

Inferring Thimlich Ohinga Gender Identity Through Ethnoarchaeological Analysis

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Abstract : The Victoria Basin is associated with gateway for migration to Southern part of Africa. Different communities migrated through the region including the Bantus and Nilotic communities that occupy present day Kenya and Tanzania. A distinct culture of dry-stone technology emerged around 15th century current era, a period associated with peopling of the western Kenya region. One of the biggest dry-stone walls enclosure is Thimlich Ohinga archaeological site. The site was constructed around fourteenth century current era. Architectural design was oval shaped stone structures that were around 4 meters and 2 meters in length and width respectively. The main subsistence strategies of the community that was crop farming, pastoralism, fishing, hunting and gathering. This paper attempts to examine gender dynamics of Thimlich Ohinga society. At that end, attempts are made to infer gender roles as manifested in archaeological record. Therefore, the study entails examination of material evidence excavated from the site. Also, ethnoarchaeological study of contemporary Luo community was undertaken in order to make inferences and analogies concerning gender roles of Thimlich Ohinga society. Overall, the study involved examination of cultural materials excavated from Thimlich Ohinga, extensive survey of the site and ethnography of Luo community. In total, an extensive survey and interviews of 20 households was undertaken in South Kanyamkango ward, Migori County in Western Kenya. The key findings point out that Thimlich Ohinga gender identities were expressed in material forms through architecture, usage of spaces, subsistence strategies, dietary patterns and household organization. Also, gender as social identity was dynamic and responsive to diversification of subsistence strategies and intensification of regional trade as documented in contemporary Luo community. The paper reiterates importance of ethnoarchaeological methods in reconstruction of past social organization as manifested in material record.

Keywords : ethnoarchaeological, gender, subsistence patterns, Thimlich Ohinga

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