Session title: Multispecies worlds and socio-centric societies – living together with animals

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Abstract:
This session proposes multispecies approaches and understandings advanced within the ontological turn as analytical frameworks for exploring how hunter-gatherers past and present were living (well) with other species. Prehistoric archaeology, entailing the study of human and animal remains from the beginnings of humanity, on a global scale, can contribute in a unique way to explore what it means to be human in a world populated by non-human others. Throughout this time humans have lived with animals in multispecies environments. Animals have been bred, domesticated, buried, hunted, and fished, nurtured as pets and companions in addition to being exploited as food and materials. How humans have lived with animals varies within, and between, societies. A multispecies approach, inspired by ethology and biosemiotics, entanglement theory, and native ontologies acknowledges that prehistoric communities were entwined with non-humans in social as well as ecological and economic ways, and also has potential to bridge polarization between Western and indigenous ontologies, while still taking native perspectives seriously. We also embrace the concept of «egomorphism» (Milton 2005) assuming that humans perceive animals as similar to themselves and able to participate in various social relations. Archaeology is largely invisible in current debates about the Anthropocene and human influence on the environment. Although archaeological periods lie far beyond the onset of this geological epoch as currently defined, engaging with the debates encourages us to reflect on relations to nature and animals past and present, and our role and place in the world. Archaeological finds can challenge present norms and understandings and provide depth and diversity to the Anthropocene-debate which would not be accessible from anthropological, geographical or historical data. We welcome papers exploring multispecies relations from a variety of perspectives – relational, zoo/biosemiotic, ethiological, historical, anthropological, environmental and phenomenological, regardless of chronological, geographical or cultural context. Contributions may focus on methods, models, case studies or theoretical frameworks.

Keywords: Prehistory, ontology, multispecies