



Seminar

ANDERS KALIFF

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*The Indo-European Roots of the
Ancient Scandinavian Horse Sacrifice*

Tuesday, 13 October 2020, 2:15 p.m.

Due to the precautions imposed by the current Corona pandemic,
the Thunberg Hall will be closed to the public until further notice.

You are therefore invited to join the seminar via Zoom instead:
<https://uu-se.zoom.us/j/63408559400>

This is an event of the research programme
LAMP – Languages and Myths of Prehistory.

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ABOUT ANDERS KALIFF

Anders Kaliff (b. 1963) is Professor of Archaeology and Deputy Head at the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History at Uppsala University. He is specialized in the archaeology of ritual and religion, with focus on cremation and prehistoric cosmologies, but has a broad experience from different archaeological fields. Before becoming a professor in 2008, Kaliff worked as a field archaeologist and field director for more than 20 years. He has also been Head of the Department of Archaeological Excavations at the Swedish National Heritage Board. Kaliff is a working member of the Royal Gustavus Adolphus Academy and of the Nathan Söderblom Society. His books on Indo-European ritual include: *Fire, Water, Heaven and Earth: Ritual Practice and Cosmology in Ancient Scandinavia: An Indo-European Perspective* (2007), *Cremation, Corpses and Cannibalism: Comparative Cosmologies and Centuries of Cosmic Consumption* (co-author T. Oestigaard, 2017), *Källan på botten av tidens brunn. Indoeuropeiska rötter till fornnordisk religion* (2018) and *The Great Indo-European Horse Sacrifice: 4000 Years of Cosmological Continuity from Sintashta and the Steppe to Scandinavian Skeid* (co-author T. Oestigaard, 2020).

ABSTRACT

Indo-European horse sacrifice is one of the world's most ancient, enduring and widespread traditions. It is possible to trace parts of the practice across large parts of Europe and Central Asia in the period ca. 2100 BC - 1900 AD, albeit in culturally specific and changing forms. Moreover, the tradition also impacted social developments in many spheres, because this cosmogonic ritual embodied world views that affected most other spheres of lives and living.

This paper analyzes Indo-European tradition of horse sacrifice in a 4000-year historic context, from the Sintashta culture in Russia in the east to historical Scandinavia in the west. The tradition shows that cosmological rituals were closely related to the region's ecology, the weather and the availability of water that was required for a successful harvest. In the cold north, the sun was important for cultivation, but it was the relation between water and winter that defined the seasons and called for horse rituals, as recent skeid traditions show. Understanding horse sacrifice as an institution therefore provides new insights into prehistoric religion from the Bronze Age to recent folklore in rural Scandinavia. Of fundamental importance is the theoretical and methodological approach to the study of the Indo-European questions, long time-spans and material culture in relation to language, ideology and ritual practice.

The question of the Indo-Europeans' existence or non-existence as an archaeologically traceable cultural group is a question that has generated fierce debate for more than a century. Recent breakthroughs in aDNA research have resulted in a total reversal of the general view of and interest in Indo-Europeans in archaeology. For the first time in the history of archaeology, it is now possible to use DNA to clarify how significant groups of people from the Caspian-Pontic steppe moved, through a rapid and fairly massive migration, from the steppe to Central and Northern Europe, beginning about 2950 BC.