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Introduction: Theory and Practice in the Late Prehistory of Europe

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We propose to integrate dialectically processual and postprocessual theory to interpret later European prehistory. We approach this daunting task with a comparative, contextualised study of selected microregions from northern Europe to the Mediterranean. Our data derive from fieldwork projects carried out between 1990 and 2006 in Thy in Denmark, Tanum in Sweden, Százhalombatta in Hungary, and Monte Polizzo in western Sicily, supplemented by relevant data from the wider regions (see Preface). Our period encompasses the third to first millennia BC, which saw major transformations that encompassed most of Eurasia (Kristiansen and Larsson 2005; Kohl 2007). Our concern is with the local constructions of these transformative changes, which should provide a new platform for understanding the operation of basic social and economic mechanisms. We wish to transcend the dichotomies between local and global, and external and internal forces of change. Our approach is materialist and multiscalar. The materialist position simply underlines the fact that most of our data were linked to the social and economic reproduction of society, as is apparent from the content of the chapters. Symbolic and ideological forces are, for the time being, given less priority, although they were treated in several works from the project (Oma 2007; Streiffert 2006), and they constantly reverberate in our interpretations. A multiscalar approach implies that we analyse social and economic activities on scales from individual activities within the household, to settlements, to regional polities that are further imbedded in broad international interactions. Although each component, representing a chapter in the book, is analysed on its own terms, we explain operations at one level in terms of the contexts and

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components of the larger and smaller scales. We seek to integrate results from the three regions into a framework to understand common processes and local histories. It demands theoretical elaboration and conceptualisation, tasks we undertake in the next section.

Our research is comparative, but comparative on two distinct levels of contrast. In his earlier work that eventually led to Europe, Earle compared long-term developments in three historically independent cases (Polynesia, the Andes, and northern Europe). An empirical observation from this work was that the dynamics of each macroregion were historically quite specific. Although the basic processes were common, within each world region, the political actors (chiefs) pragmatically structured their political economy and power strategies, creating dissimilar patterns of 'how chiefs came to power' (Earle 1997). In a seminal study of Polynesia, Sahlins (1958) used 'controlled comparison,' looking at different outcomes within one macroregion. He examined, side by side, the historically close Polynesian societies to understand how political economies and social stratification resulted from differences in overall island productivity. By controlling for historical differences in culture and technology held in common within this single macroregion, Sahlins was able to unravel the intricacies of historic processes.

Now, we focus on the single macroregion of Europe and attempt to understand long-term political trajectories from the perspective of microregional studies. With such historically controlled comparisons, we hope to lay out how contrasting local patterns made a difference to the well-studied macroregional patterns of European prehistory. We believe these comparisons lay bare the driving forces of change that are so difficult to see from the macropatterning.

The field projects in Scandinavia, Hungary, and Sicily were based upon a comparative historical/archaeological perspective on the formation of regional polities in Europe. The focus of the microregional projects was on the organisation of households and settlements, and the formation of political systems in a long-term perspective. The processes of the economic use of the landscape and of integrating exchanges were a major point of departure for our work.

A central issue must be to unravel how small-scale, yearly changes in economy and environment affect and are affected by large-scale historical changes in social and political organisation. Within an Annales framework (Bintliff 1991), we explore the relationship between structure and agency, intentional and unintentional

forces of historical change, and the material threads that weave together the fabric of history. We have set our time period from the beginning of the Bronze Age to the beginning of historical Europe – a period of 2000 years – in order to allow the study of long-term change. After 300 BC, the expanding Roman Empire formalised the division between empire and so-called barbarian peripheries – Celtic and Germanic societies; however, the necessary social, economic, and political building blocks for this development were created during the preceding millennia. Already from the second millennium BC, urban societies in the east Mediterranean interacted with well-organised Bronze Age societies in central and northern Europe, and we may here see the beginning of an early form of colonialism that unfolded with the advent of the Iron Age (Gosden 2004; chapter 4). It is further suggested that the processes of these interactions have roots even back into the third millennium BC (Kristiansen and Larsson 2005).

