Session title: **LIFEWAYS (MODES DE VIE) AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ETHNOHISTORICAL RECORD**

Organizers: John Bintliff, Leiden University, The Netherlands  
Natasha Shishlina, State Historical Museum, Moscow, Russia

Time: Friday afternoon

Room:

Session abstract:

This session will focus on long-term economic structures (lifeways) which are closely bound-up with specific traditional identities, such as peasant communities, pastoralists, or traders, manifested in the material culture and symbolic record. Questions raised concern the creation of 'timeless history' (Le Roy Ladurie) for some of these societies, or the rise of an 'imagined community' (Benedict Anderson, 2006) around a persistent economic way of living.

In recent years, archaeology has developed a strong interest in the recognition of cultural identities, relating especially to ethnicity and gender. Ecological and economic considerations have tended to be little explored, on the premise that identity is socially and culturally created. This session seeks to broaden the investigation of identity by discussing long-lived cultural identities which seem to be intimately associated with economic and ecological lifeways, creating what French geographers have termed integrated cultural ecologies or 'modes de vie'. One such example is that of peasant mixed-farming societies, where in opposition to contemporary urban communities, homes, settlement patterns and material culture can show strong underlying continuities over many hundreds of years. In contrast, societies specializing in intra-regional trade may develop hybrid cultural identities for long periods, merging the different forms of culture their economic networks interact with.

References:


INTRODUCTION

John Bintliff, Leiden University, The Netherlands
Natasha Shishlina, State Historical Museum, Moscow, Russia

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CULTURE AND ETHNIC IDENTITY: A CASE STUDY FROM THE EURASIAN STEPPES

Natalia Shishlina, State Historical Museum, Moscow, Russia

This presentation is devoted to the cultural identity and ethnicity of the peoples who have been living and still are living in the steppe. The steppe nomadic mode of life was originated and developed from the Bronze Age, and has been reflected in the traditions of small individual peoples during subsequent periods. It is still preserved in the modern culture in this special ecological and cultural environment which is the steppe.

Starting from the Eneolithic Age onward and throughout the Bronze Age, the Caspian Steppes became a peculiar historical and cultural province that developed along its own developmental pathway. A mosaic of landscapes was continuously supplemented by a cultural mosaic. Throughout several millennia groups of various traditions swept across the plains of this region, in some cases pausing to settle for no longer than several months. But some peoples who chose to use valleys with meandering steppe rivers and wide steppe watershed pastures rich with aromatic plants, stayed on these steppes for ever. They put in place a new economic system, i.e. mobile nomadic animal stock raising, based on the use of all natural resources, specific crafts, and a multi-level system of interaction.

The Caspian Steppes was the area of origin and development of this new type of economy which is nomadism. We look upon such an economy as a particular adaptive system, of which the main components have survived across the ages and are still preserved in modern culture during the Age of Globalization. Today’s lecture is dedicated to some component of this system, i.e. 1) humans, 2) environment, 3) settlements and dwellings, 4) domesticated animals, 5) kurgans (burials mounds), 6) a technological base that aggregates knowledge and that includes separate production, the food acquisition system, the system of seasonal grassland use, and exchanges with neighbouring cultures.

Therefore, the culture of the steppe was created by ordinary people living in the Bronze Age and is still here reflected in the mode of life of contemporary nomads. Socioeconomic Identity has been merged with and reinforced by ethnicity.

PHIL MASON: RECYCLING THE ANCESTORS: ROMAN CEMETERIES AND THE REUSE OF PREHISTORIC MORTUARY MONUMENTS IN CENTRAL AND SOUTH-EASTERN SLOVENIA

Phil Mason, Slovenia
The beginning of the Roman period in south-eastern Slovenia witnessed the appearance of rural cemeteries, often focused on prehistoric mortuary monuments, in areas away from the main Roman roads. These are often areas of covered arid limestone terrain (karst) with limited areas of arable land. The appearance of these cemeteries in the mid to late 1st century AD overlaps with the cessation of burial at the Late Iron Age centres in the area.

It is suggested here that the reuse of prehistoric monuments as foci for early Roman cemeteries is related to the creation of a local cultural identity by communities during the early stages of incorporation into the Roman state, when traditional centres were supplanted by new urban centres and structures. This identity involved the use of prehistoric mortuary monuments as symbolic ancestral places in the landscape in order to emphasise community control over land at a local level. This control was symbolically rooted in a time that predated the immediate pre-Roman Iron Age and was sufficient to remove significant amounts of agricultural land from use. Elements of material culture found within these cemeteries express a wider cantonal and provincial identity. The identity expressed in and based on these cemeteries endured throughout the early Roman period and into the middle Roman period, finally disappearing as villa-centred estates increased in importance in the 3rd century.

FROM LATE IRON AGE OPPIDA TO EARLY MEDIEVAL STRONGHOLD: CONTINUITY OF ECONOMICAL SYSTEMS?

