

Tiina Äikäs, Sanna Lipkin & Anna-Kaisa Salmi (eds.): *Archaeology of Social Relations: Ten Case Studies by Finnish Archaeologists*. *Studia Humaniora Ouluensia* 12. University of Oulu, Oulu (2012). ISBN 978-951-42-9527-0. 229 pp.

NEW RESEARCH IN FINLAND – NEW VIEWS

In a post-post-processual ‘Decamerone’ of recent research, a group of young scholars present their new or on-going research projects within the field of social archaeology. The articles of the book are based on papers given at a conference in Oulu in 2009 that focused on the use and critique of social archaeology. The range of topics is very wide, with papers on both theory and practice, extending geographically from Siberia to western Europe, and from Iran to northern Finland.

Theory on Heritage – and Practice

In their introduction to the book, the editors outline the aims of the book based on the themes that emerged in the conference, and also emphasise that the younger generation is more interested in recent theoretical discussions than in the old, typology-based research. The articles chosen for the publication deal with both Finnish situations and international issues. A common theme is that ‘archaeological artefacts are understood in their social context’ and thus social archaeology is used as an overall term (p. 4). It seems that almost everything (apart from typological research) can be linked to this notion of social archaeology, but it should rather be understood from a theoretical viewpoint. At first this appears somewhat confusing, but the epilogue written by prof. Milton Núñez succeeds in tying all the various themes together into a coherent book, and the epilogue also works as a good counterpart to the introduction. His contribution is also quite personal, which makes it very interesting, as he represents a different generation than the rest of the contributors. He was there when New Archaeology merged into other types of theoretical frameworks, concerned with other types of questions, such as those often referred to as ‘post-processual’. Núñez emphasises that social archaeology forms two branches: a post-processual one that seeks ‘to understand social issues in past societies and in archaeological research’, and a traditional branch that

is ‘concerned with the structure of past societies and its changes’ (p. 216). Núñez concludes with a very interesting discussion on the changes that have taken place in Finnish archaeology in the past fifty years. Among other things, he points out the lack of gender archaeology in Finland, but hopefully the situation will change with new subjects and young researchers.

The series of papers begins with Visa Immonen’s contribution on research history and theory. He presents an analysis of the ontology of the term ‘Middle Ages’ and its use in a periodisation of the past in Finland. In the field of history, this type of research is often referred to as *Begriffsgeschichte*, but it is fairly new in Finnish archaeology, which makes the contribution both important and interesting. Immonen employs Karen Barad’s ‘agential realism’ in his approach to the use of the concept. He draws comparisons to Swedish scholars such as prof. Erik Cinthio, but claims that it has had little impact on the Finnish invention of a periodisation of the past, as it always reflects the temporal and spatial context of the archaeologist’s work. Researchers such as Georg Haggrén and Markus Hiekkänen have written about both the Early Middle Ages and the 16th century as ‘ages of transition’, so as to emphasise past processes rather than events. Thus, Immonen proposes the term *medievality* in exploring the Middle Ages, as it views the past ‘not as a representation but as a set of presences and absences with the possibility of alternative ontologies’ (p. 24).

In the second article Anna-Kaisa Salmi offers reflections on humans and animal pets in Early Modern northern Finland. The jump from theory and research history to osteology is abrupt, but Salmi’s article is nonetheless an interesting contribution, as the past two decades have seen an increase in osteological research in Finland, where this line of research still represents a fresh approach to archaeological material. Nowadays, we tend to regard animals such as dogs, cats and horses as pets, but their role in the past households seems to have been of a more economic nature. This change into ‘pets’ has occurred during the Modern Period, in the 19th century AD, while during pre-Modern times it is evident that cats, dogs and horses retained a different status from other animals, as they are not present in the osteological material such as household waste. The osteological material bears no evidence of cruelty

towards these animals, which is a very interesting remark. Hopefully, Salmi will continue the study of these ‘pets’, for example, by exploring the written sources on the subject.

The paper of Minna Lehtola on cultural heritage management in the Sakha Republic, Siberia, is quite enlightening, as it draws focus on a political subject in a country that is seldom discussed in Finnish media. The subject has much to offer and forms a well-written account of the present-day identity of a people linked to a traditional way of life and world view. A bit more could perhaps have been written on the problems associated with the sale of mammoth bones and the politics surrounding this trade, but maybe more will follow on this subject. Lehtola is also an explorer of the East of our time, which would make it possible to make references to the accounts of earlier Finnish researchers who explored the East in the course of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Hopefully, Lehtola will present this subject later in the said framework. Her topic in the present paper focuses more on processes between the past and the present, which is a fruitful contribution *per se*.

Pirjo Hamari’s article also focuses on identity, but the subject is signs or identifications of ‘Roman’ in the eastern Mediterranean expressed through material culture. As a case study in discussing ‘Romanisation’ she uses roof tiles – a common material that has often been overlooked. The long use of roof tiles, with local variations, changed the face of the urban environment. In effect, the article is an eye-opener on the significance of roofs for the outlook of an urban environment and how this must have affected the identity of the inhabitants.

