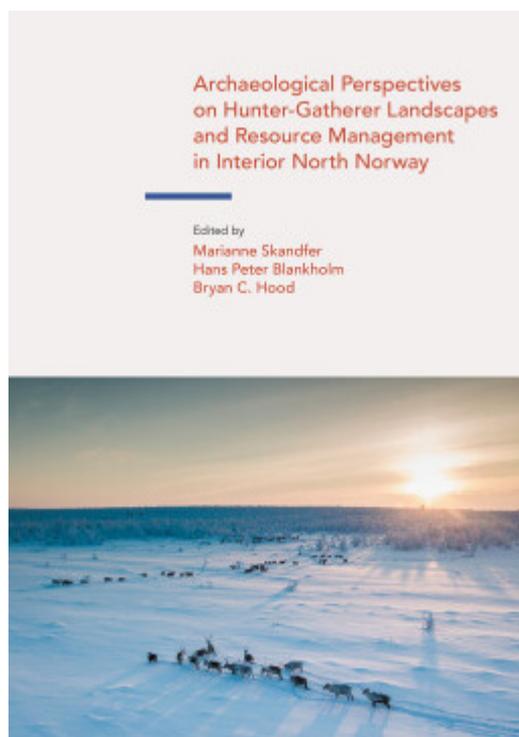


Marianne Skandfer, Peter Blankholm, Bryan C. Hood (eds.) *Archaeological Perspectives on Hunter-Gatherer Landscapes and Resource Management in Interior North Norway*. Equinox, 2024. ISBN 9781781798171. 822 pp.

'If archaeologists working outside of northern Fennoscandia were asked what they associate with northern Norway and its adjacent regions they might mention Vikings and ethnographic Sami reindeer herding, but they would probably be hard pressed to come up with any other images.' This sentiment, undoubtedly true, starts off a new book in two parts. The stated raison d'être of the book is 'the first synthesis of northern Norwegian inland archaeology'. But in doing so the authors accomplish much more. All in all, the result is a synthesis of the past of the northern parts of what is now Sápmi, the homeland of the indigenous Sámi people. The region is also known from the southern perspective as Northern Lapland.

The timespan of the book ranges from the last glaciation some 12,000 years ago to about 500 years ago, when the European states began to expand to the region. The book is the main offspring of the 'Landscape and Resource Management (LARM)' -project, conducted by archaeologists of the Arctic University in Troms, Norway, in 2009–2013. The project and consequently the book presents plenty of new field work results collated in relation to earlier research in and around the north Norway inland.

Contrasting with your basic project report, this book contains a good measure of background and theory, which elevates the book into a more widely relevant and applicable work. The inland of Arctic Norway is skillfully contextualized around questions that define much of the Northern Fennoscandian past, related to issues such as the post-glacial pioneer settlement, the dwelling boom of the 4th millennium BCE, and the process leading to the emergence of reindeer pastoralism after 500 CE. The wide yet source critical application of ethnographic analogies lays the groundwork for robust and convincing archaeological interpretation.



Each chapter is separately authored, and Bryan Hood, who lead-authors 11 chapters, has apparently done most of the writing, with editing primarily conducted by Marianne Skandfer, who also lead-authors three chapters. Hans Peter Blankholm, contributing to several other chapters, lead-authors three chapters, with two additional chapters contributed by Asgeir Svestad and Helge Irgens Høeg. Each chapter is structured as a semi-independent contribution, which leads to plenty of repetition. This is not necessarily a flaw, as presumably most readers will be interested in specific chapter-based topics. Reading the book from start to finish, though, brings with it many *deja vú* moments, but such repetition is rarely harmful to the reader especially in a work as broad as this.

Chapter 1, the introduction, establishes the main concepts and questions related to the region, as well as an initial overview of its cultural history. In general, culture history acts as linchpin for the book, providing much of the

narrative framework. The next chapter, Chapter 2, 'Research History Overview', provides a thorough background of the development of archaeology in the region from its emergent days in the early 1800s to the 1970s. Also included are the earlier accounts ranging from the Fenno of Greco-Roman geographical sources to the Sámi of the early ethnographies. The narrative familiarizes the reader to the research history through archaeology pioneers such as Gutorm Gjessing to Ørnulv Vorren and Povl Simonsen and some of their field work, which we return to in Chapter 7.

Chapter 3, 'Concepts and Methods', involves a deconstruction of terminology mostly in relation to landscape, such as 'hunting', 'herding', and 'domestication', as well as the all-important 'transition' between them. Such terms are revealed as conceptual packages that hide within them a range of generalizations and assumptions from elsewhere. The chapter also includes a near-dictionary of Sápmi cultural remains, such as different kinds of hearths and dwellings. So if you're ever wondering, for instance, what a *bearpmet árran* is, look to this chapter for the answer. Furthermore, the book's preoccupation with representativeness pretty much begins with this chapter, highlighting the authors' intent on providing a methodical review of the region's archaeology for future application.

The theoretical framework, or many modular elements of it, is presented in Chapter 4, 'Reflections on Living in Landscapes', where the authors introduce what they label 'practice ecology'. This seemingly original concept 'implies a perspective based on actors making decisions within a context structured by cultural values on the one hand, and ecological constraints and opportunities on the other.' Especially in the context of the book, the approach seems quite sensical. As the book title states, the framework focuses mostly on resource management within the context of landscape relations, applying critically elements of Traditional Ecological Knowledge. Related to the landscape are human relations to places and animals, as well as place names, mostly describing past activities in the location.

