

# WOMEN IN PORTUGUESE ARCHAEOLOGY\*

by

Vítor Oliveira Jorge\*\* & Susana Oliveira Jorge\*\*

**Abstract:** There has been a gradual growth in the presence of women in all fields of Portuguese archaeological activity (in the universities, state services, museums, etc.) since the 1970's. However, although there is a greater number of female students in Prehistory and in Archaeology in general, only lately women have become similarly represented at a professional level. Museums were the first institutions in which women archaeologists, some of known prestige, began to work. In universities, contributions by women in master thesis or Ph.D.'s have provided interesting new approaches in recent years. Finally, as distinct from other European countries, in Portugal survey archaeological units are still limited in number. In the future this is a field where a large number of women will be involved.

**Key-words:** Portugal. Archaeology. Women.

## 1. WOMEN IN THE PORTUGUESE LABOUR MARKET, ESPECIALLY IN TECHNO-SCIENTIFIC PROFESSIONS

Sousa Santos (Santos, 1990) has repeatedly characterized Portugal as a “semi-peripheral country”, that is, a country whose development occupies an intermediate position between the central societies (the so-called “first world”) and the peripheral societies of the “third world”. According to the same author, this situation implies that in Portugal elements of pre-modernity may coexist with others which are typical of the modernity or even of “post-modernity”. Traditionally, what we have had in Portugal is not the “welfare state” in the technical sense, but rather what is named by Santos a “welfare society”. This

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\*\* Institute of Archaeology, Faculty of Arts, Univ. of Porto, Portugal.

relations are more important than sex social relations for the access to certain prestige jobs. So, it is not surprising to observe, in teaching for instance, high rates of female presence. In 1984/85 the female university personnel was 31% - which is relatively high. In March 1991, in our Faculty (Faculty of Arts of Oporto University), of a total of teachers (247) 50% were females (125).

In conclusion, due to the fact that Portugal is in a place of transition between the “developed” and the “third world” countries, sexual segregation in employment is not so accentuated as in other European countries, and there is a significant “feminization” (% of women) in the teaching system (both at the teacher as well as at the student levels).

## **2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF PORTUGUESE ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE SPECIFICITY OF ITS PRESENT SITUATION**

In a previous paper (Jorge & Jorge, 1995) we defined four major periods in the history of Portuguese archaeology, which, very schematically, are:

- 1 – Origins – late 1850s, 1860s of the nineteenth century.
- 2 – First Development – from the 1870s of the nineteenth century to the late 1920s of our century.
- 3 – Backwardness, Dependency, Anachronism – from the 1930s to the 1960s of the twentieth century.
- 4 – Second Period of Development – from the 1970s to the present.

We will take into consideration here only the third and the fourth periods, because it is during them that most women make their appearance in Portuguese archaeology.

During the third period, the community of Portuguese archaeologists was small (as it is still today): at that time, around one hundred people, for the most part amateurs. The state organization of archaeology was very weak, and the central office necessarily inefficient (through lack of means and personnel); there was no systematic survey of the territory, every record of findings or sites was made in a personal manner and on an occasional basis. This situation means that the areas most known were those more accessible to the few archaeologists available. The inner regions of the country remained for the most part isolated, difficult to access because of the bad roads, far from the few culture centres concentrated at the coast. For a long time, Portugal was made up of “two countries”, with the cultural elites settled in Lisbon, Porto and Coimbra and their surroundings. With the exceptions of the Roman town of Conimbriga, near Coimbra, and of some projects by Eduardo Serrão and his collaborators in

of a more general illness of the Portuguese situation: on the one hand, the weakness of the state to organize this activity, whose importance is not fully taken into consideration by most of the authorities (a “pre-modern” feature); on the other hand, the incapacity of the archaeologists to organise themselves in order to improve their professional status, and to demand conditions of work and remuneration compatible with their technical know how. Individual dependency on the meagre funds granted by the state or the municipalities, and very hard competition among people or small groups in the permanent fight to obtain the minimum appropriate work conditions, diminish the possibilities for archaeology in Portugal to acquire a status of public respect. The archaeologist is still seen today by lay-people as a romantic “free-lancer”, searching for exciting discoveries and being rewarded through his/her own enthusiasm. The overturning of this situation is the most important challenge which the young people who are now approaching this field face.