The Mediterranean area has fascinated Finnish scholars since the dawn of science in Modern Finland, and one could maintain that the contributions of both Hamari and Paula Kouki (the following paper) serve as fine representatives of this long continuity. At the same time, Kouki represents a whole project - the Finnish Jabal Harun Project in Petra, Jordan - that has had enormous impact on Finnish research at large. Given her recent dissertation on the archaeology of Petra, Kouki’s paper is certainly up-to-date. Her paper

focuses on the continuity of tradition related to the ‘Mountain of Aron’, the sanctity of which predates the Roman annexation of Nabataean Petra during the 1st century AD. This sanctity prevailed throughout the Christian Era and until

present day, incorporated into the Islamic lore on Prophet Harun. The veneration of Prophet Harun is important for the three main religious traditions of the area (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), and the mountain became a place of active syncretism, Kouki concludes. Hopefully, we will learn even more about all the fruits of this archaeological project in the future. With Kouki’s article the anthology also goes forward to the next section that discusses ritual and world view.

Ritual, Identity and World view in Space and Material Culture

The sixth article by Sanna Lipkin fits the theme of the publication well: the use and status of textile-making in a religious context in central Italy. She discusses two kinds of context for textile-making that indicate different rituals. Loom weights and spindles have been found, e.g. in burials of the Early Iron Age. Gradually, textile tools become more common as votive offerings as the cult seems to become more monumentalised, to become more individualised in the Republican Period. Lipkin presents evidence for sanctuary weaving, or textile-making as a religious act, and thus tied to social relations in the society.

The following article by Juha Tuppi is geographically close to Lipkin’s paper as it discusses space in Etruscan views of the afterlife. Tuppi examines the Etruscan burial mounds and their evolution into cities of the dead, with special ritual entrances, road cuttings, etc. The world view of the living is affected by the notion of the afterlife. This is seen in the context of, for example, ritual landscape, and whole areas are to be taken into consideration when analysing past views of death. This article closely resembles certain recent Iron Age studies in Finland concerning the society, burials and the notions of the realm of the dead (e.g. Wessman 2010).

In the eighth paper, Jari-Matti Kuusela also examines themes that touch upon death and burials, this time as reflecting of Iron Age society in Ostrobothnia, Finland. Kuusela’s article makes references to Pierre Bourdieu’s works on social fields, which is a welcome and fresh approach, although it might seem slightly anachronistic. Consequently, the paper has much to offer as it investigates the use of material culture in a society and its links to status. His research indicates that centralisation of power in the local community

was underway during the Iron Age. Hopefully, we hear more about his results in his forthcoming research.

Samuel Vaneeckhout's paper also deals with an area in Ostrobothnia, but it examines the Stone Age. He relies on a theoretical framework known as 'global-challenge archaeology', which is a more recent form of so-called environmental archaeology, with an emphasis on a human aspect of the subject studied. Vaneeckhout's cases are from various dwelling sites with house remains, and he tries to analyse past attempts to explain the origin of social inequality – his Figure 6, which shows social changes at the Kierikki site in north-western Finland, is very interesting. Vaneeckhout claims that a period of large building projects was a result of the dominance of the community, while both the earlier and later periods were dominated by individual households. The Kierikki society at c 5000 BP clearly identified itself with larger entities as was in fashion across Europe. Teemu Mökkönen's recent study on Stone Age houses is not taken into account (Mökkönen 2011), but the theme may be something the author will return to. At least the question *why* is still out there.

In the tenth paper, Mirette Modarres discusses the history of research and the case of archaeology in Iran. The article is to be welcomed as a contribution in a field of global history of research that is much dominated by the ideas of Bruce G. Trigger. The French, British and American excavations dominated the view of Persian history and had an impact also on later local research. Many sites were destroyed through 'mining-archaeology', but this was the case all over the world as the methods of archaeology changed over time. It is evident that archaeology is politics and this article shows how it is also related to colonialism. After the revolution of 1979, foreign fieldwork ceased but local work continued. In the 21st century foreign teams are back again and they now cooperate with locals in the field. This article is an interesting example how archaeological expeditions conduct research, as the present volume also includes some articles produced by members of such 'foreign teams' (i.e. Finns investigating archaeological sites outside Finland's borders). But this book is also a good example of how loose the borders can be, both geographically and in the mind of the scholars, as well as within a discipline.

Concluding remarks

The articles represent various aspects of contemporary Finnish archaeology that has traditions in the field: classical archaeology (Hamari, Lipkin, Tuppi, Kouki), Iron Age studies (Kuusela) and Stone Age archaeology (Vaneeckhout). But themes such as ritual, death and burial represent new fields of interests and new approaches, often with a multidisciplinary background, and not forgetting the importance of the natural sciences (Salmi).

The theoretically oriented papers on history of research and/or politics (Immonen, Lehtola, Modarres, Núñez) form the introduction and conclusion of the anthology, which is all in all a very good example of the present state of Finnish archaeological research. Many of the contributors have recently finished their dissertations or are on their way of doing so, which also makes the book a very good source for acquiring an overview of the archaeologists' present research. If the conference papers had not been printed, their valuable ideas and topics would have passed unnoticed to many. I sincerely hope that the publication will be widely spread – and read for inspiration.

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