

## **Chris Hann – Short Biography**

Chris Hann (born 4<sup>th</sup> August, 1953) is a British social anthropologist who has done field research in socialist and post-socialist Eastern Europe (especially in Hungary and Poland) and the Turkic-speaking world (Black Sea coast and Xinjiang, N-W China). His main theoretical interests lie in economic anthropology, religion (especially Eastern Christianity), and long-term history (the Eurasian landmass). After holding university posts in Cambridge and Canterbury, UK, Hann has worked since 1999 in Germany as one of the founding Directors of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale.

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*Early life*

Hann was born in Cardiff, the first child of parents (of mixed Irish, English and Welsh ancestry) who were themselves born and brought up in the Welsh capital. In 1953 the family moved to the new town of Cwmbrân, in Monmouthshire. Hann was brought up in a monolingual English-speaking environment, close to the “Border Country” of Raymond Williams.<sup>1</sup>

*Career and field research*

Hann won a Welsh Foundation Scholarship to study politics, philosophy, and economics at Jesus College, Oxford University, graduating with a first class degree in 1974. He specialised in Eastern Europe, which he first visited with an Inter-rail ticket in 1972.

After Oxford, Hann was a graduate student at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. In 1974-5 he took the Certificate course in social anthropology, choosing Melanesia as his ethnographic option. For his doctorate, Jack Goody advised him to continue with the regional specialisation he already had. He spent the years 1975-77 learning Hungarian and doing field research on the Danube-Tisza interfluvium, defending his thesis in 1979. He still visits the village of Tázlár regularly, arguing that the micro-level developments he tracks there reflect the efflorescence and eventual demise of a distinctive path to “market socialism”.<sup>2</sup>

Before completing his doctorate, Hann opened a new field site in Southern Poland in 1978-9. His aim here was to compare rural adaptations in a non-collectivised socialist society with his Hungarian observations. Fieldwork in the Carpathians coincided with food shortages, the rise of *Solidarity*, and national political crisis. Apart from the insights gained into the dysfunctionality of Polish socialism, working in a region inhabited by an east Slav minority allowed Hann to develop new interests in ethnicity and national identity. He followed up in the 1990s with research into Polish-Ukrainian relations and the predicament of the Greek Catholic Church in the border city of Przemyśl.<sup>3</sup>

Hann is married to Ildikó Bellér-Hann, who teaches the societies and cultures of Central Asia and Western China at the Institute of Regional and Cross-Cultural Studies of the University of Copenhagen.<sup>4</sup> They have carried out field research together in Anatolia (east Black Sea coast) and in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, N-W China. Hann’s main contribution to the Turkey project focused on the smallholders who gave up subsistence farming in order to grow tea as a cash crop in the Rize region. He also investigated economic transformations in rural Xinjiang, while also engaging with religion and ethnic relations.<sup>5</sup>

Research in all four field sites (Hungary, Poland, Turkey and Xinjiang) began while Hann was based in Cambridge, where he was a Fellow of Corpus Christi College and Lecturer in the Department of Social Anthropology. He left Cambridge in 1992 to become Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Kent (Canterbury). After

two years as a Fellow at the Institute of Advanced Study in Berlin, in 1999 Hann moved to Halle as a Founding Director of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology.<sup>6</sup>

### *Main interests*

Hann's theoretical interests are closely related to his ethnographic research. He was a pioneer anthropological investigator of what he calls "Marxist-Leninist-Maoist socialism". Since 1990 he has traced the distinctive pathways of "postsocialism" while connecting them to global political economy. Hann has been critical of terms like "market economy" and "civil society", predicting that the slogans and strategies on which foreign advisers and local elites agreed would not deliver the goods that the mass of citizens hoped for.<sup>7</sup> A particular focus has been on the privatization of collective property, a dominant theme of team research in the first years of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology (1999-2005).<sup>8</sup> Hann then led collective research there on religious transformation after socialism (2003-2010). In his personal contributions he frequently draws on his work with the Greek Catholics of Central Europe to critique a Western, essentially Protestant, bias in the Anglophone "anthropology of Christianity".<sup>9</sup>

