Ari Siiriäinen

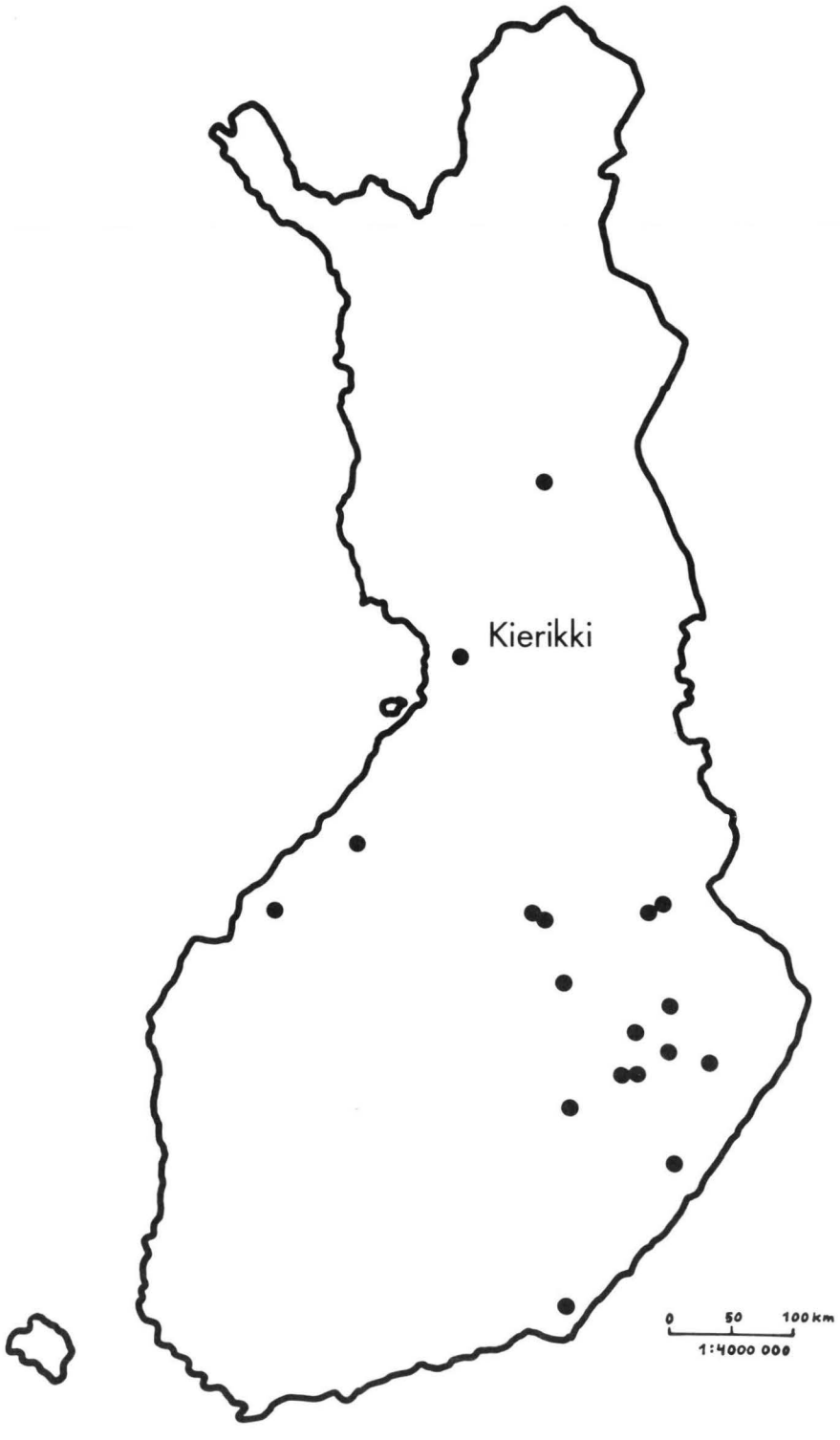
On the Late Stone Age Asbestos Ware Culture of Northern and Eastern Finland

