



BIWEEKLY COLLOQUIUM
Monday, May 6th, 5.00 pm

Not a tale of Neolithisation - The transformation of third millennium Western Scandinavia as history and anthropology

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Large parts of the Scandinavian Peninsula in the Neolithic and Bronze Age are regarded as peripheral to the referential cultural schematics of Southern Scandinavia. This is partially for empirical reasons, but also theoretical and political. The national needs of the young Norwegian state and Scandinavian regions have fluctuated between generating narratives of being “different” versus being integrated into broader European developments. Most explanatory models outline autochthonous evolution.

This is very much the case for the introduction of agriculture, where local developments are used to illustrate general models of general Neolithisation, or the local material is explained within the framework of pre-established models. This explanatory approach, though allocated much research effort, has never generated convincing, comprehensive narratives. This approach is also at odds with the empirical expression in the data, and is methodologically and theoretically problematic.

An alternative proposed in this lecture is that before 2400 BC developments were to a large extent continuous in terms of practices, creating a patchwork of variable cultural situations in various environmental and geographic contexts. In the mid-third millennium this continuity and cultural heterogeneity was terminated. Archaeologically we see this in a new set of economic, technological and social practices, as well as ideological structures. The transformations of society and culture affected a tremendous region (more than 1000 km along the coast and into the interior), in demanding and highly variable environments, and exhibiting diverse pre-2400 BC cultural situations.

The mid-third millennium transformation was not the result of Neolithisation. It did not build on evolution in preceding traditions (whether hunter-gatherer or groups with some minor agro-pastoral production) in any direct sense. Rapid development towards a Bronze Age type society was triggered by external sources – the most obvious candidate is tied to the Bell Beaker horizon that is recently brought to the fore in Jutland. This is a re-evaluation of a watershed in the prehistory of Scandinavia, but also entails viewing the Bell Beaker Culture as a social force (that should be viewed anthropologically and historically) and not primarily a typological phenomenon.

Venue: Seminar Room 204 Leibnizstraße 1, CAU Kiel