

JOUKOWSKY INSTITUTE FALL SYMPOSIUM



PERSONHOOD AND GENRES OF THE HUMAN

SENSORIAL BODIES, PERSONS, AND THINGS
IN ARCHAEOLOGY

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2024
9:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Rhode Island Hall | Room 108
60 George Street | Providence, RI

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Free and Open to the Public | No Registration Required

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FOR ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE ANCIENT WORLD

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HUMANITIES





Personhood and Genres of the Human:

Sensorial bodies, persons and things in archaeology

What is the human that archaeologists envisage when they write about the pre-modern past? How does their own conception and materialization of the human, as a person and a sensorial and embodied being, shape their narratives on embodied personhood in the past? How can we imagine different conceptions of personhood, plant, animal, thing, other, beyond the human? How does the affective and sensorial, mutual constitution of humans and landscapes produce notions of personhood? How does the performative constitution of the body, through dress, tattooing and bodily modification, gestures and postures, produce certain notions of personhood? How can a critical exploration of the personhood of the archaeologists themselves inform our understanding of past and present archaeological narratives?

Inspired by philosophical critiques of humanism and various ethnographies, archaeologists have deconstructed the notion of the universal human; they have also explored various conceptions of personhood, be it fractal, distributed, or other. And yet, this discussion remains mostly anthropocentric, undervalues the role of affectivity and sensoriality, and it is philosophically rooted in the European tradition. In addition, reflective thinking on the constitution of the personhood of the archaeologist is rarely part of the discussion. This conference will address some of these shortcomings by revisiting notions of the human and of the person, introducing into the debate neglected frameworks and bodies of thinking, and exploring some of the fascinating archaeological material from the prehistoric Mediterranean and beyond.

Program

November 16th, Saturday

Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World,

60 George str., Providence

Rhode Island Hall 008

8:30 Morning Coffee

9:00 am – 9:15 am: Welcoming

Morning session

Chair: Mina Nikolovieni (JIAAW, Brown University)

9:15 am- 9:45 am: **Yannis Hamilakis** (Brown University)

“From Persons to Trans-Corporeal, Sensorial Assemblages”

9:45 am- 10:15 am: **Dimitri Nakassis** (University of Colorado Boulder)

“Writing and personhood in the Late Bronze Age Aegean”

10:15 am- 10:45 am: **Guillermo Díaz de Liaño** (Museum Of London Archaeology)

“From Personhood to Affect: being(s) and feeling(s) in the “Argaric” Bronze Age”

10:45 -11:00: Discussion

11:00 – 11:15: *Coffee Break*

Midday session

Chair: *Yilmaz Yeniler (JIAAW, Brown University)*

11:15 am- 11:45 am: **Ana González San Martín** (JIAAW, Brown University)

“Branching Minds: Arboreal Corporealities and Fragmented Personhood in Ancient Cyprus”

11:45 am- 12:15pm: **Darryl A. Wilkinson** (Dartmouth College)

“The Rise of the Autochtholiths: Immobility and the Nonhuman Body in the Andes”

12:15pm-12:30 pm: Discussion

12:30 pm- 13:30 pm: *Lunch break*

Afternoon Session

Chair: Ana González San Martín (JIAAW, Brown University)

13:30 pm-14:00 pm: **Benjamin Alberti** (Framingham State University)

“Peccaries, Pots, and Lichen: Are we all more-than-human persons now?”

14:00 pm- 14:30 pm: **Karina Croucher** (University of Bradford)

“The Living, the Dead, and Entwined Identities: Exploring contemporary personhood and potential insights into prehistoric relationships”

14:30 pm-15:00 pm: **Yilmaz Yeniler** (JIAAW, Brown University)

“Archaeology and Nationalist Anxieties: Afet Inan’s personhood as a revolutionary scholar in Turkey”

15:00 pm- 15:15 pm: Discussion

15:15 pm- 15:30 pm: *Coffee break*

15:30 pm- 17:00 pm: Final panel

Chair: *Yannis Hamilakis* (Brown University)

Discussants: **Robert Preucel** (Anthropology, Brown University), **Jada Ko** (Institute at Brown University for Environment and Society), **Ciçek Beeby** (Classics, Brown University)

17:30 pm: Open Dinner at Flatbread Pizza (161 Cushing str., Providence, 02906)

Book of Abstracts

Yannis Hamilakis (JIAAW, Brown University)

Introductory Presentation

In this introductory presentation, I will be reviewing the recent archaeological discussions on personhood, as part of the broader shift towards relationality. I will claim that, along with their heuristic potential and fertile contribution, many of them have also reproduced certain essentialisms, focusing on selfhood and being, and not always avoiding western anthropocentrism. I would argue instead that a shift to sensorial assemblage thinking and to notions of trans-corporeality, to the flesh of the world (understood both in Merleau-Ponty's sense and in the crucial corrective provided by Black Feminist thinkers, most notably in this case, Hortense Spillers), provide an alternative way forward. Indeed, while most of the discussion on personhood in archaeology to date has found inspiration primarily in Melanesian or Amerindian ethnographies, I would claim that Black Feminist and Decolonial thinkers have much to teach us, in their problematization of humanness and personhood, and in their dissection of the racialized modes that have shaped our thinking, including the archaeological one.