Jan Marik and Alzbeta Danielisova, Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Prague, Czech Republic

The main objective of our contribution is to critically explore the nature of economic interaction between so-called 'central places' and traditional farming communities under two seemingly different political systems.

The study of central places within Bohemian archaeology is limited chronologically. Central places from different periods are evaluated separately, therefore it is of particular interest for us to compare two seemingly different economical and social systems, those of the late Iron Age and Early Medieval periods. We see in common that these represent the nodal points which were affecting the development of society for both periods in question. They represent the climax of long-term developments within respectively Celtic and Slavic history. Their urban nature and the presence of a distinctively stratified society presupposes a vital interaction with surrounding open peasant settlements. Though the centres from both periods functioned within different political systems, the interaction between these and traditional farming communities appears to be based on the same principles, which were affecting the development of political systems and structures.

The question for us is the identification of the key factors for establishing social hierarchy within past societies. In this paper we focus attention on the relationship between the agricultural base of the society and the local development of settlements and their ranking. We will argue in our contribution that the centrality of interaction
between the rural communities and urban structures is a recurrent phenomenon but one which is distinct for periods of ‘protohistory’.

SHORT DISCUSSION SESSION (10 minutes)

LIFEWAYS ( Modes de Vie) AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ETHNOHISTORICAL RECORD

Charlotta Hillerdal, Uppsala University, Sweden

The small Estonian island of Ruhnu in the Gulf of Riga, had a Swedish speaking population documented as far back as 1341. In 1944 nearly the entire population was moved away from the war to the Swedish “homeland”. This effectively ended the existence of a self-sufficient society, with a tradition of hundreds of years of having a unique cultural identity. In the 19th century, Swedish ethnographers discovered Ruhnu as an archaic Swedish community. The old-fashioned village structure and agriculture, as well as the use of a 17th century church service made them interpret the Ruhnu-population as a piece of living history.

Ruhnu has been described as an insular, static society, which in its isolation was able to preserve ancient structures. Despite the focal point of this society as an agricultural community, the main sustenance of Ruhnu was seal hunting and fishing. Ruhnu is located on a trade route in the Baltic Sea, and the population had a long tradition of hunting and trading far outside the island’s shores.

In this paper I will discuss continuity in tradition, and the perceived static state of Ruhnu lifeways in relation to cultural identity and ethnicity, I will also discuss the power that lies in controlling the narrative.

EARLY AGRICULTURAL SPECIALIZATION: HOPS AND SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY MAPS

Pia Nilsson, Department of Economics, Uppsala, Sweden

To archaeologists, historical maps are a valuable tool, often used to find indications of settlements, roads, mills, prehistoric monuments etc. Besides that, these beautiful maps offer much more information about prehistoric, medieval or contemporary situations. My study of hop farming according to the Swedish geometrical large-scale maps (1630 – 1655) and contemporary tax registers have shown a regional agrarian specialization. “Clusters” of large-scale hop farms can be defined, and the hop farmers are mainly found among the larger and assumed richer holdings, rather than among small holdings in need of broaden their economic base within the self-subsistence economy. Although subsistence farming was the prevailing system, we know that the early 17th century was a period of changes, including the beginning of individualization and specialization within agrarian society.
Why study hop-farming? The reason to study hops is that it was a valuable and important crop, in fact it was the only crop mentioned in Swedish law. The main use of hops was to preserve beer, and beer could at this time be considered as one of the most important sources of energy. Some one-third of the daily energy needs have been estimated to come from the two to three litres of beer that was drunk daily. Beer brewing was also an important way to save harvests that otherwise would have been completely destroyed by rain, because even field-germinated barley could be used. This possibility to drink “bottled grain” could save a family from starvation during difficult years.

The geographical environment seems to be another important factor. The hop-growers are never found in the best grain producing, fertile regions or close to the towns, but in regions with large topographical variety, where the farms have access to several resources besides grain-growing. I see, however, no indication of farms exhibiting signs of the ‘modern’ form of specialization that involves producing only one crop, where the profit is used to buy the farm’s daily necessities. What the maps do show is an early form of specialization, characterized by production of hops as a cash crop in excess of the ordinary production of grain and hay together with animal husbandry within the subsistence farming. Even when the hop-gardens are very large and hence time-consuming, they do not replace or affect the size of the acreage needed in self-subsistence production.

SALT SPRING EXPLOITATION IN THE CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS: BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT

Marius Alexianu, Olivier Weller, Robin Brigand, Roxana-Gabriela Curcă, Iulian Moga, Vasile Cotiugă, Universitatea Al. I. Cuza Iasi, Facultatea de Istorie, Rumania

The Eastern Subcarpathian area of Romania, which is highly rich in salt water springs and near which the oldest proofs of salt exploitation in Europe have been discovered, can be counted amongst the rarest regions where traditional, pre-industrial practices in saltworking survive to today. Ethnoarchaeological research can shed light on the links to trade, habitat, hunting and other aspects of the economy and social organization of associated communities, and this present day ethnography can be compared with literary evidence from the Near East and Classical Antiquity to reveal surprising parallels.

