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## Guest editors' foreword

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**Abstract.** We introduce here the material arising from an academic discussion held in Kazan, within the framework of the XIII<sup>th</sup> Congress of Anthropologists and Ethnologists of Russia (XIII CAER, 2–6<sup>th</sup> July, 2019). The participants in the workshop expressed considerable doubt about the popular idea that the development of inequality was an integral part of the Neolithic process, while before it there was social equality. Instead, they suggested a possibility that both Neolithic and modern hunter-gatherer equality might have emerged over time since the early Holocene. They mostly agreed that ethnographic data on modern hunter-gatherer cultures cannot be used as a simple parallel or analogy with Late Paleolithic/Epipaleolithic Southwest Asian hunter-gatherer cultures, and attempted to consider what types of archaeological data could testify to social inequality and equality in early prehistory.

**Keywords:** equality, egalitarianism, inequality, stratification, hunters, gatherers, Paleolithic, Epipaleolithic, Neolithic, archaeology, ethnography.

**Артёмова О. Ю., Финлейсон Б. Предисловие.** Мы представляем здесь материалы, которые имеют своим истоком дискуссию, состоявшуюся в Казани в рамках XIII Конгресса антропологов и этнологов России (XIII КАЭР, 2–6 июля 2019 г.). Участники небольшого симпозиума, названного «Изобретение равенства», выразили большие сомнения относительно популярного среди гуманитариев представления о том, что развитие неравенства было интегральной составляющей процесса первичной неолитизации, а также представления о том, что до начала неолита равенство было универсальной чертой социальной жизни. Участники дискуссии подчеркнули вероятность того, что равенство, зафиксированное этнографически у некоторых групп охотников и собирателей, а также предполагаемое по археологическим данным для некоторых сообществ раннего неолита Юго-Западной Азии, могло сформироваться достаточно поздно, во всяком случае уже после начала голоцена. Участники симпозиума также сошлись на том, что этнографические данные по охотникам и собирателям не могут использоваться для проведения прямых параллелей с позднепалеолитическими

или эпипалеолитическими культурами Юго-Западной Азии, а также сделали попытку определить те типы археологических данных, которые могут свидетельствовать о социальном равенстве или неравенстве в доисторические времена.

**Ключевые слова:** равенство, эгалитаризм, неравенство, стратификация, охотники, собиратели, палеолит, эпипалеолит, неолит, археология, этнография.

The collection of papers presented here arises from an academic discussion held in Kazan within the framework of the XIII<sup>th</sup> Congress of Anthropologists and Ethnologists of Russia (XIII CAER, 2–6th July, 2019). The discussion focused on how we can find better ways to use socio-anthropological hunter-gatherer data to understand the ancient prehistoric past, in particular the emergence and nature of egalitarian societies, and what contribution archaeology might make to this debate. The resulting papers approach the issue from a very broad spectrum, ranging from primatological (Butovskaya), archaeological (Finlayson), ethnoarchaeological (Villeneuve with Hayden), ethnological (Tutorsky), to anthropological (Artemova and Peterson). The two workshop organizers, Bill Finlayson and Olga Artemova, begin their contributions from what might be seen as opposite ends of the disciplinary and chronological spectrum, but end in considerable agreement despite their very different starting points. A significant difference in style is generally very visible between the Russian and the other contributions, and the ‘western’ scholars were impressed by the breadth of erudition shown in the Russian papers, which allude to a context stretching from Sumerian myth to George Orwell (Artemova), by way of Dostoyevski (Tutorsky), while Butovskaya ranges across the origins of morality, micro-economics, primatology and anthropology. In that context, the western papers appear to be rather narrow and functional!

