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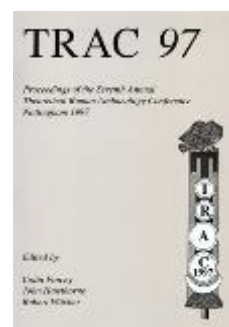
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Tales From A Romanist: a personal view of archaeology and 'equal opportunities'

by Eleanor Scott

Introduction

This is a paper about gender and the invisible web of sex discrimination in academia in Britain. [1] I draw on many of my own experiences, and the experiences of other women in academia, as well as discussing the implications of sets of criteria used by the Research Assessment Exercise and the British Academy from the point of view of women's career structures. And, because I am a Roman archaeologist, it is also in its way a paper about Roman archaeology.

It should be stressed from the outset that this is a personal account, written for a radical conference forum. Anyone reading this paper will be missing the point if they are searching for a general statistical review of the profession as opposed to a personal polemic. There is already a huge body of literature on employment issues in archaeology [2], and so the point of *this* paper is to show not what these statistics look like but rather what it is like *to live a life* as a female academic – to show that it is still hard for women *despite* the copious amounts of guidance material produced by the AUT, the IFA, NATFHE etc. [3] Women – particularly mothers – are still experiencing unacceptable pressures and discrimination at work, and this applies as much to Romanists as to anyone else.

Been there, done that: is there a sense of 'gender awareness' in the discipline?

So how might we characterize the current condition of Roman archaeology in terms of its engagement with the feminist and gender debates of the 1980s and 1990s? Could we not feel that Roman archaeology is well on the way to being a gender-aware subject, at least if the papers published in the TRAC proceedings since 1991 are anything to go by? In the second conference proceedings alone there were three papers which addressed issues of sex and gender. TRAC conference proceedings include many quality papers from women: Sue Alcock (1993), Bernice Kurchin (1995), and Manuela Struck (1995), for example.

In practice one might argue that there is now a more careful approach to equal opportunities with regard to recruitment. There is legislation in place which makes deliberate discrimination against women unlawful. Women have the right to maternity leave. Individual powerful men within individual institutions argue that they are now aware of the issues, having read directives and memos, attended equal opportunities workshops and talked to real women.

But how does this golden glow of a picture square with the dismal statistical reality? Let's get right down to brass tacks and to that Michelin star of professional academic achievement, professorial rank. A mere seven percent of professors in this country are female. *Seven per cent*. Individual institutions with considerable cachet put up an even worse performance: Cambridge, for example, has only thirteen women professors out of a total of 247 (MacLeod 1997).

This statistic parades in front of a backdrop of increasingly high numbers of female undergraduates. In a subject like archaeology, one might expect over half one's undergraduates to be female, but the majority of one's tenured lecturing staff to be male. At professorial level, we in archaeology can compete with the appalling national statistic. This is scarcely much better than the picture when I first started in archaeology as an undergraduate eighteen years ago. And

let's face it, we can count the recent British women professors of archaeology in that period of time on two fingers: Professor Rosemary Cramp, now retired, a Medievalist, and Professor Elizabeth Slater, an archaeological scientist. [4]

Sense of unease amongst women

This shortage of women at a high level is an academia-wide problem, and there is a sense of unease amongst women which is being articulated, despite the tabloid garbage about the battles being won, the post-feminist millennium being upon us, and feminism having failed women.

Those who read *The Guardian* might recall a recent debate in the Letters page about St Hilda's College Oxford. The debate raised wider issues about sexism in the university world. Dr Judith Purver of the University of Manchester wrote on 27.3.97:

The misogyny displayed ... would be laughable were it not for the fact that it reflects attitudes which, in countless subtler and more concealed guises, pervade the entire male-dominated university system. Sooner or later, almost every woman at every level in the system, and particularly at the more traditionally minded institutions, is going to encounter such attitudes. They sap self-confidence and thus impede performance... Any incoming government ... should investigate the institutionalized sexism of British higher education.

On the same day Rebecca Teiger of Oxford University wrote:

Women do not gain fewer places at Oxford, achieve poorer results in finals and hold fewer fellowships because they have different natural abilities and interests. They are in this position because the admissions procedure, style of teaching, course structure and final exams are all biased in favour of men ... the discrimination permeates every aspect of the university.

