

NW Europe in Transition

The Early Neolithic in Britain and South Sweden

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CHAPTER 5

BRAVE NEW WORLD, THE PATHS TOWARDS A NEOLITHIC SOCIETY IN SOUTHERN SCANDINAVIA

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Abstract: *This article is about the neolithisation in Southern Scandinavia. The background in the late Mesolithic Ertebølleculture is discussed and things like import items, cemeteries and settlement pattern are discussed. Climatic change and the resulting change in the procurement strategy is seen as important factors in the obviously rapid change during the late Mesolithic. The Early Neolithic in Scania is then discussed in some length and issues like chronology and settlement pattern are discussed. One of the main issues is that there is not that marked change in settlement pattern. It has often been proposed that the inland was a more or less unknown entity but this was not the case. Early Neolithic man settled though in very distinct areas with sandy soils and proximity to water, thus being able to use a wide spectrum of ecological niches.*

Keywords: *Late Mesolithic, Early Neolithic, settlement pattern, pits, houses*

The Late Mesolithic. A period of change

From 5500 BC until 4000 BC the Ertebølleculture existed in the whole of southern Scandinavia with concentrations to Denmark and Southern Sweden. The Ertebølleculture is primarily known for maybe three things; the introduction of pottery, the vast kitchenmiddens and the large cemeteries. In the period 4300-4000 BC, in what Klassen (2004, 103) calls import phase 5, there is a marked increase in the number of what may be termed prestigious objects like T-shaped antler axes and Shoe last axes. These foreign items we can perceive were loaded with potent images and had a symbolic value. They played an active part in the transformation of society (Fischer 2002). As early as c 4600 we also have evidence from northern Germany (Grube –Roehof) of domesticated cattle. This can be seen as an import with no traceable influence on the economy (Hartz, S, Lübke, H and Terberger, T. 2007, 587)

There is also evidence for a change in the use of marine resources during the period 4800-4600 BC. It is obvious that there is a rise in the use of marine resources like oysters and at the same period of time we see a marked growth of the middens. This culminates in the period 4600-4000 BC (Andersen 1993, 74). The kitchenmiddens on Jutland are due to their complex stratigraphy of great importance in the interpretation of the settlement history and chronology of the late Mesolithic as well as the Earliest Neolithic. We can also, based on the middens as well as other sites, study the diversity of environment used at the time. A small site like Agerøes on the northwest corner of the island of Funen might typify a smaller specialized late Ertebølle site (Richter and Noe-Nygaard 2004). The site is dated to

4200 BC contain 32 different animal species. Evidence from excavations in the middens during the last decades has also revealed that these were divided into smaller sites with hearths, work floors etc. (Andersen 2001, 32). The notion that the late Ertebølle sites were very large is in other words under discussion. They were continuously used for a long period of time though. In this context it is of interest to have a closer look at one special midden. This is Bjørnsholm in the central Limfjord area in northern Jutland (Andersen 1993, 59). Close to it, an early Neolithic grave with a timber construction was excavated (Andersen and Johansen 1992). The Ertebølle layers date to 5050 - 4050 BC and the Early Neolithic site is dated to between 3960 and 3520 BC (Andersen 1993, 61). This implies a more or less continuous habitation for about 1000 years. This is maybe an extreme, as we also know of sites like Meilgård that was in use for about 500 years (Liversage 1992, 102). An area behind the midden at Bjørnsholm was excavated as well. Only very ambiguous traces of habitation were revealed (Andersen 1993, 66; 2001, 26-29). The only more substantial features found in the midden are hearths and these occur in all levels of the midden. There is however no traces of huts, pits or postholes so it is still an enigma where people actually lived. The answer to this problem might be that the middens were a type of coastal sites at which people went about doing their daily routines, fishing, hunting and so forth. They did not actually live here though. We could maybe also see these locations as the places for communal feasting used at particular times of the year. But the question still lingers; where did people actually live. It might be that the middens were only a part of the actual settlement area but this notion doesn't really answer the question.

What we can say however is that the people of the Ertebølleculture used a diversity of ecological areas ranging from the fjords of eastern Jutland to the inland of Scania. An inland site like Ringkloster from the late Ertebølleculture on Jutland is in this context of great importance (Andersen 1975).

