“Seek not Greater Wealth, but Simpler Pleasure...”
– Rethinking elite legacies in Bronze Age Anatolia

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“Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and wine?”
(Shakespeare, Twelfth Night)

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Abstract: Contemplating the emergence, impact and (self-)display of privileged groups within pre- and early historic societies rose to prominence again in the past decades. For Anatolia, the Early Bronze Age period (roughly 3,000–1,950 BCE) provides an ideal arena for tracing the rise of social elites at large: a boom in metal production and consumption – as seen at iconic places like Troya and Alaca Höyük, elaborate burials and distinctive architectural enhancements are traditionally considered to be benchmarks of a solid material framework that assists the relevant discussions. However, the presence of elite groups in ancient Turkey is not necessarily limited to conservative indicators like exquisite metalwork, lavishly furnished tombs and extrovert domestic architecture. The aim of this contribution is to discuss alternative, more subtle indicators to highlight the presence of high-ranked communities in 3rd millennium BCE Anatolia.

If there is anything that can be ascertained while gazing at our eventful and still obscure prehistoric past, than it is probably the concession that social equality is, if best comes best, a figment of some scholar’s romanticising imagination.

Ever since human communities organized in larger groups, hierarchical structures developed akin to an ever-growing potential for violent conflict: Since the dawn of the Neolithic in Central Europe, battling for the most fertile grounds, resources or regional control left a trail of carnage all across the continent, as evidenced with brutally slain and discarded individuals from sites like Schlez in Austria, Thalheim, Wassenaar, to name but a few (Louwe Kooijmans 1993; Thorpe 2003; Wild et al. 2004; Runnels et al. 2009). If blood is a big expense, prehistoric communities had enough savings for several generations.

On the less sanguinary side, striving for power, influence and wealth – no matter whether it is rooted in ritual or profane entanglements – left its very worldly traces in the archaeological record. The thriving and privileged part of pre- and early historic societies appears to have made itself very well visible with lavishly equipped graves and elaborate architecture. Burials, in that case, are still considered to be the most secure source of information, given the opportunity to compare a majority of poorly or modestly equipped graves with eventually less numerous exceptionally rich interments. The theoretical cornerstones for any further discussion about elites and elite burials in archaeology was already laid by V. Gordon Childe and roughly 30 years later by Georg Kossack – in almost identical fashion, using similar models of explanation, but

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1 The manuscript was completed in March 2018. I would like to cordially thank the organizers of the conference “Ancient Communities and their Elites from the Bronze Age to Antiquity”, and first and foremost Prof. Klara Kuzmová for their kind invitation, marvellous hospitality and stoic patience until this contribution was finally submitted for the proceedings.

2 Formerly labelled “counts”, “princes” or “nobles”, the more general term “elite” now seems to be the most preferred expression used in relevant publications for the past decades (see Egg – Quast 2009, VII).
Fig. 1. Map showing the major findspots mentioned in the text. 1 – Troia; 2 – Demircihöyük; 3 – Kúllíuoba; 4 – Kusura Höyük; 5 – Alaca Höyük; 6 – Eskişpar; 7 – Arslantepe.

Fig. 2. Traditional indicator for elite agency I. 1–11 – Selection of precious metal items from the Troia treasures; 12 – Schliemann’s wife Sophia wearing parts of it, looking rather weary (after Müller-Karpe 1974 and Tolstikov – Treister 1996; scale unknown). CHYBA ČÍSLO “7”.
refuting any scent of “marxist” theory (Gronenborn 2009, 218; Childe 1945; Kossack 1974). Already here, and seemingly independent from each other, amassed wealth in single burials is branded as rather short-lived phenomena, accompanying societies in transition or on the brink of more advanced, enduring means of social organisation (Gronenborn 2009, 218).

In the past two and a half decades, after a long period of self-inflicted retreat from any theoretical discussion of elites in archaeology, this topic gained momentum again also in German-speaking academia (Eliten in der Bronzezeit s. ed. 1999; Egg – Quast 2009, but see Hansen 2012 for conceptual critique). For “Old Europe”, much focus was laid on the emergence and self-image of elites the 2nd and 1st millennia BCE, revisiting the Urnfield warrior and scrutinizing the much-debated “Fürstengräber” of Iron Age times (see Clausing 1999; Egg 2009; Schönfelder 2009 for a conspectus of more recent work). However, also preceding periods like elaborate burials in late Copper Age/3rd millennium BCE Bell Beaker contexts were subject to party extensive reappraisals (see Zimmermann 2007).