Rejection of their experiences as 'anecdotal'

These two letters, both from women in Humanities departments – one a senior lecturer, one a student – intrigued me. It would be easy to dismiss these letters as anecdotal, and therefore ill-suited to act as measures of the realities of university life. Certainly women's own accounts of feelings of their professional lives being made unnecessarily difficult for them, or their work lives being trivialized, are vulnerable to accusations of being unrepresentative or being the product of personal paranoia.

I spoke to Judith Purver and Rebecca Teiger, and asked them about their actual experiences. Dr Purver put forward what she considers to be the three most important reasons why women do not get into high office at universities with greater frequency, which were having children, exclusion from decision making processes, and lack of encouragement and mentoring.

Rebecca Teiger talked of the issue of women underperforming in finals exams. At a national level, exams are taken anonymously in order to obscure the sex of the candidate, because it had been shown that where sex was revealed through personal names, women were being consistently marked down. Why some tutors tend to mark women down is a complex issue; these people would appear to be shot through with a belief system in which women are less able than their male peers at intellectual debate. The introduction of anonymity of candidature immediately saw more women obtaining firsts. But Oxford have been watching the figures very closely, comparing control groups of men and women and their performances throughout the three years of study with finals results. Statistically, women are still underperforming in finals. This brings us to a suggested source of bias against women: style of argument (Rebecca Teiger pers. comm.). This is related to how boys and girls are socialized differently. For example, just as boys are discouraged from developing 'girly' attributes, from handwriting through to emotional behaviour, so girls are discouraged from being confrontational. But intellectual

debate *is* confrontation, and many institutions such as Oxford traditionally reward the confrontational approach in academia, just as we reward the adversarial debate in our judicial structures which so traumatizes female and child victims and witnesses (Kennedy 1991; Spencer and Flin 1990). Women, on the other hand, sometimes prefer to offer arguments which focus on conciliatory synthesis, but feel that they are penalized for this approach far too subjectively by their tutors. Ironically, the answer is not simply for women to become more confrontational, because my own experience is that tutors and peers tend to personalize this transformation and describe such an approach as 'aggressive', 'obsessive' or 'angry', because we still live very much in thrall of the cultural narrative which categorizes women who find their voices as being 'hysterical' (e.g. Gilbert and Gubar 1979; Showalter 1997).

Indirect discrimination

We also need to address the issue of indirect discrimination. Indirect sex discrimination is subtle, hard to spot and notoriously difficult to eradicate. Legally speaking, it occurs where a person or employer requires another person to meet a requirement or condition which as a member of a particular sex, or as being of a particular marital or family status, is less easily satisfied. The condition may therefore appear to be neutral – such as everyone having to work a new night shift – but if it can be shown that most of the members of a group comprising, say, lone mothers, cannot comply with the condition, then it is deemed to be unlawful (Harrison 1990: 132).

The legislation also concerns itself with age bars where they impact on gender. The test case was *Price vs. the Civil Service Commission* in 1978, where the complainant alleged indirect discrimination on the grounds of sex because far fewer women could comply with the age limits of seventeen and a half to twenty-eight to qualify as an eligible candidate for executive officer grade. By comparing the proportion of qualified women with the proportion of qualified men, it is obvious that a larger number of women of that age group will be having or bringing up children, and the Employment Appeal Tribunal held that there was indeed unlawful indirect discrimination (Harrison 1990: 132–3).

The British Academy

The age bar surfaces again and again in discussions with women about access to fellowships and grants. Age bars of thirty, thirty-five, and forty have been drawn to my attention. For example, British Academy Fellowships and many of the Oxbridge fellowships are restricted to those under thirty, "except in exceptional circumstances". I asked the British Academy what these exceptional circumstances were considered to be, and how many times they had been granted and for what reasons. The information I received made it quite clear that a woman who had spent time in her twenties having and raising a child must argue on her own behalf for "special consideration" of her "exceptional circumstances"; in the notes for applicants one reads of persons whose academic careers have been interrupted by "illness or childbirth". It concerns me that these age bars act as deterrents to women either to apply at the 'wrong' age or to have children under the age of thirty [5]. Furthermore, the association of pregnancy and maternity with illness is misguided, yet fairly common. In a recent article entitled "The 'sick' woman: pregnancy discrimination in employment", James Hanlon observed that in employment case law the comparison was repeatedly made between a pregnant woman and a sick man. Rights for women are still seen as dependent upon them meeting male norms or at least known male experiences, and "to equate pregnancy with sickness is to debase women's role in our own society" (1995: 315).

