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Between Chronos and Kairos – Existential Dilemma of an Archaeologist

ABSTRACT

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Archaeology wants to estimate the moment of origin of every thing, with all the related phenomena or processes. It wants to master the methods of measuring their duration. An ordinary archaeologist feels more like a chronometrist than an expert in man in different cultural contexts. Perhaps listening to the bustle of everyday life should constitute the essence of our efforts. Normalized time, regarded as objectively given, marginalizes cognitive importance of heterogeneous time, which is a unique, axiological measure of specific reality. Chronos, an all-preceding god, is the possessor of the repeated and evenly passing (eternal) time. In our research he thus dominates socially inclined Kairos, the youngest of gods, who brings the right time to perform an action. Volatile gift of Kairos has to be grasped at the right moment and given a unique meaning, *i.e.* value. Thanks to the scientific contextualization of time one can freely refer to the time of Chronos.

Key words: heterogenous time, homogenous time, contextualization, everyday life, synchrony, diachrony

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Definierbar ist nur das, was keine Geschichte hat
(Only that which has no history is definable)
Friedrich Nietzsche (1997, 86)

Archaeology initially was (and invariably remains) astonished at relationship between man and time (Beneš 1997). It has even fallen into a trap of time. It wants to estimate the moment of origin of every thing, with all the related phenomena or processes. It wants to master the methods of measuring their duration and any variabilities. An ordinary archaeologist feels more like a chronometrist than an expert in man in different cultural contexts. He thinks he is looking for and gathering proofs of existence of an eternal mechanism. He tries to restore its motion. This chronometric sensitivity is connected to a source-

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bound duty of an archaeologist, *i.e.* transforming historical material into source material, about which I wrote elsewhere (Mierzwinski 2005).

This empirical particularity can be even seen as a cognitive identifier of the discipline. At the same time, however, it can be stated that from an anthropological perspective this kind of chronological effort is futile. Is the history of cultures and communities a derivative of the work of a chronometer? Does the temporal contextualization constitute the essence of being? Is the researcher rewarded with a blissful listening to the monotonous ticking, piercing through the buzz of generations, its variable mood and intensity?

Perhaps listening to the bustle of everyday life, which is sometimes so weak that it turns into an ostensible silence should constitute the essence of our efforts. The moment becomes elusive and loses value, although for an archaeologist the basic question with reference to the past always remains the same: When did this happen? It is this question that other ones depend on: What happened? What is this? But they are not considered obligatory, at least not enough to compel us to create specific cognitive procedures. The meanings, functions and names we use sometimes stem from this fascination with time. We usually adapt them, rather effortlessly, from what we know (*i.e.* our reality) and we examine their possible distant origins with amazement. This actualizing manoeuvre is based on the assumption that only modernity is justification for history. What matters is the measurement of the temporal depth of our world. Normalized time, regarded as given, marginalizes cognitive importance of heterogeneous time, which is a unique, axiological measure of specific reality, thus acquiring a sacred character (van der Leeuw 1997, 341–342). Chronos, perhaps the oldest, all-preceding god, is the creator of the principles of becoming and being through the unity of opposites and the possessor of the repeated and evenly passing (eternal) time, indifferent to various manifestations of existence. He dominates socially inclined Kairos, the youngest of gods, who brings the right time to perform an action (Roscher 1884–1890; Sauer 1890–1894; Cook 1925, 859–868; Leach 1971, 124–131; Beneš 1997, 239; Pausanias *Description of Greece* V, 14.9; Posidippus, *Epigrams* 142). Volatile and uncertain gift of Kairos has to be grasped at the right moment and given a unique meaning, *i.e.* value. With this contextualization of the moment you can confidently refer to the time of Chronos.