The crucial historical questions are: Why did regional political systems develop so early in many areas of Europe when population densities were so incredibly low (Zimmerman 1999) and why was Europe so resistant to subsequent urbanisation and state formation despite the fact that the necessary building blocks were in place? To answer such world-historical questions, we believe it is necessary to study over time and in scale 1:1 the changing processes, interactions, and institutions organising household, settlement, and political territories, sometimes also called community areas (Kuna and Dreslerova 2007). Such studies allow us to draw conclusions about long-term changes and compare regional differences in organisation, as well as interregional interactions and their effects on regional developments. Only then can we begin to unravel and perhaps explain the historical dialectic between short-term political forces of change and long-term, accumulating forces of change between structure and agency.

TOWARDS A MULTISCALAR AND INTEGRATIVE THEORY OF SOCIAL ORGANISING

The effort to integrate theory and practice demands that interpretative concepts are developed to match the specific archaeological material at hand. Employing a multiscalar approach demands a corresponding theoretical elaboration of scale. We shall, therefore, begin by situating our materialist approach in terms of scale and in

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relationship to present theoretical approaches. Our goal is to capture the active linkages in societies among economy, identity, and politics – linkages that help us understand how human action results in broad social transformations. Over the past 20 years, materialism as a theoretical touchstone has developed (a greater concern with the active role played by material culture in social practice), and we illustrate how a changing understanding of material approaches can help one understand developments across later prehistory in Europe. In the next section, we illustrate how this integrative, material approach can be accomplished with the data at hand.

Work on material culture begins with the household, the locus of everyday life and the producer of most of the activities and things that archaeologists recover. Understanding the social significance of artefacts (social things) requires a firm understanding of context and variation, and the household is an ideal unit for analysis. Since *The Early Mesoamerican Village* (Flannery 1976), the analysis of households and domestic space has developed as a concern in anthropological archaeology (Netting and Wilk, 1984). The initial concern focused on the organisation and integration of activities in the spaces associated with households. With *The Domestication of Europe* (Hodder 1990), the symbolic meaning of space came into play as well.

However, these new theoretical and analytical concerns with household have not been systematically applied in European Bronze Age research, and we want to elaborate upon a few recent and notable exceptions (Arnoldussen and Fokkens 2008; Ullen 1994; Gerritsen 1999; Roymans 1999). Among our excavations, houses in Bjerre Enge (Denmark), Százhalombatta (Hungary), and Monte Polizzo (Sicily) produce preserved house floors that allow for the detailed analysis of context, with material sometimes sealed in place by burning or drifting sand. Attempts can thus be made to see how spaces articulate with each other – inside to out, one room to the next, and different parts of the rooms with specific associations to doors and features. With this material we can begin to understand how activities involving specific objects were played out. Contrasts among different settlements can then be related to social differentiation, economic specialisation, and a range of power relationships – a starting point, for example, for understanding the social and political role of a central settlement such as Százhalombatta or Monte Polizzo.
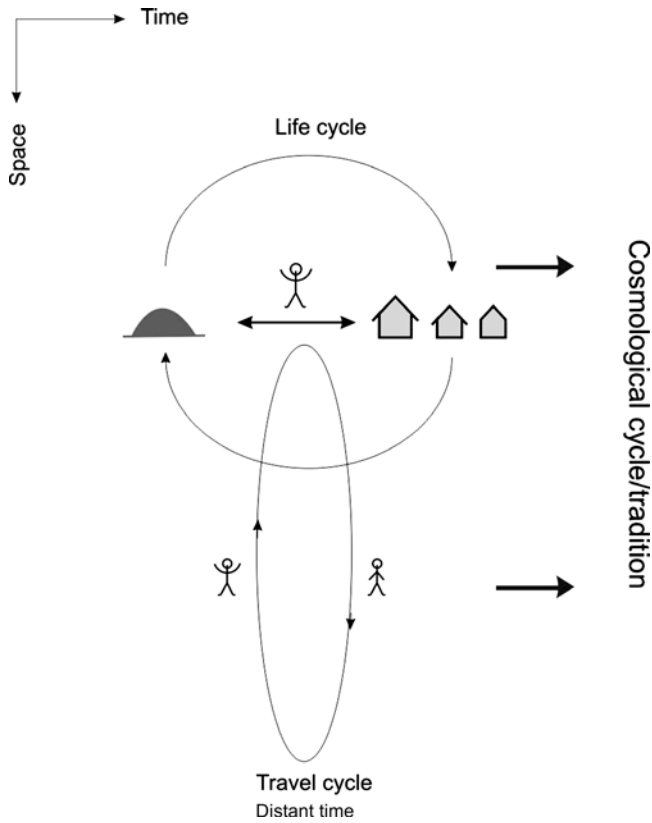
Of prime importance in our concern with social and political institutions is to understand the linkages among space, boundaries, and the construction of private and political identities. During