Parenthood in focus

Children appear to be the big issue in indirect discrimination. The construction of parenthood in our society is such that women are expected to be, and indeed are, the primary carers of young children.[6]

Maternity leave certainly isn't all it's cracked up to be. There is no legal obligation on the part of an employer to provide maternity cover. They just have to give you your job back. You can come back to a shambles of a back-log, a substantially transformed job description, and a set of disgruntled colleagues who had to shoulder the burden of your work whilst you were away. And only eighteen weeks of maternity leave is paid to some degree. Women who do not have well-paid partners and who need to return to work, and/or those women who want to return to work, then face the child-care nightmare. This is where being an academic lecturer becomes a dance of lunacy. Meetings which go on till 7 or 8pm, evening teaching, Saturday morning sixth-form open visits, weekend conferences: yes, they do become difficult when you've got a baby who needs picking up from a nursery by 6pm and there's no available child-care at weekends.

I was informed on one occasion by a senior colleague that pregnancy, maternity and breastfeeding are not sufficient reason for my not running a field project. In fact, I have been asked repeatedly if I am planning to have any more children. In the new culture of devolved budgeting, where individual faculties, schools or departments are required to pay for staffing out of their own individual budgets, a certain paranoia seems to sometimes set in about 'unpredictable' or 'extra' staffing expenses such as maternity leave. I would argue that institutions need to maintain central reservoirs of funds for maternity leave, otherwise they run the risk of penalizing departments who employ women staff, and, concomitantly, making younger female job candidates appear potentially expensive and unattractive. [7]

And what about excessively long working hours, which we excel at in this country? Whenever I complain about long working hours, or meetings that run on into the night because someone's droning on and on about the same old stuff, is it the fact that I'm the only lecturer in a trade union which is perceived to be my motivation, or is it the fact that I'm the only one who's a mother which becomes the focus of attention? Yes, of course, I *have* got a baby to get home to, but the point is surely that we all have something to get home to, or at least we are all entitled to leave work at a reasonable hour. The working practices of long hours and after-hours meetings makes it harder for women with children to compete [8]. Women who don't have children find themselves putting off having children. Another statistic to bear in mind: the vast majority of adult women in this country do paid work; over a third of the women in this country will have had an abortion by the time they are thirty.

A shocking statistic? Let's look at some real lives of professional women again, this time in a comparable profession for which there is good information. The Association of Women Solicitors has established confidential maternity helpline, so worried are they by the pressures being placed on women members not have children at all, or to have abortions if they become pregnant. They have taken hundreds of calls in the last four years (Langdon-Down 1997). The crux of the matter is that pregnancy is deemed inconvenient, maternity leave disruptive and expensive, and working mothers unreliable and unwelcome. Perceptions of the unreliability and vulnerability of female workers die hard. According to a recent BBC news report on sexual harassment in the police force reported that out of 170 female police officers questioned, seventy-nine percent had experienced at least one episode of sexual harassment in the past six months. This apparently represented an eight percent *rise* in the incidence of sexual harassment since the last study was undertaken in 1992 (BBC 1997).

In addition, there is now considerable statistical evidence that women earn less money for work of equal value. For example, in the legal profession new female solicitors are paid about £3,000 per annum less than their male counterparts. This pay differential increases as one rises through the ranks; men earn around £15,000 more than women at partner level (Langdon-Down 1997). In academia, evidence is emerging that the incremental entry-levels for female lecturers are less lucrative than those for male lecturers. [9] One of the reasons I have heard given for this, by a senior academic, is that "men have mortgages". It is a lottery for women whether or not they end up working under men like this. And the pay differential makes one's experience of motherhood even more of a lottery: child-care is expensive and a woman's attachment to a high-earning partner becomes extremely relevant to her professional circumstances.

