

Session ID	22
Session Title	Archaeology of Inequality — Themes, Debates, Methodologies
Start Time	Wed Dec 18 09:30:00
Room	802/4

Inequality is a contemporary hot topic. Globalization and political populism have, on the one hand, drawn more attention to the analysis of inequality in economics. On the other hand, established concepts and methods have come under attack for perhaps not exposing important dimensions of inequality (e.g. Stiglitz, 2012; Michalovic, 2016). Where does archaeology and with it anthropological social theory more broadly stand with regard to the concept of inequality? In archaeology, we find both established theories and approaches as well as attempts at rethinking inequality and its conceptual neighborhood (Kohler & Smith, 2018; Price & Feinman, 2010). Inequality is intimately linked to concepts of social complexity, power, competition and co-operation, and with that broader questions concerning archaeological interpretation. In this session we wish to provide a venue for discussing archaeology of inequality, both, in terms of theoretical questions pertaining to our understanding of inequality as well as questions of in terms of identifying inequalities in archaeological practice. Topics covered in the session may include:

- Inequality of what? Does social complexity equal inequality?
- Hierarchy or heterarchy What is value?
- Inequality as a driver of social change
- Quantifying inequality
- Household, settlement, and regional scales of inequality

References

Kohler, Tim & Smith, Michael E. (eds.) 2018. Ten Thousand Years of inequality: The Archaeology of Wealth Differences. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press.
Michalovic, Branko, 2016. Global Inequality: A New Approach for the Age of Globalization. London: Harvard University Press.
Price, T. Douglas & Feinman, Gary (eds.) 2010. Pathways to Power: New Perspectives on the Emergence of Social Inequality. London: Springer.
Stiglitz, Joseph E. 2012. The Price of Inequality. London: W.W. Norton & Company.

9:30	V. P. J. Arponen, University of Kiel	New Inequality: Concepts and Operationalization	In recent decades in philosophy and economic theory, research on questions of inequality and justice have witnessed stimulating and groundbreaking developments. In parallel, contemporary political events from populism to austerity and economic crises have stimulated critical thought on the concept of inequality (Stiglitz, Sen, Milanovic). In this paper, we will look at how these debates are making an appearance in archaeology. Recently, concepts such as the quality of life (Smith), the human experience (Hegmon), the capability approach (Arponen), and more have been entering the archaeological debate. Longer standing concepts such as heterarchy (Crumley), exclusionary vs corporate power (Feinman), and collective action (Blanton) continue to play a formative role in these debates. All these concepts can be seen to challenge the traditional hierarchies and social complexity based paradigm in arguably parallel ways. However, the field contains some tensions and the question of operationalizing the new insights remains an open challenge. The paper charts the emerging debate, its philosophical underpinnings, and the challenge of
------	--------------------------------------	---	--