In Brezhnev’s times, among Moscow intelligentsia, a joke circulated with a graphic that showed two parallel lines, between which a zigzag line swerves right, then left, right, then left — indicating “left-wing deviation”, “right wing deviation” and the “strong political line of the Communist Party”. This symbolic image could equally serve as a metaphor of the “mainstream” methodological trends in the human sciences, including social anthropology. Over the last two decades, after years of post-modernism and opposition to socio-evolutionary studies, even avoiding the very term “social evolution” (see Bondarenko *et al.* 2011: 3), ‘western’ social-anthropological theory has swung the other way, actively seeking to interact with archaeology, paleoanthropology, genetics, sociobiology, human ethology, *etc.* Artemova was inspired by the recent international *Conferences on Hunting and Gathering Societies* at Liverpool in 2013, Venna in 2015, and Penang in 2018, as well as the *Sharing: The Archaeology and Anthropology of Hunter-Gatherers* conference in Cambridge in 2016, and dreamed of initiating similar discussions in Russia with prominent international researchers, holding theoretical discussions that were not concerned with the political agenda of the day. Unfortunately, it turned out that the modern zigzag of theoretical discussion hasn’t yet reached Russia, and she was unable to gain sufficient support from colleagues to hold such a meeting, and even her idea of a separate session within the Kazan Russian Anthropology and Ethnology Congress (CAER13), dedicated to dis-

Discussing the methodological collaboration of archaeologists and ethnologists in researching the earliest social evolution, was rejected. Instead, Artemova worked with Finlayson, a British archaeologist, to prepare an agenda in which three foreign and four Russian scholars agreed to take part, within a session at CAER13 organized by Andrei Tutorsky on the *Anthropology of Equality*. Tutorsky not only kindly agreed to include our presentations into his session, he even became a speaker. The Kazan and Moscow organizers of CAER, primarily Valeria Ilizarova, helped us, and invitations were quickly issued to foreign colleagues, and we all met in Kazan on 4 and 5 of July, 2019 at two sessions coordinated by Finlayson, taking advantage of living in the same hotel for the duration of the conference to have extensive informal discussions over meals and while walking around the capital of Tatarstan.

During recent discussions in a session entitled the Long Neolithic at the Twelfth Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies in Penang (2018), organized by Finlayson and Graeme Warren, and attended by Artemova, both archaeologists and social anthropologists came to an agreement that the ethnographic present of hunter-gatherers is so removed in time, space and environment that it is unable to provide a reliable source for direct analogy with the Neolithic transition in Southwest Asia. However, much archaeological research has been dependent on such analogy, especially in trying to explore the social lives of the first farmers and their direct hunter-gatherer ancestors, the Natufians. Such an over-reliance on ethnographic analogy leads archaeological discussion into a re-invention of the present in the past, and makes archaeological researcher a consumer of ethnographic data, rather than a contributor to anthropological thought (cf. Finlayson *et al.* 2011; Finlayson, this volume; Warren 2018). The *Invention of Equality* workshop held in Kazan arose out of these discussions in Penang, and was intended to develop joint efforts to devise new approaches to these problems.

Our workshop title, the *Invention of Equality*, employs two words to send two simultaneous messages. The first message suggests that the common academic view, where primeval social equality was the natural state of humanity and the starting point of human history, might turn out to be scholarly construction, inconsistent with ancient realities. The second message is that some forms of social relations, those described in ethnographies of modern or recent foragers as egalitarian, perhaps represent the outcomes of relatively late and specifically local evolutionary processes, rather than the relics of a distant, universal prehistoric stage of human social development. This second message also relates to archaeological debates on whether early Neolithic sites of the Southern Levant provide evidence for egalitarianism as an early Holocene innovation, rather than a remnant of Late Pleistocene society (see Finlayson, this volume).

