



# INTERACTIONS, **CHANGES** AND **MEANINGS.**

Essays in honour of Igor Manzura  
on the occasion of his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday

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# КУЛЬТУРНЫЕ ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЯ. **ДИНАМИКА** И СМЫСЛЫ.

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посвящается

*Dedicated to 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Igor V. Manzura*



*Manz*

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## Theory in Prehistory and Prehistory in Theory (Filling the Gaps)

**Keywords:** theory, prehistory, methodology, research methods, Eurasia, the Balkans, Anatolia

**Ключевые слова:** теория, преистория, методология, методы исследования, Евразия, Балканы, Анатолия

*L. Nikolova*

### Theory in Prehistory and Prehistory in Theory (Filling the Gaps)

Advance in development of theory in prehistory is one of the directions of improvements of the prehistoric research. It may also have impact on the way prehistory has been integrated into the theoretical research.

The systematic approach in prehistoric research follows the general qualification of the scholarly approaches by using quantitative and qualitative methods, typically in combination (QIQnI approach — a qualitative-quantitative integrative approach).

The archaeological study usually misses the social sciences methodology based on a literature review, revealing the gaps and filling of the gaps. This three step research has been substituted by approaches which rarely would include a critical analysis of the previous research and rarely explain what exactly and how the used records fill specific gaps related to well defined research question.

The emerging theory on filling of gaps considers critical approach, debating, generating a system of new arguments, cross-discipline interactions, new theories and new ways of bridging prehistory and contemporary culture.

*Л. Николова*

### Теория в преистории и преистория в теории (заполняя пробелы)

Развитие теоретических построений является одним из направлений совершенствования исследований преистории. Оно может также воздействовать на интеграцию преистории в изучение теории.

Системный подход к исследованию преистории следует общей квалификации научных изысканий, используя количественные и качественные методы или — чаще — их интегративное сочетание.

Как правило, археологические штудии не используют методологию социальных наук, основанную на обзоре литературы, поиске пробелов и заполнению оных. Вместо этой трехступенчатой процедуры, мы имеем такие подходы к научному анализу, которые редко включают критический обзор предыдущих исследований и нечасто объясняют где именно и как используемые материалы заполняют специфические пробелы, относящиеся к четко определенной исследовательской проблеме.

Новая, находящаяся на стадии становления теория заполнения пробелов привлекает как критический подход и дебатирование, так и образование системы новых аргументов, междисциплинарные взаимодействия, новые теории и новые способы проведения связей между преисторией и современной культурой.

Advancement in the development of theory in prehistory is one of the directions of improvement in prehistoric research. It may also have an impact on the way prehistory has been integrated into theoretical research.

