Cultural identity? The Middle Neolithic Pitted Ware complex in southern Scandinavia

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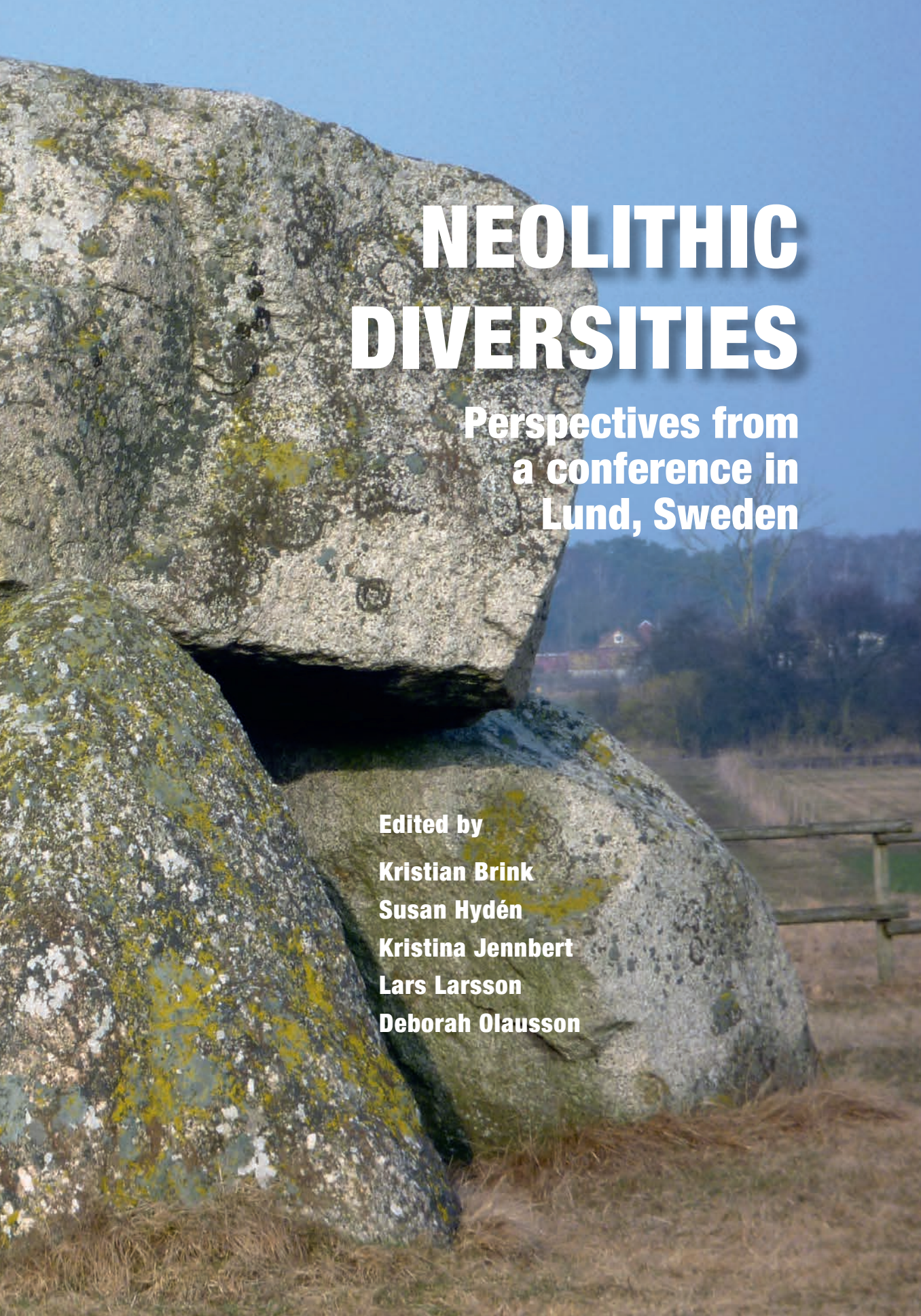

NEOLITHIC DIVERSITIES

Perspectives from a conference in Lund, Sweden

Edited by

Kristian Brink
Susan Hydén
Kristina Jennbert
Lars Larsson
Deborah Olausson

The members of the conference “What’s New in the Neolithic”, May 2013. Photo by Kristina Jennbert.

