



ECAY5004: Work, Welfare and Poverty

Theme 4: Changes in Working Practice (Part One)



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

ken.dicks@uwtsd.ac.uk

Learning Recap

What did we cover in the previous Theme?



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Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

What is work?

We have already undertaken initial research into this aspect of the Module in Theme 1.

What conclusions did we come to?



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What is Work?

According to Scott (2014), work is;

“ The supply of physical, mental, and emotional effort to produce goods and services for own consumption, or for consumption by others. Productive work falls into three main categories: economic activity or employment, unpaid domestic and leisure activities, and volunteer community service. Boundary lines between the three categories are fuzzy and determined by national conventions for surveys and official statistics”.



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A Brief History of Work

For the purposes of this Theme we will focus on the first of Scott's categories – **economic activity or employment.**

Prehistory

- In effect work in this sense has been part of society since the development of specialisation amongst humans
- The archaeological evidence is not definitive but it can be seen that even before the evolution of *homo sapiens* hominids were beginning to specialise in specific activities
- For example palaeontologists believe they can detect specific 'styles' in flint knapping which differentiates individual crafts-people
- It should be said that this evidence is open to interpretation

A Brief History of Work

Prehistory

- In the very earliest stages of human 'society' such specialisms were limited to providing for the most basic of needs e.g. food, clothing, shelter, child-care etc. (*Does this sound familiar?*)
- Some of these specialisms became more specific over time (e.g. hunting prey & gathering fruit, nuts etc.
- These were specific tasks undertaken by individual for the good of the tribe or group
- Although it was clearly 'work' it was very different from the employment or economic activity that we think of today
- Each small group would have their own specialists as groups often lived in isolation from other groups

A Brief History of Work

Prehistory

- Palaeontologists also believe that they have evidence that such tasks were also divided according to **age** and **sex**
- These theories of the early division of labour are based on fossil evidence but also on the study of hunter-gatherer societies in the modern world by anthropologists
- In terms of **age** it is theorised that the very young and the very old tended to perform sedentary tasks based near to the dwelling of the group. *Why might this be the case?*
- Thus, it is speculated, the old and young were involved in food preparation, maintenance of shelters and the repair of making of clothes

A Brief History of Work

Prehistory

- In terms of the division of labour by sex, it has long been thought that there was a clear demarcation with hunting and building being typically male activities and gathering and clothes making being typically female activities
- However, academics are beginning to challenge this simplistic picture and to argue that the truth may have been more complex (e.g. Panter-Brick, 2002)
- However, the evidence of specialisation and division of labour is thought to be as old as human society itself.



A Brief History of Work

Prehistory

- Some of the evidence for these 'communal' activities indicates that early humans need to cooperative as well as specialise
- Again, by looking a contemporary societies it can be seen that tasks such as fishing, hunting larger animals involved people working as a coordinated group
- As human societies developed there was a growth in such specialist work
- The first example is the development of pottery



Take a few moments to think about how many separate 'tasks' are involved in the making of a simple clay pot.

Using the Chat facility in Teams, share your thoughts with the group.