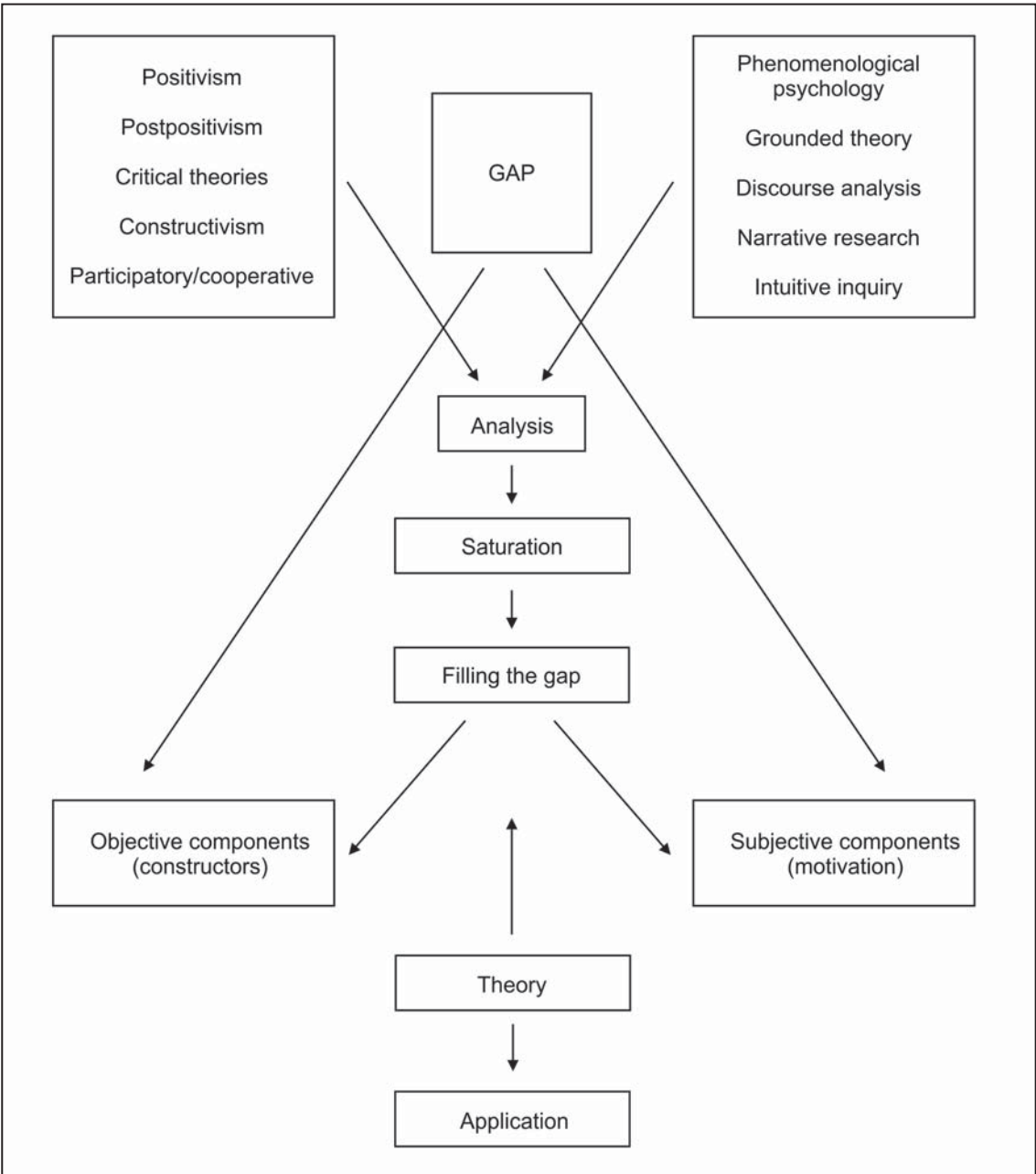
### Theory and prehistory

Theory in prehistory has been understood by many as a general overview of the regional prehistoric developments or interpretations of the social processes, or as a research question regard-

ing the subject of archaeology and the different research methods in archaeology. Prehistory has also been embedded in general theories of human society and human culture, and has precedents in the evolutionary theories. Searching for the roots of different human and cultural phenomena, the natural and social sciences go back to prehistory using, as a rule, selective records.

The main gap in both directions of research (theory in prehistory and prehistory in theory) is the absence of the traditions of structural critical analyses to reveal gaps and to fill the gaps in re-





**Fig. 1.** Model of filling of gaps in scientific research.

**Рис. 1.** Модель заполнения пробелов в научном исследовании.

search. This research study attempts to search for ways to fill these gaps (Fig. 1).

**Systematic approach**

The systematic approach in prehistoric research follows the general qualification of the scholarly approaches by using quantitative and qualitative methods, typically in combination (QIQnI approach — a qualitative-quantitative in-

tegrative approach). The quantitative approach characterizes, for example, the ceramic studies as the most popular sub-branch of the prehistoric research. It is also typical as a foundation of the paleobotanical research, although the number of samples used for this research, as a rule, assists mostly qualitative research.

The qualitative methods in prehistoric research have limitations because of the peculiarities of the material evidence. The observation, in

particular, depends on excavations or the use of a material without a context. Replication dominates in many cases — the authors use previous research and add limited new data, while the publication of new excavations includes only selective material. The worst type of qualitative replications are the regional and thematic scholarly essays, which differ from the popular literature only by added selected references, which usually do not have scientific contributions.

