

ENG_ Archeology with an LGBTQIA+ perspective

Throughout human history, **people have experienced their sexuality, their gender and their bodies in an enormous variety of ways**. However, with the appearance of historical disciplines in Europe from the 19th century, the binarism (man-woman) that was considered as the social norm determined the reading that many people would make of the past, transporting their own categories to other societies and times.

Archeology with an LGBTQIA+* perspective defends the variety of affective, sexual and gender identities throughout the human history, starting from the difference between sex (biological) and gender (social and identitarian). This is part of the academic field of Queer Archaeology, which also studies how this affective, sexual and gender diversity is historically related to other issues such as social class, or the creation of race.

(* "LGBTQIA+" is an acronym that refers to lesbian, gay, trans, bisexual, queer, intersex, and asexual people, and other people with diverse sexuality, affectivity, and/or gender identity and/or expression.)

Queer archaeology seeks to understand how the values of normativity and diversity (or non-normativity) functioned and were articulated in past societies. Therefore, when we say "adding an LGBTQIA+ perspective", this does not mean imposing anachronistic labels, but inviting us to see the diversity that exists in the cultures and societies of the past, as this diversity has traditionally been hidden by the assumptions that we make according to our precepts or current

context. *Queer* archaeology seeks to "decolonize" our vision of the past from the biases with which we look at it from the present.

Archeology with an LGBTQIA+ perspective focuses on the following axes:

- Sex: biological characteristics of an individual.
- Gender: performative social constructions that determine canons, social norms and identities.
- Sex/gender system: how a culture classifies individuals according to their bodies and social roles.
- Sexuality: sexual, affective and romantic attraction.

There are many other axes that we can question, such as family and kinship and how these are organized.

Furthermore, it is necessary to keep in mind that these concepts evolve as we become more aware of how they operate. For example, gender has traditionally been considered a social element and sex as a natural one, but 'biological' sex is also socially mediated by the observation and categorization of sexual traits, both internal and external. That is to say: there is a social component when it comes to classifying individuals as belonging to one sex or another according to their biological characteristics, since there is a (social) need to classify a great diversity of body types in a limited number of categories ("sexes").

In the 1980s, Feminist Archeology denounced how we often assume the neutral historical subject to be masculine. A paradigmatic case of the application of the LGBTQIA+ perspective in Archeology is that of the "Lovers of Modena", two persons buried together who were considered

a couple until, after analyzing their remains, it was revealed that both had XY chromosomes and the discourse changed, assuming then that they were relatives. While their relationship had been assumed to be romantic as a male-female couple, now that assumption was unacceptable, and alternative options had to be sought.

The critical theory of sexuality highlights the instability of identities, since they are the product of specific socio-historical contexts. For example, sexual-affective diversity in classical Athens, where some specific types of homoeroticism were accepted within specific social boundaries (as a practice of power and initiation), had nothing to do with the sexual-affective diversity in the Middle Ages, in which sexuality was understood according to its practices, without these intervening in the identity perception of individuals; nor with that of the Modern Age, where categories such as the “sodomite” began to be formulated as opposed to the natural and divine order in relation to the State.

In short, we need an open approach to understand the reality of people in other times and cultures, analyzing them within their own context and without "imposing" our biases as a normatively cis, straight (heterosexual), and patriarchal Western society.

That is why we invite you to visit the Museu d'Arqueologia de Barcelona with an LGBTQIA+ regard, asking yourself and seeking to understand how the values of normativity and diversity worked in past societies.

Archeology with an LGBTQIA+ perspective is part of the free visit to the exhibition of the Museum of Archeology of Catalonia (MAC) and can be visited until mid-September in the usual times of the

museum. There will be an identifier in each of the objects that are part of the proposal, and a number of questions that invite you to see the story with LGBTQ+ perspective.

To learn more...

- [@unamiradalgtbi](#) Discover more archaeological objects with an LGBTQ+ regard at the Instagram account of the “Una Mirada LGTBI+” project!
- Bibliography:
 - Blackmore, J., & Hutcheson, G. S. (Eds.). (1999). *Queer Iberia: Sexualities, Cultures, and Crossings from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1220ntr>
 - Blackmore, C. How to Queer the Past Without Sex: Queer Theory, Feminisms and the Archaeology of Identity. *Arch* 7, 75–96 (2011). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11759-011-9157-9>
 - Dowson, Thomas A. 1998. Homosexualitat, teoria queer i arqueologia. *Cota Zero* 14: 81-87.
 - Dowson, T.A. 2000. Why queer archaeology? An introduction. *World Archaeology* 32: 161–65.
 - Cleminson, Richard y F. Vázquez García. 2013. *Sexo, identidad y hermafroditas en el mundo ibérico, 1500-1800*. Madrid: Cátedra.
 - Foucault, Michel. 1978. *History of sexuality volume 1: an introduction*. Pantheon books.
 - Sánchez Sainz, Mercedes. 2019. *Pedagogías queer, ¿nos arriesgamos a hacer otra educación?* Madrid: Catarata.
 - Trujillo, Gracia. 2022. *El feminismo queer es para todo el mundo*. Madrid: Catarata
 - Vegas, Valeria. 2020. *Libérate, la cultura LGTBQ que abrió camino en España*. Dos Bigotes.

