

PART 2. COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION



PREHISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY
JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES
№ 1 (2020) 102–105

B. Hayden¹

¹ University of British Columbia, Department of Anthropology,
6306 NW Marine Dr, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1, Canada
[bhayden@sfu.ca]

Comments on papers for “The Invention of Equality”

Received 21.01.2020, accepted 10.03.2020

Butovskaya’s article provides a refreshing and more coherent assessment of primate hierarchies than has previously been advocated, and together with Suzanne Vileneuve’s work on primate “proto-feasting” behavior, this contribution provides a believable behavioral scaffold of protohominins that sets the foundations for human developments.

Artemova offers a very useful discussion of the egalitarian concept. I especially like the emphasis on it being an unachievable ideal, but which nevertheless some groups approximate. I also like the distinction between economic and other types of egalitarianism. This seems critical to me for understanding socioeconomic cultural changes. I am less convinced that it was the prestige economy ideology of the American Northwest Coast that constrained production, although it possibly played a role. In my view, what drives increased production and intensification is *competition*, not the ideology, and in complex hunter/gatherers competition primarily takes place in feasting contexts (e. g., competition for allies, marriage partners, resources, political influence). What created at least a temporary stability in cultural change (e. g., between the first complex hunter/gatherers and full agricultural reliance) was probably the restriction of competition to episodic corporate feasting rather than overt individual competition. I think it is likely that the “want more” ideology and the full productive economy only emerged with the substantial reliance on agriculture after which cultural change accelerated dramatically. Lingering egalitarian ideals (and popular defense of self-interests) probably still constrained aggrandizer strategies and competition to some extent prior to that time. It is interesting to think of the prestige economy (similar to Herskovits’ and Earle’s political economies, or what I would refer to as transegalitarian economies) as being an intermediary form between egalitarian economies and production economies. I would argue that, in contrast to egalitarian economies, there are far more pressures in prestige economies to produce surpluses (especially for feasting), but that these pressures increase even more in production economies.

Peterson’s focus on the effect of age differences between a man and his offspring on ritual knowledge transfers is an intriguing explanation for the lack of stable ritual

hierarchies in Australia. However, not all hunter/gatherers have such age differences, even though they lack stable ritual hierarchies. Thus, other factors are probably also involved. In addition, age and sex (and perhaps ritual) inequalities are not generally what archaeologists have in mind when dealing with inequalities. Archaeologists focus on social and economic types of hierarchies. I would suggest that there were also some major economic and social differences in these types of hierarchies within Australia, particularly in the north coastal and Southeastern areas where more complex hunter/gatherers seem to have existed in some locations, with greater numbers of wives, greater degrees of inequality, sedentism, and economic production. Thus, I doubt that generalizations can be made about Australian Aborigines in these respects.

I found much to agree with in Bill Finlayson's analysis, but would interpret some aspects differently. I fully agree with the assessment of the Natufian as a society of complex hunter/gatherers (at least in some areas). I also agree that looking at the PPNA in corporate vs. individual terms is a very useful perspective. Interestingly, archaeological remains seem to reflect a similar dialectic in Europe from the Neolithic to Bronze Age (corporate tombs to individual barrow graves). However, on the basis of my research in ethnographic transegalitarian societies, I cannot accept the assumption that specialized (ritual) buildings and secondary (or primary) burials or plastered skulls were used to integrate communities. And the claims that this was also the case with the Sungir burials strains credulity to the breaking point. Although social integration has been the standard interpretation used by archaeologists in the Near East, these buildings and burials make far more sense as attempts by lineage heads and ambitious individuals to exert greater control via their lineages, secret societies, or the creation of community factions. In particular, in the vast majority of ethnographic cases, secondary burial is accompanied by very costly rituals and feasts meant to exalt the deceased and promote the surviving family or lineage. Plastering of skulls must also have been done as a secondary funerary ritual (after the flesh had decomposed) and been meant to exalt the individual family member even higher. In transegalitarian lineage dynamics, it makes little difference if the individual is an adult or not for such procedures. While this may be a public display, the purpose is *not* to create community solidarity but to increase the influence of the lineage, family, or corporate group. Far from “reducing individualism”, the burial practices that were most similar ethnographically were geared to exalting the importance and wealth of the sponsoring group thereby improving their political and economic advantages in the community. Parenthetically, the lack of special mortuary treatment is an extremely unreliable indicator of egalitarian social organization (Feinman, Neitzel 1984: 76, table 2.9).

