

Lady Sapiens: Breaking Stereotypes about Prehistoric Women

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Thomas Ciotteau, Jennifer Kerner, and Éric Pincas's *Lady Sapiens* is a vibrant history book about how ancient women lived and what they contributed to society.

Steeped in interdisciplinary scholarship, *Lady Sapiens* synthesizes knowledge from archaeology, anthropology, and a host of related fields to update the image of the prehistoric woman. Evidence from isotopic studies of the calcium found in teeth accompanies studies wherein scientists brought in Namibian trackers to retrace the steps of prehistoric cave dwellers. The combination of all these findings yields an insightful, impressive, and more broad historical picture.

While sexing skeletons has been a vexing issue for much of the study of prehistory, brand-new techniques enable scientists to better decipher ancient lives through their remains. And popular culture depictions of brute cavemen dragging helpless cavewomen into marriages have too long obscured the reality of our shared history, Ciotteau and his coauthors argue. In reality, early women were hunters and gatherers, shamans and healers, artisans and leaders.

Evidence from burial grounds and archaeological sites worldwide is complemented by sophisticated new modes of data analysis to inform the book's assertions about the centrality of women in early human life. The book notes that it is probable that women in early hunter-gatherer societies practiced birth control by breastfeeding their children for a few years, for example, and that these women also had advanced knowledge of plants and medicinal herbs. Far from being relegated to the sidelines of domesticity, ancient women are revealed as active participants in society who were valued into their old age (there's evidence that post-menopausal women contributed to food-gathering and child-rearing activities).

Lady Sapiens is a compelling text that corrects mistaken stereotypes about prehistory, asserting the primacy of women in past societies and honoring the foremothers who advanced civilization with their art, knowledge, and power.

JEANA JORGENSEN (March / April 2023)

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