

Session title: STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF WEALTH IN PREHISTORIC EURASIA

Organizers: Lolita Nikolova, University of Utah & International Institute of Anthropology, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA/Institute for Development and Innovations in Education and Science, Sofia, Bulgaria
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Time: Friday afternoon

Room:

Session abstract:

The goal of the session is to approach deconstructing of wealth in Prehistoric Eurasia as a problem of prehistoric archaeology and theoretical anthropology.

We will search for archaeological evidence about.

- Distinctiveness and evolution of wealth
- The role of wealth in the segmentation and stratification of society
- Wealth and prehistoric social complexity
- Wealth and formation of regional cultural centres
- Wealth and its role in the changes in the cultures
- Wealth and interregional close and distant cultural interactions

Case studies and theoretical approaches should help to address the problem of genesis and early multifunctional development of wealth in human society.

Paper abstracts:

TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF WEALTH IN PREHISTORIC EURASIA

Lolita Nikolova, International Institute of Anthropology, Salt Lake City, USA/Institute for Development and Innovations in Education and Science, Sofia, Bulgaria

The presentation attempts to define the concepts of wealth in Prehistory and how it developed during the Neolithic, Copper and Bronze Age based on data from settlements, cemeteries and individual single or group finds. Dubene in the Upper Stryama valley (South Bulgaria) is the case study as a model of a diachronic cultural layering in Thracian, Balkan and Eurasian context.

The criterion of wealth will be applied to the theory of segmentation and stratification of the prehistoric complex society including new arguments about the proposed four-level structure of development of the elementary prehistoric social units (families and households) in Prehistory: one level of reproduction of subsistence and three levels of accumulation of wealth.

The archaeological data provide fragmented and incomplete records and this theoretical limitation in turn requires using comparative anthropological data from the traditional, historical and contemporary societies. Following the objectives of the session, the wealth will be tested against the biography of selected regional prehistoric cultural centres, the development of some prehistoric cultures (e.g. Hamangia, Maritsa, Yunatsite etc.) and the multidirectional cultural interactions in Prehistoric Eurasia, especially the steppe communication bridge in the North and the Anatolian –Balkan network in the South.

MIDDLE NEOLITHIC WEALTH AND SOCIAL COMPLEXITY IN THE ITALIAN PENINSULA: SITES, CULTURES, IDEOLOGY

Renata Grifoni Cremonesi, Dipartimento di Scienze Archeologiche, Università di Pisa, Italy
Barbara Zamagni, Scuola di Dottorato, Dipartimento di Scienze Ambientali “G.Sarfatti”, Sezione di Ecologia Preistorica, Siena

Culturally rich communities characterise the Italian Middle Neolithic. This is suggested by the organisation of the village areas, e. g. at Catignano near Pescara, where several features with specific functions (large rectangular and apsed houses, combustion features filled with charcoal, ash and burned cobbles, wide and deep pits and other storage features) are arranged in a complex framework.

These well structured societies carried on intense exchange and trade, as suggested by the rich assemblage of cultural remains, which are made up of a wide range of raw materials. Among these, the most relevant are the ophiolites, which crop out in the western Alps and circulated over a very wide area; also important are the good quality flint coming from the Lessini and the Gargano outcrops, and obsidian from Sardinia, Lipari and Palmarola. The pottery technology was significant as well, with examples of high-level craft work from the North of the Peninsula (Squared Mouth Pottery), and from the South (painted *figulina* pottery, with plastic decoration).

Apparently, the wealth produced by the circulation of such goods on trade networks originated cultural centres of regional relevance. The circulation and accumulation of goods produced wealth, which started some sort of social segmentation; though still barely recognisable, this characteristic crops out also from the differentiation of the grave goods of some burial sites. Eventually, the mobile art objects and the wall paintings, and the use of natural or artificial underground burial sites (Serra d’Alto culture) point to the extreme complexity of the spiritual world of these groups.

SYNCHRONIZING THE LIFE CYCLE OF THE SIGN SYSTEMS AS A PRODUCTIVE CULTURAL WEALTH WITHIN THE TRAJECTORY OF THE DANUBE CIVILIZATION

Marco Merlini, The Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

The databank *DatDas* (Databank for the Danube script), developed by the present author, organizes a catalogue of 4,410 actual signs recorded from a corpus of 954

inscriptions composed of two-more signs and 819 inscribed artifacts from the Neo-Eneolithic cultures of Southeastern Europe. The system consists of a database structure related to an interface software that makes possible to view and query archaeological and semiotic information in an integrated fashion. The structured and statistically inquired set of data from *DatDas* leads to an original overview on the sign system employed by the Danube civilization via setting up its cycle of life in synchronization with cultural complexes, cultures and cultural groups.

On the whole the decentralized profile in the spread of sign technology and rapid turnover of incipient literate settlements are among the key features of the “script network”. However, *DatDas* provides statistic evidence that the signs system possibly had developed in some regions through a network of proposed four-range hierarchical nodes of political authority based on central settlements that accumulated incipient literacy as a productive and reproductive cultural wealth and social construct. In other words, the archaeological data point to a geo-cultural profile of the development of the Danube script characterized by a few urban agglomerations as centres of gravity within an extremely dynamic – and sometimes dramatic – web of settlements based on common cultural roots, exchange relationships of mutual political advantage and shared socio-economic interests.

ROMANIAN PREHISTORIC TREASURES: ON THE BRIDGE OF REALITY AND THE RESEARCH IMAGINATION

Cristian Schuster, Institute of Archaeology, Bucharest, Romania,

Many prehistoric group artifacts discovered on the territory of Romania are considered as cultural treasures. But it is usually not very clear why they had been identified as such and what is their social function in the society.

One of the most important criteria is the material from which the objects were made. According to this theoretical principal, the golden objects take first place although if we study the problem contextually and in depth, it occurs that many artifacts made from clay, stone or different metals (for instance bronze), may have even a higher cultural and artistic value for a given prehistoric individual, household or community. Consequently, I will propose in my presentation some explanation principals of hierarchy of material culture status in the prehistoric society and in particular how to distinguish the treasures from the other groups of objects that may had other social functions.