

**In-person and Online**  
**22<sup>nd</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> Sep 2022**

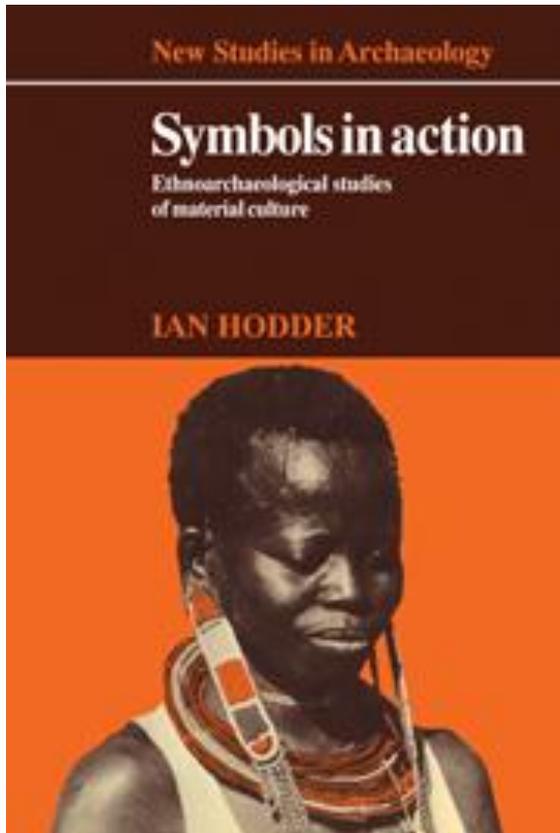
# **Symbols in action** **at 40**

**Baringo and beyond**

**McDonald Institute for Archaeological  
Research, University of Cambridge**



# Symbols in Action at 40: Baringo and Beyond



2022 marks 40 years since the publication of 'Symbols in Action' (SiA) by Ian Hodder. The book was highly influential in the emergence of post-processual archaeology and changing archaeological thought around the world. In particular, SiA helped reshape archaeology by highlighting the active nature of material culture and the contextual nature of the meanings of things. It also opened up consideration of material culture symbolism, the structured nature of discard and the material expressions of age and gender, drawing attention to the cultural, economic and political dynamics that influenced modern communities and the socio-cultural landscape.

To mark the four decades since the publication of SiA, you are invited to a two-day conference that will focus on the influence and contributions of the book to theory more broadly, and to the archaeology and material culture in Africa in particular. Researchers from archaeology, history, and anthropology will:

- discuss the work's continued presence in archaeological thought and that of other disciplines in Europe, Africa and N. and S. America,
- how Hodder's findings in and around Baringo can be contextualised in light of more recent research, as well as
- how we can further develop theoretical contributions to re-shape the global body of archaeological research, make the results relevant to living communities, promote participation, and constructively engage with contemporary cultural issues.

African perspectives on material culture and material agency played a fundamental role in global archaeological theory production in the 1980s and 1990s. By the late 1990s, the role of ethnoarchaeological studies and the construction of ethnographic analogies had declined, and debates on material culture in archaeology had moved on, with a shift away from concern with what things mean to what they do and how human and things are entangled and assembled. At the same time, while material culture studies have advanced enormously since the early 1980s, many of the key themes raised in SiA, and the important critiques it inspired, seem to remain pertinent to archaeological theory and practice today more than ever.

## Programme

### Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> September

Informal dinner at 19.30 at the Bath House, 3 Benet Street, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire, CB2 3QN.

### Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> September

Time	Speaker	Title
9.15 – 10.00	<b>Registration</b>	
<i>Archaeological perspectives on the legacies and impact of Symbols in Action</i>		
10.00 – 10.25	Nik Petek-Sargeant, Matt Davies & Paul Lane	Welcome & Introduction
<i>Symbols of Power, Identity &amp; Personhood in the British and European Neolithic</i>		
10.25 – 10.45	Julian Thomas	<i>Symbols in Action</i> and British Prehistory
10.45 – 11.05	Niall Sharples	The Orcadian Neolithic: A case study in contextual archaeology
11.05 – 11.25	<b>COFFEE</b>	
11.25 – 11.45	Annelou van Gijn	Of old and new and mine and ours: beads and pendants from Dutch Neolithic burial contexts
11.45 – 12.15	<b>Chair:</b> Christopher Evans	<i>Discussion</i>
12.15 – 13.30	<b>LUNCH</b>	
<i>Discard, Structured Deposition and Symbolic Practice in the US Southwest &amp; Mesoamerica</i>		
13.30 – 13.50	Kelly Goldberg	Symbolizing identity: Material culture, transnationalism, and mobility of agents of the Transatlantic African Diaspora
13.50 – 14.10	Scott Hutson	The meanings of discard in Mesoamerica
14.10 – 14.30	Samantha Fladd & E. Charles Adams	Ash and “trash” in action: A US Southwest perspective
14.30 – 15.00	<b>Chair:</b> Katherine Grillo	<i>Discussion</i>
15.00 – 15.20	<b>TEA</b>	
<i>Revisiting Ethnoarchaeology and African Material Culture Studies</i>		
15.20 – 15.40	Olivier Gosselain & Alexandre Livingstone-Smith	While we were sleeping. What archaeologists did with African material culture and what it did to them
15.40 – 16.00	Worku Derara, Alfredo González-Ruibal & Bula Wayessa	Symbols and things in action in western Ethiopia. Ethnoarchaeological approaches.
16.00 – 16.20	<b>Chair:</b> Freda Nkirote	<i>Discussion</i>
16.20 -16.30	<b>PAUSE</b>	
16.30 – 17.30	Mike Parker Pearson & Ian Hodder	Reflections, commentary and open discussion

**Conference dinner and reception: 18.45 – 21.30 Magdalene College**

**Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> September**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Title</b>
<i>Historicising Material Practices around Lake Baringo, Kenya</i>		
9.30 – 9.50	Nik Petek-Sargeant	Conformity through material culture and time: A diachronic perspective on Ilchamus (Njemps) identities
9.50 – 10.10	Katherine Grillo	Pots in action: Extra thoughts on symbols and subsistence in Samburu
10.10 – 10.30	Matthew Davies	Symbols in time and space: Marakwet material culture and landscape
10.30 – 11.00	<b>Chair:</b> Alexandre Livingstone-Smith	<i>Discussion</i>
11.00 – 11.20	<b>COFFEE</b>	
<i>Material Histories, Absence and Becoming: Revisiting Analogy</i>		
11.20 – 11.40	David Kay	Analogies of Absence, or “I dug a hole, there wasn’t much in it, what now...?”
11.40 – 12.10	Emmanuel Ndiema	Monumental architecture in Turkana Basin: Places of worship or habitation?
12.10 – 12.30	Sam Derbyshire	Turkana, in the making
12.30 – 13.00	<b>Chair:</b> Kelly Goldberg	<i>Discussion</i>
13.00 – 14.00	<b>LUNCH</b>	
<i>Beyond Static Presents: Analogies and Deep History</i>		
14.00 – 14.20	Fleur Martin	Scarcity and accumulation: Teleki’s caravan at Lake Baringo
14.20 – 14.40	David Anderson	The rise and fall of ‘Njemps’: A history of cultural transition in Kenya’s Rift Valley, c. 1830 to 1920
14.40 – 15.00	Paul Lane	Deep history, archaeology, and the percolation of time in African material assemblages
15.00 – 15.30	<b>Chair:</b> Matt Davies	<i>Discussion</i>
15.30 – 16.00	<b>TEA</b>	
16.00 – 17.00	Ian Hodder in conversation with Henrietta Moore	Reflections & responses
17.00 – 17.20	Nik Petek-Sargeant & Matthew Davies	Publication plans & close
17.20 – 17.30	<i>Vote of Thanks</i>	
17.30	<b>CLOSE</b>	

## Presentation abstracts

### ***Symbols of power, identity & personhood in the British and European Neolithic***

#### ***Symbols in Action and British Prehistory***

*Julian Thomas, University of Manchester*

*Symbols in Action* was subtitled 'ethnoarchaeological studies of material culture', and it was strongly implied that the contextual approach that the book pioneered was one that could be applied in other regions and periods of archaeology. Significantly, the case study that Ian Hodder chose to demonstrate the applicability of the insights generated in the East African fieldwork was set in Neolithic Orkney. The maxims that material culture is meaningfully constituted, is active and not passive, and that it must be addressed contextually have proved exceptionally influential in British prehistory, and particularly in the study of the Neolithic. In this contribution I will seek to account for this, while considering the enduring importance of the meaning, context, and 'activeness' of material things.

