***Woman the Toolmaker: Hideworking and Stone Tool Use in Konso, Ethiopia*. [DVD]. Tara Belkin, producer. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2006. 27 min.**[*]

Reviewed by Elsbeth Linn Dowd

Woman the Toolmaker is an ethnoarchaeological study of hide working by the Konso people of southwestern Ethiopia filmed in 2001 and 2002. The film focuses on several Konso hide workers who still used flaked stone tools for scraping hides, rather than less traditional materials including metal and glass. The majority of the hide workers (more than 77 percent) were women, who both produced and used the stone scrapers. For all of these artisans, hide working was a part-time occupation to supplement the family income.

The film touches on an array of themes of interest to many anthropologists, including social organization, identity, and globalization. The target audience, however, is most likely to be archaeologists, especially those interested in lithic (stone tool) production and craft specialization in sedentary agricultural societies. The field of archaeological interpretation is a difficult business. Archaeologists start at one end with material remains and come out at the other with a series of statements about human behavior and history. Inference plays a critical role throughout this process as the archaeologist attempts to reconstruct social history from a rather modest set of material, often including stone tools, lithic debris, pottery sherds, faunal remains, botanical remains, and (if we are lucky) house patterns and other details of site structure. In this enterprise, archaeologists draw heavily on modern ethnographies in search of appropriate analogies. While ethnographic examples must be critiqued and screened very carefully for their potential applicability, they provide archaeologists with a valuable understanding of a portion of human variability, particularly the part of it associated with the role of certain artifact classes.

While this film is an ethnographic snapshot of stone tool use in a particular time and place, by a people with a specific history, it still has great promise for informing archaeological studies. Of particular note is the film's focus on stone tool production and use by women. Too often archaeologists have assumed that men were the main producers and users of stone tools, partly because of the emphasis on projectile point styles for identifying temporal periods and social groups. More recently archaeologists have begun to pay more attention to women, especially to their role in the production and use of scrapers among Native American groups on the Plains. While it is entirely possible that women in the past also made projectile points, this idea has seldom been seriously considered given the predominance of male hunters in the ethnographic record. This has caused women to be absent from archaeological interpretations of many hunting and gathering groups, because projectile points and lithic debris are often the primary evidence for mobile pre-ceramic people. Although the modern-day agricultural Konso have an entirely different life-way and economy than ancient hunter-gatherers, the film aptly illustrates that no inherent barrier exists to lithic production by women. By showing that women are perfectly capable of stone tool production and use, embedded among all of their numerous other responsibilities, this film challenges assumptions of gender roles that have shaped archaeological interpretation and broadens our collective interpretive imagination.

Another important aspect of this film is its careful attention to the entire process of stone tool production and hide working. Archaeologists work backwards in their interpretations of craft production, starting from the finished products and used (sometimes recycled and reused) tools. By examining the complete process, often called the *chaîne opératoire* (chain of operations), the film expands archaeologists' knowledge of a possible production sequence for stone tools and for hide production. Seeing how these production processes are embedded within a particular society also helps us to think about what sorts of social behaviors the material record might represent, and forces us to question certain common ideas about archaeological site formation processes. The film is quite detailed, showing where the workers obtained their raw lithic material, the processes of heat treatment and reduction, the manner in which the finished scrapers were hafted, and how they were re-sharpened. In terms of interpreting archaeological site formation, it was noteworthy that the women conducted their knapping over a bowl or goat skin, and then deposited the lithic debris in a midden or location outside the village wall so that their families' feet would not be cut. Sometimes archaeologists assume that a lithic scatter indicates a work area: this study suggests that might not be the case. Archaeologists who study use-wear will be interested to see the hafting, as well as the different methods used for scraping cow skins as opposed to goat and sheep skins.

As the film notes, stone tool production has occurred for more than two and a half million years, but the use of this technology is now coming to a close. Between initial research and production of the film, the number of hide workers using stone tools dropped dramatically. Many of the Konso hide workers had to change certain practices in response to the economic demands of a society intersecting with the global economy. I would like to know more about how these forces were affecting the Konso socially, as well as economically and technologically. As one woman stated, "I feel that they [the children] should learn [hide working] so that we can keep this history and not lose it." Clearly hide working with stone tools was tied to her identity, and so I wonder how her sense of identity may have shifted.

This film is an excellent resource for teachers and researchers alike. It draws together some of the key interests of contemporary anthropology, including the archaeological focus on the socially-embedded use of material culture and the socio-cultural focus on the reaction of small-scale societies to the forces of globalization and modernity. It is appropriate for any introductory (or higher-level) anthropology or archaeology class. At 27 minutes, it is short enough to keep the attention of a class, and has clear footage and a moderate pace. I would, however, suggest that the instructor make time for discussing the film, as its broad applicability to anthropological and archaeological issues may not be readily apparent to beginning students. A pamphlet accompanies the DVD, providing more information on Konso society and hide working for the instructor, along with suggestions for further reading. The film would be a very good acquisition for any anthropology or archaeology department.

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