Inseparable relationship between the order of daily routine and ritual, cyclic or occasional, uniqueness, gives hope. The hope itself, however, is not enough. Kairos' time – time of seizing the opportunity – is not given, so its existence requires effort. It consists of actions and events¹. The larger their quantity, the higher their concentration and capacity of time. It thus expands multilaterally from the inside. There are no limits, no reference to a fixed measure. Kairos' moment must acquire meanings to become objectively separated, and thus cognitively significant. In the order of Chronos we are always lost, because the present is found only by reference to the past or the future. However, we remain continuously late in the face of the past and vainly impatient in the face of the future. The present or, generally speaking, everyday life, seems to lose importance in this context. It can be changed only by turning to Kairos, belonging fully to the present. The opportunities that were seized serve to highlight particular moments in chronological time, which reduces the feeling of being lost in the monotony. The highlighted episode helps to remember the year, century and millennium. This gives the beginning to history and circumstances of their narrativisation. After all, Kairos' gift, burdened with uncertainty, has an enormous dramatic potential. Occasions arise due to the expected disturbances of the order, since every moment can become significant.

The study of time in the humanities is thus based on the ability and willingness to transform each irrelevance into relevance and repeatability into uniqueness without losing the benefits that their separation gives. Favourable conditions for archaeologists to do so stem from the fact that, to a large extent, the communities they analyse functioned in a world of magical-mythical valorisation, strongly marked by ritualisation of behaviour (Kuna 1997). This was expressed by the reference to primordial time when everything was established (Eliade 1998; 2000, 409–429). The difference between what was unique and repeatable was fading. Each re-enactment of an activity was also a primordial act and all the

¹ This connection between seizing the opportunity and creating conditions for its emergence can be seen in the fascinating semantic analysis of the noun *kairós*, presented by R. B. Onians (2000, 343–348), who starts with its specific interpretation by Homer: a convenient place on the body to deal a lethal blow. It has to be noted that A. B. Cook (1925, 859–862) points to the connotations of this term and the verb *keiro* (I am shaving). In this way he finds an explanation for the characteristic features of Kairos: his shaved back of the head and razor, whose blade is supporting the scales, or is stroke by winged feet of the rushing god, in his hand.

precedents were mythologized. Continuing meant creating, and it was not the result of retrospectively observed multiplications of a particular fact. The future anticipated the past, which in the context of linear time, assuming predictability of the future based on past experience, seems paradoxical (Kowalski 1994, 15–16). Therefore, this would be the world order which is constantly fraught with Kairos-like situations in the present (van der Leeuw 1997, 362–364). It is well illustrated by the words of Hesiod: *Observe due measure, for right timing is in all things the most important factor* (*Works and Days* 694).

It requires significant effort to sustain one's conviction of being completely disenchanting, which is not a promising sign for anthropological sensitivity towards the past. Archaeologists try hard to do so, since they still convincingly support Tylor's monograph definition of culture (Mierzwiński 1994; 2000; 2005). They think that it is a convenient research tool for material traces of the past, because it justifies their multidisciplinary and comprehensive ordering. Its universalist message also allows to create frameworks with an enormous time depth. An archaeologist is thus gaining cognitive comfort. Finding or ordering things, he holds the belief that he contributes to re-enactment of culture and chronology. He perceives this kind of doubled effort as doomed to succeed, as archaeology strives to reach out to the foundation of all the phenomena of the anthroposphere. But is this care for anchoring in linear time sufficient to ensure that we will ever cognitively find ourselves in *illo tempore*? Mythical essence of this condition is expressed in its time-space paradox. It can be constantly within our reach, yet remain unreachable. In order to reach it, one only needs to have an urge to do it. This is where the core of the problem resides.

Fascination of archaeologists with chronological, uniformly ordering time, will prevail as long as there are undiscovered resources of things and stratigraphic systems. Their uncovering gives one a sense of almost literal digging into the past. Digging in the ground with a spade takes us back in centuries, and often even this kind of minimal effort is not necessary to find oneself in a significantly chronometric situation. The material traces of the past are omnipresent. Preoccupation with their chronology is strengthened when it is possible to use absolute dating methods on a larger scale. The clash with the results of relative chronology studies leads to exciting research situations, to the point of questioning what appeared to be an absolute value. This happens mostly

with reference to popular radiocarbon measurements, calibrated mostly within the Holocene thanks to breakthroughs in dendrochronology (Becker *et al.* 1989; Wązny 2001). The radiocarbon descriptions are statistical in nature, *i.e.* their value is conditioned by the adopted level of probability. The greater their precision, the less credible they are. There do not have, therefore, the value of calendar date (Walanus, Goslar 2004). Archaeologists, however, have a tendency to absolutise them. This universal lack of criticism stems from longing to create an event-bound prehistory. This implies confusion in the face of relative chronology, which in this situation adopts the difficult role of a falsifier of radiocarbon dating, instead of only being, according to the ‚consumerist’ expectations, its grateful recipient.