#### **The Orcadian Neolithic: A case study in contextual archaeology**

*Niall Sharples, University of Cardiff*

In this paper I will explore the archaeological case study that completed the analysis of *Symbols in Action*, the Orcadian Neolithic. It will consider what Hodder was trying to achieve with this archaeological taster and how it presaged his later career in Neolithic studies. It will also look at the influence the approach taken had on the study of Neolithic in Orkney and how this region has gone on to become essential to understanding the Late Neolithic occupation of Britain.

#### **Of old and new and mine and ours: beads and pendants from Dutch Neolithic burial contexts**

*Annelou van Gijn, Leiden University*

Beads and pendants are often considered personal ornaments par excellence, closely related to the identity and memories of the individuals wearing them. We frequently find them in Neolithic burial contexts in the present-day Netherlands. However, because of their past (usually public) visibility, they are obviously also items with a significance surpassing that of the individual. They refer to community values and identity and, from that perspective, also relate to other items that appear in burials such as axes. Microwear research of beads and pendants has corroborated this and has shown that their biographies can be quite variable, both within graves but also when examined over time. This paper addresses the stories these ornaments can tell us about Neolithic burial rituals.

***Discard, structured deposition and symbolic practice in the US Southwest & Mesoamerica***

**Symbolizing identity: Material culture, transnationalism, and mobility of agents of the Transatlantic African Diaspora**

*Kelly Goldberg, University of South Carolina*

Obtaining, maintaining, and negotiating positions of power in the nineteenth century transatlantic slave trade required mastering the ability to control and manipulate perceptions of individual and group identity. In *Symbols in Action*, Ian Hodder discusses the use of material culture as a tool in establishing a group's cultural identity as a form of resistance against external pressures during times of tension and competition. But what happens when this situation is scaled beyond the local level, when cultural identities span across the Atlantic and tension is applied from a global system? This paper employs ethnographic and archaeological analyses of sites in coastal Guinea and the south-eastern United States to discuss how material culture (most notably ceramics and items of adornment) are tied to conceptions of gender, power, and resilience across various loci of the transatlantic African Diaspora.

**The meanings of discard in Mesoamerica**

*Scott Hutson, University of Kentucky*

Ian Hodder's ethnoarchaeological work in Africa succeeded in showing that we cannot assume that rubbish is merely an impediment whose discard is governed by principals of efficiency and expedience. Rather, trash embodies multiple and sometimes conflicting cultural values and its meaning often depends on strategic actions in the context of ethnic and gender relations. In ancient Mesoamerica, studies of discard practices have developed on parallel lines. Cosmological structures help explain where things were discarded and show us that practical logics of efficiency and utility were subsumed within broader structures of meaning based on the nature of human relations with powerful other-than-human agents. Refuse was potent and could be recycled as a performative act to both negate earlier political structures and create new ones. Some of the force behind refuse therefore derived from its chronologically malleability, evoking the past but also playing a role in strategies of renewal. Refuse could also be dangerous, a form of pollution not necessarily in the sense of matter out of place, but matter out of time, as revealed by the necessity of destroying household goods from previous epochs.

**Ash and "trash" in action: A US Southwest perspective**

*Samantha Fladd, University of Colorado, & E. Charles Adams*

Since the mid-2000s, studies of deposits and specifically depositional practice have become increasingly common in the Americas. Moving beyond the initial confines of processual and behavioural archaeological inquiry, research on these topics often delves into questions of the symbolic practices that formed the cultural world occupied by past peoples. In the Southwest, this shift is occurring in tandem with ethical shifts in the discipline, including greater inclusion of Indigenous communities in the interpretation of their own histories. Using

work at the Homol'ovi Settlement Cluster in northeastern Arizona as a case study, we discuss two aspects of this shifting approach to the deposition of ash and "trash." First, we trace the contributions of the core schools of thought (processual, behavioural, post-processual) to understandings of deposition in the Americas and address how various theoretical frameworks have ultimately led to similar interpretations of deposition. Second, we consider the nuanced and at times fraught relationship between the application of universalist theoretical approaches and particularistic insights from descendent Indigenous communities. Using this framework of etic and emic perspectives, we assess the impact of Hodder's *Symbols in Action* on depositional studies in the Americas today.