A persistent strand of Hann's work concerns the connections between anthropology and history. After leaving Cambridge, Hann edited the collection *When History Accelerates*, in honour of Paul Sterling. This focused on recent and contemporary history.<sup>10</sup> After joining the Max Planck Society, Hann began to address longer-term patterns, acknowledging debts to Ernest Gellner, his head of department in Cambridge in the 1980s, and Jack Goody, the supervisor of his doctoral thesis. Hann has sought to place recent socialism and postsocialism in the context of the "Eurasian miracle" that accompanied the rise of cities in the late Bronze Age.<sup>11</sup> According to him, in a creative dialogue with Goody, the last three millennia of Eurasian history may be thought of as a dialectic between market exchange (culminating in capitalism) and redistribution (culminating in Marxist-Leninist-Maoist socialism, but expressed more attractively in democratic variants of these doctrines).<sup>12</sup> Here the key concepts are borrowed from Karl Polanyi.<sup>13</sup> His major current project (funded by the European Research Council)

compares civilisations across the Eurasian landmass with reference to the moral economy of small businesses.<sup>14</sup>

### *Collaboration*

Particularly since moving to Germany, Hann has cooperated systematically with scholars whose regional and theoretical interests differ from his own. This is particularly evident in economic anthropology, where he has maintained a friendship with Keith Hart that dates back to the 1980s when they were colleagues in Cambridge.<sup>15</sup> He has also worked closely with other leading figures in the (sub)discipline, including Stephen Gudeman, with whom he led the “Economy and Ritual” postdoctoral research group in Halle in 2009-2012).<sup>16</sup> More recently he has co-led similar groups with Catherine Alexander and Jonathan Parry (on “Industry and Inequality in Eurasia”, 2012-2015) and with Don Kalb (on “Financialization”, 2015-2018).

Together with Faculty colleagues in history and archaeology at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg (where he is Honorary Professor), in 2012 Hann launched an International Max Planck Research School for the “Anthropology, Archaeology and History of Eurasia” (ANARCHIE) in 2012.<sup>17</sup> With Hermann Goltz of the Faculty of Theology, he organized an international conference on Eastern Christians, the papers of which were published in 2010.<sup>18</sup> He has participated part-time in Thomas Hylland Erikson’s “Overheating” project at the University of Oslo, a multi-dimensional investigation of contemporary globalization.<sup>19</sup> In 2016 Hann was the initiator of “MAX-CAM: Centre for the Study of Ethics, Human Economy and Social Change”, a collaboration between the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity (Göttingen, Peter van der Veer), and the Division of Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge (James Laidlaw and Joel Robbins).<sup>20</sup>

## *Honours and awards*

Hann has been a member of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences since 2008. In 2015 he was awarded the Rivers Memorial Medal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (London).

## *Personal*

Chris Hann and Ildikó Bellér-Hann have two children; both have chosen to do doctoral research in social anthropology.

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams, *Border Country*. Carmarthen: Parthian Library of Wales, 2006 [1960].

<sup>2</sup> *Tázlár, a village in Hungary* (1980); “Backwardness revisited: time, space and civilization in rural Eastern Europe”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2015 (57 (4): 881-911). [journals.cambridge.org/repo\\_A993jp3WAY8ff](http://journals.cambridge.org/repo_A993jp3WAY8ff).