Several main lines of inquiry were set out as the starting point for the meeting. The workshop was set up to discuss one specific area of hunter-gatherer society — egalitarianism. Does the equality described in some hunter-gatherer ethnographies represent the relic of the remote past or is it the result of specific evolutionary processes, contingent on many discrete factors? Modern and recent hunter-gatherers are still frequently used as timeless models for hunter-gatherer behavior, despite common recognition of the theoretical and methodological challenges involved. Archaeologists focus on the idea of the development of inequality as an integral part of the Neolithic process, assuming their hunter-gatherer predecessors were egalitarian. Evidence for equality observed in the earliest Neolithic societies of Southwest Asia is consequently often interpreted as the result of efforts to preserve hunter-gatherer

egalitarian behavior from the past. Delegates to the workshop were asked to consider whether egalitarianism might be as innovative as much else in the Neolithic, and that both Neolithic and modern hunter-gatherer equality might be something that emerged over time, since the early Holocene. The workshop participants were asked to consider whether the egalitarian social systems of modern hunter-gatherers conceivably represent a possible start point for the ancestors of the first farmers, particularly when it has already been widely recognized that the final hunter-gatherers of the region, the Natufian final Epipaleolithic culture, were far from the so-called simple hunter-gatherer societies that are most typically egalitarian, as discussed in the paper by Villeneuve and Hayden.

The contents of the papers go a long way to address the questions raised before the workshop. Marina Butovskaya provides a detailed discussion of the behavior of the common ancestor of modern humans, chimpanzees and bonobos, as well as the behavior of some more distant relatives (macaques as an example) to indicate that egalitarian behavior was almost certainly not an original human social mode.

Artemova and Finlayson had found in previous discussions that they shared a number of ideas. Finlayson has been conducting excavations in Southwest Asia with the aspiration to understand why ancient people relatively quickly and in a limited region of the world changed both their economic strategies, from hunting and gathering to food production, and at the same time their social and ideological ways of living, before these developments spread rapidly beyond Southwest Asia. Explanations dependent on external factors, such as climate change or demographic pressure, appeared increasingly unsatisfactory (*e. g.* Price and Bar-Yosef 2011). Equally, it appeared increasingly clear that the shift to a farming mode of subsistence did not serve as a direct cause of social and ideological change, but that all these processes of transition were intimately entangled. Meanwhile, Artemova's anthropological research had increasingly suggested that no recent or contemporary hunter-gatherer societies showed any parallel process to the Neolithic transition. Both Artemova and Finlayson, working through their respective lines of evidence, have concluded that specific local evolutionary trajectories apply to both modern and ancient hunters and gatherers.

Suzanne Villeneuve and Brian Hayden approached the topic from a very different basis from Finlayson. They argue that much behavior cannot be directly observed from the archaeological record, but has to be inferred through ethnographic analogy. They provide a detailed description of likely food surpluses generated by Natufian economies on the basis of analogy with recent societies on the Northwest Canadian plateau, which they consider to be particularly apt. Finlayson has argued the contrary, that there are no good analogues for the Southwest Asian Neolithic transition, and that we should base our arguments more on the increasingly rich archaeological evidence available, allowing us to both study the transition as it occurs, and potential to make a direct contribution to wider anthropological debates. Despite these differences, both Finlayson and Villeneuve with Hayden agree that there is considerable evidence for social stratification in the Natufian.

Three papers in this volume (Peterson's, Artemova's, and Tutorsky's) are based on ethnographic data approached in accordance with a general methodological principle that anthropological research aims to show us what forms of social life are possible under the conditions of this or that mode of subsistence, rather than to supply empirical material for archaeological interpretations (*cf.* Ingold 2013: 4; Artemova 2016: 26).

Nicolas Peterson analyzes contradictory accounts of precolonial Australian Aboriginal societies as manifesting aspects both of egalitarianism and of inequality. He highlights quite complicated but, in a sense, balanced social systems with many components mutually interlinked and intricately adjusted to each other, and shows such entailments of those systems that made it impossible for the marked inequalities — predominantly connected with ritual status — to become hereditary. This and some other fundamental principles of social interactions determined pronounced 'aspects of egalitarianism' in the precolonial life of the Indigenous Australians.