### ***Revisiting ethnoarchaeology and African material culture studies***

#### **While we were sleeping. What archaeologists did with African material culture and what it did to them**

*Olivier Gosselain*, Université Libre de Bruxelles & *Alexandre Livingstone-Smith*, Royal Museum for Central Africa

In the late 1980s, SiA was part of our emerging toolkit, albeit more as a repellent than a theoretical referent. Without having to read it, we were expected to criticize it if working in the field of cultural technology - especially on the Francophone side - or interested in the emerging field of material culture studies. In SiA, there were too many inanimate objects, no techniques, many symbols, and ultimately little action. Add to this some theoretical confusion - as we were told by researchers more knowledgeable than us - and the die was cast: Hodder was one of the bad guys.

In the mid-1990s, we no longer quoted or paid attention to this work. We had other concerns and other scientific battles to fight, especially against jargon-packed neo-evolutionary theories, a new incarnation of techno-functionalism. Time has passed and it now seems if we had fallen asleep, without ever having engaged with Ian Hodder's work personally or in any depth. Perhaps because doing so would lead us to question some problematic aspects of our own work.

Reading SiA almost 40 years later is a disconcerting experience. Of course, there are several methodological flaws that reviewers pointed out at the time. The lack of information on the conditions and strategies of field enquiries is one of them. But there are also highly positive and inspirational elements. For example, the fact that Ian Hodder adopted a realistic conception of identity as not merely reduced to ethnicity but also including age groups, social class and gender relations. Or the fact that he emphasized phenomena that resonate completely with current concerns, notably distinct forms of social interaction and their effect on behavioural and material repertoires. The cartographic approach and the search for spatial correspondences between different categories of facts (material and immaterial) is also very close to what we strive to do in comparative technology.

And then there are all the aspects of SiA that we took for granted and unproblematic at the time, and which seem more than questionable today: a kind of ethnoarchaeology that illustrates what Bruce Trigger defined as "imperialist archaeology", without any form of benefit for the communities visited, a strictly etic perspective, in which the voice of the people studied

is completely absent, a lack of consideration for individual relationships to material culture, an implicitly static perception of history, etc.

These problematic aspects appeal to us all the more because we can find them in our own work. Indeed, we started investigating African material cultures within a broadly similar conceptual and theoretical framework. It is only by pursuing our work on the continent, through encounters, diverse experiences, unexpected opportunities, discussions, and readings that we have progressively developed other approaches and conceptions. In this paper, we would like to share some of them, without any desire to give lessons. They constitute a long overdue tribute to what people such as Ian Hodder initiated when they started to take African material cultures seriously, moving debate beyond racist and folkloristic clichés.

### **Symbols and things in action in western Ethiopia. Ethnoarchaeological approaches**

*Worku Derara Megenassa, Addis Ababa University, Bula Sirika Wayessa & Alfredo González-Ruibal*

Ethnoarchaeological research conducted in western Ethiopia during the last couple of decades has allowed us to test and expand some of the concepts developed by Ian Hodder regarding the relationship between things, symbols and identity. In this paper, we will discuss three cases in which things act as potent symbols that unveil key aspects of culture and social relations. In our first case study, we will look at materials used in the processing and consumption of coffee among the Kafecho in southwest Ethiopia and how they convey ideology and identity, symbolize parts of the human body, and establish differences in social class. The variation in types and quality of coffee-related pots amid three subaltern clans in Kafa (Manjo, Manno and Maniyo) underscore extant inequalities and materialize ways in which each group defines itself in relation others. In our second case study, we examine pottery technology as a social practice among the Oromo of West Wollega. Pottery objects are perceived and treated as persons and the stages of pottery production are also associated with the stages humans pass through in their lifetime. The transformation of wet vessels to the leather-hard stage are likened to a new-born baby that has to be protected from strangers to avoid harm. Pottery technology is also associated with other areas of production: the tools and vocabularies used in farming and food processing are transferred and used in pottery-making. Therefore, the technology is a result of the dynamic interaction among material objects, and between materials and people. Our third case study examines the granaries of the Hamaj people in northwest Ethiopia. Decorated granaries are much more than containers of cereal, they serve to identify the Hamaj vis a vis other neighbouring groups in a multiethnic region; they are repositories of the deep cultural memory, and they play out gender relations and notions of fertility.