Typical of the interpretation of the evidence is narrative modeling of cultural process. Models very often have been offered by authors who do not demonstrate enough minimum empirical knowledge for the regions which are the foundation of the models. Knowledge deficit is also distinctive in cases where the used theory is either not well studied or (if new) not well constructed as a trustworthy knowledge. The situation is similar when prehistory is included in more general historical analysis — replication and empirical deficit of knowledge likely characterize most of the contemporary generalizations. Usually, the archaeological prehistoric approach is not searching for gaps in research but replicating previous writings or applying already-discovered techniques and already-made conclusions toward new segments of material culture.

### **Filling the gaps**

The archaeological study usually misses the social sciences methodology based on a literature review, revealing the gaps and any attempts to fill the gaps. This three-step research has been substituted by approaches which rarely include a critical analysis of the previous research and rarely explain which exact records were used — and how they were used — to fill specific gaps related to well-defined research questions.

Figure 1 offers a theoretical model of revealing and filling the gaps in the archaeological research based on a syncretic approach. The most popular theories in the current social research illustrate the general idea of syncretic approach, but they can be substituted by other theories.

There is a specific theoretical question which the researcher needs to answer in every new study: Are there enough records to fill the gap (including those that already exist and those learned by the author) and to answer the main research question? In many cases, revealing the gaps can be the end of the research quality records that could fill those gaps are missing. However, such studies are much more valuable than studies based more than 90% on replications. Another aspect of the problem of gaps and records is whether the missing

records are accepted as an obstacle or a challenge for research hypotheses (Hansen 2014: 251).

A specific question is whether the research question requires qualitative, quantitative or blended (integrative) research methods. In many cases, absence of considerable (or any) research results happens when the writer is not using an adequate method — for instance, using qualitative instead of quantitative methods.

### **Critical approach**

Qualitative research dominates for prehistory topics without a significant application of the critical method. One very popular option is to name written in the past theories “classic” which in fact need to be reevaluated. One good example of this is G. Childe’s “theory” of social evolution. Even in 2011, it was cited as commonly accepted in scholarly literature (Bleda 2011: 200; cp. Hansen 2014), although it is completely outdated in light of current knowledge and is unacceptable from any theoretical point of view. G. Childe proposes two stages of social evolution — (1) the emergence of farming and sedentary life and (2) the emergence of urbanism, marked respectively by Neolithic and Early Bronze in Asia Minor. However, farming and sedentary life make up only one of the forms of social development. There is another model — from hunter-gathering toward pastoral societies, with very complex social advancement. In addition, urbanism is a very ambiguous term and it can be very poorly documented archaeologically. Accordingly, it looks like G. Childe did not have the necessary theoretical education and methods of correct interpretation of the empirical archaeological material for serious social theories.

The example with the “social evolution” theory of G. Childe shows that one of the main gaps to fill in prehistoric archaeology is the lack of theoretical education and serious empirical background in order to generate scholarly theories.

### **Debating**

Debating is another method of filling gaps. Such debate was initiated by B. S. Düring on the theory of M. Özdoğan (1996) about Asia Minor and the Balkans as a large cultural formation zone from the late Neolithic Age and the beginning of the Early Bronze Age (5500—3000 cal BCE) (2011: 204). B. S. Düring states that the model has little explanatory content and cannot be developed further with more research. This author does not see any sense in blending similarities and differences in one term. He equaled the term of M.

Özdoğan with “a single archaeological complex”, although they are two different concepts. Such substitution of one concept with a completely different concept is a incorrect debate, which again demonstrates the absence of the very foundation of fruitful critical analyses on prehistory. The difference between M. Özdoğan and B.S. Düring as archaeologists is that the former has much more empirical experience and, as the debate mentioned above shows, is better educated in prehistoric culture itself. The model of M. Özdoğan is extremely advanced for the study of prehistory, since the author departs from the elementary interpretation of prehistoric culture on the basis of the similarity and difference in the material culture. Instead, he looks at culture as a complex phenomenon in which neither similarities nor differences in material culture show directly the nature of population relationship over vast territories. The example with the tripods provided by B.S. Düring does not contradict the model of a large cultural formation zone; in contrast, it supports the idea of the existence of different genealogical lines of interrelations with local peculiarities and differences which are at the same time interrelated. While in the Balkans, the population continued to produce the tripods as a possible cultural memory complemented by the epos of genealogy; in Asia Minor, this type of materiality was replaced by other cultural symbols which, however, might have the same genealogical meaning. At the level of genealogy epos, both regions continued to interact despite material peculiarities.