Olga Artemova juxtaposes a number of African and Asian hunter-gatherer societies in which people deliberately and always, or almost always, strove to achieve equality in their social networking, against those hunter-gatherer societies in which people did not do that as a rule. She refers to the accounts of precolonial Australian Aboriginal societies as an example of the latter, though not denying the structural aspects of egalitarianism within them outlined by Peterson.

Andrei Tutorsky describes certain examples of the egalitarian behavior exhibited (on special occasions) among modern Northern Russian villagers, who in normal everyday life demonstrate the presence of several types of hierarchies deeply rooted in their history and culture. That is the practice of the equal division of game after the fishing expeditions. His data and conclusions overlap with Artemova's observation that various modes of behavior and rules of communication intended to put the individuals or groups concerned in equal positions have been and are familiar to members of quite different societies, but they have been and are mostly used temporally and only in specific social settings.

There were two additional speakers at the workshop, whose papers are not represented here. Leonid Vishnyatsky provided an analysis of osteological evidence from the Late Paleolithic, Mesolithic and early Neolithic from the Near East, western, central and northern Europe, which may provide evidence for an increase in the frequency and scale of violent conflict associated with the formation and development of the production economy. His data supports an hypothesis that the production economy and elaboration of technology created conditions that enabled the development of political structures which made warfare their main function, and shaped the practice of what can be called war in the full sense of the word.

Evgenei Vdovchenkov presented a paper on "Inequality and mechanisms of socio-economic leveling in ancient nomadic societies as exemplified by the Sarmatians", where he argued that no ancient nomadic society was egalitarian, but that every nomadic society had its own limitations or constraints on the development or elaboration of economic inequality. The nomadic way of life also determined that political power was diffuse in its nature.

All of the papers were followed by numerous questions and comments and the final discussion was quite vivid and even polemical. Especially lively debate was caused by Finlayson's evidence on and ideas about an egalitarianism, possibly created anew, of early Neolithic people in the Southern Levant. Some social anthropologists, however, suggested that fascinating data presented by Finlayson might be interpreted in a number of alternative ways.

The main conclusions of the discussion could be summarized as follows:

1. Academic research has not obtained credible evidence of equality as a typical trait of the most ancient human social systems. On the contrary, there are reasons to believe that the earliest social systems were characterized by

hierarchical structures which over time have evolved differently, although some of them, at various times, could have approximated to real egalitarianism.

2. The evolutionary paths of innumerable social associations should be conceived of as multiple, multi-directional and not linear (allowing for change to move backwards, down side branches, and not always in a progressive developmental manner). The historical diversity created is why the method of ethnographic analogy provides little for archaeological reconstruction of those forms of social life which disappeared long ago. Nevertheless, social anthropologists are fully capable of helping archaeologists through demonstrating the enormous range of possibilities of interpretation for similar material evidence, as well as by proposing avenues of investigation which their experience in studies on living, dynamic and unpredictable reality suggests.
3. If we agree that the ethnographical data from modern hunter-gatherer cultures cannot be used as a simple parallel or analogy with Late Paleolithic/Epipaleolithic hunter-gatherer cultures, we need to develop a deeper understanding of the development of such cultural features as demand sharing, the satisficing principle of economic behavior, minimization of effort and risk, and social and ideological mechanisms to reduce the motivation for individuals, groups and families to accumulate wealth. The successful productive economies that emerged by the Late Neolithic required very different social and ideological attitudes to material wealth than is found amongst modern 'simple', or even 'complex' hunter-gatherers. We argue that it is unlikely that the ancient Neolithic inhabitants of the Southern Levant emerged from hunter-gatherer societies that had developed the ontology designed to limit the accumulation of wealth and create equality. Our future discussions will seek what evidence there is for social inequality and equality in early prehistory, and what forms of evidence should be sought and interrogated.

It would be highly desirable that such discussions, meetings, and subsequent publication of their proceedings happen more often in Russia, for this is how true interdisciplinarity (to which we are all called) could be achieved. After all, interdisciplinary work should be done by the experts in disciplines, but not by experts in interdisciplinarity.

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