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Neolithic Diversities

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Preface

In the study of the distant human past, certain events and periods have come to represent decisive passages from one human state to another. From a global perspective, the characteristic feature of the last ten thousand years is that people in different parts of the world, and at different points in time, started to grow plants and domesticate animals. The rise and dissemination of agriculture were crucial factors for the continued existence of humankind on earth. The incipient agriculture is often regarded as the very beginning of human *culture*, as it has traditionally been perceived in western historiography, that is, as control over nature and the "cultivation" of intellectual abilities.

As a result of the increasing national and international interest in the northern European Neolithic (4000–2000 BC), combined with large-scale archaeological excavations which helped to nuance and modify the picture of the period, senior researchers and research students formed a Neolithic group in 2010. The Department of Archaeology and Ancient History at Lund University served as the base, but the group also included collaborators from Linnaeus University and Södertörn University, and from the Southern Contract Archaeology Division of the National Heritage Board in Lund and Sydsvensk Arkeologi in Malmö and Kristianstad.

Meetings and excursions in the following two years resulted in the holding of an international conference in Lund in May 2013 entitled "What's New in the Neolithic". Invitations to this conference were sent to two dozen prominent Neolithic scholars from northern and central Europe.

The conference was a great success, with presentations and discussions of different aspects of innovative research on the Neolithic. The members of the Neolithic group took an active part in the discussions following the presentations.

It was decided before the conference that the papers would be published. The members of the Neolithic group also had the opportunity to contribute current research to this publication.

After the conference an editorial group was set up, consisting of Dr Kristian Brink, PhD student Susan Hydén, Professor Kristina Jennbert, Professor Lars Larsson and Professor Deborah Olausson.

A grant was received from Riksbankens Jubileumsfond for the meetings and excursions of the Neolithic group 2010–2013. We would like to thank The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities and Berit Wallenbergs Stiftelse for grants which enabled us to hold the conference "What's New in the Neolithic". Grants from The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, and Stiftelsen Elisabeth Rausings Minnesfond financed the layout and printing of this publication.

I. PERSPECTIVES ON PEOPLE, IDENTITY AND PRACTICE

Cultural identity?

The Middle Neolithic Pitted Ware complex in southern Scandinavia

Kristina Jennbert

Abstract

The aim of this short article is to question the archaeological classification of the Neolithic archaeological cultures, and to raise questions about how to understand the fragmentary material culture in terms of social agency and cultural expression. The settlement of Jonstorp in southern Sweden as a case of the south Scandinavian Pitted Ware complex presents theoretical and methodological implications for the study of economic systems in emerging complex societies. We have problems understanding the time in question. The problems might be in the archaeological material and our classifications, in our methods and our ability to understand the past. However, the narrative of the Neolithization and the introduction of animal breeding and cereal production in southern Scandinavia describes a chaotic period with the construction of monuments and enclosures, technological innovations and colonizing the landscape. Does the material culture at the Pitted Ware sites reflect encounters between regional cultural identities? Can we talk about clashing cultural identities in altered regional economic systems in Scania, southern Scandinavia and in the rest of Europe? My contribution to the debate involves anthropological theories of economic systems, sociological theories of cultural representation, conflict and identity, and above all a critical perspective on archaeological classification.

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Introduction

CAN WE UNDERSTAND what happened during the Neolithic? Can we ask questions about cultural identities? Can we talk about clashing cultural identities in altered regional economic systems in Scania, southern Scandinavia and the rest of Europe? Did people meet peacefully or did they end up in violent conflict? The aim of this short article is to question the archaeological classification of the Neolithic archaeological cultures, and to raise questions about how to understand the fragmentary material culture in terms of social agency and as cultural expression.

There is no doubt that we have to work with a very fragmented material record, as the amount of material that has perished is voluminous. We work with oral cultures, today silent. Perhaps our questions are too naïve, and too ambitious for us to find answers? Of course, the actual source material gives us limitations.

Nevertheless, in the following I will discuss the Pitted Ware complex in the Kullen area in northwestern Scania and draw some conclusions about researching the Neolithic. One tempting question is whether the material culture at the Pitted Ware sites reflects a regional cultural identity. The settlement Jonstorp in southern Sweden as a case of the south Scandinavian Pitted Ware complex will present theoretical and methodological implications for the study of economic systems in emerging complex societies.

The archaeological classification

Our shortcomings might also lie in our classifications, in our methods and our ability to

Fig. 1. The location of Kullaberg in northwestern Scania, south Sweden. Illustration: Maria Wihlborg 2013.

understand the past. But it is a deontological responsibility to scrutinize our terminology, and the tyranny of our classifications, and to realize that the past as modern constructions reflects mentality and values in our own time.