The cemeteries that in some cases are associated with the settlement sites are still quite few. The first cemetery from the period that was excavated is Vedbæk north of Copenhagen on Zealand. This is rather small with 22 individuals of both sexes and of various ages. It is dated to c 5000 BC (Albrethsen and Brinch-Petersen 1977). The largest of the known cemeteries is Skateholm 1 with more than 60 burials (Larsson, L. 1984).

The apparent lack of more substantial traces of huts or houses, especially from the later part of the Ertebølleculture, has been one of the most discussed issues in Scandinavian Mesolithic research over the years; why do we not find any more substantial traces of occupation (for a review see Biwall *et al.* 1997; Cronberg 2001, 81-89). One of the most intriguing new aspects of the late Mesolithic has therefore been the excavation of houses and huts at the site Tågerup in western Scania (Cronberg 2001, 89-149). The site is not located directly at the coast but in a sheltered position in a deep lagoon. The oldest remains are from the Kongemose culture (Karsten and Knarrström 2001). One of the houses, House I, was a circular construction rebuilt in two stages. The other one, House II, was an 85 m² rectangular longhouse with a singular row of roof supporting posts. House III has been described as a shelter.

The chronology of the houses is complicated as discussed by Cronberg (2001, 147). The radiocarbon dates are, except for two, all way to young and are mostly Neolithic or Bronze Age. The dating of the houses therefore had to be based on a study of the transverse arrowheads (Vang-Petersen 1984). This dates the houses to the early and middle phases of the Ertebølle culture. Interestingly enough a couple of pottery sherds are mentioned from House III. They are accordingly dated to the Ertebølle culture (Cronberg 2001, 143). Pottery is not adopted in Denmark and Scania until c 4600 BC (Hallgren 2004, 136). If the interpretation of House III is correct, it is not older than 4600 BC. The house structures from Tågerup might imply that people during the late Mesolithic lived in large communal houses.

Man, memory and landscape

The Neolithisation in Scania

I will in the following argue for that at the start of the Early Neolithic there is a change of focus in the settlement location and connected to this also a change in how people perceived the landscape that they lived in. The focus will be on southernmost Sweden, Scania. The starting point will be the often discussed change in settlement pattern between the late Mesolithic and the early Neolithic (Larsson M.

1984). The large coastal Ertebølle sites were more or less abandoned as permanent settlements. They were however still used seasonally by the early farmers. New areas inland were occupied, preferably sandy soils close to water. The sites have usually been seen as small, about 600-1000m² but this notion is however under discussion today (Larsson M. 1984; Andersson 2003, 175).

We can tell a story of how people at this time re-invented themselves and their relationship with both other people and the surrounding landscape. This view goes well with the one that Carlstein (1982, 39) sees as “a web of individual-paths in time-space”. This notion can also in many ways be compared to what Tim Ingold (2000, 193) in a discussion of temporality and landscape has written, “In short, the landscape is the world as it is known to those who dwell therein, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them”. This he calls a “taskscape” The landscape is thus both agency and time embodied (Ingold 2000).

Most agency theorists agree on that agency is a socially significant quality of action rather than being synonymous with action itself (Dobres and Robb 2000, 8). It is also important to stress, as John Barrett (2000, 61) has stated, that action, time, space and agency work together and carry the past into the future. In using agency theory we can investigate how cultural meanings and social structures are constructed and transformed through peoples interactions with others, loosely termed social practice (Jordan 2004, 112)

One main issue that has been discussed is to what degree Neolithic man changed his concept of land and the myths and stories about it. As John Barrett (1994, 93) has suggested this might have a long history perhaps going back to the Mesolithic in that those places might have been part of a much wider seasonal cycle of movement. This is also what the evidence from the middens suggests. It is obvious that they were seasonally used. Some for the hunting of swans and migrating birds like the site Aggersund (Andersen 1978). Some of the middens like Norsminde, Ertebølle and Björnsholm have traces of earlier occupation. These pre-midden layers are radiocarbon dated to between 4960-4600 cal BC (Andersen 2001, 24). Places like these could be termed “persistent places” and such places would have engendered a sense of time and belonging (Cummings 2002, 79).