Figure 1.1.
The articulation of local
versus foreign, closure
versus openness in the
operation of Bronze Age
society.

the Neolithic and into the Bronze Age, two apparently contradic-
tory developments marked both local distinction and international
connection (Figure 1.1). Locally, the investment in built landscape
included permanent farmstead and larger settlements, burial and
ceremonial monuments, and cleared landscapes and field systems.
These built landscapes were coupled with a material culture of every-
day life (especially domestic pottery) that suggests local distinctive-
ness and closure. Internationally, however, the expansion of long-
distance exchange networks in metalwork and other luxury items
appears to emphasise openness and connection. How can we explain
the dual nature of Bronze Age society – the dynamic between open-
ness and closure? Forms of local and regional identities in material
culture are thought to signal a symbolic demarcation of political and
perhaps ethnic identities linked to the formation of more hierarchical
and bounded forms of political power (Kristiansen 1998:chapter 8.2),
and raise theoretical and comparative questions regarding ambiguity
in personal and political identity (Diaz-Andreu et al 2005).

We accept the possibility that identity and ethnicity take on new
forms. Present discussions circle around the concepts of the fluid

and the stable (Jones 1997; Bürmeister and Müller-Schessel 2007; Kristiansen and Larsson 2005:chapter 1.2; Fernández-Götz 2008). Ethnicity may be fluid in the movements and incorporation of people, but stable in its material symbolism. Or it may be socially and demographically stable, but fluid in its material symbolism, such as incorporating foreign 'ethnic' elements (Fuhrholt 2008). The comparative evidence of the project may give some clues towards addressing questions of the use of material cultural in identity formation. With differences in gender, leadership, and social spheres of action, closure and openness in social action may exist together within different spheres of a society.