A debate has taken place over many decades about the classification of archaeological material related to the Middle Neolithic (MN): the Funnel Beaker culture (farming), the Battle Axe culture (herding), and the Pitted Ware culture (hunter gathering) (e.g. Becker 1954; Malmer 1962). The material culture in the Scandinavian Middle Neolithic (MNA), at the transition between MNA I and MNA V, has been interpreted as belonging to developments within the Funnel Beaker culture (Edenmo *et al.* 1997, p. 144; Iversen 2010, 2014). The Battle Axe culture follows in MNB. The Pitted Ware is interpreted as a cultural expression in its own right, which chronologically overlaps the division between MNA and MNB (Malmer 2002; Jennbert 2007, 2014), but also as a part of the Funnel Beaker culture (Edenmo *et al.* 1997). Thus, different interpretations have evolved about the MN archaeological complexes and subsistence strategies.

The Kullen area and Pitted Ware sites in eastern middle Sweden

A quick look at the distribution of the Pitted Ware sites in the Kullen area shows quite another geographical setting than the Funnel Beaker sites and Battle Axe sites further south in western Scania. In the Kullen area a large number of Late Mesolithic Ertebølle and Middle Neolithic Pitted Ware sites are situated on the southern shores of Skälder-

viken. This region in southern Sweden was a post-glacial island during the Neolithic, isolated from the mainland by a wide strait between the present-day Höganäs and Jonstorp (Fig. 1). The archaeological sites of the Neolithic period have mainly been registered by surface collection, and by a few excavations near Kullaberg. Sites of different ages very often share the same location, according to results from the restricted excavations and the survey collections (Lidén 1938, 1940; Althin 1954; Malmer 1969, 2002, p. 122; Jennbert 2007, 2014).

The formation of the Pitted Ware complex is closely connected to coastal areas in southern Scania as in eastern Middle Sweden (e.g. Carlsson 1998, p. 49; Gill 2003). The Pitted Ware culture seems to occur around the Baltic Sea, and in eastern middle Sweden already in Early Neolithic (EN I and EN II), and consists of a fairly well defined material culture (Åkerlund 1996; Stenbäck 2003; Larsson 2006; Papmehl-Dufay 2006). However, the concept of Pitted Ware culture is complicated to use in western Scandinavia, and often connected to the Funnel Beaker tradition (Larsson & Olsson 1997; Strinnholm 2001; Iversen 2014).

The Neolithic Pitted Ware sites in Scania are mostly located on the seashore, mainly on the northwestern coast (Lidén 1938; Malmer 1969; Jennbert 2007), the northeastern coast (Wyszomirska 1986) and the southeastern coast (Strömberg 1988). Sites are also found in the central part of the province, along the shores of the large lake Ringsjön (Althin 1954, p. 82).

With the island location in the Kullen area, and with the main activities taking place on the beaches, the Jonstorp sites undoubtedly characterize a maritime economic system. The sea opens up the potential for navigation, colonization, and trade. The sea should be understood as allowing movement and connections rather than a barrier for dividing social space. The location must surely have influenced emerging cultural identities.

Economic systems

Early in archaeological research, the distinction between the Neolithic archaeological groups traditionally was explained by economic factors, defined in terms of either agrarian or foraging economic systems. The polarity between the different systems of subsistence goes back to the earliest Scandinavian archaeologists (e.g. Nilsson 1838–1843; Becker 1954; Malmer 1962). However, it is too simplistic to argue, as in the ongoing debate, that different material complexes represent different subsistence systems.

The categorization of "farmers" versus "hunter-gatherers" inhibits rather than increases an understanding of social agency in the Neolithic. Unfortunately, the twentieth-century categories and the archaeological chronological system have created narrow categorizations that generate more problems than constructive ideas in finding answers about social agency and cultural identities. In contrast, anthropological and sociological research on economic systems that consider social agency expand the analytical concepts. If the understanding of subsistence strategies is supplemented with concepts such as production, consumption and distribution of goods and services, (e.g. Sahlins 1972; Woodburn 1980, 1982; Godelier 1986; 2010; Pryor 2005), new interpretations may be formulated.

The Neolithic was a period of major transformation of the landscape. The landscape ecology, with the different ecological niches, allowed for all kinds of economic routines, including farming, fishing, herding, hunting and the use of resources such as flint, clay and perishable material. The Jonstorp sites give us some clues about economy, but a restrictive emphasis on subsistence strategies does not consider all aspects of the economic system on the shores.

