

INEQUALITY IN ANTIQUITY
Tracing the Archaeological Record

April 5-6, 2014

The social and political division of communities was a common and complex feature of past civilizations around the world. In many ancient cultures there were several discrimination strategies: free people versus slaves, age- and gender-based categories, economic concentration and exclusion. As archaeologists, we have to ask how visible such structures of inequality are in the material record of the past. Where they are visible, how do we interpret their meaning for the marginalized communities that they document? So far, no symposium has addressed these diverse aspects of inequality in a single venue. A wider, interdisciplinary archaeology based approach to these issues should prove especially productive.

The main aim of the Symposium is to present methodologies developed in the analysis of ancient inequalities and to offer a comprehensive range of case studies.

We know that in ancient times there were men and women, freemen and slaves, locals and immigrants. We can observe some material residues of their existence in the archaeological record. The central methodological problem is how we can extract fuller meaning from the surviving archaeological residues and relate those meanings to issues of gender, legal and ethnic status, and other categories of potential inequality.

This conference will apply two relatively novel approaches. While studies of slavery, gender, and ethnicity are relatively common, the IEMA conference will explore them as intersecting areas of study within the larger framework of inequality. It will also attempt to bring together prehistorians, specialists in classical archaeology, and students of Late Antiquity, as well as physical anthropologists; epigraphers; and statisticians.

Many issues should arise from the perspective envisaged for this symposium. Is it possible to develop a general theory of inequality in antiquity? Is it possible to define wide-ranging strategies for the archaeological analysis of that inequality? To what degree are the inequalities and social boundaries culture specific and how does their emergence relate to growing complexity? To what degree can archaeologists identify and analyze different patterns of inequality

Inequalities. Sociological theory recognizes a valuable distinction between *ascribed status* and *achieved status* of people.

The first is constituted by attributes over which we have no control, i.e. age, gender and ethnicity. We are dealing with the social differences of age classes (from infant to elderly); the division between male, female and potential hybrid sexuality roles; and finally, ethnic components and cultural mixing, ultimately leading to the formation of new identities (a phenomenon sometimes labeled as 'creolization').

The second is the position attained in life through education and personal advancement, whether achieved in egalitarian context or through heredity. Economical divisions between the rich and the poor, with all the nuances between, become a fundamental aspect; but also the social roles of ruling and ruled people (considering also the other classes of officers, merchants, craftsmen, etc.) and the political division between citizens and non-citizens, that is to say different degrees of freedom and slavery.

Different cultures in time and space. The general and methodological approach of the Symposium will be implemented using the widest available evidence. Perspectives of social inequality frequently insisted on a rigid dichotomy between egalitarian and hierarchical, but a combined approach could reveal very useful. The participants should address different time periods of antiquity, while the geographical framework will focus mainly on the Mediterranean area.

Archaeological Sources. The Symposium will discuss social organization mainly focusing on the archaeological record. Preference will be given to material culture studies, ritual and burial practices, analysis and forensic research on anthropological remains. There are features of material cultures that clearly denote the political and social conditions of people, e.g. the shackles of forced workers found in the Athenian silver quarries and in the rest of Europe. There are humble potsherds of plain cooking ware and architectural remains that can be associated to foreign people living in a specific working area, whether free workers, prisoners or slaves. In such cases, strategies of spatial segregation can sometimes be defined, whether self-generated or forced. Burial practices seem quite revealing in defining hierarchy and social boundaries, as well as the potential existence of foreigners inside the ancient communities. Sometimes, human sacrifices in graves contexts might indicate the final purpose of prisoners and slaves or the fate of relatives of the dead people. Another archaeological source providing important answers is epigraphy, whether related to engraved pottery, clay tablets or marble stones; in this case very clear indications will come from the onomastic analysis of large amounts of data, that can enlighten about the status, kinship, foreign origin or freedman nature of the people.

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