Turning eastwards, and prehistoric Anatolia (Fig. 1) in particular, the rise and explicit visibility of elites is commonly understood as tightly intertwined with the iconic finds from 3rd millennium BCE Early Bronze Age Troia (Northwest Turkey; Fig. 2), Alaca Höyük (Central Turkey), and Arslantepe (Eastern Turkey; Fig. 3; 4). Although all of these assemblages are generally – and reasonably – presented as a package when it comes to elite debates (see e.g. Klaunzer 2013), and do indeed share the lavish consumption of (precious) metals combined with exceptional technical skills, they differ profoundly in space, time and social-archaeological context.

The (in)famous treasure finds from Troya, with their obscure and still debated history of exploration and acquisition (Traill 1995; 2000; contra Easton 1994), are now generally accepted to be several hoards scattered over the citadel of Troy II (and perhaps early III) in the (later) 2nd half of the 3rd millennium BCE (Tolstikov – Treister 1996; Treister 2002; Sazcı 2007, 361; Bachhuber 2009, 1). That said, at least one of these assemblages (treasure “R”), probably even three more (treasures “D”, “E” and “F”) are considered to be not properly recognized intramural cremation (?) burials, since they were reportedly associated with human bones and a “snowy white powder” (Schliemann 1881, 62, 545–546, 549–550; Sazcı 2007, 360–361). This would link EBA Troia with Alaca Höyük, which also yielded elaborate burials within its settlement premises (cf. infra). A definite answer will, however, never be possible – Schliemann’s dilettantistic approach keeps it irresolvable for good.

The “royal burials” of Alaca Höyük (Arik 1937; Koşay 1938; 1951), the partly destroyed, but equally wealthy equipped grave from Horoztepe (Özgűç – Aok 1957; 1958; Zimmermann 2009b, 12) and the “royal grave” of Arslantepe (Frangipane et al. 2001; Frangipane 2007–2008), however, are sure enough richly equipped (cist) graves. Then again, the cist burial of Arslantepe dates to 3,000 BCE, whereas the 13 famous cist graves from Alacahöyük belong to the 2nd half of the 3rd millennium. Furthermore, the Arslantepe assemblage, a single inhumation plus several slaughtered individuals eventually deposited on top of the stone cist as “loyal retainers” who had to follow their master into death, seems embedded in a highly diverse, dynamic and competitive cultural setting on the verge of the 3rd millennium BCE (Frangipane 2001). The rich inventory contained copious amounts of metal vessels, weapons, tools, and jewellery, partly made from a rather exotic copper-silver alloy, but also conventional pottery (Hauptmann – Palmieri 2000; Hauptmann et al. 2002). In their combination, the items testify to

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3 The corruption of especially prehistoric archaeology during the Hitler regime to reinforce its despicable racist doctrine lead to an almost complete neglect of any theoretical approach to archaeology at large – a field that then again flourished in the English speaking world (Arnold 1990; Hassmann 2000; Eickhoff 2005). However, until the later 1990ies, the exception proves the rule with the rather isolated German contributions authored by M. H. K. Eggert (see Eggert 2001 for a conspectus of his work).

4 An extremely early dating of the Alaca Höyük burials, as proposed by Ü. Yalçın (Yalçın 2011, 61–64) is solely based on very few radiocarbon dates retrieved from findings stored in the vaults of the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara for now about 80 years, and met no broader acceptance yet.
Fig. 3. Traditional indicators for elite agency II. Inventory of grave “D” from Alaca Höyük, Central Turkey (after Müller-Karpe 1974, scale unknown). **CHYBA ČÍSLO “48”**.
three very different cultural affiliations: material from local cultural context, a southbound Mesopotamian-Uruk connection already well known from the site, but also a new element associated with Transcaucasia – ringing in the advent of a new power – showing but not only excellency in metalwork – in Eastern Anatolia (Frangipane 2001, 6–9).