In recent decades, some spectacular changes has followed. There are densities and time perturbations where we seemed to have reached a stable understanding. Ages and periods are expanding locally or generally in centuries or millennia, for instance in the case of the Neolithic or Early Bronze Age. Sometimes they disappear locally or are supported conditionally, as in the case of HaB2. This period has been written with a smaller font at the junction of HaB1 and HaB3, ca. 920 cal. BC, in the periodization tables developed for areas west of Poland. In this way some tension is generated between chronological schemes constructed on the basis of different categories of sources and assemblies which are hardly equipped with similar elements. The mildest instance of this situation is the occurrence of chronologies of inventories with varying degrees of detail. It is influenced by the issues of periodization of archaeological cultural units of the assumed chronological-chorological nature, susceptible to internal divisions.

So we constantly act within a complex system of dating. The situation determines which of its elements or orders gains primacy in a particular situation and whether the tendency for chronological specifications is credible. Archaeological sources are subject to the processes occurring in the natural environment, and they must be taken not account while dating. Even the classic geological stratigraphic principle concerning the antecedence of what lies below, which became the basis of archaeological chronology, can be used in a conditional way, since stratigraphic systems are of dynamic nature. Historical material can move from older to younger layer, and vice versa. What is more, the layers themselves can move.

In these conditions it is difficult to expect an understanding for Kairotic synchronic research, since it resembles treading on quicksand. In order to maintain a relative stability of conditions to create an anthropological narrative, one has to talk about high-depth time sequences in a reducing manner. This requires handling time of limited depth, but high density, adequate to the intensity of activities and content on the micro-social level. Even if we do not deal with it empirically, we must take into account its presence under the surface of the phenomena averaged by chronological reduction. It is therefore preferable to operate at the junction of such reductions, because in this way typical features of each of them can be grasped without their blurring in long duration, too easily losing sight of subjectivity of men in the history. What becomes more interesting here, are the processual outcomes of activities in history.

Besides, the tendency to falling into timelessness becomes an archaeological particularity of long duration. The effects of chronometric source-related efforts do not translate into historical reality. On the one hand we encounter an extraordinary variation in styles and forms, which allows us to hold sophisticated discussions concerning dating. On the other hand, there emerge the spheres of alimentation and semiotic facts which seem to constitute an almost frozen background for periodizational virtuosity. As referring to them is usually superficial, laconic and stereotypical, we would vainly, even with good will, search there for manifestations of phenomenological attitude. There is a widespread assumption, rather for the sake of convenience, *i.e.* to minimally disrupt chronologising tendencies of researchers, that prehistory consists of long stabilization phases and short transformation phases. The latter are preferably inspired from the outside, which makes them important chronology-wise. Such desirable dynamics of history becomes identical with the chronology of sensitive markers, which increasingly consist of the dates themselves, as they are obtained via scientific methods from stylistically neutral source materials.

Archaeo-anthropological analyses of everyday life, which require a reference to culturally conditioned time, remain on the sidelines of chronometric activity. They benefit from it to a little extent. What they face is a long duration in a cognitive waiting room. To ensure favourable conditions for chronometric studies it is assumed that social, semiotic or alimentary contexts of everyday life were characterized by

low susceptibility to change. If at all, it was of a rather abrupt nature: from one long-lasting period of processual immobility to another. This should not be obscured by the relatively common phenomenon of feigned or declarative processualism, expressed for instance by suggesting a continuous shaping of anything, until disappearance. This behaviour could be classified as processual correctness or chronometric synchronophobia.