In Northern and Eastern Finland and in Ostrobothnia, i.e. to the east and north of the SW Finnish Late Comb Ceramic, Corded Ware and Kiukainen culture area, the period subsequent to the Typical Comb Ceramic phase (2900–1300 BC) is characterized by Middle and Late Subneolithic asbestos-tempered ceramics. Two or three groups have been identified within the material: Kierikki, Pöljä and its sub-group Jysmä (Siiriäinen 1967, Meinander 1954 a & b, Edgren 1964). So far, they have not been subjected to close analysis and their typological definition as well as their typological and chronological interrelationships are still uncertain. Because these groups are of importance in Finland with respect to the so-called Volosovo problem, I shall present certain viewpoints concerning them. The aim of the co-operation project concerning the Volosovo phenomenon is to take up the problems discussed here in more detail.

The main criterion in defining pottery of the Pöljä type is the vessel rim, which is bent inwards at a sharp angle or slightly curved inwards. The base of the vessel is round, in some rare cases even. According to Purhonen (1973), about 1/3 of the vessels are undecorated and with smooth walls, 1/3 have horizontal furrows drawn with an indented artefact either on the inner or outer wall, or both, and the remaining third are decorated with stamp impressions or incisions. The stamps are comb stamps, wound cord stamps and line stamps and they have been applied in horizontal zones to cover the whole of the vessel surface.

Pöljä type ceramics are dated to the Late Comb Ceramic phase (ca. 2900–1800 BC) (Carpelan 1979, Siiriäinen 1978). According to Carpelan, the tradition continues until the end of the Stone Age to the period of the Kiukainen culture in SW Finland. At that stage, it occurs together with asbestos-tempered ceramics in which the vessels have a symmetrical T-formed rim list extending both inwards and outwards. In these vessels the stamp ornamentation is found only on the rim list, the walls are undecorated and the vessels have even bases. This group of ceramics has been found only at the Jysmä site in Iisalmi, where together with Pöljä ceramics it can be dated according to the shoreline displacement of Ancient Lake Saimaa to a younger date than other sites with Pöljä ceramics in the Saimaa region (Siilinjärvi Pöljä, Outokumpu Sätös, Pyhäselkä Hammaslahti; cf. Saarnisto 1970). Carpelan suggests the term Jysmä type for asbestos-tempered ceramics with T-shaped rim lists, on the basis of the Jysmä site in Iisalmi.

The other Middle Subneolithic asbestos-ceramic group is Kierikki, which I have tentatively defined as follows according to the Kierikki find in Yli-Ii: the clay is tempered with asbestos or asbestos and talc; the base of the vessel is round and the rim is straight and slightly thickened; decoration consists of thin or wide comb stamps, small shallow pits or drawn lines; the decoration covers the vessel surface sparsely and it also occurs on the edge of the rim, sometimes on the inner walls. Pottery of this type has been found on at least 21 sites within the same area of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distribution as the Pöljä type (cf. fig. on p. 31). However, the finds have not been systematically analyzed. The most extensive excavations have been carried out in Kierikki, where the ceramic material is exclusively of the Kierikki type.