Part-time work

Research Fellowships are primarily open to people in continuing full-time posts (Leverhulme Trust, conditions for 1998 awards.)

Many women try to make their return to work more manageable by electing to return on a part-time basis in the first instance. Women have this legal right. The majority of part-time workers in this country are female, in all types of jobs. Unfortunately, part-time work is held in low esteem by many who hold positions of power. This is reflected in the absence of senior positions held on a part-time or job-share basis. Part-time work is looked down on in this country. I have it in writing from a senior academic manager that he considers that job adverts for full-time staff attract candidates of a better 'calibre' than job adverts for part-time staff. What job adverts for part-time staff attract, of course, are quite a few women.

I was recently in the position of initiating a grievance procedure (with the support of my trade union, NATFHE) on the grounds that I had been unfairly discriminated against as a part-time and therefore as a female academic. At the time of the grievance, part-time lecturers were barred from applying for internal research grants and sabbatical leave, and there was also an implication for my supervision of Ph.D. dissertations. During this process, I came up against all the established male structures of academia and I found it deeply intimidating. The grievance procedure was essentially a set of stage directions for a confrontation, a mini-courtroom battle. As regards support from peers and colleagues; let's just say that it was seen very much to be *my* personal problem. [10]

The structures which hold indirect discrimination in place

Exclusion from decision-making processes

The answer to the problem of long hours is not to tell women that they don't have to bother coming to Departmental meetings or committee meetings or that they can work at home. This misses the point. Women need to be *more* involved in the decision making processes of their profession, not less. You are not doing women any favours in the long run by giving them a note excusing them from games.

Membership of committees needs to be looked at especially closely, repeatedly and frequently. At the moment, there is a suspicion in the minds of some of the women who do serve on influential committees that they're invited onto a committee to make the others feel good about the gender balance, rather than to contribute their opinion and knowledge. Many decisions already appear to have been taken prior to the actual meeting – and so one becomes the token woman at a rubber-stamping exercise.

RAE criteria

Where, in all this mire of networks of power, webs of intrigue and corridors of learning, might I be able to engage with the criteria for success, as defined by one's peers and superiors? Let's look at the 1996 Research Assessment Exercise, hereafter known as the RAE. The RAE is designed to be rigorous peer review which rates all archaeology departments which choose to enter the exercise, and gives them a grading out of five. A 5 is good; 1 is not so good.

The panel:

Professor B W Cunliffe (Chairman), University of Oxford
 Dr S Bowman, British Museum
 Professor W Davies, UCL
 Professor M Fulford, University of Reading
 Professor M Jones, University of Cambridge
 Professor P Warren, University of Bristol
 Dr T Watkins, University of Edinburgh
 Dr A Whittle, University of Wales, Cardiff
 Dr David Gale (Assessor), Natural Environmental Research Council
 Mrs Jacqueline Wilson (Secretary), HEFCE

This year's panel of eight academics – the majority of whom were professors – was chaired by Professor Barry Cunliffe, and contained two women – one, Dr Sheridan Bowman, a scientist and the other, Professor Wendy Davies, a Medieval historian. (Intriguingly, these profiles mimic the subject areas which have produced recent female Professors of Archaeology.)

How is the panel selected? I spoke directly to Barry Cunliffe about this. Apparently Heads of Department and professional bodies such as English Heritage are asked to submit names. The Higher Education Funding Council for England, hereafter HEFCE, gives general guidelines, such as the requirement that the panel members reflect a wide geographical spread, that the main subject areas of archaeology are represented, and that age and gender are taken into account. I asked Barry Cunliffe if the two out of eight, or twenty-five percent, female panel membership was, to his mind, a fair representation of the numbers of women in archaeology. He replied that it was certainly a fair representation of *the numbers of women's names which were submitted*. In other words, only one in every four names submitted to HEFCE were of women.

