

**ANALYSIS OF
THE ECONOMIC
FOUNDATIONS
SUPPORTING THE
SOCIAL SUPREMACY OF
THE BEAKER GROUPS**

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE XVII UISPP WORLD
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Foreword to the XVII UISPP Congress Proceedings Series Edition

Luiz OOSTERBEEK
Secretary-General

UISPP has a long history, starting with the old International Association of Anthropology and Archaeology, back in 1865, until the foundation of UISPP itself in Bern, in 1931, and its growing relevance after WWII, from the 1950's. We also became members of the International Council of Philosophy and Human Sciences, associate of UNESCO, in 1955.

In its XIVth world congress in 2001, in Liège, UISPP started a reorganization process that was deepened in the congresses of Lisbon (2006) and Florianópolis (2011), leading to its current structure, solidly anchored in more than twenty-five international scientific commissions, each coordinating a major cluster of research within six major chapters: Historiography, methods and theories; Culture, economy and environments; Archaeology of specific environments; Art and culture; Technology and economy; Archaeology and societies.

The XVIIth world congress of 2014, in Burgos, with the strong support of Fundación Atapuerca and other institutions, involved over 1700 papers from almost 60 countries of all continents. The proceedings, edited in this series but also as special issues of specialized scientific journals, will remain as the most important outcome of the congress.

Research faces growing threats all over the planet, due to lack of funding, repressive behavior and other constraints. UISPP moves ahead in this context with a strictly scientific programme, focused on the origins and evolution of humans, without conceding any room to short term agendas that are not root in the interest of knowledge.

In the long run, which is the terrain of knowledge and science, not much will remain from the contextual political constraints, as severe or dramatic as they may be, but the new advances into understanding the human past and its cultural diversity will last, this being a relevant contribution for contemporary and future societies.

This is what UISPP is for, and this is also why we are currently engaged in contributing for the relaunching of Human Sciences in their relations with social and natural sciences, namely collaborating with the International Year of Global Understanding, in 2016, and with the World Conference of the Humanities, in 2017.

The next two congresses of UISPP, in Melbourn (2017) and in Geneva (2020), will confirm this route.

Introduction

Elisa GUERRA DOCE and
Corina LIESAU VON LETTOW-VORBECK

The Bell Beaker phenomenon is one of the most fascinating horizons in European Later Prehistory, due to its vast geographical distribution, the intrinsic value of some of the artefacts comprising the Beaker package, or its supposed links to certain kinds of ritual ceremonies as shown by the frequent deposition of Beaker items in burial contexts.

At present, the idea that the Beaker package is best interpreted as a symbol of power common to socially-prominent individuals by the mid-to-late third millennium BC is widely acknowledged by scholars in this field. From this point of view, the Beaker phenomenon is seen as the archaeological evidence representing an ideology which was shared by a number of prehistoric societies geographically scattered throughout much of Western and Central Europe, or, more specifically, was only shared by elite individuals within these territories.

The strategies employed by these individuals to attain such privileged statuses, however, are poorly known. Therefore, in the framework of the XVII World UISPP Congress, held in September 2014 in Burgos (Spain), a session entitled '*Analysis of the economic foundations supporting the social supremacy of the Beaker groups*' (B36) was organised by this volume's two editors. The session focused mostly on examining this issue at a European level, and less on the study of the Beaker package itself, as a way of looking at the economic foundations that helped these individuals attain their higher social statuses.

The proximity of Beaker sites to natural routes of communication highlights the importance of exchange networks through which people, objects and ideas may have circulated through Europe during this time. The Amesbury Archer in southern England is one of the best examples of interaction within Beaker territories. Having said this, considering that Beaker pots themselves were not exchanged over long distances attention, however, must be paid to other mechanisms of diffusion.

The present volume comprises the papers presented at this session suggesting that Beaker groups may have controlled certain products and technologies. There seems to be a strong link between Beakers and metalworking, as the papers presented by Jaroslav Peška, Concepción Blasco, Ignacio Montero and Raúl Flores point out. Jaroslav Peška's work discusses the technological equipment needed for metalworking found deposited in several male graves in Moravia; archaeometric studies indicate that these items were used prior to being placed in the graves. These graves, together with other attributes, reveal the high social status of these males. As a result of recent excavations in Madrid, Blasco *et al.* present new data on the significance of copper objects in burial contexts. Like other grave goods, in Bell Beaker funeral rituals copper items follow a strict social code with regard to gender. This, therefore, confirms that the scheme followed here was identical to that of continental Europe. Otherwise, the finding of an Atlantic type of halberd in an undisturbed tomb in Madrid would indicate the existence of contacts with the British Isles, although the piece may have been produced at a regional workshop. In any case, it represents one of the most ostentatious signs of prestige so its presence is noteworthy.

Gold ornaments were symbols of high status during the Bell Beaker phenomenon. A number of types frequently found in Beaker tombs suggest that networks existed along the Atlantic façade, as Andrew Fitzpatrick, Germán Delibes, Javier Velasco and Elisa Guerra's contribution shows, which focuses on the examination of basket-shaped gold ornaments in the Bell Beaker record.

Prestige goods, however, were not limited to metal objects, and also included goods produced on non-local materials. Beakers in south Iberia were frequently associated with exotic and prestige items both in burial and non-burial contexts. According to Ana Pajuelo and Pedro López Aldana's contribution to the present volume, this would indicate an attempt by Beaker groups of legitimising their social standing by exhibiting symbols of power in moments of crisis.

The intentional selection of 'exotic' dentines such as elephant ivory and sperm whale teeth, including fossil ivory, to produce beads and buttons, seems to be a more exclusive practice than previously thought. Corina Liesau argues that these pieces might have been circulated along the Atlantic and Mediterranean, and Beaker groups might have controlled their circulation as well as that of cinnabar in Central Iberia. Similarly, Elisa Guerra's study indicates that there is strong evidence supporting the links between Beaker groups and salt production and distribution across Central and Western Europe. According to Patricia Ríos' contribution, even though the deposition of flint arrowheads within male graves was not as frequent in Iberia as elsewhere, Beaker groups might have controlled their production.

All this seems to suggest that elite exchange networks were developed within Europe by the third millennium BC. Consequently, control of these networks would have been crucial to Beaker groups. Recent research projects point towards the deliberate location of Beaker sites in the vicinity of natural routes of communication in Iberia (chapters by Gabriel García Atiénzar, and Anna Gómez, Patricia Ríos, Marc Piera and Miquel Molist). Therefore seems that these exchange networks were not only used to circulate goods, raw materials and mineral resources, but were also the travel routes of ideas and technologies. Beaker groups, thus, would have managed to control the production and circulation of prestige goods and certain technologies, so this may help them to attain their social status. In addition, understanding the diversity of their burial costumes and their grave goods reveals the existence of a type of behaviour that precedes several funerary traditions of some Bronze Age societies.

Finally, we would like to thank the organizers of the XVII World UISPP Congress for including our session in the programme, and also the authors for making this volume possible. We hope these contributions inspire their readers and provide them with food for thought on the Beaker phenomenon and ideas on how to best further this fascinating area of research.