Traversing the central Anatolian highlands, at our next stop at Alaca Höyük, we find ourselves in the later third millennium, and confronted with a very different social setup. The 13 famous “royal graves” are benchmarks in Anatolian archaeology and at the same time a political keystone for the young thriving Turkish Republic in the 1930ies, looking for a new Anatolian-based identity (Özdoğan 1998, 116–119). Besides the proverbial “icons” like the abstract and ceremonial standards, the iron dagger, and the gilded vessels referred to in numerous publications (see Özyar 2000; Gerber 2006; Zimmermann 2008; Yalçın 2011; 2016) for more recent discussions and comments), the graves also contained other copper-based weaponry, figurines, pottery, jewellery, and seemingly profane objects like spindle whorls and loom weights in huge numbers, making it rather impossible to associate the single inventories with any specific sex, gender or function these individuals eventually had in this Early Bronze Age community: androgynous priestly warriors with an affinity for cattle-prodding, knitting and weaving might be the closest branding possible.

No matter (as) what they were represented in their graves (but see infra), they were probably part of the local EBA Hattian culture, eventually pastoralists controlling vital resources in the vicinity and along the caravan route connecting the Syrian plains with Anatolia and beyond (Efe 2007; Zimmermann 2009a; Zimmermann – Genç 2011).

Arriving at the upper extend of the proposed caravan route, in the far Northwestern corner of Asia Minor, the disastrous original documentation of the hoards found at Troy, with the legendary so-called “Priam’s treasure” as the biggest of at least 16 (!) more different caches of objects (Sazcı 2007, 360–364; Bachhuber 2009, 1) poses a further challenge to the interpretation of the – in total – more than 14,000 single items from the citadel of Hisarlık. Dated conventionally to the second half/late 3rd millennium BCE, several items might be from a considerably later, 2nd millennium BCE context, their relation to the majority of EBA III objects unknown (Treister 2002). Conventional interpretations see the treasures as deposits of valuable items buried...
in times of looming danger, other, alternative approaches assume internal power struggles amongst the local elites, with monumental building projects, alternating destruction layers and a more and more erratic hoarding practice as tangible archaeological evidence (Bachhuber 2009). What these ritual behaviours – let it be hoarding precious things, let it be elaborately burying the dead – now seem to have in common throughout prehistory is that they are comparably short-lived episodes on the grand archaeological timeline. Once these phenomena disappear, very likely at that point where a society abandones the old order or transgresses the line to a more stable community organization, they disappear at once, and for good – exhuming the ideas of Vere Gordon Childe, once again (see also Gronenborn 2009, 218–219, 226–227).

May it as it be, and with the problematic evidence from Troia set aside, the elite debate still centers largely on funeral evidence as the most reliable indicator for privileged groups

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**Fig. 5.** Traditional indicators for elite agency III. Elaborate architecture associated with a local ruler, example from Külüoba, Western Turkey (after Zimmermann 2009b).
within a given society, generally applying the unwritten rule that the number and quality of grave goods reflects the status of the buried person when he or she was still alive. So far, so good, so true?

Rumour has it that it is generally not the deceased person who decides about how to equip the path that leads to the netherworld, it is always the bereaved whose burden it is to plan, dig, build, and furnish the grave, with the actual recipient of all the pompous plunder condemned to remain silent. The above mentioned analogy might be tailormade for quite a few graves in relevant necropoleis – but for all?

The question remains how early elites defined and refined themselves when they still were present amongst the living. Is architecture like megaron-type buildings, their derivatives or fortified dwelling complexes as attested in Troia, Küllüoba, or Karataş-Semayük (Fig. 5; see
Zimmermann 2009b for a comprehensive overview) the only clue that the privileged left for us to contemplate? Certainly not, and conspicuous pottery types like depa amphikypella or so-called “Syrian” bottles (eventually containing precious ointments, oils or perfumes) were certainly related to drinking and feasting ceremonies once accessible – and affordable – to only a small and exclusive circle within any EBA community (Fig. 6; Zimmermann 2005; Rahmstorf 2006). That aside, there might be other, rather subtle ways of reinforcing and perpetuating enhanced social status, whose discussion shall comprise the final part of this contribution. Right here it should be noted that the following lines are rather basic, alternative considerations open to further debate.

There is certainly little doubt that jewellery has, as a body adornment, status-defining or status-enhancing function. Schliemann’s wife Sophia Egastromenos might not look too happy...
with the weight of a good portion of “Priam’s Treasure” resting on her head, but earrings, necklaces, bracelets and anklets were sure enough an integral part for displaying one’s (privileged) place in a community (cf. Fig. 2).