Economic exploitation incorporates both agency and structure, and these factors must guide our interpretations of the sites. Did people visit the sites in order to get supplies for growing terrestrial plants, or just to slaughter the catch of seals? Or were social factors involved? At the Jonstorp sites the archaeological evidence gives some hints as to the economic exploitation of the landscape and seascape. Fishing and seal hunting, cultivation of wheat and emmer, gathering of wild plants and anthropogenic indicators of plant and animal tissues, bones, urine, faeces and ashes were found in the culture layers.

The sites in the Kullen area were not isolated and separated from the mainland. The archaeological material does not exhibit remoteness, rather connectivity, integration and contact with the mainland (Lidén 1938; Carle 1986; Malmer 1969, 2002; Jennbert 2007, 2014). In conclusion, the Pitted Ware complex on the shore at Jonstorp, and in other coastal areas in Scandinavia, reflects a maritime economic system with knowledge of seafaring and skilled handicraft. Judging by the character of the material culture, the people were also in interaction, whether peaceful or violent, with people in the adjacent monumental landscape.

Cultural representation and identity

What about the cultural representation and identity expressed by the material culture found on the Jonstorp sites? Are pottery, flint and stone tools, the maritime economic system, and seashores associated with a special cultural identity? It is not just subsistence strategies that should be understood but also the meaning of the material culture. Nowadays, material culture is understood as a conscious expression challenging and remodelling social roles. Material culture can be understood as a set of things with meanings in a set of practices between members of a society (Hall 2013, p. XVIII).

Material culture is not a passive reflection of social reality, but an active component for people to define themselves in relation to others. Materiality in itself is as much an active social force as an expression of skill in handicraft and technology. As materiality can signal either identity and ownership, knowledge and quality, but also the behaviour, characteristics, and appearance of individuals, so material culture are to be understood as a social force and vital in the construction of cultural identity (Jones 1997; Boivin 2008; Olsen 2010; Hodder 2012).

In his research Maurice Godelier shows that neither kinship relations nor economic relations are sufficient to forge a new society. Instead he argues that political-religious relations weld together kin groups into a society with the authority of a territory, its inhabitants, and its resources (Godelier 2010). The artefacts could in that case function as cultural representations in political services.

Neolithic pottery and tools could be examples of this. A compilation of typologically classified Neolithic tools in Scania and their association with contextual placement in the different Neolithic complexes develops the issues further (Table 1). The find associations support the idea that objects circulated during the Neolithic, and closed social groups did not exist. At the Jonstorp sites the following patterns can be observed:

- Associations with Funnel Beaker contexts: Pit-ornamented vessel, clay-disc, thick-butted flint A/B- axe, thin-bladed axe, double-edge axe
- Associations with Battle Axe contexts: Thin-bladed axe, thick-butted flint-axe with concave cutting edge, thick-bladed flint axes
- Cylindrical blade cores, and tanged blade arrowhead at Jonstorp are associated with the middle Neolithic; arrowheads A-C with MNA, type D with Battle Axe

Table 1. Associations of a selection of artefacts and contexts in Middle Neolithic Scania related to Funnel Beaker, Pitted Ware with special presence at Jonstorp sites and Battle Axe contexts (Carlie 1986; Strömberg 1988; Karsten 1994; Malmer 2002). EN (Early Neolithic), MN (Middle Neolithic).

Artefact – relative dating	Funnel Beaker context	Pitted Ware context	Battle Axe context
Funnel Beaker beaker (EN–MNA)	Dwelling, megalith		
Funnel Beaker, big pit-decorated storage vessel (MNA IV–V)	Dwelling, enclosure, wetland		
Pit-ornamented vessel (MNA)	Dwelling, enclosure, wetland	Dwelling, Jonstorp	
Clay disc (EN, MNA)	Dwelling	Dwelling, Jonstorp	
Thin-butted flint axe (EN, MNA I–II)	Dwelling, wetland, earth grave		
Thick-butted flint A-axe (MNA III–V)	Dwelling, single find, wetland	Dwelling, Jonstorp	
Thick-butted flint B-axe (MNB)		Dwelling, Jonstorp	Single find, wetland
Pointed-butted flint axe with concave cutting edge (MNA IV–V)	Dwelling, single find, wetland		
Thin-bladed axe (MNA IV–V, MNB)	Dwelling, single find, wetland	Dwelling, Jonstorp	Earth grave
Narrow chisel (EN–MNA, MNB)	Dwelling, grave		Earth grave
Thick-butted flint-axe with concave cutting edge (MNB)		Dwelling, Jonstorp	Single find, wetland
Thick-bladed adzes (MNB)			Earth grave
Thick-bladed flint axes (MNB)		Dwelling, Jonstorp	Earth grave
Polygonal battle axe (EN)	Dwelling, megalith, Single find		
Stone mace head (EN)	Single find		
Double-edge axe (EN: MNA)	Dwelling, megalith	Dwelling, Jonstorp	
Flint halberd (EN, MN)	Dwelling, hoard		
Flat copper axe (EN, MN)	Single find, wetland		Single find, wetland
Battle axe (MNB)			Single find, wetland, earth graves
Cylindrical blade cores (MN)	Dwelling	Dwelling, Jonstorp	
Tanged blade arrowhead (MNA, MNB)	Dwelling, megalith, enclosure	Dwelling, Jonstorp	Dwelling