What actually motivated this shift in settlement and why did people move? Was the shift actually that radical? As discussed above the inland area was by no means an unknown entity. The change in settlement area might be seen as a functional response to economic changes but also to climatic change. There is a marked increase in temperature at the Atlantic-subboreal transition (Karlén and Kuylenstierna 1996) as well as dramatic changes in the shoreline displacement. This is especially noteworthy in eastern Denmark where the shoreline displacement caused

marked changes in the landscape (Larsson L.2007, 605). Taken together these things altered the landscape in the long run and an increase in temperature also facilitated the growing of cereals. Changes in the ecology changed and altered the structural conditions under which the new subsistence could operate. Mesolithic man of course had knowledge of different ecological niches and that is why the move might not have been that upsetting. Motivations for doing this, we can argue, must have been formulated into strategies by people who had a certain level of knowledge about their social and natural environment. People were active agents in the way in which the settlement sites, the farming plots and so on were chosen. They created meaningful landscapes, which helped them to develop a sense of group identity as well as a self-identity. People also mixed their material culture bringing in both new items while still preserving some old ones. I would here draw the attention to the obvious similarity between the flint inventory of the Ertebölle culture and the earliest Funnel Beaker culture (Oxie group). The existence of transverse arrowheads, flake axes and singular core axes in the latter has been noted and discussed as evidence for a close connection between these. This close connection actually only exists in the earliest Neolithic (Oxie/Svenstorp) and is obviously gone in the later stages (Bellevuegården/Virum) (cf Larsson M.1984, 162; Fischer 2002, 351-355). The term “creolisation” might be useful in this context. The term refers to a process whereby men and women actively blend together elements of different cultures to create a new culture. Creolisation is perceived as a more active process and one that involves, by definition, a give and take between peoples of diverse cultural traditions (Cohen and Toninato 2010, 1). The term leads Zvelebil to formulate the ‘Neolithic creolisation hypothesis’ based on language, migration and the merging of different cultures (Zvelebil 1995). This is why the concept of agency is important as it recognize that men and women make well-supported choices, and take action to realize these choices (Dobres and Robb 2000, 133). In the earliest Neolithic individuals or groups of people who had a certain level of knowledge about their social and natural environment must have formulated individual and collective motivations - reasons and justifications for doing things - into strategies.

As mentioned above Mesolithic man had previously both moved and stayed in the inland of Scania as is well known from several settlement sites like for example Bökeberg (Karsten 2001). As noted by Magnus Andersson (2003, 161) though in his work in western Scania there are few if any traces of Mesolithic habitation on the Early Neolithic inland settlements. There is obviously a different strategy at work here; the earliest farmers chose quite other areas for settlement. If we look at the distribution of the earliest polished flint axes, the pointed butted variant; it is obvious that the inland took on a whole new dimension (Hernek 1989; Jennbert 1984). It is now time to take a closer look at the settlement sites.

Several of the earliest Neolithic settlements had a distinct

location in the landscape. They were situated on ridges or small hills in the undulating landscape. People located their settlements to areas with a large ecological diversity. The sites are close to water and in general located on sandy soils. This is especially true for the sites with large amounts of pits like Svenstorp and Månasken in SW Scania (Larsson M. 1984; 1985). The pits are often layered meaning that they were actually recut and reused. Large amounts of flints debris are found in the pits, but also obviously unused implements like flake axes, flake scrapers and in some cases even complete axes and vessels (Larsson M.1984; 1985). The interpretation of these pits has usually been very functional; they were waste pits. Some of the pits with complete axes or vessels have been re-interpreted though as ritual pits (Karsten 1994; Andersson 2003, 169; Rogius et al.2003; Larsson M. 2007).

Above I mentioned that memory is important in creating new identities but also in recollecting the distant past. The coastal sites were reoccupied and used seasonally during the earliest Neolithic period thus creating links with past generations. Strassburg (2000, 292) mentions that there is a marked change in funerary rites 4900-4700 cal BC as for example observed at the Skateholm cemetery. People seem to use red-ochre sparingly and there are very few, if no, depositions of red deer antlers. Interestingly enough, if this notion is correct, we can in the earliest Neolithic see that red deer antlers were once again deposited in not graves but in pits that very often are associated with long barrows. At the site Almhov in Malmö (Western Scania) several pits with antlers were excavated a few years back (Gidlöf *et al.* 2006; Rudebeck 2010, 83-253). These pits are associated with three long barrows. In for example pits 6, 232 and 3868 several parts of red deer antlers were found (Gidlöf *et al.* 2006, 64, 65, 71). Pit 6 was radiocarbon dated to 3940-3690 cal BC (Ua-17156) that is very early in the Neolithic sequence (Gidlöf *et al.* 2006, 61). Liliana Janik (2003, 116) discusses the possible function of different animals as markers of cultural identity. In the light of the discussion above, this is a highly intriguing possibility. If the significance of different animals changed over time it might be vital for the interpretation of the ways in which the Early Neolithic unfolded and evolved. The notion of memory is important here as well.