However, apart from attachable objects of material or any intrinsic value, body modification practices like tattooing and scarification could be also considered as status-enhancing endeavours. With the former having lost almost all radical appeal it was once associated with in the 20th century CE, the latter being regarded as a fringe obsession in post-modern urban contexts, we should remind ourselves that such modifying exercises are assumed to have been realized (at least) since the Late Pleistocene (cf. Ucko 1962; Schuster 1968–1969 with pioneering studies; Lobell – Powell 2013, however refuting the possibility of Upper Palaeolithic evidence for tattoos (Lobell – Powell 2013, 41), and can be well traced through the millennia on preserved soft tissue and figurines alike. Painted decoration on various Neolithic and Chalcolithic figurines from Eurasia, the Mediterranean and the Near East are sure enough fine candidates to argue for versatile tattooing practices, which are not to be understood as simply “l’art pour l’art” pastimes, but status- or rank-defining applications (Fig. 7; Lobell – Powell 2013, 41).

Anatolian clay figurines from various 3rd millennium BCE Early Bronze Age contexts now show such conspicuous traces that might indeed testify to tattooing or even branding/scarification, hence symbolically reflecting modification of the soft tissue that might refer to individuals with certain social privileges bestowed on them when they were still alive and well.

Moving away from body decoration practices to more subtle technological applications, the presence and absence of metalwork from funeral contexts traditionally serves as an indicator for the actual social status of the buried individual (cf. supra) – with the looming methodological problems related to the straight analogies applied here. A potential, more sublime indicator for distinguishing “elite” metalwork from profane castings might be the consumption of larger quantities of rare materials, especially tin, which partially exceeds by far the 2–3 weight % that is sufficient to create a decent bronze (Zimmermann – Yıldırım 2008). This phenomenon is now attested at an ever-growing number of copper-based metal objects from Central Anatolia, and is probably not only related to enhance or manipulate the final colour of the object (towards a more silverish sheen; Table 1). This might have been a possible way for local elites in the periphery of larger centers to display newly accumulated wealth through “superfluous expensiveness” (Veblen 1994, 95; Zimmermann 2009c), since they eventually could not afford, or did not have access to skilled craftsmen who worked – or were hired – in the relevant centers of power like Troya and Alaca Höyük in the later 3rd millennium BCE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Cu</th>
<th>Ag</th>
<th>Pb</th>
<th>Fe</th>
<th>As</th>
<th>Sn</th>
<th>Sb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ro-04-M42</td>
<td>Tubular bead</td>
<td>88,40</td>
<td>0,000713</td>
<td>0,25</td>
<td>0,36</td>
<td>0,31</td>
<td>10,50</td>
<td>0,10</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ro-05-M94</td>
<td>Tubular bead</td>
<td>79,80</td>
<td>0,000323</td>
<td>0,16</td>
<td>0,62</td>
<td>0,40</td>
<td>16,80</td>
<td>2,13</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ro-05</td>
<td>Pin shaft</td>
<td>86,90</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0,55</td>
<td>0,12</td>
<td>12,50</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ro-xx-M81</td>
<td>Pendant fragm.</td>
<td>87,50</td>
<td>0,12</td>
<td>0,10</td>
<td>0,90</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>11,50</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ro-05-M106</td>
<td>Biconical bead</td>
<td>87,90</td>
<td>0,13</td>
<td>0,64</td>
<td>0,29</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>10,90</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ro-06-M145</td>
<td>Bead fragm.</td>
<td>84,65</td>
<td>0,5</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>15,30</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ro-06-M139</td>
<td>Bead fragm.</td>
<td>91,00</td>
<td>0,0003</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>8,97</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ro-06-M141</td>
<td>Cup fragm.</td>
<td>87,80</td>
<td>1,0</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>12,10</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 1. Potential alternative indicators for elite behaviour II. Measurement chart showing the excessive use of tin for alloying Early Bronze Age objects from Central Turkey (after Zimmermann – Yıldırım 2008).
By way of conclusion, the ideas sketched in the final section are by no means to be understood as facts that skipped our attention so far, but initial considerations on how to track privileged groups within a given social setting in later prehistory. The dead, as stated above, do remain silent. But the many dimensions of prehistoric elite identity, their customs and behaviour in the world of the living is still a fertile ground for further academic debate.

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