

Session #450

THE 3RD MILLENNIUM BCE: FROM CULTURAL PHENOMENA TO NETWORKS?

Theme: networks_networking_communication_archaeology_of_interactions

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The 'Beaker people' have been part of our scientific discourse since the late 19th century. Subsequent generations have given different labels to the material patterns observed: culture, people, phenomenon.. This latter concept is nowadays also used for other labels: 'Baden', 'Corded Ware' or 'Funnel Beaker' (Furholt 2008, 2014), without necessarily changing anything in the methodology of prehistoric research. A similar development is now occurring with the maturing of aDNA studies (Olalde et al 2018; Eisenmann et al 2018). Do these different concepts represent prehistoric reality, or is a different methodology needed to understand "Similar but different" (Czebreszuk 2004) in cultural expressions across time and space?

One such methodology would be Social Network Analysis. Social Network Analysis originated in social sciences, coupled with mathematical concepts (graph theory, sociometry) and powered by computer tools since the 1970s (Granovetter 1973). From a theoretical point of view, it mobilizes relational information and studies interactions between different actors, in order to explain social facts (Collar et al 2015). From a practical point of view, it provides computer tools producing visualizations, mathematical indices (expressing the position of certain individuals (nodes) within a network), and understanding the spread of particular traits (e.g. Rogers 1979).

It was already Clarke (1976) who coined the term 'Beaker network'. Recent work using this method for specifically the 3rd millennium BCE has increased dramatically (e.g. Furholt 2016; Kleijne 2019; Caraglio, Rios and Liesau, in press; Bourgeois/Kroon 2017). As this methodology is in development, many different perspectives exist on what can and should be done to answer to the problem of 'Similar but Different': How can we interpret the comparisons between "similarities networks"? Can they point out some "hubs" for the diffusion of material or immaterial representations? Are particular regions better or less integrated in networks?

This session invites papers that focus on various scales of analysis: From using networks to reconstruct human practices within specific contexts (such as 'Beaker' funerary deposits), and to understanding the large scale diffusion of Beaker ideas and the movement of people or material culture that characterise the 3rd millennium BC.