<sup>3</sup> *A Village Without Solidarity: Polish peasants in years of crisis* (1985); “Postsocialist nationalism: rediscovering the past in South East Poland”, *Slavic Review* 1998 (57 (4): 840-63)

<sup>4</sup> <http://ccrs.ku.dk/staff/?pure=en/persons/381452>

<sup>5</sup> *Tea and the domestication of the Turkish State* Huntingdon: 1990; *Turkish region: state, market and social identities on the east Black Sea coast* (with Ildikó Bellér-Hann), Oxford: 2000. “Embedded socialism? Land, labour, and money in Eastern Xinjiang” in Chris Hann and Keith Hart (eds.), *Market and Society: The Great Transformation revisited* Cambridge: 2009, pp. 256-71; “Smith in Beijing, Stalin in Urumchi: ethnicity, political economy and violence in Xinjiang, 1759-2009” *Focaal. Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 60: 108-23 (2011); “The universal and the particular in rural Xinjiang: ritual commensality and the mosque community” in Magnus Marsden and Konstantinos Retsikas (eds.), *Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds*. Dordrecht: 2013, pp. 171-91.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.eth.mpg.de/>

<sup>7</sup> (Ed.) *Market Economy and Civil Society in Hungary* Brighton: 1990; *Civil society: challenging western models* (ed. With Elizabeth Dunn) London: 1996. *The skeleton at the feast* Canterbury. 1996.

<sup>8</sup> “From production to property”, *Man* 1992 28 (3): 299-320; *Property relations: renewing the anthropological tradition* (ed.) Cambridge:1998; *The postsocialist agrarian question* (with the Property Relations Group) Münster: 2003; (ed.) *Property Relations* Halle: 2005 <http://www.eth.mpg.de/3026998/2000---2005---dep---hann>

<sup>9</sup> (ed.) 2010 *Religion, identities, postsocialism. The Halle Focus Group, 2003-2010:*

<http://www.eth.mpg.de/3341163/2003---2010---dep---hann>

“Creeds, cultures and the witchery of music”, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2003, 9 (2): 223-39; “The heart of the matter: materialities, modernities and Christian civilization”, *Current Anthropology* 2014. 55 (Supp. 10): 182-92.

<sup>10</sup> Ed. *When history accelerates: essays on rapid social change, complexity and creativity*, London:1994.

<sup>11</sup> “A concept of Eurasia”, *Current Anthropology* 2016, 57 (1): 1-27; Cf. Jack Goody, *The Eurasian Miracle*, Cambridge: 2010.

<sup>12</sup> “Goody, Polanyi and Eurasia: an unfinished project in comparative historical economic anthropology”, *History and Anthropology* 2015, 26 (3): 308-20.

<sup>13</sup> Hann is one of a small group of economic anthropologists able to read and evaluate Polanyi’s early Hungarian texts as well as the better known writings in German and English. See “Radical functionalism: the life and work of Karl Polanyi”, *Dialectical Anthropology* 1992, 17: 141-66. See also “The economic fallacy and forms of integration during and after socialism”, *Economy and Society* 2014, 43 (4): 626-49.

<sup>14</sup> Realising Eurasia: Civilisation and Moral Economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (European Research Council Project Number: 340854, 2014-2019). [http://www.eth.mpg.de/erc\\_realeurasia](http://www.eth.mpg.de/erc_realeurasia)

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<sup>15</sup> See *Market and Society: the Great Transformation revisited* (ed. with Keith Hart) Cambridge: 2009; *Economic anthropology: history, ethnography, critique* (with Keith Hart) Cambridge: 2011.

<sup>16</sup> See *Economy and ritual: studies of postsocialist transformations* and *Oikos and market: explorations in self-sufficiency after socialism* (both volumes ed. with Stephen Gudeman) New York: 2015.

<sup>17</sup> ANARCHIE – <http://www.eth.mpg.de/anarchie>

<sup>18</sup> *Eastern Christians in anthropological perspective* (ed. with Hermann Goltz) Berkeley: 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Hylland Eriksen: Overheating. The three crises of globalisation: an anthropological history of the early 21st century: <http://ccrs.ku.dk/staff/?pure=en/persons/381452>

<sup>20</sup> More details concerning the research programme of this Centre should be available in May 2016.