Hypothetically, the Pitted Ware complex in Jonstorp signals another kind of materiality than the contemporary or slightly older Funnel Beaker complex, and the later Battle Axe complex. A blending of different things or qualities characterizes the material culture on the island. However, the dating of the Jonstorp sites is problematic, as the Ua series ^{14}C datings of food crusts were affected by freshwater reservoir effects. The remaining ^{14}C datings point to a time sequence between 2,900 and 2,600 cal. BC (Fig. 2), e.g. between MNA and MNB (Müller 2010). Of course, it is impossible to say anything about contemporaneity in the material culture. Judging by the stratigraphy of the excavated units (Jennbert 2014), however,

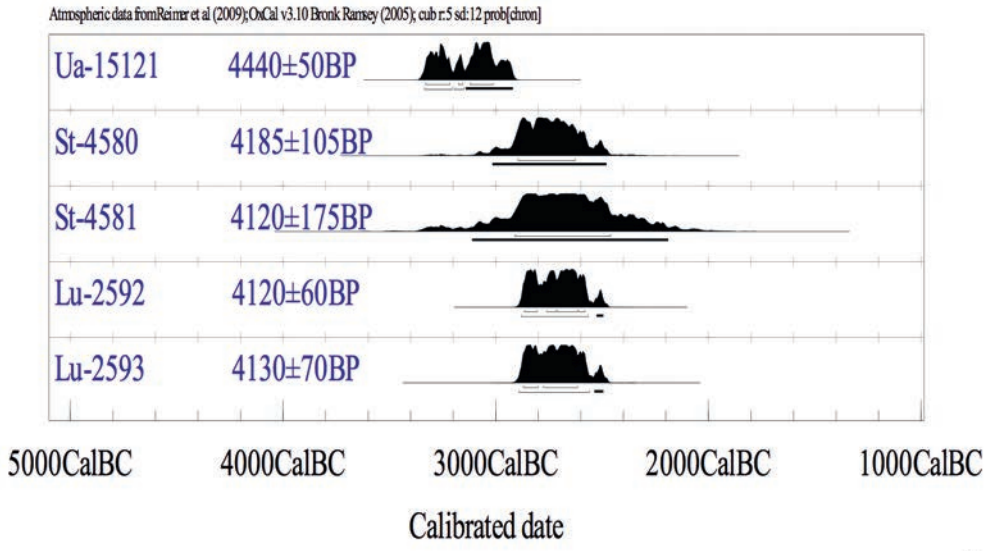

Fig. 2. Calibrated ^{14}C datings from Jonstorp M2 and M3 sites.

we can assume that several of the objects could have been used during one generation or two.

So, can we talk about artefacts as cultural representations and identity at the Pitted Ware sites at Jonstorp? We may suppose that the maritime economic system was a delayed return system. In a delayed return system binding commitments and dependencies between people are vital (Woodburn 1982). The finds indicate activities such as reuse of polished flint axes (Leffler 2013), as well as pottery craft, flint and stone manufacture. Without local flint access, the flint axes were certainly a desirable raw material, for example, for tanged arrowheads, whose function could have been either as tools for catching seal, or a weapon against other people (Jennbert 2014).

Work axes in the Pitted Ware are characterized by the same set of flint axes as in the Funnel Beaker and the Battle Axe complexes (Carlie 1986; Malmer 2002, p. 81). Although there are similarities in material expressions in the middle Neolithic complexes, my interpretation of the material culture and the setting of the Jonstorp sites leans towards a blended creolization. One possibility for understanding the blending of material culture is to consider social movements, and the encounter of the southern Funnel Beaker complexes in combination with the Swedish eastern Pitted Ware complexes.