## ***Historicising material practices around Lake Baringo, Kenya***

### **Conformity through material culture and time: A diachronic perspective on Ilchamus (Njemps) identities**

*Nik Petek-Sargeant*, University of Cambridge

'When do ethnic units identify themselves in material culture?' is one of the main questions that *Symbols in Action* attempts to answer. In its largely synchronic approach to material culture patterning and ethnic identities, significant emphasis was put on understanding the need among the Ilchamus (or Njemps as referred to in the book) to conform to material cultural norms. However, the objects, as well as conformity itself, have histories that require consideration and that complicate identity when diachronic perspectives are applied. Moreover, the Ilchamus are a relatively young ethnic community that emerged from migrants with different identities coming together. These identities continue to persist and the 'when' in the initial question therefore also becomes a question of time and not only a question of quantity in material culture differences (in use, meaning, and style). Using archaeological, archival, museum and oral historical data, this paper will discuss changes in material culture among the Ilchamus over the last c. 200 years, their relation to the layered identity, and the influences and inter-ethnic relationships that shaped it.

### **Pots in action: Extra thoughts on symbols and subsistence in Samburu**

*Katherine Grillo*, University of Florida

Chapter Six of *Symbols in Action* brings us to the Leroghi (or Lorroki) Plateau in Samburu, northern Kenya, to explore the use of material culture in identity formations amongst and between hunter-gatherer and herder communities. Patterning in the distribution of pots, calabashes, adornments, and other artifact types is largely explained by deep histories of non-competition and intermarriage. My doctoral fieldwork with these communities focused on pottery, particularly the ways that pastoralist subsistence and mobility structure the production, use, and discard of pots in archaeologically-observable ways. I suggest that culinary practice – what pots are used for – plays a significant and often under-recognized role in shaping ostensibly similar Loliin (historically hunter-gatherer) and Samburu (pastoralist) materialities. I also consider the ways that, despite little apparent differentiation in terms of preferred pottery styles, Loliin and Samburu use and discard pots and other material culture in distinctive and ideologically-specific ways at both settlement and special-use sites. I reflect, finally, on the continuing relevance of *Symbols in Action* for archaeologies of pastoralism in eastern Africa today.

### **Symbols in time and space: Marakwet material culture and landscape**

*Matthew Davies*, University of Cambridge

*Symbols in action* (SiA) was seminal for the way in which it elaborated the active nature of material symbols in the construction of complex social identities, and for how it developed a critique of simple understandings of archaeological 'cultures' as ethnic units. SiA was of course criticised on multiple fronts, especially for its lack of historicity and as an example of

a problematically extractive ethnoarchaeology. Yet we should perhaps read SiA as a beginning rather than an end. Many of these criticisms and flaws have been productively addressed by Ian Hodder's students and the trajectory set in motion by SiA. Beginning with Henrietta Moore's well-known work on the Marakwet of Kenya (who neighbour SiA's core Baringo case study), this paper picks-up on a longstanding strand of research and examines three interconnected insights at increasing spatial and temporal scales. The paper first examines material culture change in Marakwet to argue both for the durability of symbols and the creativity involved in their successive temporal re-contextualisation. The analysis attempts to re-historicise Marakwet material culture by bringing into question many common narratives about the linearity, progressiveness and/or erosive nature of 'modernity'. Secondly the paper re-visits Moore's analysis of spatial and temporal change in Marakwet homesteads, but shifts attention away from symbols and identity construction to the way in which daily processes of structured and symbolic practice come, through time, to influence the wider Marakwet landscape. The aim here is to historicise the landscape, not by typology and chronology, but by showing how structured quotidian actions and tasks play-out over broader spatial and temporal scales producing an account of landscape that challenges simple narratives of anthropogenic degradation and impending ecological collapse. Finally, the paper picks up on broader ethnic and ecological interactions between the agricultural Marakwet and Pastoral Pokot and attempts to show how the symbolic inter-ethnic boundaries elucidated in SiA can both mask and facilitate productive forms of engagement and exchange. In particular, I argue for the generative potential of difference in fostering the economic and ecological specialisms that have and continue to shape the wider Baringo region and I question some of the negative contemporary ways in which such farmer-herder relations have often been cast. These three research trajectories do not necessarily form a coherent account of life and change in Marakwet, but in drawing on the legacy of SiA, I hope that they briefly present a selection of thought-provoking insights as to how we might read change across spatial and temporal scales and how a contemporary archaeology of sorts may use such readings to find relevance in the present.