Remember that there is a lot of pressure on staff to enter the exercise and to be considered research-active, so much so that a number of undesirable recruiting practices, such as failure to advertize and interview for appointments properly, have arisen, which appear to have benefited male academics more than female academics. Each member of staff entering the RAE is required to outline a research profile including details of up to four pieces of published work which they wish to be considered, and it is normal in archaeology for a full complement of four pieces of work per person to be named. But is it a level playing field? What about staff such as myself who are part-time? Was I asked to submit 0.5 of a research profile? No – it seems that if you're part-time, or you've had a period of maternity leave, then it's just tough if you can't compete with the rest; there are no specific procedures to follow if one is engaged in a *normal female career pattern*.

Barry Cunliffe makes the point that there is a section of the overall application, called RA6, which the Head of Archaeology completes, in which "special circumstances" can be taken into account. "Used intelligently", he says "RA6 can take away the straitjacket". This, for example, is where a Head of Department could explain about a lecturer having had an extended period of sick leave. But I would make the point again that pregnancy and maternity leave are not the

same as sick leave, and that to regard them as 'special circumstances' is to argue that the male experience is the normative experience against which all other experience must be judged. One is also dependent upon one's Head of Department to make one's case, a case that he or she may well not understand particularly well themselves.

Allowances *are* made for members of staff, quote, "in the early stages of their career", but given the information that one submits to the RAE this can really only be done on the basis of age, which tends to reward men more than women, given that women are far more likely, in their twenties and thirties, to have heavy family commitments. Again, Barry Cunliffe argues that a case could be stated in RA6, and I would again challenge this by saying that this tends to present the male experience as normative, as the gold standard of career patterns. In addition, how can one guarantee that the panel would weight such explanations in RA6 fairly and appropriately, especially if the chair should pass to someone – male or female – who is dismissive of these issues? [11]

I suppose I would define exercises, documents and sets of criteria such as the RAE as being like an apparently sound computer programme corrupted by an invisible virus. The apparently neutral RAE and the fellowship rules and the criteria for academic promotions and the criteria for sabbatical leave and interview formats and questions etc. – they are all infested with the underlying assumption that what is normative is male.

Implications for Roman Archaeology

On the subject of judging the quality of publications for the RAE, I quote:

The panel will read selectively from the works cited... The panel will not collectively rank journals but individual panel members *will be guided by their own views* on the relative standing of the journals [my emphasis].

Barry Cunliffe states that the panel did take quality of papers into account. They particularly considered the 'impact' of the paper. However he accepts that inevitably "a range of perceptions and impressions were brought to bear on the process". Can one therefore feel confident that research papers published in the *TRAC Proceedings* will be given as much credit as if they were being published in *Britannia* or *JRS*?

The whole thing is particularly worrying, I feel, when one considers that some 'prestigious' avenues of research, presentation and publication are not especially women-friendly. I recall with dismay the shameful treatment which some female speakers and delegates have received at the hands of male academics at conferences and seminars. And I don't just mean the rape jokes in the bars, the uninvited touching and the assumptions that women will take care of the catering arrangements: I mean the sarcastic, snobbish remarks made in the public forum of discussion, a forum turned unnecessarily into a confrontational war-zone where the old boy network dug in and lobbed out its barbs. One also needs to consider that certain research topics which are of value might be regarded by an RAE panel as trivial, marginal or trendy and worthless. Think of gender, women, masculinities, children, infancy.

So academic appointments alone do not end discrimination. It is what happens to women once they have been appointed to academic positions which matters. You could make every archaeological appointment for the next five years female, and although it might end the feelings of isolation, it wouldn't end discrimination in itself if none of these women ever made it to professorial level and they spent the rest of their days fending off questions about how many babies they plan to have and being ignored in major decision-making processes.