Questions

1. Is there homoeroticism in this mosaic? Many representations of the female body have been made by and for the male gaze (for example, the Nude Maja), has this always been the case? Can we see female representations that are more natural, sapphic or represent sorority? What differences would there be?
2. What is masculinity? How has it been constituted over time? Priapus was a rustic god of fertility, represented with a large phallus. Have symbols related to the genitals always had sexual connotations? Have phallic images always been

associated only with fertility? Have there been other symbolic or conceptual relationships?

3. Since when does affective, sexual and gender diversity exist in our evolutionary line? Is *Homo sapiens* the only species with individuals showing affective, sexual and gender diverse behaviors?
4. How were tasks distributed in Prehistory? Was there a division of tasks, such as hunting, according to gender roles?
5. How has the use and perception of jewelry in societies changed? Have they always been different according to gender? Have the most discreet jewels always been for men?
6. How is unique thought structured in societies? Do these preconceived and hegemonic ideas in societies lead to structural violence (LGTBphobia, sexism, racism...)?
7. What is motherhood, and how has it been understood over time and across societies? Have women always been the only ones in charge of caring for their offspring?
8. How has the sexuality of deities been understood in different cultures?
In many cultures deities have been outside the current binary of male and female. Hermaphroditus (Rome), Awo (Akan people), Cintéotl (Aztec culture), Sedna (Inuit goddess), Nana Buluku and Mawu-Lisa (Fon and Ewe peoples)...
Does the Christian deity have a specific gender?
9. In our culture we usually associate the figure of the moon with femininity, but is this the case in all cultures? Why and how do we assume the characteristics of a particular gender to certain elements external to gender?
10. This female figurine does not present the characteristic features that will be used later for the female representation. How do you think this representation has changed and why? Have you ever wondered how the representation of corporeality has changed over the centuries and in different cultures?
11. What is femininity? Is it something socially acquired, or is it intrinsic to the person? Have the precepts of femininity always been the same everywhere?
12. This sculpture represents the god Apollo, but for many years it was thought to represent Aphrodite since her facial features were considered feminine. Why

was femininity attributed to his features? Are there really physical attributes, enduring over time, that can be considered only as belonging to a single gender?

13. In the Trojan War, Hector killed Patroclus. Patroclus's lover, Achilles, will take revenge by killing Hector.

Can we find great stories of homosexual love in the archaeological remains? What weight could these stories have in Greek society?

14. Have dolls always been considered a girl's game or is it a current idea? What function have they had historically?

15. What were same-gender relationships like in early civilizations like Ancient Egypt? How have we interpreted the available information?

The Egyptian gods Horus and Seth are an example. In myth, we are told Seth got Horus drunk to take advantage of him sexually. This turned into a sexual fight for dominance where both deities turned into hippopotamuses. Some versions of the myth tell that Seth became pregnant with Horus. The myth has been interpreted as a scene of violence, revenge, hatred and even humiliation, but there are also interpretations that read it positively: the unification of Egypt used to be represented by the union of these two gods. Could this union, applied to the union of the kingdom, have a homosexual content? What values were related to sexual diversity in ancient cultures? Were they always the same values or did they change according to cultures, social strata, specific relationships, etc.? How has affective, sexual and gender diversity evolved in the different cultures of the world and its religions?

[Learn more about sexual, affectual and gender diversity in mythology here](#)

16. What relationship has there been between the institution of the Church and sex?

What relationship has sex had with humor over time?

17. How have identities been constituted throughout history? Identities depend on their context: how have they changed in our environment?

18. How do we assign gender or sex to objects? What consequences can it entail?

19. Many times sailors' life has been related to homosexuality as it is a very masculinized environment. On the high seas, sailors, being surrounded by men, would have found in each other the affection that they could not get from

women. Would this homosexuality really have taken place because of the lack of women on the ships and voyages? Is homosexuality a choice or a remedy for a specific need?

20. The passage of time makes the same object look very different from its original form. For example, after spending decades or hundreds of years under water. There is often a big difference in how we tend to see archaeological reality as opposed to how it really was: for instance, we find skeletons instead of the living people of past societies, and we often find them in a single (funerary) context instead of the great variety of contexts that each person used in his life. In short, in Archeology there is a "problem of observation": we build stories around the objects or bodies found, and in this construction we can apply visions of reality that are our own, but they can be far from the concrete reality of the people who actually lived in those past eras.

Can you think of other problems that arise from transporting our present biases into the past? How can we solve this problem?

21. Was gender and sexual diversity accepted in ancient Greece? How did these realities look and live? What is the interrelation between gender and sexuality in Ancient Greece?

Conclusions

In order to know what surrounds us, we need to have an open look. Pre-established social prejudices and conceptions, through which we often analyse, or even study, our environment, can make us lose a great deal of reality. The production of the knowledge has often met with this problem, allowing only partial or even unrealistic knowledge of our environment, when reality is full of diversity, such as: affective, sexual, gender, racial, functional...

Observing archaeology from an LGBT+ perspective allows us to see from other points of view realities that we might not have previously thought about. The same applies to all other knowledge! Do you dare look at history, nature, art, science... with an LGBT+ look? Do you want to know more about LGTBIQA+ archaeology? Visit our instantgram (QR at <https://www.instagram.com/unamiradalgtbi/>). For any query, do not hesitate to write to: unamiradalgtbi@gmail.com