### ***Material histories, absence and becoming: Revisiting analogy***

#### **Analogies of Absence, or "I dug a hole, there wasn't much in it, what now...?"**

*David Kay, University of Cambridge*

It is a much-repeated aphorism that 'absence of evidence is not evidence of absence', and in many (perhaps most) cases this is certainly a wise rule to follow. However, Hodder's research and publication of *Symbols in Action* has long taught archaeologists that to blindly follow received disciplinary truths is to risk bypassing much of the interpretive complexity inherent to our data and, perhaps more importantly, to the lives of the people to whom those data relate. It is in this vein, and following the ethnoarchaeological precedent employed throughout *Symbols in Action*, that I wish to look again at how we interpret 'absence' in the archaeological record. Utilising my own recent research on historic Marakwet settlements in northwest Kenya, I will argue that through the careful balancing of different data sources and the critical use of diverse modes of interpretation, it is possible to incorporate certain facets of 'absent evidence' within rich social and material histories that would not otherwise be easily

accessible to archaeologists. Moreover, the implications of such a methodological and interpretive approach extend well beyond the study of individual archaeological sites or landscapes and, in East Africa in particular, have the power to critique many popular conceptions of the rich complexity (or supposed lack thereof) of rural lifeways, both past and present.

### **Monumental architecture in Turkana Basin: Places of worship or habitation?**

*Emmanuel Ndiema*, National Museums of Kenya

Unlike other disciplines that can directly interrogate their subjects to ascertain the meaning of objects or symbols, archaeologists normally don't have that luxury and therefore rely on objects and symbols that were left behind by our ancestors. Our knowledge of our ancestry is based on broken bones, objects, symbols and chipped stones. Often scientists must weave disparate strands of evidence together to infer the economies, technologies, social organisation, and ritual practices of extinct societies.

In contrast, the megalithic structures of the Turkana Basin offer an incomparable window into the social structure and rituals of our ancestors. The appearance of this type of megalithic structures coincides with major cultural innovations that allowed our early ancestors to engage in managed food production that eventually led to sedentary lifestyles and complex social economies that formed the foundation of modern communities. These megalithic structures allow us to evaluate how meaning is conscripted to objects and symbols and changes through time. As we celebrate 40 years of Ian Hodder's *Symbols in Action*, we should stop to think how far we can peer into the past by using ethnographic analogies to interpret the archaeological record. In this paper, I will look at the diversity of megalithic structures and how meaning has changed, as well as how these might diverge from ethnoarchaeological results and perspectives.

### **Turkana in the making**

*Sam Derbyshire*, University of Oxford

Drawing on long-term ethnographic research focused on material culture, this paper explores socio-economic and political change in the Turkana region of northern Kenya. Looking into histories of production, use and exchange, it considers the enduring value of a material culture lens, as highlighted in *Symbols in Action*. Analysis is presented in relation to colonial and post-colonial African histories, the use of historical object and photographic collections in situated fieldwork activities, and the challenges involved in making sense of the radical socio-material transformations associated with economic growth and the spread of new technologies.

***Beyond static presents: Analogies and deep history***

**Scarcity and accumulation: Teleki's caravan at Lake Baringo**

*Fleur Martin, University of Warwick*

This paper explores the history of Count Teleki's visit to Lake Baringo in 1887, focusing on the collection of local material cultural heritage, which was subsequently brought to museums in Budapest and Vienna. What did Teleki collect at Baringo and by what means did he accumulate these things? Count Teleki's heavily armed, 300-strong caravan arrived at Baringo anticipating an 'El Dorado' of grain from the irrigated fields: instead, they found communities blighted by famine. Despite this, Teleki's caravan stayed at Lake Baringo for nearly three months, replenishing stores for their journey north, buying ivory, and collecting material culture of various kinds. Studying the caravan's accumulation of grain, ivory and artefacts in a time of local famine highlights the coercive and violent character of these nineteenth century exchanges. In return for goods and ivory, the local Il Chamus would only take livestock, placing no value upon the glass beads Teleki brought. There were overt cases of looting, but the exchange of clothing and the accoutrements of daily life for food also demonstrates the inherent violence of Teleki's accumulation at Baringo. This paper questions how the caravan materially impacted upon the region and the scales of scarcity and accumulation at play, drawing upon a study of Teleki's Baringo collections. This is analysed in conjunction with Hodder's work on these object types, to question what they can tell us about the nature of trade and violence, furthering the analysis of age and sex conformity which Hodder reads into their materiality and exchange.