Throughout our book, social and political spheres of action will be working simultaneously, and we must understand how a person's place in society was always contingent on context. We thus ground our work firmly in the specific levels in which humans acted. However, a danger always exists that our theoretical concepts may impose a western notion of hierarchy that may not be able to fully grasp the specific character of actions and transactions that, in the past, transmitted power between people and households. The multiscalar debate in historical archaeology provides a good case in point (Hauser and Hicks 2007). In a commentary, Dan Hicks called for 'flatter, more ethnographic conceptions of scale, that seek to recognize how both small and large scale emerge from complex networks of human and material enactments' (Hicks forthcoming). Although we share this point of departure, we also recognize that constraints guide the way we construct archaeological materials (methodologies) and interpretative concepts (theory). Households, settlements, and regional polities were the multiscales of human action and of our archaeological data recovery (Lock and Molyneaux 2007). Although important differences must exist between past and present perceptions, the exercise of power and exploitation remains universal in its effects. In Figure 1.2 we illustrate theoretically how different scales are connected by opposing forces of social integration and exploitation that may lead to the rise of internal contradictions. In the concluding chapter, we explore in archaeological detail how such forces materialised in the archaeological record, leading to different historical scenarios in our three study areas.
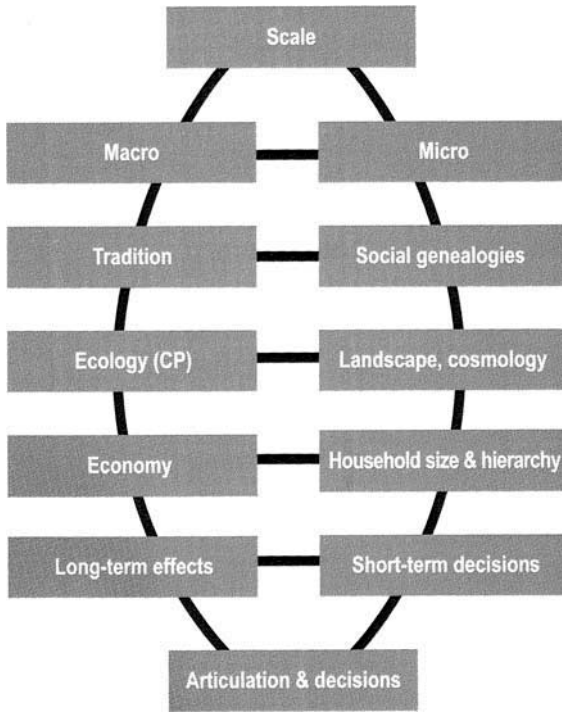
In order to understand how economies work from households to regional and interregional systems, we introduce the concept of a political economy. The reproduction of the physical landscape, its

Figure 1.2.
The articulation of scale in settlement analysis.

settlements, burials and households, and broader social relations depends on the political organised economy (Earle 2002). 'The political economy is the material flows of goods and labour through a society, channelled to create wealth and to finance institutions of rule' (Earle 2002:chapter 1). This is an arena for social and political competition, which may lead to the formation of unequal access to productive resources, as some were included and others excluded through property relations in productive lands and symbolic things. At the local level, this may be reflected in different sizes of farms, or specialisation of production between settlements and communities at large, elements that can be analysed and studied in the archaeological and environmental record. Finally, the deposition of prestige objects in burials and hoards represents a ritualised aspect of how to study unequal access to wealth and its disposition or consumption.

In the political economy, institutions with a set of rules that govern the production and distribution of resources and wealth integrate domains of power The use of material culture in the expression of institutions is a prerequisite for obtaining and maintaining power (Kristiansen and Larsson 2005:chapter 1.2), while, at the same time, it regulates and constrains individuals' attempts to increase power.

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Institutions are thus the building blocks of society. Their rituals legit-imised the power of office holders, whether ritual chiefs or war chiefs, through visible performance and participation that engaged and inte-grated society's members in its reproduction. Institutions are literally built up materially through the construction of landscape features, including houses and monuments, and the gifting of objects, includ-ing items of display and identity. Thus, one makes a family by build-ing a house or makes a political alliance by giving a special sword. The importance is that the institutions are built materially in addi-tion to symbolically, and the process of making involves intentional actions by participants.

Agency is critical here. It has been used to make objects vital in social action (Gell 1998; Dobres and Robb 2000). DeMarrais, Castillo, and Earle (1996) introduced the concept of materialisation to account for the active role played by material culture in social strategies and as a framework in the formation and reproduction of institutions. Others have stressed the materiality of lived experiences, the role of bodily experience, and expression (Treherne 1995; Sørensen and Rebay 2008; Shanks 1999; Meskell and Joyce 2003). Here we encounter the relationship between the formation of the self through a social identity and its dialectical relationship with collective identities (from social groups or classes to polities and ethnicity).

