From herds to empire: Biomolecular and zooarchaeological investigations of mobile pastoralism in the ancient Eurasian steppe

Fact Sheet

Project Information

ASIAPAST

Funded under H2020-EU.1.1.

Grant agreement ID: 772957

Overall budget € 1 999 145

Project website

EU contribution € 1 999 145

Status Ongoing project

Hosted by CHRISTIAN-ALBRECHTS-UNIVERSITAET ZU KIEL Germany

Start date 1 April 2018

End date 31 March 2023

Objective

The emergence of mobile pastoralism in the Eurasian steppe five thousand years ago marked a unique transformation in human lifeways where, for the first time, people relied almost exclusively on herd animals of sheep, goat, cattle, and horses for sustenance and as symbols. Mobile pastoralism also generated altogether new forms of socio-political organization exceptional to the steppe that ultimately laid the foundation for nomadic states and empires. However, there remain striking gaps in our knowledge of how the pastoralist niche spread and evolved across Eurasia in the past and influenced cultural trajectories that frame the human-herd systems of today. Little is known about the scale of pastoralist movements connected with the initial translocation of domesticated animals, how mobility became embedded in pastoralist life, or how movement contributed to the formation of sophisticated political networks.
There is a poor understanding of the character of herd animal husbandry strategies that were central to pastoralist subsistence and how these co-evolved alongside pastoralist dietary intake and ritual use of herd animals. We have a remarkably poor understanding of what pastoralists ate, especially the dietary contribution of dairy products - the quintessential dietary cornerstone food of pastoralist societies.

ASIAPAST addresses these gaps through a biomolecular approach that recovers the dietary and mobility histories of pastoralists and their animals recorded in bones, teeth, and pottery. This project pairs these methods to detailed analyses of the economic and symbolic use of herd animals preserved in zooarchaeological archives. These investigations draw from materials obtained from key sites that capture the transition to mobile pastoralism, its intensification, and emergence of trans-regional political structures located across the culturally connected regions of Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

Field of science
/agricultural sciences/animal and dairy science/dairy
/agricultural sciences/animal and dairy science/animal husbandry
/humanities/history and archaeology/history
/social sciences/media and communications/library science/archives

Programme(s)

Topic(s)

Call for proposal
ERC-2017-COG

Funding Scheme
ERC-COG - Consolidator Grant

Host institution
CHRISTIAN-ALBRECHTS-UNIVERSITAET ZU KIEL

Address
Olshausenstrasse 40
24118 Kiel

Activity type
Higher or Secondary Education Establishments

EU contribution
€ 1 097 990
Beneficiaries (3)

CHRISTIAN-ALBRECHTS-UNIVERSITAET ZU KIEL

Germany
EU contribution
€ 1 097 990

Address
Olshausenstrasse 40
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Activity type
Higher or Secondary Education Establishments

Website
Contact the organisation

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

United Kingdom
EU contribution
€ 234 270

Address
Oxford Road
M13 9PL Manchester

Activity type
Higher or Secondary Education Establishments

Website
Contact the organisation

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL

United Kingdom
EU contribution
€ 666 885

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Beacon House Queens Road
BS8 1QU Bristol

Activity type
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