Dimitri Nakassis (University of Colorado Boulder)

Writing and Personhood in the Late Bronze Age Aegean

This paper examines the study of personhood in the 'Mycenaean' world (the advanced Late Bronze Age in the southern Aegean). This world is commonly understood in terms of individuality, largely due to the assimilation of the 'Mycenaeans' with Homeric heroes and the first Greeks. Yet much of the evidence commonly associated with individuals is, in fact, far from straightforward. For example, although the names of persons in the Linear B texts might be thought, at first glance, to provide clear proof that the authors of these documents considered the autonomous individual to be a perfectly natural category, a variety of evidence suggests that these represent an administrative shorthand for what must have been socioeconomic units of various sizes and levels of complexity. Despite these problems, this paper argues that the written evidence of administrative texts can contribute to the study of personhood in the Bronze Age Aegean. Although there are significant problems, both methodological and theoretical, in translating the world of the administrative texts into textured discussions about personhood in the Aegean, it has the virtue of being evidence that is both contemporary and free from certain distortions. Despite not being a one-stop shop, the administrative texts may provide a narrow window into one aspect of personhood, and represent a significant contribution to its broader study, untethered from older models of Homeric society and generalized models of Mediterranean elite dynamics.

Guillermo Díaz de Liaño (Museum of London Archaeology)

From Personhood to Affect: being(s) and feeling(s) in the “Argaric” Bronze Age

In this talk I will first present the key features of personhood in the Southeast Iberian Peninsula, in the so-called ‘Argaric’ society during the Bronze Age (2200-1550BC), in order to then explore the relationship between personhood and emotions in Late Prehistory.

In my analysis of personhood, based on the study of funerary practices in a context of increasing social and economic inequality, relationality can be characterised as the central element structuring identity. Nevertheless, numerous other traits, such as individuality, partibility and permeability also shaped the way in which humans were conceptualised, perceived and engaged with. Moreover, I will argue that it is possible to suggest that personhood was not limited to human beings, as it also included a plethora of other non-human entities.

Finally, I will present some of my ongoing research on prehistoric emotions, where I will argue that the ways in which societies conceptualise, feel and display emotions are structurally connected to their available ways of being a person. From this perspective, I will explore the way in which notions such as ‘emotional communities’ (Rosenwein 2007) and ‘emotional regimes’ (Reddy 2001) relate to personhood.

Ana González San Martín (JIAAW, Brown University)

Branching Minds: Arboreal Corporealities and Fragmented Personhood in Ancient Cyprus

Archaeological research in the prehistoric Mediterranean has increasingly highlighted the significance of nonhuman entities, such as trees and landscapes, in shaping socio-political and religious life. In this paper, I will explore how these elements, far from being mere exploitable resources, were likely perceived as sentient, agentic entities with the political capacity to sanction behaviour and shape meaning within prehistoric communities. Tracing the origins of these practices from the Bronze Age through the Iron and Archaic periods in Cyprus, I bring together a diverse range of proxies—including terracotta figurines, sacred groves (*vakoufika*), ritual sites, and landscape features—to interrogate the expanded notions of personhood that could have been attributed to these nonhuman actors.

I will argue that these trees and landscapes embodied a fragmented yet powerful form of personhood that extended beyond the human/non-human binary, functioning as guardians of natural, communal resources, as well as mediators of social and political boundaries. This dynamic interaction between human and nonhuman actors is framed within assemblage theory, emphasizing how these landscapes operated as active, affective assemblages that shaped social cosmologies and constructions. By synthesizing archaeological evidence with historical, anthropological and theoretical frameworks, I aim to highlight a deeply rooted tradition, well-documented in pre-modern history, of environmental personhood and agency that was central to the regulation of access, ownership and use of land, and the broader socio-political fabric of ancient Cypriot communities.

Darryl A. Wilkinson (Dartmouth College)

The Rise of the Autochtholiths: Immobility and the Nonhuman Body in the Andes

Ethnographers and archaeologists working in the context of the Indigenous Andes have increasingly emphasized not only the importance of nonhuman persons, but also the ways in which both human and nonhuman persons continuously co-create each other through their interactions and relations. Moreover, nonhuman persons are often part of landscape, with bodies that are composed of either lithic or hydrous substances. However, one relatively unexplored aspect of this phenomenon is how it has changed over long periods of time, something which the discipline of archaeology is uniquely positioned to address. In this paper, I therefore discuss some of the ways in which nonhuman (especially lithic) bodies have changed over the past three millennia in the Andes. Specifically, I will focus on the appearance of immobile lithic bodies in the form of bedrock outcrops under the Inka Empire (c. 1350-1532 CE), which contrasts with the more itinerant lithic bodies that dominated in earlier periods. From this evidence, I will develop an argument that in the Inka realm, a radical metaphysical break occurred, wherein the relative immobility of bodies (both human and nonhuman) became a fundamental element of personhood for the first time in Andean history.