Throughout the period, we notice an increased influence of researchers from abroad, be they French (collaboration of Jean Roche with the University of Porto, after 1974, for instance), German (creation of the German Archaeological Institute in Lisbon in 1972), British - it was Hubert Newman Savory (Savory, 1968) who wrote the first popular modern synthesis of Iberian Prehistory - or, more recently, North American. The positive influence that these researchers had on the orientation of the generation who is now at work is visible in the significant improvement in the quality of archaeological activity during the last two decades, mainly in scientific terms. The development of consistent and durable regional projects; the improvement of rescue archaeology; the systematic study of certain main themes, namely in Ph.D. dissertations - like the Upper Palaeolithic and the Mesolithic, the process of neolithization, the megaliths, the Chalcolithic hill-forts, the rock art, the Bronze Age settlements, the Iron Age and Roman hill-forts, the study of Roman towns and villae, the medieval and industrial archaeology -; the producing of the first good synthesis of our Prehistory and Roman Archaeology; and the organization of some important meetings, all these are signals that Portuguese archaeology has reached a dignified status and that it begins to be operational. Let us refer, in particular, to the holding, in October 1993, at the University of Porto, of the 1st Congress on Iberian Archaeology, which was attended by about 800 people, and whose most visible out-put was the publication of 8 volumes of Proceedings, with more than 500 pages each. Portugal is no longer an isolated country; and, in this respect, it is crucial for us to establish permanent grounds for collaboration with our neighbours and to create stable conditions for dialogue with other European countries, like our partners in the E.U., and others. Portuguese researchers have started to participate regularly in international forums, and it is now vital that foreign colleagues also make an

do Património Arquitectónico e Arqueológico”) we have around 160 people, about 1/3 of whom are women. The most numerous group corresponds to prehistorians (about 60), and here we find again the same percentage of women (about 1/3). An interesting disparity seems to exist in the domain of mediaeval archaeology, where the number of men exceeds the number of women four times.

Also, the academic qualification of our archaeologists is, for the moment, still very low; in general, they all took an university degree (normally in History), but in 1993 only 17 people had a Ph.D., 4 of them being women. Among those 17 Ph. D.'s, 4 had been obtained abroad; and 3 were in the field of Natural Sciences, although these people may be considered as archaeologists, as they have directed, or are directing, excavations. This means that actually only 11 Ph.D. theses in archaeology were completed in Portugal, but indeed many others are in the course of preparation. And we should not forget Master's dissertations, some of them with a quality and an extension corresponding to a Ph. D. abroad.

Although the number of the teaching/research personnel working in universities or similar institutions has grown considerably since April 1974, only 65 people exist in this specific activity, and, at the moment, the possibilities for future expansion are very limited. In this universe, women (20) are more than 1/3 in relation to men; 1/4 of these women have a Ph.D. and 14 of the 20 have a post-graduate degree. That shows a good level of training when compared to men's.

Private universities have boomed recently in Portugal; in spite of being expensive, they grow at the cost of the public ones, where there is a low number of places available for students wanting to get training in the field of archaeology. The private universities in Portugal only have 13 teachers in the area of archaeology, 4 of them being women.

Trying to look now at other indicators of Portuguese archaeological activity, we may consider the number of papers published by men and women since 1935 (Oliveira, 1984, 1985). Between 1935 and 1970, the disparity of female and male activity at this level is enormous, and most significant if we consider the number of people who have published 5 or more papers (that is, people who carried out more substantial or continuous work). That disparity clearly diminishes during the seventies, but to a certain extent maintains itself if again we only consider the authors having published 5 or more papers. To be more precise, in this last case the rate is of 1 woman to each 5 years in the period between 1935 and 1970 (35 years), and of 6,5 women to each 5 years in the seventies. Women's presence as authors grew, in fact, but not so much as could be expected. Anyway, if we had numbers for the 1980s - perhaps the best moment of Portuguese archaeology this century - and the beginnings of the 1990s, the picture would be very different, favouring women. Throughout this last period, we estimate that the number of

we will see what is the best we can do with them.” “Them”, the so-called data, are being built by each of us now, in our imagination. They are products of our intuition, validated or not by our institutionalized practice. They will reproduce themselves if they are not formalized and called into question. In this field, there is a lot to do in Portuguese archaeology, and, having this target in mind, the initiative of female archaeologists may be important for a new archaeological consciousness of which their colleagues, men, will also be the beneficiaries.

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