9:45	Penny Bickle, University of York	Diversity vs. Inequality?	<p>This paper will examine the relationship between models of social diversity and the narratives of inequality constructed for the European Neolithic. I will argue that the different identities that made up prehistoric societies, and how they operated, are often taken for granted in building larger models of social change, and, in particular, those pertaining to the mechanisms in which social inequality is thought to grow or decrease. For example, assumptions about inequality in the early Neolithic (e.g. big men models), rely on under-explored conceptions of gender, that often unthinkingly reproduce modern binary gender hierarchies. Therefore, I argue, a key first step in researching social inequality is to determine the forms and extent of diverse lifeways present within a society, asking what were varied possibilities? I define this concept of “social diversity” as the myriad differences, which set people apart from each other, and often arise in identity formation practices and the creation of social relatedness (e.g. kinship, political hierarchies, etc.).</p> <p>Drawing on the emerging results from the Counter Culture Project diversity (2018–2020), I will explore how we can explore social diversity, and use this to build models of social inequality for the early and middle Neolithic in central Europe that challenge notions that the Neolithic saw an inevitable steady increase in inequality.</p>
10:00	John P. Walden, University of Pittsburgh; Michael Biggie, Los Angeles Maritime Institute; Julie A. Hoggarth, Baylor University, Texas	Examining the Role of Intermediate Elites in Determining Changing Patterns of Inequality in Status, Wealth and Wellbeing during the Rise of the Late Classic Maya Polity of Lower Dover, Belize	<p>The emergence of higher levels of socio-political complexity is often construed as going hand in hand with rising inequality in terms of wealth, status and wellbeing at the household level. This presentation focuses on how the rise of the Late Classic (AD 600-900) Maya polity of Lower Dover affected status, wealth and wellbeing inequalities of surrounding commoners and intermediate elites. The study focuses on three autonomous villages which became integrated into the emergent polity as neighbourhoods. Several methods for quantifying inequalities at the household, neighbourhood and polity level are employed. The presentation outlines neighbourhood level variability in the different types of inequality following the rise of Lower Dover. These patterns suggest that the intermediate elite neighbourhood heads possessed sufficient agency to negotiate with the ascendant ruling family at Lower Dover, and to employ strategies of their own devising in their relationships with their subordinate commoners. Some intermediate elites chose to use their new relationships with Lower Dover to extract more resources from their increasingly impoverished commoner subordinates, while others chose to eschew the benefits of alliance with the ruling family in favor of safeguarding the interests of their commoner subordinates. Ultimately, the study reveals that there was no uniform relationship between the rise of an ancient polity and levels of inequality, and that instead variability in different forms of inequality was largely based on local, historically contingent relationships between commoners, intermediate elites and the ruling family.</p>
10:15	Dries Daems, University of Leuven	Conceptual modelling of social complexity trajectories and inequality in urban networks.	<p>The study of the emergence of social complexity in human communities is considered one of the “grand challenges” for archaeology in the 21st century (Kintigh 2014 Grand challenges for archaeology. PNAS). Some of the questions that are to be explored include the causes of social and economic differentiation and inequality, the emergence of social organisation, and the underlying drivers of complexity trajectories. Even though social complexity is a topical subject in current archaeological debate, (implicit) teleological and Eurocentric discourses of social evolutionary complexity remain prevalent (Pluciennik 2005 Social Evolution). In this paper, I wish to present an alternative approach by introducing a conceptual model of social complexity trajectories, focusing on the development of communities and cities as complex adaptive systems, centred on key concepts of feedback, emergence and self-organization. It particularly focuses on underlying dynamics and causal factors of social complexity trajectories by focusing on three core mechanisms: connectivity, diversification and intensification. This encompassing theoretical model is built on foundations of complex systems thinking, archaeological theory, social practice theory, and sustainability and resilience science. The model will be illustrated through a case-study of the emergence of central places and urban networks in Achaemenid and Hellenistic Anatolia.</p>

10:30	Adam S. Green, Cambridge University; Thomas P. Leppard, Florida State University; Toby C. Wilkinson, Cambridge University; Darryl Wilkinson, Cambridge University	Capital in the 21st Century BC: The Bronze Age Dynamics of Economic Growth and Inequality	Traditional archaeological models hold that wealth inequality is the inevitable result of economic specialisation, production of goods for generalised use within a society or exchange across social boundaries. These models maintain that emergent elites establish exclusive control over economic surpluses, which they then use to provision specialists who make bespoke goods that in turn enhance elite control. However, wealth inequality also appeared in marginal contexts where we might suppose surplus margins to have been small or unpredictable (e.g., much of the insular and coastal Mediterranean), and, conversely, economic specialisation appeared in absence of appreciable wealth inequality, such as in the cities of the Indus Civilisation. Thomas Piketty argues that inequality increases in capitalist societies when returns on existing wealth (r) exceed the production of new wealth (g). We posit that this may be a universal dynamic of 'complex societies', with the potential to convincingly explain instances where inequality occurs in absence of surplus as well as instances where specialisation occurs in absence of inequality. This new perspective explains how a single regular dynamic, $r > g$, can produce radically different social and economic outcomes, disentangling discrete processes that are often conflated as part of the problematic neo-evolutionary 'trait list.' It also suggests that economic specialisation can indeed drive urbanisation and long-distance exchange, but does not in itself pre-suppose the dominance or even presence of economic elites who differentially control the specialist labour or the staple surpluses needed to provision such labour.
10:45	Darryl Wilkinson, Cambridge University; Toby C. Wilkinson, Cambridge University; Adam S. Green, Cambridge University; Thomas P. Leppard, Florida State University	A Deep History of Oligarchy	Rapidly growing wealth inequality is one of the most pressing political and scholarly issues of our time. Anthropological research on this topic has generally focused on the origins of divine monarchies in the Bronze Age, while research across the other social sciences has mainly considered the problem from the perspective of rising wealth disparities under modern capitalism. In this article, we consider a relatively neglected part of the narrative: the origins of oligarchy during the Iron Age. Oligarchy is defined as private wealth so extreme that it begins to rival the capacities of the state itself. We argue that oligarchy did not exist in the Bronze Age, but several innovative transformations in Eurasian cities made oligarchic political economies possible during the first millennium BC. In particular, it became increasingly common for cities to be populated by renters, who resided in apartments leased from elites. This led to considerable speculation on urban real estate by those elites, something which had not generally been possible before, and which contributed to the appearance of private wealth on an unprecedented scale in human history.
11:00	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK
11:30	Susanne Moraw, University of Leipzig	Iconography of Inequality: children and adolescents in the mosaics of a Late Antique Villa	<p>The famous mosaic floors of the late antique villa at Piazza Armerina (Sicily, fourth century AD) present, inter alia, numerous depictions of children and adolescents: girls picking flowers in a beautiful garden and weaving them into wreaths, boys driving chariots drawn by birds in a play hippodrome, boys learning to hunt small animals or serving their masters during a picnic in the woods, youthful male and female slaves attending the lady of the house, and many more. The paper will use the visual depiction of non-adult persons on these mosaics as a case study. By means of iconography, it will analyse some of the axes of inequality that pervaded late antique society: age, gender, socio-economic status, legal status (i.e. slave or Roman citizen), ethnicity (Roman vs. African or Germanic). Which inequalities are discernible at first sight? And how are they staged? Which inequalities, on the other hand, are rather blurred? And why?</p> <p>Taking sociology's concept of intersectionality as a basis, the paper aims at demonstrating how archaeology – in this case, iconographic analysis of representations of late antique life – can contribute to a better understanding of the multiple facets of inequality that pervaded, or even structured, a given society of the past. The paper will be part of a future project on childhood and youth in late antiquity.</p>
11:45	Manuel Fernández-Götz, University of Edinburgh	Debating social inequality in Iron Age research – where are we now?	Interpretations on social inequality have figured prominently in Iron Age research, although from very different perspectives. For a long time, the predominant narrative depicted hierarchical warrior societies with elites at the top of a social pyramid, following the stereotypical model applied of so-called 'Celtic' societies. However, more recent scholarship has emphasised the diversity of social configurations in the Iron Age, with an increasing number of publications questioning, to a greater or lesser extent, the existence of elites and hierarchies and proposing alternative models around notions such as heterarchy and anarchy. The present paper will outline the main approaches and contextualise them in relation to major trends in archaeological theory. Moreover, I will use Early Iron Age southern Germany as a case study to propose an alternative model that integrates the notions of hierarchy and heterarchy not as opposing concepts, but as complementary mechanisms which regulated social interaction within a dynamic framework of power relations.