Conclusion: the personal is political

It is possible, then, to identify a number of discriminatory practices, the cumulative effect of which is devastating for women in the profession. I have categorized these down as the 'four C's':

- **Children.** Pregnancy and maternity are only experienced by women, who lose out professionally as a result of being parents or being perceived as future mothers. Thus it is not just 'having children' which affects women's careers, but rather how they are then perceived as mothers and the barriers which are unnecessarily put in the way of their managing their private and professional lives.
- **Criteria.** The criteria by which success is judged – full-time working, continuity of service, academic impact at a young age, confrontational argument, working long hours, the desire to re-locate, etc. – are focused on the apparent gold standard of male patterns of working lives. The normative is male. The ordinary realities of the ordinary working lives of real women are dismissed as 'special circumstances' or 'exceptional circumstances' and even equated with illness.
- **Committees.** Women are under-represented on the powerful committees and they suffer as a result of this exclusion from the decision-making processes of academia. Committees make appointments in their own likenesses
- **Confidence.** Women suffer especially from a lack of encouragement and mentoring, and are more likely to have their work described in personal terms. Female mentors are in short supply and successful women do not always understand the problems of other women.

In conclusion, I would stress that there is a structural link between statistics such as the dismal proportion of women at professorial level and the actual practices of academia, such as attitudes towards and unconscious biases about women as parents. The personal *is* political, and for us to be still stuck with a system in which women are required to monitor their fertility in order to attain professional respect is bizarre and unacceptable. Time, surely, for the playing fields of academia to be levelled.

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Notes

[1] This paper was first delivered as a conference paper at the TRAC97, as a paper entitled 'Roman archaeology: gendered practice; ungendered theory?'

[2] Much of the work on equal opportunities in archaeology has been carried out in the United States and Australia, for example M.C. Nelson, S.M. Nelson and A. Wylie (eds.) 1994 *Equity issues for women in archaeology* (Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association No. 5), but there are some British publications, especially the report of the Equal Opportunities Committee of the IFA, *Women in British Archaeology* 1992, and the papers published under 'Women in Archaeology' in the 1991 issue of *The Field Archaeologist* where data on university admissions and membership of various committees etc. is discussed. The AUT has published various documents of equal opportunities and the 'glass ceiling', such as *Goodwill under stress* 1990, although these statistics are now a bit out of date. There is also a growing literature on women archaeologists, such as M. Diaz-Andreu and M. L. Stig Sorensen (eds.) 1997 *Excavating women: a history of women in European archaeology* (Routledge), which recognizes that the discipline of archaeology has been particularly inclined to ignore the

achievements of women archaeologists.

[3] For the uninitiated: the AUT is the Association of University Teachers, and NATFHE is the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education, both trade union organizations. The IFA is the Institute of Field Archaeologists, a professional body.

[4] The issue of non-British women archaeologists employed in British universities is a related and important area of debate with significant implications for Roman archaeology; I am grateful to J. D. Hill for discussing recent research on this issue which is being carried out at the Universities of Cambridge and Southampton. Incidentally, the three other British women professors of archaeology were: Dorothy Garrod, a prehistorian, Kathleen Kenyon, a prehistorian with an interest in early civilization, and Jocelyn Toynbee, a Romanist.

[5] One referee points out that in Denmark, childbirth is specifically taken into account when age bars are made. The system there is that qualification bars for fellowships etc. are calculated not by age but by the number of years one has held one's degree, with time allowances being permitted for each instance of maternity.

[6] I am grateful to Lindsay Allason-Jones for reminding me that women are also in the main the primary carers of elderly relatives.

[7] Trade unions may well have produced copious guidance literature on this topic but the point is that institutions are not necessarily taking it on board, nor do they have a legal obligation to do so. Very many 'line managers' remain untrained in Equal Opportunities.

[8] Long hours of course also include after-hours (i.e. evening into night) informal meetings in pubs and colleagues' houses and offices.

[9] See the IFA documents 1991 and 1992 mentioned in footnote 3.

[10] With notable and honourable exceptions: my grateful thanks for support and advice to Charlotte Purkis and Roberta Gilchrist.

[11] I am grateful to Barry Cunliffe for his input into this paper, although I fear we must disagree on the efficacy of his suggested built-in gender-bias remedies!

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I would like to thank the TRAC 97 organizing committee, particularly Rob Witcher and Colin Forcey, for encouraging me to write this paper. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Professor Barry Cunliffe, Dr Judith Purver and Rebecca Teiger for talking through a number of issues relevant to this discussion. Lindsay Allason-Jones, J.D. Hill and Kenneth Dark made a number of useful suggestions, for which I offer my thanks and appreciation. Thanks too to the anonymous referees who provided a number of useful references and comments.

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