

## **Travels, transmissions and transformations**

### **Travelling technologies and ideas**

Researcher: Niels Johansen

Originating in the 3rd millennium BCE, the chariot was clearly developed on the basis of earlier vehicles, but in terms of its light frame and the use of horses for tractive power this technology represented radical novelty in the sphere of human transport. While the swift chariot came to play a central military role for almost two millennia, it also appears that its use had considerable, broader ideological impact in many cultural contexts – not least on the cosmologies of the societies in question.

The project will examine the cultural origin of this technology and specify and compare its ideological impact across a large part of Europe. Recent studies within cognitive archaeology and anthropology, as well as other branches of the cognitive sciences, have shown that the formation of particular ways of thinking about the world is often related to the experience of specific forms of material interactions, notably technological ones. These advances will be employed in the analyses of selected cases from Scandinavia Central Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean. Symbolic aspects of the material culture of the period will constitute the core empirical resource in the analyses of all these areas.

The central analytical target of the project comprises a) a comparison of the manner in which spoke wheeled transport had (or did not have) an ideological impact in these regions and b) a clarification of how and why the impact of this technology was similar or differed across these regions. Secondary objectives will be to examine the degree to which the movement of the technology under study was related to more general transcultural flows, and to discuss the mechanisms responsible for the cross-cultural transfer and transformation of technology and associated ideas.

### **The dialectic between interaction and identity formation/ethnicity.**

Researcher: Kristian Kristiansen

We have in recent years seen a renewed interest in concepts of identity and ethnicity . While ethnicity undoubtedly played a central role in all human societies as part of a common origin and shared historical identity (tradition), its material expressions have been an underdeveloped field of study. I propose that it is possible to delimit various forms of social and ultimately ethnic identity, through a careful analysis of the geographical distribution of social institutions and the symbolic meaning of their material culture.

The project proposes to analyze three basic forms of relationship in material culture:

1) An entangled relationship exists between language, ethnic identity and material culture as forms of communication. The relationship is complex, and needs to be spelled out in concrete cases.

Working hypothesis: when a package of material culture defines a shared symbolic identity that is linked to basic social and religious institutions (cosmology and general forms of ethnic identity) it

presupposes frequent social interaction and a shared language for its continued reproduction. Several forms of ethnicity/identity may co-exist, such as local dialects and 'national' languages.

2) The reproduction of a social and cultural tradition in material culture may create sharply defined borders against other social and cultural traditions, as demonstrated by Ian Hodder in ethnographic case studies. Working hypothesis: when such cultural boundaries can be documented over longer periods of time, and if they reappear after shorter breaks in cultural and social continuity, it represents most probably a fundamental cultural boundary, eventually in combination with a language boundary.

3) Finally, the formation, consolidation and dissolution of cultural and ethnic identities in material culture will be studied in order to gain insight into the historical long-term processes of these concepts. It includes a better understanding of the relationship between processes of hybridization and of homogenization in the formation of cultural identities. Working hypothesis: hybridization characterizes the dissolution or invention of cultural identities, while homogenization characterizes their consolidation.

These assumptions will be applied as heuristic tools in a reinterpretation of cultural traditions in south Scandinavia from 3000 BC to 1000 BC. They are to be regarded as preliminary and rather general approximations/hypotheses that should be modified and specified by the research carried out in the project, as well as future research.