Similarly, while the tower at Jericho may have been visible by the entire community (as is the case for many public performances by secret societies), access to the top of the tower must have been restricted to a select group of people. In addition, like the large ritual structure at WF16, secret society structures on the American Plains could also house entire communities and were the center of those communities; however, their main purpose was not to create community integration, but to increase the power of the secret society. Nor do I think that the storage features in the earliest “communal structure” at Jerf el Ahmar were for the entire village or that the early structure was mainly used for storage. As Finlayson correctly notes, there was obviously a small select number of people who participated in events in this structure. Any storage facilities (food or paraphernalia) would have pertained to those participants and distributed according to their rank. Given the nature of the structure, power iconographies,

and power events such as sacrifices, it is difficult to conceive of such groups as internally egalitarian.

There seems to be some confusion in Finlayson's analysis concerning whether the *multiple duplicate storage facilities* at Dhra were for overall community use, or for the use of different segments of the community. There was no centralized storage facility for the community and so it seems improbable that the multiple storage facilities functioned to maintain an egalitarian social structure at Dhra. Indeed, the excavation of four granaries "interspersed between the oval/circular food processing/residential structures" (Kuijt, Finlayson 2009) does not conjure an image of communal storage. They make far more sense as individual corporate (probably lineage) facilities, which would fit with Finlayson's emphasis on the corporate vs. individual nature of social relations. I have recorded similar arrangements in longhouses in Southeast Asia (Hayden 2012), and one can easily imagine groups of households at Dhra forming lineages administered by kin heads who compete for village dominance without pronounced household differences (as emphasized ethnographically by Adams 2019). The larger houses in the Late PPNB may well be the consolidation of lineage power in the form of multiple, heterarchical ancestral houses for different lineages much like Torajan or Sumban ancestral lineage houses; and these are definitely *not* egalitarian societies (see *Ibid.*). In transegalitarian societies with nascent inequalities, overt ostentation, wealth, or exercise of power is likely to backfire, so that ambitions are often masked by creating corporate kinship groups, holding lavish funerals (like the elaborate graves at El Hemme), or creating ritual societies putatively "for the good of the community". Thus, PPNA storage is not likely to have been "communal", (for which there is no ethnographic warrant), but is likely to have been "corporate", either for kin groups or sodalities.

It find it unrealistic to assume that there was no concept of household or individual property prior to the appearance of storage facilities in houses in the Late PPNB. People must have had private property throughout and even before the PPN. Were there no prestige items? Were there no tools? Were there no clothes? The mere presence of prestige items (like the obsidian, copper, and beads at Hallan Çemi and elsewhere) testify to individual property. However, I would agree that the most costly such items were probably corporate property the use of which was most likely reserved for the hierarchical administrative heads of the corporate group.

On a more theoretical level, rather than increased food production leading to egalitarian societies, several studies have demonstrated that there is a strong correlation between resource abundance and sociopolitical complexity. Why should greater surplus result in enforced sharing? Finlayson's interpretation thus seems anomalous, although something of that nature seems to have been transpiring, as it also did in the earliest Neolithic of Central Europe. Rather than negating the existence of inequalities, I favor a shift in focus to kinship corporate groups (*e. g.*, lineages), or similar groups, and their competing gambits to dominate community politics, especially as these groups waxed and waned in importance. It is gratifying to see some recognition of this importance in Finlayson's interpretations.

The ultimate indicator of inequalities in the PPNA and B is the indication of human sacrifice and possible cannibalism at Jerf el Ahmar (a headless female body in the middle of the "communal structure" floor; skulls under the posts of that structure, and cooked heads in an adjacent pit); at Göbekli Tepe (disarticulated human remains with cutmarks interspersed with feasting bones and refuse); and later at Çatal Höyük (3 in-

fant bodies under the doorsill of a structure). Human sacrifice is, above all, used to express supreme power and dominance.

Space does not permit further elaboration of these or other points, but interested researchers can find much fuller documentation in several recent books related to these issues (Hayden 2016; 2018).

References

- Adams R. 2019. Household ethnoarchaeology and social action in a megalith-building society in West Sumba, Indonesia. *Asian Perspectives* 58: 331–365.
- Feinman G., Neitzel J. 1984. Too many types. *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory* 7: 39–102.
- Hayden B. 2012. Traditional corporate group economics in Southeast Asia. *Asian Perspectives* 50: 1–23.
- Hayden B. 2016. *Feasting in Southeast Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Hayden B. 2018. *The Power of Ritual in Prehistory*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kuijt I., Finlayson B. 2009. Evidence for food storage and predomestication granaries 11,000 years ago in the Jordan Valley. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 106, 10966–10970.