

BIWEEKLY COLLOQUIUM
Monday, November 27th, 4:15 p.m.

PREHISTORIC BABIES IN THE NEOLITHIC TRANSITION
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The current world population of c. seven billion people is a living testimony that, paradoxically, the human race thrived despite the complexities of birthing. The changes in human pelvic morphology as a consequence of bipedalism and encephalisation made the birthing process extremely difficult and risky for both mothers and babies. And even now, each day about 800 women and approximately 7,000 newborns die as a result of child birth-related complications. How is it possible than, that the first increase in fertility rates occurred in prehistory, in spite of difficult births?

Key pillars of fertility increase are mothers and babies but their role in that process has not been adequately studied by either physical anthropology or archaeology. The ERC BIRTH project, which I will present, investigates the biological and cultural mechanisms that affected fertility and led to a major demographic shift in human evolution, known as the Neolithic Demographic Transition. Looking at the Neolithic transformation through a newborn's perspective in the Central Balkans between 10000 and 5000 BC, I will discuss: 1) The role of Neolithic houses as a new 'birthing arena' in human evolution, which could have had an



important impact on the neonatal survival. Heated houses could have had positive effects on neonatal survival because the problem of thermoregulation is one of the main causes of death among infants. 2) Which part of the 'Neolithic package' was crucial for prehistoric babies and how new foodstuffs changed weaning practices and duration of breastfeeding. 3) How new Neolithic baby food was served according to the imprints of deciduous teeth on bone artefacts. 4) How new and easily available supplementary food for babies could have influenced the entire system of cooperative breeding.

From the perspective of prehistoric babies and their mothers, 'house life' and new type of weaning food were probably of crucial importance. Those inventions opened the possibility to include other breeders (non-parental individuals participating in caring for the offspring) in the process of feeding the infants in the Neolithic, which could have led to considerable changes in the cooperative breeding system and its important advancement.

Venue: Leibnizstraße 1, Seminar Room 204