Therefore, I choose to classify the Jonstorp archaeological material as Pitted Ware, because of the character of the material culture, especially the pottery, the economic system, and the landscape settings. Thus, the Jonstorp sites express a certain regional cultural identity. Following the complexity of the Jonstorp site, I understand other Pitted Ware sites with the same complexities in western and southern Scandinavia as being expressions of blended creolization. The phenomena of blending might be the consequence of social agency, even conflicts as clubs, mace-heads, polished stone-axes are found on the Jonstorp site as on other Neolithic sites.

Social conflicts

The traditional archaeological classification of different Neolithic archaeological cultural groups makes it more difficult to understand

social agency and cultural expression. The scientific need to sort and classify in unmixed finds is understandable, but it has limited the scope for understanding dynamic social encountering. Of course, social encountering has all kinds of dynamics. To simplify in this short article, social agency might include peaceful interaction as well as violent conflicts.

Certainly, there were commitments in the encountering between people in different parts of the province, but in what ways? It seems as if the warrior ideal was a growing social category during the Neolithic, probably already during the Mesolithic. Artefacts such as clubs, daggers of bone and antler, and arrowheads, the burials, and the body traumas show the presence of war and violence during the Neolithic (Sarauw 2007; Ahlström & Molnar 2012; Schulting & Fibiger 2012). Likewise, weapons of flint, stone, and antler were in use, found on dwellings, in graves, and deposited as single finds and in hoards on dry land or in wetlands. It looks as if social practices included competition between different social groups.

In addition, several Funnel Beaker places were constructed by building megaliths and enclosures (Larsson 1982; Andersson 2004; Brink 2009; Müller 2011). In Scania the river valleys inland from the coastal regions contained megaliths, enclosures, and settlement sites (Strömberg 1980). The Pitted Ware sites are not located in the river valleys, but associated with the coasts, and the shores of Ringsjön, although there is a certain discrepancy in the geographical use of Scania; the most important point is that the boundary between the Funnel Beaker complex and the Pitted Ware is far from sharp (Strömberg 1988, p. 78; Malmer 2002, p. 49).

My assumption is that the different social groups during the Neolithic were involved in specific spatial routines and traditions. My previous hypothesis was that the access to the ecological mosaic with its physical and mental resources was negotiable through the social agreements (Jennbert 2014). As I continue trying to understand what these different archaeological groups stand for in terms of cultural representation, conflict, and social identity, it seems obvious that there were multiple circumstances indicating growing social conflicts and clashing cultural identities in the late MNA.

Conclusion

When social aspects are integrated into the system of archaeological classification, the understanding of the fragmentary material culture is broadened and extended. The Neolithic archaeological cultures emerge as complex social units, not as isolated units of self-nourishing and evolving social units. Understanding the fragmentary material culture in terms of social agency and cultural expression raises new questions.

The settlement Jonstorp as a case of the south Scandinavian Pitted Ware complex serve as a suitable candidate to explore theoretical and methodological implications for the study of economic systems in emerging complex societies. The Pitted Ware sites were situated in a maritime non-monumental landscape along the coasts. The Funnel Beaker and the Battle Axe sites were located along river valleys with the construction of megaliths, cemeteries and enclosures. Even if there were similarities in the material cultures, differences, especially in pottery ornamentation, also indicate diverse social units and identities. The dissimilarity in the landscape use and geographical settings of south Scandinavian Neolithic assemblages indicates different economic systems and social identities. Probably, In the emerging social complexity, several Neolithic regional lifestyles were represented in the landscape. As a result, the encountering between groups of people led to competition between groups of people.

In conclusion, we still have insufficient classification of the Neolithic archaeological assemblages. The analytical complexities in the interaction between material culture, economic system, landscape setting, geographical location and cultural identities need to be extended. The narrative of the Neolithization and the introduction of animal breeding and cereal production in southern Scandinavia describes a chaotic period with the construction of monuments and enclosures, technological innovations and colonizing the landscape. Regarding multiple landscape use and consideration of its benefits, the maritime landscape increase the horizon of understanding. The seashore and wetland areas can be understood as ecological niches on the margins. But the agency of the fish and the seals in the seas, like the wild and domesticated animals on land, is as crucial for social activities and cultural identities, as are the potential pathways out to the maritime landscape.

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