

Social models of late Bronze Age societies

The theoretical framework for reconstructing Bronze Age social structures is set by two contemporary discourses in Bronze Age research: One refers to the Aegean Bronze Age as the starting point of a stepwise development of centralization and concentration of power that radiated as far as Europe and finally culminated in the person of a potent autocrat or an 'elite'. The other discourse that can be labelled as 'beyond elites' is directed against an exclusive fixation of traditional Bronze Age research on the members of 'elites'. Both discourses draw upon neo-evolutionary stage models for the development of societies, in which a growing complexity is accompanied by increasing hierarchization and stabilization. Against this background, it is the objective of the sub-project to design models for Bronze Age societies without any preconceptions of either non-specifiable 'elites' or a neoevolutionism inspired theoretical eclecticism. Instead, impulses will be rooted in ethnological/cultural-anthropological studies on mechanisms of societal integration beyond the vertical exercise of power. In other words, models should be developed that neither automatically reduce social structure to the organisation of governance nor identify emerging settlement hierarchies with social hierarchies.