In other words, the model of M. Özdoğan is not only reasonable but it creates extremely fruitful directions for serious scholarly research. It can be very strongly supported and updated with evidence from Early Bronze II (the third millennium cal BCE). Despite the numerous analogies in pottery — including the encrusted style of ornamentation — the population of Troy I—II did not accept the fashion of corded technique of decoration (Nikolova 1999). The Anatolian urban society might have looked at this technique as primitive, or perhaps there was an oral cultural memory related to the corded technique of ornamentation which was not understood by them. In the early third millennium cal BCE, Asia Minor and the Balkans were a cultural formation zone of communities which interacted intensively without full unification of the material culture and with tendencies to develop local peculiarities. In other words, the model of M. Özdoğan can be spread over the third millennium cal BCE despite many authors who believe that during the third millennium the Balkans were just on the periphery of the Aegean civilizations. The metallur-

gy in the Balkans, including the gold finds from Dubene — Balinov Gorun, show that the Balkans were an equal partner in Aegean civilization although, because of the absence of stone architecture, this culture looks peripheral.

### ***Generating a system of new arguments***

The most recent instance of this method is the work by S. Hansen (2014) on the fourth millennium. It is an important step in regard to the willingness of experts on the Eurasian 4<sup>th</sup> millennium cal BCE (see e.g. Nikolova 1999) to overlay the past dominant topic of migrations and invasions with a meaningful discussion based on grounded theory about the meaning of materiality as a stage in the advancement of civilization. S. Hansen expands the interpretation toward searching for a more complex social system of stratification instead of applying the popular theoretical matrix of chiefdom, although all his analysis of metal weapons supports exactly the theory of chiefdom as a possible dominant political system in Eurasia during the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium cal BCE. Many contemporary components of the political systems of democracy can be used to support reinterpretation, even of the system of chiefdom, and expand the research question in the direction of searching for interrelation between organized political structure in prehistory and the different aspects rooted in this system of democracy.

Social hierarchy itself does not mean absence of democracy. Many prehistoric records show that the social hierarchy was a result of differences in the individual household development, not of an oppressive system of exploitation of the majority. Prehistory is a candidate for a golden age of accumulation of individual wealth by majority of population, which can be confirmed by the ownership of houses, for instance. In other words, the contemporary understanding of democracy can bring many arguments to bear when we look at prehistory as a prototype of contemporary democracy.

### ***Cross-discipline interactions***

One of the most intensive current integrations is between archaeology and DNA research. The impact of DNA on archaeological and genealogical research in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century can be compared with the impact of the discovery of radiocarbon chronology. Today, everybody feels like a cultural tree with deep endless roots, which increases the cultural value of each individual. DNA has made people depart from the traditional dichotomy ordinary — extraordinary, espe-

cially because of the disappointment from the intellectual “elite” which not only cannot keep the highest achievement of civilization, but contributes very often to the devolution of culture and society. The so-called ordinary people with their deep cultural roots, genealogical memory and standard life framed by positive values seem to contribute better to human culture than the “extraordinary” which may reproduce corrupted patterns of success.

DNA research has made prehistory closer to all people. However, the scholars do not always respond critically to the limitation of the DNA research, and it has become more trouble than joy in the prehistoric research. A typical example is the article of W. Haak et al. (2015) which includes bioanthropological measurements that typically do not have cultural information — the authors are those who create a cultural matrix, unfortunately without any objective, theoretical, cultural criteria since neither bone nor archaeological material culture is an attribute of a specific language (Nikolova 2015).

### ***New theories***

The new theories are the best method to identify gaps in any science, but in many disciplines today, it is difficult to generate new theories. Prehistory is just one of those. One possible reason is the absence of education among those generating new theories. There is education in research methods, but research does not mean new theories.

