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House and Household - making room for history

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Topic - Theoretical and methodological perspectives in archaeology

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The household is commonly identified as a fundamental element of social organization in past times. In archaeology, the household has often been regarded as an essential level of research, in order to bridge the gap between grand theories of cultural change and the practical archaeology on the ground. This is also a field where the combination of material culture and written text is both rewarding and, in fact, necessary. Archaeologists as well as historians have collected massive amounts of empirical observations concerning houses and households, and they have developed theoretical approaches, but they have not very often collaborated systematically on these matters. Nevertheless, this is a field where the benefits of cooperation between archaeology and history, material culture and written texts, are obvious. It is also a field where methods and theoretical approaches have developed rapidly during recent years. Much new empirical evidence has also been added.

Within the disciplines of social, economic and cultural history a lively discussion is now taking place concerning households in relation to social practice, space and material culture. In historical archaeology, studies concerning the early modern period have increased rapidly, thus making possible very close household analysis in multidisciplinary studies. This makes possible new perspectives; emphasizing the complex structure of households, gender and agency, household cycles and family history as well as alternative models of households.

In our session we would like to welcome contributions discussing the relationship between house and household, both from theoretical and from methodological and empirical points of view. The main focus is how to develop the analyses and understanding of households as function and structure in past times, and the relationship between houses and households, as for example through deeper cooperation between history and archaeology.

Presentation Preference - Regular session (half day)