Research on relationships between form and symbolic message, which are complex and variable in time, resonate to a small extent. The distinction between diachrony and synchrony is being lost, while it should be constantly present in a field intended to become pre/historic anthropology. This is expressed by striving to taxonomically describe the collection of findings, highlighted by the criterion of belonging to one of the many archaeological units of long duration in the selected area. Apart from human affairs, we also lose there date markers which are characterized by low chronological sensitivity. Appreciation of this distinction allows for precise dating utilization so that the long duration (processualisation) does not lose its particularity in the face of long dating (chronologisation). In Central European or even continental (non-Anglo-Saxon and non-Scandinavian) archaeology there is rarely the need to develop ideational frameworks and identify orders of typical characteristics, which are used for tracking and understanding the transformations (*e.g.* Czebreszuk 2001; Kadrow 2001).

Time horizons may serve as a good example of diachronic-synchronic confusion. They begin their cognitive life as determinants of explicit settlement, social, cultural or political discontinuation, which makes them promising signs of the desired prehistory of events. After years of research they end up in a blurred time sphere, with processes which are less and less clear. They are therefore doomed to belong to long duration.

To show the opportunities that the change in the approach to time and acting at the junction of long-term situations may bring, I refer to the case of Penelope. Her experience with time and its relativity is very instructive for archaeologists, as relative chronology, inscribed in the concept of history as long duration, remains the primary weapon in finding one's way among things. It will not be changed by progress in the so-called absolute dating if archaeology is to remain a science which examines past forms of social existence of people through cultural

specificity of things. Penelope epitomises long duration, although, considering the time span which we use in archaeology, 20 years is a barely perceptible period when it comes to transparency of people and events in it. However, these 20 years of waiting were unusually abundant with events which, to a different extent, concerned Penelope. She was also engaged in some of these events, but her involvement was overshadowed by the actions of her husband. They filled the parallel time which can be defined as sacred as it meant temporary exemption from the community to which he belonged.

Penelope's manipulations concerned the time one has at his or her disposal in everyday life. This is the area where Kairos manifests his influence. For this purpose Penelope used a tool similar to the one used by Clotho ("Spinner"), one of the Moirai. She did not reach for the spindle, but the loom. Her agency involved weaving a shroud for her father-in-law to bury him with dignity when he passes away (Homer, *Od.* II 86–132, XIX 134–166). But it was just an excuse. She wanted to gain chronological time to wait, notice and take advantage of the joyful time when it comes, or even cause its coming. Her persistence was in fact a derivative of fidelity. What she has woven during the day was ripped at night. There, perhaps, the etymology of her name is hidden: *péné* (weaving, fabric), *lépein* (break, not finish).

Penelope used a more complex tool than the Moirai because she had a different approach to time. Despite this fact, she has sometimes been identified with them. The Moirai used a spindle because they were spinning threads of individual lives to break them in the end. Clotho was pulling out a thread from a distaff, Lachesis ("Allotter") cared about the twist of the fibers and Atropos ("Unturnable") ripped it by the distaff. They were thus determining the boundaries of life. They did not define its content, because it was to a substantial degree the result of relationship with other people, which is exemplified by the case of Meleagros². Their effort had a biological and eschatological dimension. Anyway, from the divine perspective it was a one-day life. It would therefore comply with the sphere of normalized time, which constitutes a prerogative of Chronos. We all remember Oedipus' answer

² Artemis was deceived by a goddess to kill his mother's brothers. In order to avenge the death of her fellow-men from the hands of her son, a kin of her husband, she threw a log into the fire which she had been protecting for many years, as a guarantee of his life (Drexler 1894–1897).

to the riddle of the Sphinx about a creature that from morning to sunset of life shifts from four-, through two- to three-legged position (Kerényi 2002, 330). From this divine, processual or global, thus long-lasting perspective, the life of every human being is reduced to a normalized (averaged) time interval. It acquires a homogeneous dimension. The life becomes indistinguishable and lost in the depths of the ages, just like the lives of countless generations and communities. This loss of the Kairos' uniqueness and depth of individual existence is well-known in archaeology. Oedipus solved the chronological riddle of existence, perceiving it as a model of human life, because the particularity of his own life denied its validity. It is even indicated by the etymology of his name. In the morning he was not crawling, but became a child of pierced, fettered and swollen feet (Höfer 1897–1902, 740–743; Kerényi 2002, 325–326). Like many heroes he intensely experienced deceptive activities of Kairos, suffering the consequences of the choices made by him and others.