Chapter 5 reflects on the physical parameters of the landscape, both its geology, including sourcing of different stone materials, and

its biosphere, i.e. general plant life, and animals most relevant to humans that are mammals, fish, and birds. Chapter 6 takes the environmental conditions further by introducing paleoenvironmental reconstructions with emphasis on climate and dominant tree species during the last 10,000 years. These chapters provide deep background for the upcoming materiality sections, starting with Chapter 7, which details the archaeological research history in Interior Finnmark and Troms. This chapter is the heftiest with 67 pages. Here is where the book begins to read like a catalogue. This is usually the case when presenting large assemblages of sites and related excavations with a concise narrative. This is especially the case here, since the research history contains enough details pertaining to specific excavated areas and their finds that the reader does get the impression that we are truly talking here about all the excavations in the region. The next 200 pages, chapters 8–11, detail the results of the project's own field work with a division into chapters by region. These chapters may not be for everyone but are understandably essential for future research, especially since the following chapters further extrapolate from these results.

Chapter 12 offers an overview of the 121 known Stone Age house pits found in the interior regions. Included are all the pertinent typological analyses as well as a general discussion that reflects upon the contemporaneity of nearby dwellings and their reuse, with the conclusion that the house pit assemblage of the interior seems to follow its own unique logic relative to the coast, where the number of known house pits amounts to thousands. Chapter 13 has a similar take on trapping pits found in the interior. The interior North Sápmi is characterized by vast hunting pit systems with nearly 10,000 pits in total. This gives archaeologists much to work with, and the related questions are pretty much the same wherever hunting pit systems are found, giving extra weight for the chapter in the context of Fennoscandian trapping pit use.

Chapter 14, 'Settlement models for Stone Age Interior Finnmark', studies 'subsistence-settlement variability in relation to long-term environmental changes', using mainly

the (food-)resources of the inland as the foundation for settlement modeling. Chapter 15 is a speculative account of two different stages of reindeer herding, conceptualized as 'hunting-embedded herding' and 'large-scale pastoralism', leaning mostly on historical sources and ethnographic deduction. Chapter 16 is where human-reindeer relations and the herding-pastoralism question are studied through the archaeological evidence, whilst keeping in mind the more hypothetical discussions of the previous chapter. Wrapping the analytical chapters is Chapter 17, which studies the 1553–1752 Swedish taxation and population records of Interior Finnmark. The related statistical analysis forms a chronological bookend, a 'what came after' of the earlier chapters.

The narrative, but not the theoretical framework, is largely culture historical, with each chapter exhibiting a chronological structure from past to present. This works mostly well, although reading several chapters in succession brings about temporal vertigo. Some chapters are even structured with looping chronologies, which repeat from old to new from different perspectives, a structure that might have worked better composed differently.

Figures are mostly excellent, especially site and artefact photographs, but also the many topographical maps. Distribution maps from excavations allow the reader to really sink their teeth into specific sites. There are some quirks. Among them is Figure 10.4 which is a full page section drawing, rotated 90 degrees, that is 6 meters wide and apparently 5 cm deep depicted in the same scale, cutting the white page in half from top to bottom with a 2 mm wide snaking pole, which leaves you wondering, whether this is a joke by the arctic archaeologists to contrast the oft-nonexistent cultural layers of the north with thick stratigraphies of almost anywhere else in the world. If so, kudos on a job well done.

Another puzzling decision is to have Chapter 18, 'Pollen-analytical investigations in Finnmark', as the final chapter preceding the

concluding section. In the chapter, the different terminological constructs of agriculture in relation to cultivation and anywhere in between are not discussed or defined. Instead, all anthropochores (plants that spread alongside humans) are interpreted as evidence of agriculture. This chapter presents evidence of such agriculture in the interior North Norway as early as 1600 BCE. The main evidence seems to be the pollen of broadleaf and ribwort plantain, known medicinal plants, which is intriguing in its own right. The reader is left wondering whether the placement of the chapter to the very end was caused by scheduling issues, with most of the book already written and the conflicting interpretations of agricultural activities around and after 1600 BCE surfacing too late in the game to be properly embedded. The concluding Chapter 19 does not comment on Chapter 18 at all, with the agricultural interpretation preemptively dismissed in Chapter 14¹, making it seem all the more an outlier. It serves to raise more questions than answers. Unintentionally this only strengthens a sense of unresolvedness of the region's archaeological narrative, which in the opinion of the book's authors, despite their best efforts, remains exactly that: unresolved.

The two-part book is not exactly leisurely in its narrative and can at times be a heavy read, but as a near-total synthesis of the current state of archaeology of the region it is immensely readable and should be considered required reading for all archaeologists venturing into the geographic or thematic territory. The book not only offers new insight into a former *terra incognita* but also synthesizes a lot of widely pertinent ethnography and clarifying research history, making a service for the general field.

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Endnotes

1 p. 575: 'A pollen core from the highlands just north of Kárášjohka/Karasjok contained Cerealia pollen dated to 1500 BC, which was interpreted as a potential indicator of cultivation (see Chapter 18, this volume). However, the location hardly seems suitable for cultigens. [...] The problem, however, is whether it is possible to distinguish cultigen pollen from that of wild grasses [...].'