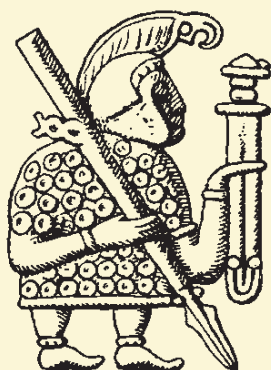


.. FORN VÄNNEN

JOURNAL OF
SWEDISH ANTIQUARIAN
RESEARCH



2026/2

Recension

Hannah Cobb & Kayt Hawkins (eds.), *Documenting Activism, Creating Change: Archaeology and the Legacy of #MeToo*, Archaeopress Archaeology, Bicester 2025. 264 pp. ISBN: 978-1-80583-006-1.

Archaeology occurs as a discipline incessantly informed by topical issues. In our time this is exemplified by post-postcolonial and equity issues, together with inquiries about the Anthropocene. National and international conferences have for some decades given sessions on equity issues, gender, queer, and intersectionality, and more recently issues of how to cope with harassment. Archaeological associations have included codes of conduct in their statutes. The discipline's awareness and timeliness are similarly revealed through the present edited volume, aiming to document sexual harassment, and to present good strategies of how to fight such conduct especially through different practices of non-violent activism. A summary of the book is followed by a few themes of discussion.

The book opens with pages vii–xix discussing the issues of Author Biographies, Definitions, Organizations, Groups, Social Media Communities, Hashtags and Abbreviations Mentioned in the Book, and Acknowledgements. The volume is further organized into five sections, with 20 chapters written or co-written by 43 archaeologists of multiple backgrounds and recently working in the USA, Africa, and Europe. Section 1, Ch. 1–3, Setting the Scene: Documenting Activism, Creating Change. Section 2, Ch. 4–9, Raising Awareness: Highlighting Harassment. Section 3, Ch. 10–15, Online Activism: Creating Communities, Challenging Norms, Driving Change. Section 4, Ch. 16–19, Activism in the Workplace: Disrupting Structures of Discrimination. Section 5 comprises the closing Ch. 20 written by Barbara L. Voss titled Commentary and Conclusion.

Illustrations are sparse with a total of 17 figures and 2 tables, shared by chapters 6, 7, 11,

12, 15, 19, 20. But the few are useful and to the point. Powerful is the cover with the title “Pride Trowels” in a rainbow spectrum and some additional colors. Lists found in pages xvii–xviii are valuable for information as well as for further knowledge about how work against harassment has been organized. The number of nations represented among the authors is rather limited, with several from Anglo-Saxon milieus but also a small number from for example Turkey and South America. Scandinavia is represented only by a small number of Swedish colleagues from universities and contract archaeology, all of whom have been active in strategies of raising consciousness about equity issues as well as about harassment.

A few questions have turned up during reading, but the issues have no definite answers. First, are younger generations of today more frequently hit by sexual harassment than ours? Or is it the case that today there is an organization in charge to turn to if you become a target? I am afraid that sexual harassment is a longstanding problem, but I also add the fact that today, with its formalized support, it is more accepted to speak up on sexual harassment, and the signal is that the offender is to take the shame. Forms of harassment might have changed over time. For earlier generations like mine (born in the 1950s), collective harassment, like misogynic humor out in the field, or indecent songs at feasts, might have been more frequent than specifically sexual harassment, and were sometimes only laughed away. On this point I could however be wrong, because do we have mountains of massive unreported sexual assault for mine and for earlier generations? Further, it can be asked if sexual harassment always is from peers or from superiors? Harassment between students is known, and from student to teacher are known in a few cases but does not seem to have been officially reported.

A next point is that I find it rather surprising that Norwegian colleagues are invisible in

this crucial book. Did KAN (= the organization “Women in Archaeology in Norway”, active in 1985–2005) clear the terrain for us and the younger ones? This is not possible to find out and Norwegian absence in this context might of course be accidental. And as mentioned, the number of nations represented in the book is limited.

As Hannah Cobb writes in Ch. 7 (p. 67), the subjects of this book are painful and hard. Certainly, they are. I guess most of us were confronted by embarrassing and unwished-for information when #MeToo came up as an issue in archaeology, in our own discipline, at our own workplaces. Many more than ever known among our colleagues and students came out as horrified, even traumatized, by pestering and sexual harassment; and as known from the present book, there are students and colleagues who left archaeology for the reason of harassment. This is serious because it implies that until a few years ago, neither consequences against offenders nor supportive strategies for insulted were established.

All the productive strategies in the book aiming to fight and avoid harassment are therefore such a positive finding. We learn that colleagues and students in several countries and in different areas of archaeology have been quick to come to action and to reach results as well. Something has indeed been achieved! With such fruitful outcomes, a significant legacy of #MeToo has already been shaped and has the prerequisites to be here to stay. There are different methods to fight harassment. One way is peer support for young female students and colleagues, as well as for other groups less visible in the profession such as hbtqia+ and black colleagues. Peer support includes good and trusted listeners, or on-line support of different kinds, for example the group “TrowelBlazers” telling the stories of women in archaeology. Other strategies aiming to disrupt systemic and formal structures have been at work, for example when actively included in union policy. The practice of low voice activism has gained space in our time and is practiced on a large scale, not least with climate- and anti-war activists.

The topic as well as the publishing of the book itself must be seen against the background of time and political climate in general. We find ourselves in a time of polarization and of contradictions regarding equity issues. If we first look back to our pioneer mothers born in the 1920s to 1940s, a small number of pioneers were educated in a time of progress and faith in the future in a post WWII climate. A few more of them were educated in the 1960s and 1970s with student activism for better and more democratic education, with antiwar movements and general radicalism. These decades were all of them decades covering the long periods of de-colonization, the Civil rights Movement, and include the decade when the Second Wave of feminism was born. Since the 1980s other contradictory influences have gained space, as there has been a wave of conservatism opposed to gender and equity issues, a backlash. However, this was also the era when feminism expanded in scope, theory and method, and was consolidated legally, in academic practices and education, comprising archaeology and its different areas of practice in society.

#MeToo focused specifically on sexual harassment but has given force to the rise of consciousness on a more general level, namely, to place any harassment under the wide blanket of colonial domination.

The book is excellent and pedagogically valued. It is easy to follow its line through the initial documentation of harassment, to its constructive strategies of how to fight harassment. And Barbara L. Voss’ closing chapter (Ch. 20) is excellent in its clarity of summing up and commenting aspects of the issue treated in the book.

Finally, this book is an important one. Why not include it in introductory courses for archaeology students worldwide? This would be a strategy with the potential to spur students to take an active part in seminar discussions following their reading and further contribute to keeping up consciousness. More extensive teaching of issues of harassment and of strategies for fighting them would therefore offer an additional way of preparing students for a professional life and its codes of conduct. It would from the very start

give a sign of how harassment is approached at the workplaces. A place on reading lists would also be noticeable as an act of resistance. We find ourselves in a time of evident anti-gender and anti-queer ideologies and practices, and we have already seen that these are strategies directed also against universities and their agendas of education.

English revision by Judith Crawford.

Tove Hjørungdal

Institutionen för historiska studier
Göteborgs universitet

Box 200

SE-405 30 Göteborg
tove.hjorungdal@archaeology.gu.se