Also Penelope's actions had far-reaching consequences. She undertook the task which she was not going to finish before the return of Odysseus; or she rather wanted to give her hope for his return time to be fulfilled. Working on the fabric was only a ruse enabling her to influence the course of events for over 3 years. She involved many people, turning them into hostages, and eventually, with no particular intention, victims of her waiting. She was weaving and ripping the threads of the fabric, but also human fate, not excluding their own. The loom revealed the power of magic of tying and untying (Kowalski 1998, 300–302). Therefore, she took advantage of the situation in which she found herself. She experienced a long duration which she made meaningful by appreciating the importance of daily events and the apparent monotony of domestic bustle. The spindle and loom are her symbols. She turned them into weapons of her fidelity and her prospective prize. She transformed chronological time into Kairos' time, or rather in the former she found prerequisites for the latter, which, however, required some pugnacity. She used the assets that were available to a woman of her era and position. She depended on the care and will of her father and son, prone to remarry her in order to restore social, political and ownership order demanded by the citizens of Ithaca (Homer, *Od.* I 296–302, 381–417, II 47–79, 126–150). She made her son hostage of the hospitality tradition and at

the same time she was playing with his fear that if he sent her back as a widow to her family home, where her suitors would follow, he would have to return her dowry to her to remarry. Therefore she was waging a quiet battle for her happiness, manipulating men of her and her husband's family as well as her suitors. As it turned out, for the latter it was a battle of life and death. When a maid betrayed her and her moderate measures failed, she had to finish the shroud and she reached (after a secret instigation of Athena) for a male weapon, *i.e.* a famous bow of Odysseus, which no one but him could use (Homer, *Od.* XXI–XXII). In this way she anticipated his early return and the arrival of the time of Kairos. Therefore she gave meaning to the hope contained in sham weaving. Reaching for the bow, she determined the fate of her suitors and revealed the relationship of the loom and the eschatological sphere. She demonstrated her Valkyrian face. After all, Valkyries were weaving plans for future battles, using heads of warriors who were to die in them as loads for the warp (*Edda*, 327).

Her work on the shroud in female chambers was done on the sidelines of other events, but in fact they were the aftermath of her activity, having a great magical power. She was seemingly persuaded by her suitors and parents, and maybe even indirectly by her son to choose one of the contenders. None of the suitors was willing to take over the heritage of Odysseus. They wanted Penelope, and feasting at the expense of Telemachus was only one of their persuasive strategies. They were abusing the hospitality rule which Telemachus was forced to follow, being neither the heir nor the substitute of his father. The lack of the shroud had an influence on the life of Laertes. His daughter-in-law in a way kept him alive, but at the same time she prevented her son from taking his rightful position. The three-year delay also got the suitors bound to the decision they had made. They feasted so long that it was against their own expectations. They even got stuck in a situation imposed by Penelope and it was for good. Kairos' time of the feast had features of chronological uniformity. Suitors were held hostage of a reversed sense of everyday life, day-night rhythm of sacred monotony. Thanks to the (un-)weaving efforts of his wife, Odysseus could find out during his visit at the gates of Hades that his return makes sense and it is even necessary (Homer, *Od.* XI 180–209). Thus, the effects of the weaving ruse reached beyond the boundaries of everyday life. In the end, the news of the deceitfulness of female weaving and terrible

power of a loom spread in the underworld thanks to the dead suitors (Homer, *Od.* XXIV 132–157). Here the connections between Penelope and Moirai, between ordinary and sacred time, are perceptible.