12:00	Simon Kaner, Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures; Andrew Hutcheson, Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures	Yayoi vs Iron Age: a comparison of increasingly complex settlement structures and material cultures during later prehistory in Japan and Britain	<p>By late prehistory both Japan and Britain had become complex in terms of their settlement structures and the range of material culture being routinely deposited in some locations. Often in both situations there has been an assumption that the monumentality and the defended nature of some settlements indicates increasing inequality and, in particular, concentration of power and resources in the hands of an elite. By the time that Chinese and Roman writers examined both places there is a clear notion that kingship was to some extent institutionalised. By that time in Japan the construction of some of the largest burial mounds in the world were underway. How do we schematise and write histories about these developments without falling into stale processualism?</p> <p>We will examine some of the evidence and touch on possible analogies for these societies that do not necessarily always imply rampant inequality. For instance, how do these prehistoric situations in Japan and Britain compare with what we know of Coastal Salish society on the North West Coast of North America during the first millennium CE where inequality seems to have been actively resisted? We will also suggest that the idea of inequality, as examined archaeologically, should be subject to further theoretical work in the light of historically better understood examples.</p>
12:15	Artur Ribeiro, University of Kiel	Environment and inequality: understanding climate and social process through the impact of the 4.2k event in Southern Iberia	<p>In very general terms, archaeology tends to follow the thought pattern in which environmental change is conceived as an external driver of societal change, whereas agency is considered an internal driver of change. According to this thought pattern, inequality is assumed to be an internal process, that is, something that exists due to the internal choices and actions produced by agents. These agents can be conceived as having some form “entrepreneurial” spirit, leading them to chase power and prestige, and thus forming stratified societies, or they can also be conceived as oppressed subjects, who resist and retaliate, and on occasion, undermining the inequity within the system.</p> <p>Basically, this thought pattern recognizes human behaviour in terms of either freedom or constraint, but never both at the same time. This mutual exclusivity makes it difficult to recognize how changes in the environment can affect social processes, such as those involved in the creation of inequality. The aim of this paper is to highlight these social processes from the perspective of environment, namely how the 4.2k climatic event led to the rise of unequal relations in southern Iberia. More specifically, the paper will demonstrate that when it comes to the rise of hierarchical societies in Southern Iberia, the most parsimonious hypothesis is that which recognizes climate as exacerbating, accelerating, and facilitating that rise.</p>
12:30	Session organisers	Discussion	
13:00	END	END	END