To use this approach successfully, however, we adopt an under-standing of agency that relates to the expanded material world. In his book *Art and Agency*, Alfred Gell (1998) defines agency as being social and relational. That definition includes, also, material objects and art, which are ascribed agency once they are immersed into social relationships as exemplified by religious idols and style. Animation, divinity, and power can thus be ascribed to specific objects that have undergone special rituals or are decorated in a certain way. Gell turns an abstract western concept of agency into a useful theoretical tool in a specific interpretative context. The transformation of anthropolog-ical knowledge about material culture into a modern understanding demands a series of interpretative steps: agency = abstract western concept of intentionality; symbolic meaning = western interpretation of material culture as meaningfully constituted; and socio-material relation (materialisation) = contextualised non-western interpreta-tion of material culture as animated and empowered. Agency can be said to be at work in symbolic meaning and in materialisation, but in the latter, a more holistically complete understanding exists

of the relationship between the social and the material (Tilley et al 2006). Some objects can be ascribed with innate religious power and personality that act back upon people. Therefore, in the past, symbolic meanings were imbedded in relations of meaning, power, and agency among humans, animals, and material culture (Oma 2007).

To this can be added the concept of biography to understand how objects can be used for symbolic construction and reproduction of social relations (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986). Each object has a long history of making, transfer, and use that encapsulates specific social histories of work, events, and social connection. We can begin to delineate a more systematic theoretical framework for the interplay between domestic and public space, social and ritual space, and their changing meaning by attempting to reconstruct the history of objects. We employ Gell's theoretical framework to discuss how, in the Bronze Age, personal identity was constructed through relationships to a specific object (the sword) and how that linked the individual into the political economy.

MATERIAL THREADS: SPACE, OBJECT, AND LABOUR; BIOGRAPHY AND IDENTITY

Our theoretical position is part of an ongoing change in theoretical focus within archaeology. It represents an interpretative journey from broader evolutionary concerns with prehistoric societies towards a narrower phenomenological concern with negotiated social praxis and embodiment. More than a theoretical movement from processualism to postprocessualism, it attempts to get into the otherness of the past through a change of focus and interpretative strategy and therefore corresponds well with a postcolonial discourse (Gosden 2004; van Dommelen 2006).

Subsequently, a number of theoretical concepts illustrate the rather massive change of perspective during the past 25 years, summarised as a movement from the outside to the inside of society:

From social typology ——————→ to social complexity

From materialism ——————→ to materiality

From function ——————→ to context

From representation ——————→ to praxis

From social identity ——————→ to personhood

From experience ——————⟶ to embodiment

From pattern ——————⟶ to path

From settlement ——————⟶ to dwelling

However, we wish to argue that many of the listed concepts are dialectically intersected into each other. By employing an updated version of a materialist approach to multiscalar interpretation, we propose to integrate levels of the lived experience in the past and its materialisation in social institutions from households to regional polities. In doing so, we emphasise the way that materials act to integrate processes through laboured transformations, flows of goods, and their embodiment; and how the material record gives a direct record for observation and interpretation. This dialectic between observation and theoretically informed interpretation, between theory and praxis, must be anchored in specific contexts.

We pursue our theoretical endeavour to integrate contexts of different scales by proposing that materialism, materialisation, and materiality represent interconnected theoretical domains of material culture with an interpretative potential to account for both individual and society (on materiality: DeMarrais, Gosden, and Renfrew 2004; Taylor 2008). We illustrate our theoretical approach by studying the Bronze Age sword. First is the history of the sword's production and use; this takes place as part of political economies that linked together international relations and regional political systems. At the individual level, the sword symbolised warriorhood; it was an inalienable object acting as the embodied materiality of the fierce fighter of the Bronze Age world. Sword and warrior in this way became one. The sword also identified the warrior as a member in good standing of a social institution, defined by certain rules and social etiquette and also by a number of recurring material accoutrements, including dress, weapons, musculature, and scarred body. He was thus a member of a larger brotherhood that empowered its members. We call this an institutional materialisation of warriorhood. Finally, the warriors' martial actions, from cattle raiding to long-distance trading and raiding, to property enforcement and defence of his chieftain, contributed to the political and economic reproduction of a stratified society, and therefore belong under the theoretical umbrella of materialism, imbedded in the social relations of production.

Materialism in the Marxist tradition states that the production and reproduction of the material conditions of life are necessary, but