The typological and chronological relationship of the Pöljä and Kierikki types is problematic, because they have been defined according to different principles: the Pöljä type has been defined strictly according to one criterion (the rim list) whereas the Kierikki type has been defined more broadly with the definition including the material of a site with a relatively large amount of ceramic material. If the Pöljä type were defined in as broad a manner and the Siilinjärvi Pöljä assemblage were taken as the starting point of the definition, the group would also include comb stamp decorated vessels without rim lists. Both groups have been found together on several sites, which suggests that they are at least partly contemporaneous and were made by the one and same ethnic group. On the other hand, the fact that on some sites there are relatively large numbers of vessels of the one type alone can be interpreted in different ways: it can be a pure coincidence or different vessel types served different functions – whereby the activities carried out at the site dictated the types of pottery used there – or the difference can be partly a chronological one between the Pöljä and Kierikki types. In my article on the Kierikki site in 1967 I chose the latter alternative and assumed that part of the Kierikki type – i.a. the ceramics from the Kierikki site – was older than the Pöljä type but on the other hand part of the Pöljä type was younger than the Kierikki type. On the basis of the above-mentioned chronological interpretation, vessel forms and ornamentation I have suggested that the Kierikki type developed from the Typical Comb Ceramic and the Pöljä type in turn from the Kierikki type remaining in use for a longer period. Because both the chronology and the typological definitions are highly uncertain, there is no reason to keep strictly to this interpretation. Carpelan (1979) has presented a partly different interpretation on equally plausible grounds. According to him, the Kierikki and Pöljä types are parallel from their very origin with the former continuing – as I suggested myself – the Comb Ceramic tradition and the latter the Early Subneolithic asbestos ceramic tradition. As stated above, Carpelan assumes that the Pöljä type continued in use after the Kierikki type was no longer made and became contaminated by the Jysmä type. In this connection it must be stressed that both Carpelan and I agree on the fundamental issue of the groups representing a local continuation of earlier ceramic groups. However, Carpelan is of the opinion that the Jysmä type reflects cultural influences from the Volosovo sphere, which would have reached Finland at the beginning of the Late Subneolithic, ca. 2000/1800 BC.

The distribution of the Pöljä group seems to be limited to the territory of Finland. On the other hand, the Kierikki group has parallels further east. I refer to Gurina's (1961) East Karelian early asbestos ceramics with thickened rims and decoration consisting of comb stamps and small pits. Gurina dates the group to the end of the Stone Age between Pit and Comb Ware and textile-impressed ceramics and »classic» asbestos ceramics. Pankrušev (1978) dates the Karelian early asbestos ceramics also to the Late Neolithic and to the same period as the Rhomboid Pitted Ware.

The slate artefacts of the Kierikki site material consist of both general Scandinavian types and types specific to the so-called North Scandinavian slate culture. The former are an arrowhead, thinned at the base and mainly of the Pyheensilta type, two unbarbed tanged arrowheads and an arrowhead mainly belonging to the group of skewer-shaped East Finnish arrowheads. Artefacts of the North Scandinavian slate

culture include a broad one-bladed curved knife and a tanged arrowhead with small barbs. In addition to the ceramic material the slate artefacts link Kierikki to the cultural heritage of Northern and Eastern Fennoscandia.

Imported objects of foreign raw materials – flint points and amber pendants – are prominent in the Kierikki material. The flint arrowheads (19 in number) are long and thin, of tapering oval form and retouched throughout. The type belongs to the Comb Ceramic and Pit and Comb Ware cultural sphere, especially its later stages. They are also found in finds of the Volosovo culture (Ošibkina 1978), but are also in large numbers in Late Neolithic connections in East Karelia (Gurina 1961). In Kierikki they can be regarded thus as an eastern element, which, however, does not require contacts further afield than East Karelia. It is to be noted that flint arrowheads of tapering oval form are also found on East Baltic Late Neolithic sites, but they are not as long or thin as the Kierikki specimens (e.g. Vankina 1970).

The amber pendants from Kierikki, especially the buttons with V-shaped drilling (10 specimens), bring East Baltic contacts to the fore. Amber beads and pendants made their way from the raw material areas on the Latvian and Lithuanian coast during the Typical Comb Ceramic (3300–2800 BC) probably through the agency of prestige trade to all parts of this cultural sphere except East Karelia. Later, in the Middle and Late Subneolithic periods, the same »trade» continued to the same areas and extended to Central Russia to the Oka River and to East Karelia (e.g. Jaanits 1982). Although the import of amber connected with Kierikki and also Pöljä ceramics belongs to the later period of expanding trade and could thus be theoretically aimed at Finland from the east and south-east, it is still more natural to regard it as using direct channels from the East Baltic region that had opened previously.