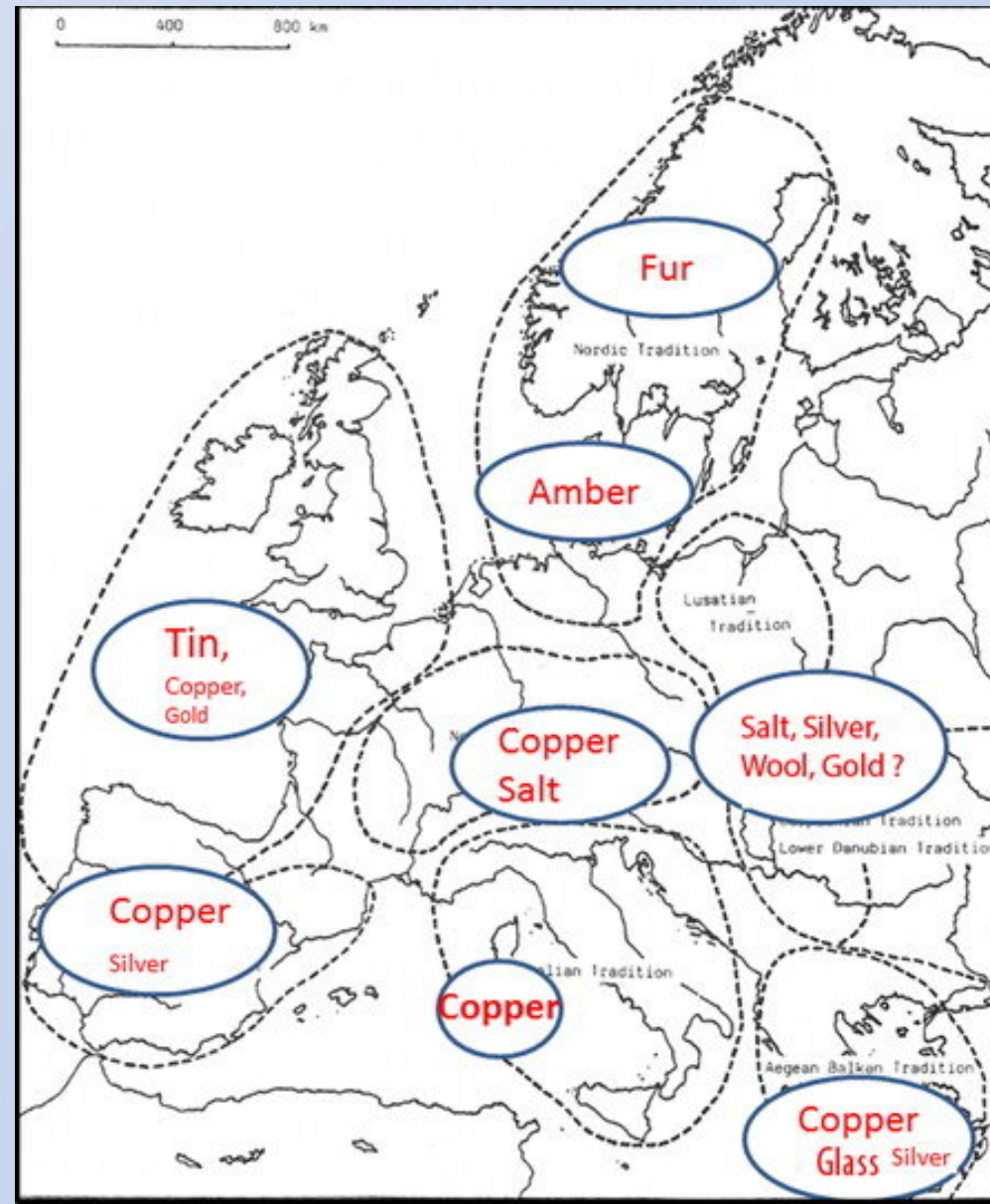
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Prehistory

- Other examples of prehistoric specialisations include;
- The production of textiles (i.e. spinning & weaving)
- The development of agriculture (planting & harvesting crops and the domestication of animals, development of irrigation)
- Metallurgy (beginning with copper, bronze and then iron working)
- Particularly in the last example, the distribution of materials means that metal goods could not be produced everywhere and this meant that groups started to develop trading networks that often covered significant distances (Earle *et al.*, 2015)





A Brief History of Work

Development of towns & cities

- The specialisations outlined previously meant that groups could become larger and support more members
- The development of agriculture in particular mean that groups became tied to specific localities and villages, towns & cities began to develop
- In turn, the growing complexity of societies led to the creation of new 'specialisms' such as;
- Scribes – to record transactions and keep records
- Lawyers – to mediate in disputes between traders
- Physicians – to care for the growing urban population