Weaving and ripping somehow expressed the conviction that Chronos' monotony of long duration is not the essence of human – individual or collective – life, but it is the point of reference for appearing of Kairos. Reaching for the bow heralded the advent of time which was filled with all kinds of intensity, in which the events and emotions multiplied. It was the time of ritual chaos, heralding the rebirth of order. The guilty were murdered. Their bodies were thrown away like impure carcass, and the festive chamber was thoroughly scrubbed. No trace of those events was supposed to be left. Only then there appeared Penelope and recognized her husband. Her Kairos' actions and enjoying their consequences remained flawless.

Eschatological dimension of weaving has a very impressive evidences in historical material (Eibner 2000/2001, 108–115). I particularly refer here to the depiction of this activity on a burial vessel from Sopron cemetery, well known to Central European archaeologists and dating back to the Early Iron Age. Warp threads hanging on a vertical frame are not only the expression of the length of worldly life. They do not only testify about the activity of the Fate Guardians. Loom weights are attached. There are tense, ready for weaving. I perceive this as an expression of hope that death brings a happy time for the deceased. It announces entwining his fate with the lives of other inhabitants of the underworld. Warp threads descend to the base of the loom and below the zone of the vessel where a figural scene is presented. They descend into the realm of the underworld, from which emerges a weaver. Can we find there Kairos' sphere of action, his beyond-death relationship with Hermes, a psychopomp, their shared mobility and tendency to establish social communication? The scene with the dead suitors in the final book of the *Odyssey* seems to confirm this.

What we should learn from Penelope is the ability to thicken and differentiate time, to attach a value to it through filling it. The importance of her efforts is important for us, because it grows out of everyday life. A banal situation becomes heroic and historic, and thus narrative. Kairos triumphs over Chronos. For now, archaeology functions in the opposite way. The uniqueness of human fate becomes a breeding ground for taxonomies utilized in periodization tables. Synchronization

sequences have a certain similarity to the warp threads on the Sopron vessel. But will we encounter a Penelope-like hero to minutely, rapidly and predictably draw them through a weft, generating a historical drama on a human scale? Are they strong enough to withstand the load and moves of the shuttle? Are they at all suitable for the warp? What if they are unreal like the threads of the naked king's garments?

Penelope wove and repeatedly ripped the same cloth, so she must have had a strong warp. We all too often do not even reach the weaving stage. We focus rather on spinning the threads, their twisting, piecing, breaking, exchange, where it is not so hard to avoid knots and tangles. One has to simply confront the multitude of periodizational versions. After multigenerational preparations one can raise a suspicion that it is not about a reasonable "haberdashery" perfectionism but about prolonging the preparatory actions to avoid narrative weaving. Could this losing track of the weft thread or inability to select it be a common problem? Or are the dilemmas concerning the selection of weave insurmountable? Therefore, we behave more like Moirai in the service of Chronos, deciding on the occurrence and duration of individual entities which are estimated according to the standardised measure of years.

The warp threads are always made to measure for individual human beings, clinging to the frame of historical processes and loaded with existential circumstances. In the hands of a professional, weft thread justifies the usefulness of the warp, loom, and weights by creating situational weaves. The weaving metaphor is cognitively attractive since it shows that a correction is always possible. It is possible to withdraw, even to the starting point, to add warp threads, change the weights, weft thread, weave and design of the fabric, the type of yarn, its twist and thickness, the loom itself and, finally, a weaver. You just need Penelope's cleverness and courage in directing the course of affairs. Otherwise all we have left may be a pile of random rags, suitable, at most, for a patchwork.

Penelope's example shows that only when we begin to weave and rip will we face the Kairos' time which we can give and use ourselves. Then the cognitive hope is born. This requires, however, having a vision of the outcome so as not to get lost in the attempts to organize the reality. Narrative weaving becomes only a tool to achieve the aim to control one's own destiny by understanding one's place in the world in the context of the past. With such an attitude we do not have to be influenced by

the efforts of other weavers and forced to continue their work. Others should not be our Moirai or, especially, Penelopes. We should bear in mind the tragic fate of the suitors. We can not forget the distinction between the aim and the tools to achieve it.

