

8.5.: Claudine Cohen (Paris): The Descent of Woman. Gender in pre-historic studies

Moderation: Marianne Klemun

Abstract: The question of the place and roles of women has long been marginal in the investigations of prehistory in Western Europe. "Prehistoric Man" fueled scientific debates and popular representations since the 19th century, while prehistoric women often remained objects of fantasies and commonplaces. Myths inspired by the Biblical *Genesis*, or inherited from the Christian tradition, and the status it traditionally assigned to women in the family and in society, long projected stereotypic views on our understanding of women in the prehistoric past.

However, the sciences of human evolution and prehistoric cultures have sometimes attempted to overcome this so-called "women's archaeological invisibility". What scientific discoveries, studies and evidence have contributed to giving a signification to the condition of women in the prehistoric past? What evolutionary roles, social places and status, what powers, real or symbolical, have been assigned to them? Our inquiry will examine in particular the influence of feminist movements, and their relationship to this scientific endeavor. It will examine hypothesis drawn from evolutionary biology, paleontological, archaeological and artistic evidence that forged new research orientations, but also sometimes created new myths that have come to overlap traditional frameworks.

Through these questions, we will attempt to draw conclusions on the status of the sciences of human prehistory as disciplines, on their methods, on the nature of their evidence, on the stories they construct and the way they are deeply linked to different social, political, economic contexts, and - more generally - on the question of the relationships between anthropological sciences and society.

Zur Person:

Claudine Cohen is a specialist in history and the philosophy of Life and Earth Sciences, namely paleontology, paleo-anthropology, prehistoric archaeology, and the related disciplines (geology, evolutionary biology, anthropology), from Early Modern to contemporary times. Her research also concerns scientific imagination and the public dissemination of this scientific knowledge, particularly in the arts and literature.

She owns a double academic affiliation in the sciences (Biology, Earth Science) and in the Humanities (history of science, Arts and Languages), being a Professor at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (3rd sections, Earth and Life Sciences), where she serves as the Director of the research program "Biology and Society" - and a Maître de Conférences at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (Paris).

Main Publications:

Boucher de Perthes, Les origines romantiques de la préhistoire (with J.-J. Hublin, Paris, Belin, 1989)

Le Destin du Mammouth (Paris, Seuil, 1994) new edition Points/Seuil 2004)

English translation *The Fate of the Mammoth, Fossils, myths and history* The University of Chicago Press 2002

L'Homme des origines, savoirs et fictions en préhistoire (Paris, Seuil, 1999),

La Femme des origines (Paris, Belin Herscher 2003, new ed. 2006),

Spanish translation *La Mujer de los Origenes* ed. Catedra, Valencia, 2011

Un Néandertalien dans le métro (Paris, Seuil, 2007)

Leibniz's *Protogaea* (first edition in the English language, translation from Latin and introduction, with A. Wakefield) Chicago, The University of Chicago Press 2008, Paperback 2010.

Science, libertinage et clandestinité à l'aube des Lumières (PUF, 2011)

La Méthode de Zadig : la trace, le fossile, la preuve (Paris, Seuil 2011)