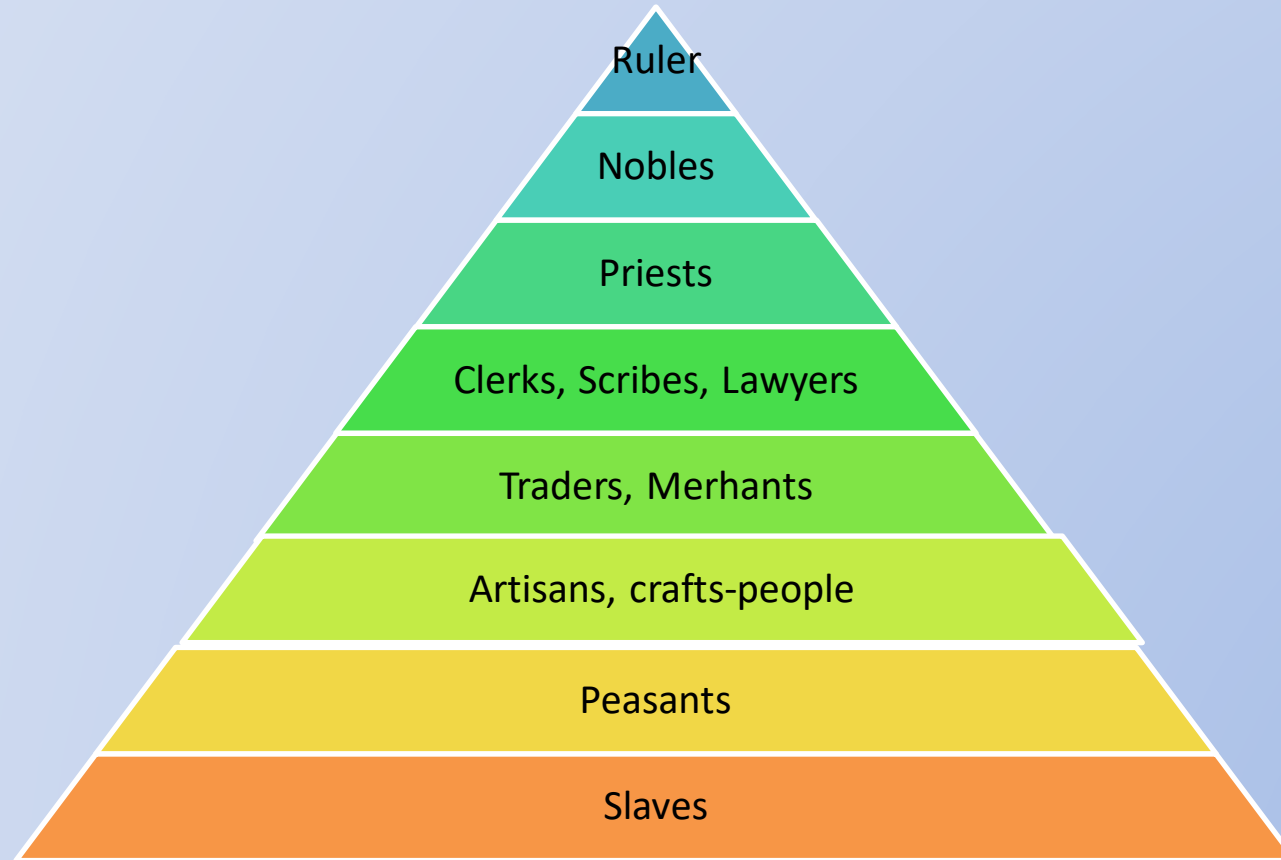
A Brief History of Work

Development of towns & cities

- It is also argued that the development of urban society lead to the first clear examples of social stratification
- This meant that society was seen as a hierarchy where roles and occupations were given different levels on importance
- This is also known as the division of society by 'class' which we will return to in another Theme.
- Although societies differed in their structure it can be seen most, if not all ancient social hierarchies followed a similar pattern

A Brief History of Work

Beginnings of social stratification



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