

The workshop will address social inequality and resource exploitation across different historical periods, from the Neolithic to the present day. Its primary aim is to undertake a diachronic comparison of the relationship between access to resources and the development of social and political inequalities, with particular attention to mechanisms by which specific resources—their extraction, circulation, and control—structure economic and social hierarchies.

Contributions engage with two interconnected dimensions:

- (a) unequal or restricted access to key resources within societies, particularly the control of such resources by dominant social groups or classes, and the role of this control as a central economic factor in the emergence and consolidation of social inequality; and
- (b) supra-regional inequalities between societies possessing different types and quantities of resources, and the ways in which these disparities shape their economic and political relationships.

A particular focus will be placed on the often-paradoxical relationship between producers and beneficiaries: those who extract or process resources are not necessarily those who accumulate wealth, and this dissociation between production and consumption proves to be a recurrent pattern across very different historical and geographical contexts.

The workshop brings together scholars working across a broad chronological and geographical spectrum — from prehistoric Europe to the ancient Near East and Egypt, including the Bronze Age eastern Mediterranean — and combining archaeological analysis with archaeometric data and quantitative approaches to the study of social inequality. On the eve of the workshop, a guided visit to the Technisches Museum Wien and its exhibition on resources and labour will extend this reflection to the modern and contemporary world, grounding the long-term diachronic perspective in present-day realities.

ORGANIZER

Michael Brandl, Pamela Fragnoli, Mario Gavranović, Reinhard Jung (OeAI, OeAW)

REGISTRATION

Registration until 05.05.2026: pamela.fragnoli@oeaw.ac.at

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Initiative Future Archaeology – Conference

The Long History of Inequality: Resources, Control, and Social Power



07.05.2026 –
08.05.2025

Technisches Museum Wien –
Austrian Archaeological Institute
5th Floor, Seminar Room 7+8
Georg-Koch-Platz 2
1010 Vienna

Program

TH, 07.05.2026

16.15

Visit at the Technisches Museum Wien

Exhibition “Arbeit & Produktion. weiter_gedacht_”

FR, 08.05.2026

09:00 – 09:05

Welcome Greetings of the Organisers

09:05 – 10:35

Session 1 — Raw Materials, Extraction, and Early Inequalities

Jean-Philippe Collin, Université Libre de Bruxelles

Exploiting Flint, Structuring Society? The Neolithic Mines of Spiennes and Middle Belgium.

Paolo Biagi, Università Ca’ Foscari Venezia

Chert Exploitation and Circulation in Sindh and Las Bela (Pakistan) from the Mesolithic to the Indus Bronze Age.

Dagmara H. Werra, Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk

Artur Jedynak, Muzeum Archeologiczne i Rezerwat “Krzemionki”

The “career” of Świeciechów flint and the striped flint in the Eneolithic, exemplified by the role of the settlement Gawroniec Hill in Ćmielów.

10:35 – 11:00

Coffee Break

11:00 – 12:30

Session 2 — Resource Control and Emerging Complex Societies

Marcella Frangipane, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei

Unequal access to primary resources and the emergence of inequalities in Greater Mesopotamia.

Changes in the economic goals and function of political institutions at the end of 4th millennium BCE.

Tom Maltas, University of Oxford

The farming-inequality nexus and its consequences for early urbanism in the eastern Mediterranean.

Richard Bussmann, Universität zu Köln

Inequality and the early ancient Egyptian state: resource management in local communities.

12:30 – 14:00

Lunch Break

14:00 – 15:30

Session 3 — Production, Distribution, and the Social Experience of Inequality

Mario Gavranović, Austrian Archaeological Institute of the Austrian Academy of Sciences

Aleksandar Kapuran, The Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade

Bronze Age copper producing societies in East Serbia – poor producers and wealthy females.

Teresa Bürge, Universität Bern

Access, distribution and use of agrarian resources in Bronze Age Cyprus. A question of inequality?.

Samuli Simelius, Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study

Access to urban resources: a measure of health inequality in the ancient world.

15:30 – 16:30

Final Discussion

19:00

Speakers’ Dinner at Katscheli