The reuse of the coastal areas for different purposes is also evident from the earlier mentioned site Björnsholm. Here a grave structure with an occupation layer was excavated in 1988. The stone-lined pit was found together with two large pits, a ditch and three intact pots and belongs to a group well known Danish Long-Barrows (Andersen and Johansen 1992, 38). It was situated c 20 m to the rear of the midden. The Long Barrow was built very close to the Ertebölle midden and to the subsequent Early Neolithic settlement. This could also be seen as a way of humans to connect with both the past and the present. The construction of this Long Barrow and its use would also add to other memories associated with this place. It connects the midden as a place of both life and death to the later Early Neolithic monument.

Through narratives going back centuries in which these sites and middens figured meaning and remembrance took on a new dimension and they were transformed into something much more potent in the Early Neolithic.

How then did people adopt to the new situation? As mentioned above there is a change in the settlement pattern at the beginning of the Early Neolithic, c 3950 cal BC. New areas inland are used and the digging of large number of pits on some sites as well as the building of the first Long Barrows is all parts of this new scenario.

So why discard complete vessels and implements? We can, as mentioned above, not just see the pits as waste pits but as evidence for something much more profound. Richard Bradley (2000, 131) has said, referring to Britain that these artefacts were being returned to the elements from which they were formed. According to Julian Thomas (1999) the digging of pits are associated with feasting and the items deposited in the pits are a sort of remembrance of these feasts. This must in many ways have changed how people perceived the landscape. By bringing together different elements, the sites eventually became a microcosm of the landscape as a whole. The performance of rituals was an important part of the structuration of society and they helped people to not only connect and re-connect with the ancestors, but also with the future. This topic has been widely discussed during the last decade or so (Thomas 1991 ch.4; Bradley 2000, 2005). People gave specific places like rocks and streams names and in creating paths in the forest they also created links between both places and people. Myths and stories are then told about it and the place thus becomes historical (Thomas 1996, 89). If we go with this notion it is obvious that monuments as well as other constructions fitted into a landscape already filled with potent and symbolic places (Cummins 2002, 107). But it was now much more important to secure an identity and to make a lasting impact on the landscape.

Thus we can view the first monuments as a medium to preserve social order and it was at the same time part of a communal activity. The building of a monument significantly alters people's roles in the landscape and their view of it. Structures are both the medium and the outcome of social practices (Parker Pearson and Richards 1994, 3). This notion has rather elegantly been expressed by Matthew Johnson (1994, 170) as follows "Landscape is all about a sense of place; architecture is simultaneously a moulding of landscape and the expression of a cultural attitude towards it".

There is one last remark to be made regarding the way in which material culture or symbols helped to constitute a New World. Christopher Gosden (1994, 35) has proposed that standardized material forms provide a support for people when dealing with rapid changes in society. This might thus be seen as a part of the communal memory. Mixing old and new elements made it possible for people to create "a new world" (Thomas 1996, 37). Public meanings

especially of ethnic identity and interpretations were negotiated and contested. In times of rapid change people used, re-invented and re-used both new and old principles while still being able to communicate, as we have seen, through the medium of material culture.

What I in this article have argued for is that there are many similarities between the late Ertebølleculture and the Early Funnel beaker culture in their use of material culture and still the changes that we can observe are profound, new settlement pattern, new economy and the building of the first monuments. The re-use of the middens and the coastal sites, the use of red deer antlers and the similarity in material culture all point to a common history. Implicit knowledge, habitual practice and material culture may be seen as forms of cultural inheritance, which are passed between generations, and modified by innovation. In addressing this process it is important to recognise that artefacts, architecture and landscape are not merely the outcomes of human action, but the media through which human projects are carried forward. Taken together the past helped people not only to connect and re-connect with the ancestors, but also with the future. In this way a "New world" was created. Or was it a "sign of the gods"? (Larsson L. 2007, 607)

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