Benjamin Alberti (Framingham State University)

Peccaries, pots, and lichen: Are we all more-than-human persons now?

The groundbreaking work of Chris Fowler introduced the complexity of anthropological thinking about personhood to archaeology and broke post-processualism's focus on the individual. It has now become commonplace in archaeology to speak of the personhood not just of human people but of animals, plants, or things. "The human" remained assumed, however, until more recently. Whereas the critique of personhood drew largely from anthropology, the critique of the human in archaeology has drawn principally from philosophy and the sciences. The human as a category has been simultaneously expanded and taken apart. Are we all humans (in the conventional sense of the word), or is the human something else entirely?

Different traditions of thought – new materialism, posthumanism, and various Indigenous theories – impact significantly how we answer these questions. The "human," in a Western philosophical sense, remains the anchor for much thinking in archaeology "beyond the human." To claim, "peccaries are humans" is quite distinct from declaring "we are all lichens now." Similarly, the idea that "pots are persons" looks quite different depending on how thoroughly you interrogate the underlying ontological basis for the claim. Which theory and concept of personhood and human you employ depends on what you want the concept to do. A key question is, what types of methods of analysis alongside which concepts will provoke our materials to play as active a role as possible in their own theorizing? I illustrate my theoretical discussion with reference to lowland South American ceramics.

Karina Croucher (University of Bradford)

The Living, the Dead and Entwined Identities: Exploring contemporary personhood and potential insights into prehistoric relationships

This paper explores contemporary reflections brought about through on projects with communities today, exploring life, death, gender, and how the past can play a role in building wellbeing and resilience. In addition to reflections on identity and relationships promoted by this work, new understandings of prehistoric contexts are explored, through case studies from the prehistory of southwest Asia and beyond.

Yilmaz Yeniler (JIAAW, Brown University)

Archaeology and nationalist anxieties: Afet Inan's personhood as a revolutionary scholar in Turkey

The institutionalization of archaeology has had different trajectories in different parts of the world and this process has led to the emergence of professional archaeologists as persons. My paper aims to follow this trajectory in the case of Turkey. During the formation of a new Turkish nation after several wars and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the elites around the national leader, Ataturk, became interested in the "glorious" days of history and "origins" narratives starting in Central Asia. Therefore, archaeology was called to reveal the roots of Turkishness that was mixed with other civilizations and existed in Anatolia for thousands of years.

Considering this socio-political context, my paper takes a reflexive perspective on persons who produced archaeological discourses regarding the intersection between race and gender. Afet Inan, as one of the first female intellectuals in Turkey, will be the central example for analyzing this intersectionality. Inan received her doctoral degree in anthropology under the supervision of Eugène Pittard with a dissertation concerning a study of thousands of skeletons from Anatolia. Inan, as an adoptive daughter of Ataturk, also became a public figure representing modern Turkish women and advocating for women's civil and political rights. I will demonstrate how "women" and "whiteness" were two crucial concepts in her publications that contributed to the official history of the new country. I will argue that the material traces of the past also shaped the ways Afet Inan constructed her own personhood as a revolutionary scholar.

List of Participants

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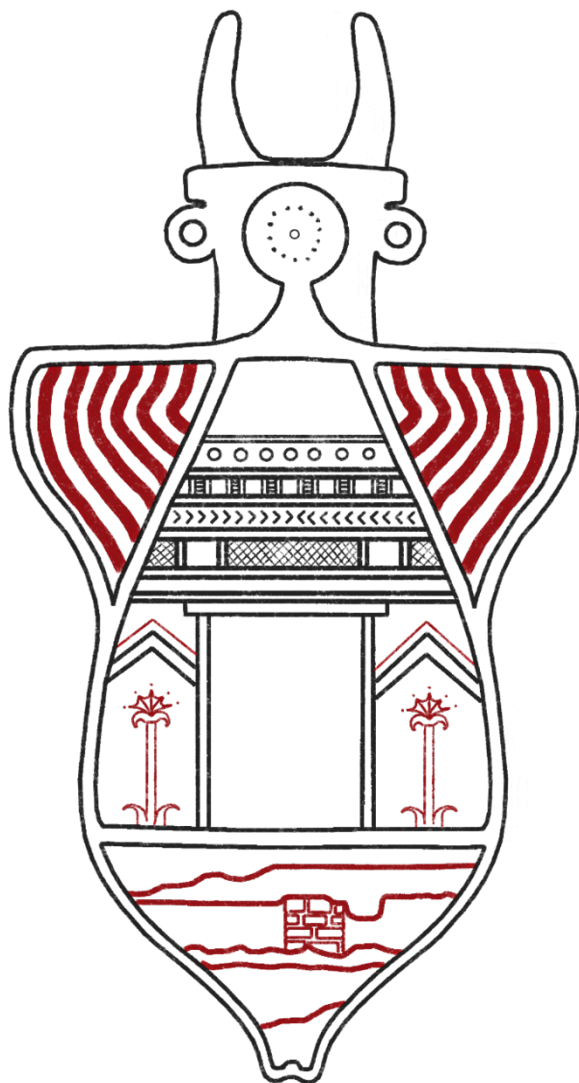
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