SHORT DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

LONGHOUSE SOCIETIES OF POST-MEDIEVAL GREECE AND CYPRUS: A CASE OF ‘TIMELESS HISTORY’?

John Bintliff, Archaeology Faculty, Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands
The study of traditional lowland villages in Greece has identified the dominance of a particular form of peasant dwelling, the longhouse, associated with agropastoral villages from Late Medieval times into the late 20th century AD. The way of life appears little altered, with limited material possessions, relative poverty, and a disjunction to the more dynamic and socially-mobile world of the towns. Early Modern commentators describe such a lifestyle as backward and primitive, and the surviving houses are rapidly disappearing in favour of homes with urban and bourgeois associations. This paper will present the historical background and the nature of this 'mode de vie', asking whether it forms one of the 'timeless history' phases proposed by Le Roy Ladurie.

Bibliography:

MULTICULTURAL SYNTHESIS, ETHNIC IDENTITY, AND THE CASE OF PHOENICIAN-PUNIC MALTA

Anthony J. Frendo, Department of Arabic and Near Eastern Studies, University of Malta, Msida, Malta

It is a commonplace that the relationship between archaeological artefacts and ethnicity turns out to be a highly vexed and moot problem. Despite the many excellent theoretical studies in archaeology buttressed by anthropological theory, in fact each case has practically to be taken on its own merits when it comes to relating artefacts with ethnic identity. Nonetheless, although there is no simple equation between the two, there are cases where the overall archaeological pattern does allow us to use ethnic tags. The Phoenician-Punic period of the Maltese Islands (circa 750 B.C. – 218 B.C.), sandwiched between the remarkable prehistoric and Roman periods, has hardly left any above-ground structures for archaeologists to examine, and this fact can explain why it can be described as elusive. However, the period is anything but elusive when it comes to archaeological artefacts such as pottery, inscriptions, jewellery and amulets. Indeed, the archaeology of Phoenician-Punic Malta provides an excellent case study with respect to multicultural synthesis and ethnic identity. This aspect will be examined with special
reference to pottery, certain architectural gorges, a Phoenician inscription which turns out to be virtually a quotation from the Egyptian book of the dead, the names of Punic people which incorporate Egyptian divine names, as well as swivel rings with pseudo-hieroglyphic writing on them used purely for decorative purposes. The very multicultural synthesis of the Phoenicians is a pointer to who they were, namely international traders (note that the Phoenicians were Canaanite, and that the word ‘Canaanite’ also means ‘merchant’!), and this is one of the main reasons as to why their material culture was so eclectic.

VIKINGS AT RUS: THE DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOURCES FOR LIFeways AND ATTEMPTS TO ASCRIBE ETHNIC IDENTITIES TO PAST COMMUNITIES

Veronica Murasheva, State Historical Museum, Moscow, Russia

Archaeological studies in the territory of the ‘Ancient Rus’ have yielded many artifacts classifiable as Scandinavian and dated back to the Viking Age. The quantity of such finds is fairly large, even compared with similar finds in the Scandinavian regions themselves, and this has been considered as an argument for a large population migration from the Northern regions to the Eastern European area.

The investigation of written and archaeological sources shows the variability of Viking migration aims in Eastern Europe. These included the development of river merchant communities spreading out to the Arab Caliphate and to Byzantium, the service in local princely retinues, as mercenaries as well as peaceable rural migration. The archaeological studies of the Gnezdovo complex cemetery however, revealed in contrast the practical absence of Northern immigrant assimilation within the whole Viking Age time interval. At the same time there is a constant influx of new immigrant groups, the latter not breaking off their links with Scandinavia. What can we say about the changes of lifeways in such a foreign environment?

Vikings as horsemen? Some sources (Suprut hoard) allow to discuss the possible lifeways changes of Vikings inhabiting unusual landscape zones such as the borderlands of woodland and steppe.

The changes of costume fashion: the adoption of Oriental elements in costume. Firstly we can look at attributes with a social-meaning (the composite warrior belt) as well as the use of “exotic” things such as for as women’s decoration.

Who were the women buried along with Vikings? Some data allow to assume that they were representatives of the local East European peoples.

The self-ascription or ascription of any ethnic and social group is rather difficult to establish based on archaeological materials. All aspects of mentality could be unambiguously reflected only in the conscious text such as the written sources; the material relics of ancient peoples are much more “silent” in this relation. The settling of Scandinavians in Ancient Rus is very complicated as it is considered as the incorporation of foreign ethnic elements within a Slavonic environment. Moreover the Scandinavian culture bears are presented here by the members of definite social group: they were warriors, merchants and then to a lesser extent artisans. Hence the ethnic self-ascription in this case could be interpreted as having a social “tint”. The Scandinavian
culture elements being brought to Rus by their Northern bearers came to be perceived in new and different ways by new polyethnic social groups such as the retinue of the Ancient Rus, and this soon came to serve not as ethnic but as social markers.

SHORT FINAL DISCUSSION (10 minutes)