

Mika Lavento, Textile Ceramics in Finland and on the Karelian Isthmus, Nine Variations and Fugue on a theme of C. F. Meinander. Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistyksen Aikakauskirja 109/2001, 410 p.

Mika Lavento's dissertation *Textile Ceramics in Finland and on the Karelian Isthmus* discusses several of the important source complexes from the Late Neolithic and Early Metal Ages, but it is primarily textile ceramics that are central to the book. In earlier years, different researchers have meant different things with this concept, depending on differences in their typological and geographical points of departure. In his dissertation, Lavento attempts to delimit and define what C.F. Meinander labelled Sarsa-Tomitsa ceramics from other kinds of textile ceramics. This group of materials is then compared and related to other Early Metal Age ceramics, forming a basis for an interpretation of relations between groups of people during the period.

The dissertation focuses on several problems that are partly intertwined:

1) Lavento purports to present Early Metal Age ceramics, construct its chronology and describe the sites where it occurs. 2) He wants to test Meinander's definition of Sarsa-Tomitsa and Kalmistommäki ceramics with the markedly extended material that is presently available and, if necessary, to change or update the definition. 3) Compare two different ways of studying ceramic types: multivariate analysis (statistical method) and to try to understand the *eidōs* of the ceramics (phenomenological method). 4) To try to determine chronological extent and to study spatial variation more precisely than what has been done previously. 5) To discuss the concept of style in archaeology and its usefulness for studying the relations between groups of people and individuals in prehistory.

Lavento constructs his theoretical approach with central building blocks from post-processual archaeology. Hermeneutics is especially important for the understanding of the research process as a continuing dialogue between the interpreter(s) and that which is interpreted. Lavento maintains that phenomenological methodology

and viewpoints should also work well within archaeology. By using Husserl's concept of *eidōs*, he tries to give a philosophical justification of the practice common in traditional archaeology of separating out essential traits from inessential ones by using intuition and experience.

It is a surprising tandem of phenomenology and hermeneutics that Lavento wields in the thesis. These different philosophical traditions are often seen as resting on different epistemological baselines and are even regarded by some philosophers as incommensurable. Heidegger is, of course, the central exception here. Maybe Lavento could have gone further into Heidegger's views to try to fuse these traditions more. As it stands, they stand more or less side by side rather than working in tandem.

The theoretical building blocks work relatively well in connection with the first four problems referred to above. There is also a discussion on style that operates as a theory of material culture. What I think is missing in the dissertation is a theoretical baseline for a discussion of the individual and society in prehistory. Even though Lavento picks up the concept of ethnicity, this discussion does not seem to be of any consequence when he tries to interpret the patterning in the archaeological material that is produced in the earlier chapters. This is of consequence for the interpretations in the final chapter of the dissertation.

The dissertation shows a well thought-out view on classification and typology. Lavento does not fall into the same trap as most humanistically inclined archaeologists do - to reject numerical methods because they are viewed as belonging to the natural sciences and not to *humaniora*. There is no logical opposition between a humanistic perspective and the use of numerical methods (there might, however, be a political one...). Lavento's dissertation clearly shows this: the statistical patterns achieved can be a source of re-evaluation and lead to the central questions of why these patterns occur and what they mean - a step further in the hermeneutic process and even a possibility to break out of the hermeneutic circle.

There is a logical and explicit progression from

the isolation of the studied phenomena via the selection of characteristics and choice of statistical method (factor analysis) to the discussion and evaluation of the relevance of the achieved patterns. One can still ask if not other methods and points of departure would give different results. The focus is on producing clusters and groups, and for that factor analysis is appropriate. However, one of the central issues here is clinal vs. abrupt change in stylistic variability and for that one could think of methods that are better suited to this type of question, for instance methods such as multiple correspondence analysis or multidimensional scaling which can portray gradual change. As it stands, only abrupt change (groups) seems to have been focussed upon.

By analysing the results from the factor analysis Lavento discerns a south/west (Sarsa) and an east/north (Tomitsa) group exactly as earlier archaeologists have suggested. What is new is that Lavento also discerns what he calls Kainuu ceramics. It seems as if Lavento becomes uncertain if this is a grouping on par with Sarsa and Tomitsa or if it is a “subgroup” of Tomitsa ceramics. He chooses the “safe” alternative that is better in line with the existing interpretation of the textile ceramics as a mainly bipolar phenomenon. Maybe one could advise Lavento to be more bold, to believe more in the patterns that he actually gets.

A central theme is also the search for the so called Kalmistonmäki ceramics. In the initial analyses this group does not emerge at all and it is only when a separate analysis is made of the ceramics from the Karelian Isthmus alone that it emerges as one of three subgroups. Lavento states that the Kalmistonmäki ceramics have definable characteristics but that the amount of ceramics is not large enough to support the definition of an independent ceramic group with ethnic dimensions. Here is the first place that a theme emerges that will be central in the final chapter: ceramic group = cultural group = group with ethnic dimensions.

