

Book reviews - Buchbesprechungen

Mesolithic Interfaces – Variability in Lithic Technologies in Eastern Fennoscandia

Tuija Rankama (ed.), *The Archaeological Society of Finland*, 2011, 253 pages, Hardback and electronic, ISBN 978-951-98021-9-0

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Something new has happened in European Mesolithic research – something that researchers concerned with the early prehistory of Scandinavia have waited long for. Personally, I first discovered this in 2005 at the Seventh International Mesolithic Conference in Belfast. However, at most large “Mesolithic conferences” since then, as well as in international journals, this has become increasingly clear. What I hint at is of course that the investigation and publication of the early Stone Age in Eastern Fennoscandia, i.e. modern day Finland, has increased significantly during recent years. The edited volume „Mesolithic Interfaces – Variability in Lithic Technologies in Eastern Fennoscandia“ can in this context be seen as the latest culmination of an ongoing process. Editor of the volume, T. Rankama (in the *Foreword*), and E. Hertell and M. A. Manninen (in the *Introduction*) reveal what has started and driven the process. The foundation of the Interfaces in the Mesolithic Stone Age of Eastern Fennoscandia Project was laid in the late 1990's when T. Rankama started a volunteer study group at the department of archaeology at the University of Helsinki. The group included former students E. Hertell, M. A. Manninen and M. Tallavaara, who since then have become distinguished Stone Age specialists. Not much attention had been given to knapped lithic artefact materials in finish archaeology prior to the forming of this project. This probably has several reasons, e.g., much of the early industries are made from quartz, a material that is not easily analysed and understood archaeologically, as well as a vast, often forested, finish landscape that is not easily surveyed for lithic scatters. However, as this volume, along with other published research papers of the group members, demonstrates, there was a lot to come for in the eastern Fennoscandian lithic material. Simply the definition of worked lithic raw material types and their outcrop areas shows mobility, regional origin and contact of the colonizing societies as discussed in the first paper *High Mobility or Gift Exchange – Early*

Mesolithic Exotic Chipped Lithics in Southern Finland (Hertell & Tallavaara).

Thanks to the group, it is today evident that high mobility pioneering societies using exotic flint materials deriving from the western Baltic, and culturally from the “post-Swiderian” tradition, roamed around eastern Fennoscandia, reaching Lapland and the coast of northern Scandinavia. The site that more than any other has explicated this fact is the Sujala site located in northern Lapland (Rankama & Kankaanpää 2008). However, recently the site Fällegohtesajeguolbba in the Varanger Fjord region has been acknowledged too (Rankama & Kankaanpää 2011). The Sujala site is spatially analysed in the volume by J. Kankaanpää and T. Rankama (*Spatial patterns of the Early Mesolithic Sujala Site, Utsjoki, Finnish Lapland*), a much appreciated contribution that explains about this enigmatic site, its excavation, lithic material and spatial find distribution. The Sujala area 2 is, so far, the only site in northern Scandinavia with a “post-Swiderian” type of lithic assemblage that is fully excavated. From the spatial analysis a single component site, including a dwelling place, is convincingly interpreted. Thus, also from an intra site spatial point of view, high mobility seems to be evidenced.

As mentioned, the key to unlock the early prehistory of Finland was to address questions and methodologies concerning chipped lithic artefact materials. The “post-Swiderian” is signified by a specific lithic technology, in which regular lithic blades are produced from particular high quality lithic raw materials, from regular conical core types, while later Mesolithic groups increasingly employ quartz materials and different lithic concepts, as investigated earlier by the group (Tallavaara *et al.* 2010). The papers *Hunter-Gatherer Mobility and the Organisation of Core Technology in Mesolithic North-Eastern Europe* (Hertell & Tallavaara) and *Far and Few between – an Archive Survey of Finnish Blade Finds* (Manninen & Hertell) employ this approach and identify characteristic blade and core morphologies, while ascribing them to different techno-complexes and discussing their meaning culturally, economically and technologically.