The topography of the Kierikki site is exceptional. It was located at the downstream end of a low island in a river in a place that was probably waterlogged and extremely suspect to flooding. In the excavation a group of pits interpreted as post-holes running in pairs were found. These features were situated in streaks observable in the bottom part of the culture layer (Siiriäinen 1967 fig. 2). The streaks were straight and at right angles to each other. I have assumed that these were the remains of bridge constructions supported by posts with dwellings in between. It is, however, impossible to present any reconstruction of the constructions and the streaks with the post-holes could just as well indicate the post foundations of rectangular-shaped dwellings.

Sites on the waterline, in alluvial locations or on boggy ground supported by posts or platform-like foundations are known from a wide area in Eastern Europe from the Urals to the East Baltic region. They seem to be common in the East Baltic area where they are limited to periods later than the Typical Comb Ceramic phase. It has been suggested that there were rectangular houses on posts at Sarnate, Šventoji and Lagatša, among other sites (Vankina 1970, Loze 1979, Rimantiene 1979). On the basis of material known to this author it is impossible to ascertain whether the post constructions were an East Baltic innovation. It is, however, interesting to note that there are two sites from the easternmost region of the amber trade, where similar topographic locations have been utilized and similar post constructions occur as at Kierikki and the above-mentioned Latvian and Lithuanian sites. These are Modlona and the contemporaneous site of Pogoštitse 2 with similar material located in the area between Lakes Beloje and Voze. Ošibkina, who has recently studied the Stone Age of the areas south-east of Lake Ladoga, dates Modlona to the latter half of the third millenium BC and to the same period as the Pit and Comb Ware of the late Kargopol type of the region (Ošibkina 1978). She regards Modlona and other comparable finds

as evidence of a foreign ethnic group in the region. It was through the agency of this group that the four-sided post-supported dwelling type and pitless ceramics spread as innovations to the area.

In addition to Kierikki there is another Finnish site with a row of post-holes running in pairs, Kärräniemi in Rovaniemi. There, the traces of the post-holes form an oblique angle and the form suggests a pier or palisade rather than a dwelling construction. The Kärräniemi site was located on a low-lying sand-bar jutting into a small lake in the course of the Kemijoki River. The site is dated to the period of Pöljä ceramics.

In Finland post-holes on Stone Age sites are subject to various interpretations and because of the nature of the soils even certain post-hole remains are found only by chance. It is probable that the assumed post constructions at the Kierikki and Kärräniemi sites are not unique. It is possible that there were post constructions of some kind at sites situated on low-lying islands and sand-bars. Examples of such sites are i.a. the sand-bar sites in Suomussalmi (Huurre 1959). There is no way of obtaining a reliable picture of the chronology and distribution of sites with post constructions in Finland, but the hypothesis can be suggested of post-supported dwellings spreading from the East Baltic as an innovation in the Middle Subneolithic period. In any case, the finds of amber indicate that there were regular contacts with the East Baltic region at the time.

The following summary can be presented of the Middle and Late Subneolithic asbestos-ceramic culture. The pottery is based on the local Comb Ceramic and asbestos ceramic tradition, however with possible influences from the Volosovo culture at the beginning of the Late Subneolithic period. The slate and flint materials reflect the same: the latter contains types of overall Scandinavian distribution, while certain types link the culture as an eastern area to the North Scandinavian slate culture. The flint arrowheads, again, are of eastern type, either from East Karelia or further afield, from the Volosovo sphere. Amber, in turn, is an East Baltic element and I would assume the site type with post constructions to be of East Baltic origin.

Conclusions regarding cultural history and ethnogenesis must however await a broader synthesis regarding the whole of Finland. As discussed in this connection, the continuity of local traditions from earlier periods strongly suggests ethnic continuity, as well. The importance of the East-Baltic – Finnish axis is to be stressed in this connection.

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