In the chapter on the dating of textile ceramics different dating methods are employed: shoreline dating; stratigraphy; ¹⁴C dating of sites and find contexts where textile ceramics have been found and the AMS dating of organic remains on the ceramics itself. He utilizes the different dating methods to see where the results agree and disagree, which is a reasonable way to handle the issue of dating.

According to the AMS method, the main period of textile ceramics lies between 1700 and 1000 B.C. Extending the confidence interval to 95.5 % gives a dating between 1900 and 500 B.C. We get a thin “tail” that reaches into the first millennium B.C., but the main bulk of the dates lies in the second millennium B.C. The dates based on context gives a more unclear picture, which is to be expected. Generally speaking, their value is determined more by agreement with the general dating picture than vice-versa. Lavento’s conclusion is that the beginning of the period can be put to 1700 B.C., while the end is more difficult to ascertain. He mentions that AMS dates end at 500 B.C. but is not prone to accept this on the basis of two context dates: Viirikallio (800 - 300 B.C.) and Kitulansuo (700 - 150 B.C.). This seems to me as a fragile basis to question the AMS dating interval since these contexts could just as well belong to the beginning of the dating intervals as to their later ends. This weakens his arguments for placing the end of textile ceramics to B.C./A.D. From the perspective of Lavento’s own analysis it would be more plausible to put the end to 500 B.C. All this notwithstanding, Lavento performs a thorough and balanced chronological analysis that will be an important basis for future interpretations of the role of textile ceramics.

Comparisons with material from Estonia and Northwest Russia show a clear separation between the different geographic areas. A comparison with Bronze Age ceramics from SW Finland shows a surprising similarity. According to Lavento, this similarity is difficult to explain. Comparisons with earlier and later ceramics are also made, in which similarity with Kjelmøy ceramics is noted, whilst the Anttila and Luukonsaari ceramics differ clearly from the textile ceramics. Also Morby ceramics show some similarities with textile ceramics (Sarsa variety). A central problem for Lavento’s interpretations in the final chapter of the dissertation is however that Pöljä ceramics has not been included in these comparisons. Why this central material is omitted is difficult to understand.

A description and discussion of other material categories from the Early Metal Age in Finland form a basis for a discussion of exchange systems during the period. The fact that so called arctic bronzes are found in the south and crucibles and moulds in the north leads Lavento to the conclusion that there has been exchange between the two

areas. Sites from the Early Metal period differ clearly from the sites from the Late Neolithic (with Pöljä ceramics). This is the case both with site size, site localization and presence/absence of semi-subterranean huts. From having sites during the Late Neolithic that Lavento interprets as sedentary or semi-sedentary villages we get smaller, more temporary sites that Lavento interprets as the remains of nomadic groups. This change can also be observed in NW Russia, Northern Norway and Northern Sweden.

In the last chapter of the dissertation the relationship between the mobile foragers (textile ceramics) and the sedentary coastal population in SW Finland is discussed. The latter is seen as a different culture. i.a. because of its houses, its agriculture and animal husbandry. According to Lavento, this shows that the different cultures had little in common and that contacts were sporadic. This I find to be a strange interpretation, since there are many studies on the symbiosis of different societies where the differences in economy and culture seem to be the central driving force in intensive contacts between the societies. This is shown for instance by Barth's analyses of the Swat in Pakistan and Hodder's analyses from Eastern Africa, examples that Lavento himself mentions in an earlier chapter (Barth 1956; Hodder 1982).

Lavento's interpretation of the textile ceramic phenomenon in Eastern Finland builds upon a perceived discontinuity between the Late Neolithic and the Early Metal Age. This discontinuity is based on the difference that he suggests exists between the ceramic traditions. The new ceramics is supposed to come into the area with its makers – that there is a full-scale immigration of new people to the area. He even goes so far as to suggest that the Neolithic population was not there any more. Is one really supposed to read this as an argument that the earlier population died out? Prehistory is full of discontinuities in material culture without there being a need to resort to such drastic explanations. One can also add that such a hypothesis must rest on a detailed demonstration that such a discontinuity really exists. The total formal and chronological dissimilarity that is suggested to exist between Textile ceramics and Pöljä ceramics, a dissimilarity that forms the crucial basis for this hypothesis, is not demonstrated at all in the dissertation, something that seems

odd. Do we have the chronological control to be able to even propose such a discontinuity? I doubt that such a discontinuity can be demonstrated.

The earliest metal axes in the area are interpreted as early signs of exchange with eastern areas and an effect of either exchange of prestige goods or direct exchange via traders (Seima warriors). Finally, Lavento takes the last step towards a traditional culture-historical interpretation: asbestos pottery, Kiukainen pottery, Bronze Age ceramics of SW Finland and textile ceramics were all made by different populations (ethnic groups?). This is one possible way to interpret the material, but personally I favour a different interpretation: one that builds on conscious social strategies that people in the different local societies developed. Such a view would in a better way account for the interesting structures that Lavento's analyses in the first part of the dissertation resulted in and which stands as the most important result of the thesis.

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