**The rise and fall of 'Njemps': A history of cultural transition in Kenya's Rift Valley, c. 1830 to 1920**

*David Anderson, University of Warwick*

Large-scale, fortified settlements, based upon a system of irrigation agriculture, existed at the southern end of Lake Baringo from the 1840s until the 1910s. From the 1840s to the 1880s they became a key supply station on the northern caravan routes that brought traders into the Rift Valley from the East African coast. Il Chamus at Lake Baringo supplied food and ivory to these caravan traders. From 1901, through their cooperation with British colonialists, the Maa-speakers who inhabited the Il Chamus villages of Leabori and Lekeper rapidly accumulated large holdings of livestock. Young men began to move away from the villages with their livestock, and by 1920 these two communities had completely dispersed, leaving their cultivations on the banks of the Perkerra and Molo rivers to take up pastoralism in the Rift Valley and over the Laikipia escarpment to the east. In this transition, Il Chamus mimicked social and cultural practices among Maa pastoralist sections, seeking to join larger Maa cultural ceremonies on Laikipia, and then setting up their own manyattas below the escarpment. How completely, and how easily, did these agriculturalists make the transition to pastoralism, and what consequences did this have for their material culture? This paper will reconstruct this history, focusing on the impact of the livestock acquisitions following the Ribo Post expedition of 1901, and with particular reference to the dynamic character of material culture, cultural identity and social practice first raised in Hodder's *Symbols in Action* – a study based partly upon fieldwork undertaken at Lake Baringo.

## **Deep history, archaeology, and the percolation of time in African material assemblages**

*Paul Lane, University of Cambridge*

A criticism that can be made of much of the early post-processual ethnoarchaeological research by Ian Hodder and his research students was the common neglect of the historical and archaeological records of the geographical locations that were the focus of study, despite overt recognition of the temporal structuring of space and material culture assemblages. Considerations of time were largely restricted to understanding how the temporal and spatial rhythms of routine practice helped both create and recreate the structuring structures of society and how the material world was implicated in such processes. Some efforts were made to understand how such structuring structures were sustained across successive generations. However, few attempts were made to trace the changes and continuities in these in the deeper past, prompting accusation from critics that these studies were atemporal in nature and at risk of perpetuating notions of 'the timeless [non-Western] other'. Drawing on a selection of examples from more recent work on African societies, this paper aims to redress such concerns and offer a few explanations for this curious oversight of deep time during the initial phase of post-processual ethnoarchaeology.

## Poster abstracts

### **Villagization, identity, and material culture: material assemblages and percolating pasts in Zigua households, north-eastern Tanzania**

*Elias Michaut, University of Cambridge*

Using household inventories collected in 1991 in two Zigua villages of north-eastern Tanzania, this poster uses ideas about entanglement, assemblages, and percolating pasts to provide a diachronic and vibrant account of local changes in material culture and dwellings. The poster will analyse how 20<sup>th</sup>-century migratory labour and the 1976 villagization led to increasingly multi-ethnic communities, which resulted in the widespread abandonment of traditional Zigua roundhouses and the introduction of new pot styles that became both markers and makers of ethnicity. The production of other facets of identities through constellations of objects will also be discussed, looking at how distinctions in age were materialised within young men's houses, and how historically-specific gender norms—adopted with the arrival of the new 'world religions' in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century—were reinforced by the gendering of objects and household space.