One has to spot the difference between manipulations of chronology, which are aimed at maintaining archaeological cultures and their social recipients, and the attitude that assumes that we get to know a community by understanding its archaeological testimony. The communities of a certain archaeological culture are not the archaeological culture of a community. In these situations we valorise the time, *i.e.* the benefits of using diachrony and synchrony, differently. In the first case synchrony becomes merely a part of the workshop. It serves for alignment and stabilization of diachronic warp strings. Chronological horizons are its chronological manifestation, often having, as I have already mentioned, a vast time depth. They adopt a structural role, which in the loom structure can correspond to a warp sensor. The point is to make synchrony interlaced with diachrony, so that the past does not consist solely of passing away.

For who can comprehend the course of centuries or millennia? We only pretend to grasp continual becoming when we flee to the long duration positions so willingly. While we reach for processual perspective of history all too easily, it is hard to deny that the temporary human experience usually encompasses a few decades. Its linear order is transmitted (summarised) by reference to specific events, emotional states, life situations and personal relationships, hence our tendency to reduce the history according to our needs and perception abilities. Its cognitive expression is anthropomorphization of processes and their components, which become subjects of long duration. We inevitably enter the realm of mythologising, or hiding complex content which is growing from generation to generation, in a seemingly simple biographical stories involving schematic cultural heroes.

Taxonomic (*i.e.* ahistorical) cultures, whose pseudo-life is measured in centuries, are convenient subjects of archaeological myths. This is the preferred scale of our biographical reductions. Their genesis is of truly mythical setting. We establish them currently with the introduction of order of history. They are born from the chaos of historic matter due to the power of arbitrary decisions and chronology. Since they genetically fit in the proposed time order, they also create the illusion that they

reflect the meaning of historical phenomena and processes (Werner 2004, 6–13). In fact, we are dealing here with ritual actualization of the time of origin, which we at the same time locate in our present. After all, we are talking about measuring the BP age (*Before Present*), so carried out in relation to 1950 AD (Walanus, Goslar 2004, 11–12). Only mythisation allows for this kind of manipulation of time and it permits such shifts. Is our understanding of prehistory going to change substantially when instead of the claim that archaeological taxonomic entities (not only cultures) existed for certain centuries and millennia, in this or any other era, period, or phase, we will use only the fairytale formula: Once upon a time, there was an archaeological culture of this or that?

We shall remember, however, that Chronos and Chaos (a space-time Abyss) are relatives and it is not entirely certain who was the father and who was the son (Grimal 1987, 61). Pondering on this issue should precede every act of creating taxonomic entities from the immensity of sources. Does it not merely prove the mythologising conviction that chaos created order? This anticipatory nostalgia for cognitive stabilization does not result in anything. Including new finds in the existing way of ordering things in the chaos of history may prove to be only a manifestation of the ritual renovation of the latter. It raises some questions as to whether we entirely take advantage of the opportunities and whether we cognitively enter the scope of Kairos' activity at all. Archaeological cultures justify the omnipresence of cognitive reductions of long duration which are in turn treated as a substitute of macrostructures. As a result, formal constructs constitute an alibi for using a temporal perspective which is anthropologically inadequate. They are conducive to avoiding synchronic schemes, which after all provide opportunities to observe microsocial diversity and dynamics. They give meaning to locating unique events in the course of history.

A sequence of synchronic frameworks (not to be confused with stagnancy in long duration) can give birth to an in-depth description of changes and an interest in culture-specific narration (Piątkowski 1993, 75–77). Each of them has a humanistic value, reveals some knowledge, even about its creator, is a part of the truthfulness of an anthropological myth, if only it makes a man a hero. It is worth here to emulate Hesiod (1999, 109–201), who does not refer to eras or ages of mankind, but to generations of people. He thus sees the past as

a sequence of autonomous and specific synchronic schemes, which nevertheless comprise a larger historical project. He perceives the present and the future from this social perspective. How long will it take us to live up to this mythical attitude from 27 centuries ago? It will certainly take time if we remain faithful to the monographic, universalist and evolutionist vision of culture.