The new theory in prehistoric archaeology needs solid empirical data. Typically it is based on a systematic approach. It also requires a critical analysis of the records. For instance, the author's theory of diffusion of cremation from Central Europe to the Balkans was based first of all in reanalysis of the records from Northeast Bulgaria, where one cremation grave was redated from the Early Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age (Nikolova, 1993). Chronology is crucial for prehistory.

Another very fruitful type of new theory is the extensive use of the knowledge for contemporary society and on humans for analyses of prehistory. The prehistoric culture and prehistoric population are comparable with the contemporary civilization, and as more comparative analyses are conducted by researchers, more can be learned about prehistory. For instance, J. Cole (2006) used the contemporary knowledge on nutrition to offer models of cannibalism in prehistory.

In some cases, the regional research becomes a battlefield of dominance of theories, which de-

velops the science and instead of filling the gap, increases the gaps of research. Very typical is the case with the so-called Transition period between the Chalcolithic and Bronze Ages in Bulgaria. Two PhD dissertations were defended in the 1980 s on this topic with similar/identical material. In addition, the code of academic ethics was broken at Sofia University because of the unreasonable hiring of a second prehistorian at the Department of Archaeology, which has corrupted the science of prehistory in Bulgaria for an unknown number of generations.

In other words, even the smartest new theory in prehistory needs to be accepted as a golden apple on the tree of science and should be not substituted with the whole tree, which is represented by the entire scholarly community. Prehistory is extremely dependent on the scholarly community of science and the crisis in this discipline today is due mainly to the fact that instead of integrity, the academic community is corrupted by damaging networking and embedded with the dangerous behavior of some members.

Prehistoric archaeology in theory has been crossing with the crucial impact of the contemporary society on development of the general social theory. It is not wrong to make direct analogies between prehistory and the contemporary world, but it should be methodologically well-backgrounded. In many cases, the analogies are not stated, but the text shows such impact. One good example is the “provisional statement” of S. Garfinkle (2013) about the Ur III dynasty. The interest in the Ur III dynasty is global since it provides a skeleton of the concept about prehistoric wealth in the theoretical literature. However, all concepts of S. Garfinkle about wealth — extraction of wealth by the “crown,” the networking of the elite, the dependence of the “crown” on existing social networks and the marriage factor in obtaining or securing wealth — are more like reflections of knowledge from the historical and contemporary worlds on prehistory than a conclusion based on a complex analysis of the archaeological records from the third millennium cal BCE and a reasonable retrospective-prospective analysis. The very idea of the author to make conclusions about Ur III wealth and “crown” policy without a complex comparative analysis of the records, at least from the synchronic cultures, seems weak. The records show that wealth was a big problem in prehistory. For instance, treasuring of wealth in the period of the Ur III dynasty has a forerunner in the later Copper Age period in the Balkans, where prestigious gold wealth was treasured at Varna cemetery. In other words, S. Garfinkle does not use the correct methodolo-

gy for the theory that he has been trying to promote since he eliminates the complexity of the archaeological records and the classic methodology for such research — an extensive synchronic and diachronic comparative analysis. For this reason, none of his conclusions looks like the result of an analysis of the Ur III period.

### ***New ways of bridging prehistory and contemporary culture***

There is no wall of history between prehistoric and contemporary civilization. Both are comparable directly and the knowledge from prehistory may have a direct impact on the contemporary civilization and vice versa. The museum approach to prehistory as something unique has been updated with innovative integrative approaches — from analogies and comparisons to integrative culture and social practices. An instance for an integrative culture with an impact on contemporary community is the use of the prehistoric site as a shared, performative space (Hamilakis, Theou 2013).

## **Conclusion**

Developing a methodology to fill the gaps in prehistoric research is a task of the new generations of prehistorians, who need to break with the traditional method of replication and create a scholarly framework for innovative approaches. The role of prehistory in human knowledge increases, and in turn requires highly qualified specialists to invent the critical approach and to develop a methodology which responds to the new request of human society — an effective science with strategic goals and smart research questions.

The emerging theory in this work includes a skeleton of methods to fill gaps in prehistoric research: critical approach, debating, generating of new systems of argument and new ways of bridging prehistory with the later epochs including the contemporary world, as well as new theories. This theory can be enriched further in both directions: by developing a comprehensive content of the already revealed methods and by searching for new methods and techniques.

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