingly external information supports the research on domestic sites.

The carefully organized structure of the work and the quality of the historical research allow for the easy comparison of her data with those from other cities, and I found myself frequently considering similarities (and differences) between New York's development and

that of Boston or Salem or Lowell or Philadelphia. This is an infinitely useful quality too rarely found in any sort of archaeological research.

This cautious approach, however, occasionally results in a sense of restraint that leaves the reader wishing for more. While one commiserates with Wall in her discussion about the lack of personal documents that might reveal the thoughts behind the decisions of ceramic acquisition (pp. 135–136) (certainly no new obstacle in historical archaeology), I do not think that she would have been going too far out on a limb if she had decided to speculate a bit on the meanings of these choices based on her use of prescriptive literature, combined perhaps with early 19th-century fiction (she refers to *Persuasion* once, early on in the introduction [p. 13]). Having established so stable a foundation of background history and social trends, it seems she stops short of fully exploring the possibilities. Here I am caught between appreciation of her deliberate documentation of her research and the desire to learn what she thinks could lie just beyond. Perhaps this could have been further emphasized in her chapter introductions, with a little more hypothetical fiction blended into the fact.

There is a small but increasing number of volumes on the study of gender in archaeology, including Gero and Conkey (1991), Walde and Willows (1991), and Claassen (1992). Those volumes specifically on historical archaeology and gender are somewhat fewer, including a host of articles in a thematic issue of *Historical Archaeology* (Seifert 1991), Spector (1993), and Scott (1994). The annotated bibliography compiled by Bacus et al. (1993) attributes virtually all of the gender research in historical archaeology to the above sources. Wall's contribution therefore increases the present body of work by 25% and is the first book devoted specifically to an archaeological analysis of the gender roles of European-American women and men. Given the title of her book, I found it surprising that she did not refer to this body of work in her introduction. A brief review of the literature would not have been out of place considering the significant nature of this work. The title of her dissertation, "At Home in New York: The Redefinition of Gender Among the Middle Class and Elite

1783–1840," while a little less eye-catching, is more reflective of the work she does here.

Wall's prose is clean, accessible, and spare. The illustrations are interesting, supportive of the points she makes, and give a good sense of the feel of the changing neighborhoods. In making the connection (frequently attempted, so seldom achieved in the field) between her theory and the data at hand, the author is explicit with her theoretical orientation and generous with her personal point of view: this is informative and appealing.

As foreword author Stanley South promised, Diana Wall has bridged the gap between theory and data in this work. This substantial research will be of immeasurable use to scholars interested in the processes of urbanization, the early Federal period, and class structure, as well as gender. She has taken a pile of broken plates and made them speak of agency and social change.

References

Austen, Jane

- 1992 *Persuasion*. In *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen*, Volume II. The Modern Library, New York. [1818]

Bacus, Elizabeth A., Alex W. Barker, Jeffrey D. Bonevich, Sandra L. Dunavan, J. Benjamin Fitzhugh, Debra L. Gold, Nurit S. Goldman-Finn, William Griffin, and Karen M. Mudar, eds.

- 1993 *A Gendered Past: A Critical Bibliography of Gender in Archaeology*. Technical Report No. 25, University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology, Ann Arbor.

Claassen, Cheryl, ed.

- 1992 *Exploring Gender Through Archaeology: Selected Papers From the 1991 Boone Conference*. Monographs in World Archaeology, No. 11. Prehistory Press, Madison.

Gero, Joan M., and Margaret W. Conkey, eds.

- 1991 *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

Scott, Elizabeth M., ed.

- 1994 *Those of Little Note: Gender, Race, and Class in Historical Archaeology*. University of Arizona Press, Tucson.

Seifert, Donna J., ed.

- 1991 *Gender in Historical Archaeology*. *Historical Archaeology* 25(4).

Spector, Janet D.

- 1993 *What This Awl Means: Feminist Archaeology at a Wahpeton Dakota Village*. Minnesota Historical Society Press, St. Paul.

Walde, Dale, and Noreen D. Willows, eds.

- 1991 *The Archaeology of Gender: The Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Annual Chacmool Conference*. University of Calgary Archaeological Association, Calgary.

Wall, Diana diZerega

- 1987 *At Home in New York: The Redefinition of Gender Among the Middle Class and Elite, 1783-1840*. Ph.D. diss., Department of Anthropology, New York University.
- 1994 *The Archaeology of Gender: Separating the Spheres in Urban America*. Plenum Press, New York.

Lorinda B. R. Goodwin

Department of Archaeology
Boston University
675 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02215

POTTERY WORKS: POTTERIES OF NEW YORK STATE'S CAPITAL DISTRICT AND UPPER HUDSON REGION by Warren F. Broderick and William Bouck 1995, Dickinson University Press, Canbury, NJ, 285 pages, \$59.50.

Reviewed by Paul R. Huey and Lois M. Feister

This book continues a trend toward regional pottery studies that was begun by Lura Woodside Watkins in 1949 with her now-famous study of New England redwares.

Broderick and Bouck have gone a step farther, however, by concentrating on one single region. As a result, they are able to provide much more information about the potters themselves and thus give a human dimension to a material culture study.

The specificity of such a regional concentration may appear to be less appealing to a wider audience. With this book, however, this approach should be very useful to archaeologists. Earthenware and stoneware made in the upper Hudson Valley area at and above Albany were shipped south to New York City and New Jersey, east and north to New England and Canada, and west to western New York State. As a result, the sherds and whole vessels appear throughout the northeast. The authors illustrate one vessel marked with the name of a grocer in Montréal, over two hundred miles away from its manufacturing site in Albany.

The pottery industry began with the making of pan tiles in the Albany area in the 17th century, grew slowly in the 18th century, and in the early 19th century began to develop rapidly as the area became an important center for both earthenware and stoneware manufacture. As the ceramic industry of the New York City/New Jersey area declined in importance, many of the potters, following the market, appeared in the upper Hudson Valley area to reestablish themselves. Readily available in the region were redware clay supplies (including the famous Albany slip), firewood, salt from Syracuse, and minerals from the Adirondacks, while there was also access to an excellent system of canals, navigable rivers, and paved roads.

The authors begin with a summary of the technology of pottery manufacture consisting of well-written, easily understandable descriptions. Then they offer a chapter on each location or area (Albany, Greenbush, Lansingburgh, Troy, West Troy, Greenwich and Galesville, Mechanicville, Northumberland, Fortsville, and Galway), finishing with the large pottery plants in Fort Edward and Sandy Hill, some of which lasted until 1942. In addition, there is a useful chapter written by Patricia Barbanel on the 17th-century potter "Kees Pot." Appendices include descriptions and wage lists from rare publications, a list of pot-