James G. Frazer, one of the prominent representatives of cultural evolution, in response to a question whether he had ever come into contact with the natives he was writing about, was to exclaim in surprise: *Me? God forbid!* (Waligórski 1973, 153). Would we react similarly to a question about our relations with the residents of prehistory? This should not be so easy considering the experience of ethnologists after their long-lasting fieldwork. They have not sought to collect new assemblies of items among the living cultural fossils, but they have wished for a temporal stay in a different kind of life. Treating the lack of conditions to hold such trips to the past and the nature of our fieldwork as obstacles is not enough when there have already appeared among us some archaeological proponents of subjectivity of (non-human) things, defending their right to a biography and an active place in history as mediators of interpersonal communication (Domańska 2006, 104–127).

The reductions of long duration reflect one's time greed. They give one a sense of control over the fullness of history, and so the whole time. One can use them to almost immediately reach the end or the beginning of time. Sizes of long duration are, after all, a matter of arbitrary decision. One can use several chronological reductions to traverse history. They are like seven-league boots. We are therefore in the realm of magical activity. Excessive interest in time, *i.e.* the expense of history, raises the question whether we are still on the verge of cosmological and historical tradition, when the time was to transform from a hero of a cyclic cosmological drama to a linear way of reference for history (Toporov 1977, 120–123). Is chronology unnoticeably becoming chronology? These cosmological inclinations are revealed by the aforementioned anthropomorphisation of the narrative and its tools. The proposed inhuman (taxonomically patched) heroes of prehistory are born, they grow up, engage in relationships, have children, grow old and eventually die (Mierzwiński 2008). Thus they become the Oedypian one-day men.

The fact that prehistory is excessively burdened with passing away makes us approach the oldest phases of history as a global extinction of cultures and peoples. This kind of anthropological evolution is a perverse reward for persistent striving for identifying prehistory in the context of standardized and irreversibly targeted time. Sometimes the cognitive longing for engaging with linear chronologisation leads to surprising processual proposals. For example, it is suggested that prehistoric communities of Oder River basin exhibited traces of thinking in terms of continuous time much earlier than it was in the Mediterranean, *i.e.* in the first half of the second millennium BC (Czebreszuk 2001, 88, 202–203). We shall not forget that the perception of time is an expression of value one attributes to the world. Urging a change in the understanding of time exerts pressure on people from prehistory to rationalize the way we do, to accelerate their march towards modernity. Hurrying the history, however, is as futile as Xerxes' trying to control the waves through whipping and putting handcuffs on them (Herodotus, *Dzieje / The Histories* VII 34–35).

We burden the people of the past and material remains of their activity with responsibility for our inability to keep up with restless history, with a provoking variability of an unknown world. We do not keep up with creating images of this world, assuming in good faith that it is what we want. Archaeological statements on cultural topics are often astonishing with their banality and ordinary character. It can be said that the effort spent on dating turns out to be incomprehensible. If the chronological time cannot be used as a research tool, gaining objective or even subjective cognitive status, then we lose touch with reality under study. Choosing Chronos we do not chase but run away from Kairos, which is contrary to the eternal order of the social world. This is the involuntary archaeological cognitive anarchism.

Reducing any uniqueness to the chronological (one-day) dimension of being, are we able to grasp and understand the cultural meaning of human existence? Perhaps Wolfgang Goethe was right arguing that: *In life, the most important thing is life itself, and not its result* (Spengler 2001, 39). What is the most important in history is activity in the context of different cultural frameworks, rather than awaiting the advent of modernity (Zvelebil 1997, 256–259). So let us hurry to get to know the people of the past, not letting them go away. This can be a Kairos-like paraphrase of a beautiful thought of Fr. Jan Twardowski

(1999), who captured the humanistic value of the encounter in the great work of transcendence. These unique moments give meaning, density and rhythm to human life and long duration (Vidal-Naquet 2003, 67–68). It is synchronic, or situational archaeo-anthropology that should be the purpose of archaeology, not diachronic anthropology, as expected by processualists (Plog 1973). Only such a perspective allows for an effective study of the contexts of interpersonal communication, *i.e.* Kairos-like time travels.

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