### **From bronze to votive terracotta figurines: symbols of social agency and resistance to romanisation in the Gubbio valley landscape?**

*Marianna Negro, University of Cambridge*

The Roman landscape of Gubbio is quite different from the rest of Roman Italy. The ritual manifestations of the valley are an example. There is copious evidence of Umbrian rituals during the Iron Age, which are mostly distinguished by the deposits of highly schematic votive bronze figurines on upper reaches such as Monte d'Ansciano. This is a distinctively Umbrian ritualisation of the landscape through the agency of material culture, however, there is evidence of continuation of ritual activity in a hybrid form. A small number of interesting Roman terracotta figurines are found in the rural landscape of the Gubbio valley, and, despite terracotta figurines being quite a common phenomenon during the Roman times, the Gubbio valley figurines are different in terms of the shape and context in which they were found. Overall, all 7 terracotta figurines appear to be found in Roman sites in the vicinity of previous Umbrian sites. Moreover, the figurines are always found in rural or suburban areas, implying this was not an official ritual and could have been on the contrary, an act of passive resistance. The most interesting case, is the figurine found on Monte Loreto, where already a small amount of Umbrian bronze votive figurines was recovered. Additionally, the area just under Monte Loreto, becomes an important rural settlement during the Imperial time, suggesting that memory does have an active role in shaping the organisation of the landscape. Therefore, the figurines which have ritual agency also become symbols of resistance during the 'romanisation' process.

**Move forward, or not: The chaîne opératoire of early medieval (9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century CE) slag in southern Morocco**

*Biyang Wang, University of Cambridge*

Having lived under the shadow of the Romans for centuries, Northern Africa started to become a part of the Arab Caliphate after the early conquest from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the early 8<sup>th</sup> century. Since then, Northern Africa, along with Greater Syria, Spain, and Egypt, gradually shifted from Hellenistic and Roman culture towards Islamic culture. This Islamization has seen heated research in the field of Islamic and Mediterranean archaeology. However, the archaeological sites along the edge of the Sahara are also significant to the study of the interaction between the Mediterranean and the sub-Saharan worlds, although they have long been marginalised. This research is hoping to fill this void through metallurgical methods by analysing a selection of slag from Tamdult in Morocco from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE in order to reconstruct the local metal-making technology, technological choices and the cultural conflict experienced over time. It aims to study the Trans-Saharan trade and knowledge exchange during the wave of Islamization through a semi-quantitative approach, hoping to shed further light on the influence of Islamic culture and the local reaction to it, contributing to an understudied part of northern African metallurgy.

**Assessing the Archaeology of Apiculture in Light of Indigenous East African Beekeeping**

*Benny Q. Shen, University of Cambridge*

Despite of its well-attested antiquity, apiculture has been overlooked in archaeology. Current methods that traced the origin of beekeeping to the early onset of Near Eastern agriculture, relying on either the remains of apicultural structures or lipid analysis of beeswax residue, become infeasible when encountered with sub-Saharan African apiculture where hives and receptacles were mainly made from perishable materials and where beeswax was not widely collected until the colonial-era. This study problematised current approaches in the archaeology of apiculture from an Africanist perspective by comparing the Artefact Conservation Probability of Indigenous East African beekeeping with other beekeeping methods through Bayesian modelling. Moreover, this study proposed the conceptualisation of 'bee-scape' as alternative lines of evidence to detect ecological/landscape indicators of past apicultural activities in East Africa. New theoretical grounding in the archaeology of apiculture may further contextualise the Dorobo/Okiek case study discussed in *Symbols in Action*.

## Information about venue: McDonald Institute seminar room

The McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research is located [here](#), and the address is: Downing St., Cambridge CB2 3ER, United Kingdom.

The seminar room is located on the ground floor of the Courtyard Building.



*Detailed location of the McDonald Institute (Courtyard Building), with entry from Downing Street.*

### Directions to the McDonald Institute

To get to the McDonald Institute, enter Downing Site through the main entrance on Downing Street (triple arches). The McDonald Institute is the square building in the middle of the courtyard.

The McDonald Institute is at walkable distance from the City Centre (5 min).

It can be reached walking (27 min), driving (7 min), or by public transport (bus U Universal to Pembroke Street stop, 13-18 min) from Homerton College.

The Institute is also a 20 min walk from the Cambridge train station, or 12 min by the U Universal bus (Railway Station to Pembroke Street) or alternatively any of the bus lines 1, 3, and 7.

## Questions and queries

Please email Nik at [np569@cam.ac.uk](mailto:np569@cam.ac.uk) if you have any questions regarding attending the conference virtually or in person.