A central theme of the project is signified by the concept “interfaces”, understood as border zones, whether it is geographical, cultural or chronological. In the papers *Stone Age Flint Technology in South-Western Estonia: Results from the Pärnu Bay Area* (Kriiska, Hertell & Manninen), *Northern Inland Oblique Point Sites – a New Look into the Late Mesolithic Oblique Point Tradition in Eastern Fennoscandia* (Manninen & Knutsson) and in the last paper *The Kaaraneskoski Site in Pello, South-Western Lapland – at the Interface*

between the "East" and the "West" (Rankama & Kankaanpää), modern geographical borders are fruitfully transgressed by archaeological research collaborations towards the eastern Baltic and Northern Scandinavia. Both Lapland and the eastern Baltic constitute regional eco-zones that obviously were exploited in their entirety by mobile prehistoric hunter-gatherer societies. Thus, by enlarging the geographical scope and comparing and discussing national derived typologies and terminologies of "cultures" and "tool categories" across nations and regions much new information and understanding is achieved. Especially the paper by M. A. Manninen and K. Knutsson should be emphasized as a very valuable contribution, as it presents a vast amount of data (site locations, assemblages and radiocarbon dates), concerning the middle-late Mesolithic (7th-5th century BC) at a superregional scale of Fennoscandia and Scandinavia. It seems from analysis of characteristic lithic artefact morphologies (oblique points and core types) that technological shifts during these periods took place at a much larger geographical scale than anticipated in earlier and more regionally focused studies!

Should I be critical it would be in regard to the theoretical, methodological direction that some of the papers take. Hertell, Manninen and Tallavaara often employs a processual methodology with references to much ethnographic literature, which is relevant, e.g., when discussing large-scale hunter-gatherer mobility. However, by adopting a strict processual approach, including all definitions, there is also a chance of too uncritically (re)producing results. For example, the idea of efficiency, as a main parameter in human behaviour and technology, is problematic as shown in much anthropological and sociological literature (e.g., Mauss 1979; Bijker 2010). Along the same line, some of the mathematically based analyses and graphs on human behaviour in relation to, e.g., ecology and stone tools types, typical to the processual school, documents statistical trends, but are generally not easily understood. The goal in many lithic studies of today is to analyse and present a case in a dynamic way, so that artefacts are explained and understood as parts of processes – and then link to broader perspectives.

Lastly, I would like to congratulate the editor with the quality of the graphical design. Designer Mikael Nyholm has done a splendid job in producing a book design that is so "appetizing", that you instantly like to open and browse the volume and read the eight papers. The volume includes an impressive number of high quality colour photos, drawings, graphs and tables. I would also like to emphasize that it is highly valuable that lithic artefacts in many instances are both drawn and represented by colour photos, as it gives the reader a chance of understanding the crucial variation in the raw material qualities and properties unearthed in the region.

To make it short, the volume „*Mesolithic Interfaces – Variability in Lithic Technologies in Eastern Fennoscandia*“ should be part of the library of every archaeologist with an interest into Stone Age societies in Northern and Eastern Europe. Buy the hard cover to have the beautiful book, or download for free from: http://www.sarks.fi/masf/masf_1/masf_1.html

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GIS Simulation of the Earliest Hominid Colonisation of Eurasia

Kathryn Holmes, ArchaeoPress, Bar International Series 1597, Oxford 2007, 148 pages, £ 33.00, ISBN 978 1 4073 0013 9

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Despite the constant cry of academic papers for more data it is often new approaches that are needed in order to understand the old problems. The study of early hominid dispersals is a complex academic issue integrating data from several very different disciplines: archaeology, biological anthropology, paleozoology, palaeoclimate studies, geology and, most recently, genetics. The multidisciplinary nature of this topic is challenging as it forces an individual to combine highly specialist knowledge (and a lot of it) from several very different fields. The threshold of how much one person can process and make sense of has been met a long time ago leaving us with too much information to understand this complex, global phenomenon using only qualitative techniques. However, the nature and amount of data related to the first "Out of Africa" is also a blessing as it allows for a richer interpretation of the different aspects of the dispersal and enables crosschecking hypotheses against independent data types, if the right method is used.

Kathryn Holmes introduced one of these methods in "GIS Simulation of the Earliest Hominid Colonisation