

Inter the Mesolithic - Unearth Social Histories: Vexing Androcentric Sexing through Strøby Egede

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This article dissects the methodological toolbox of essences referred to as the Mesolithic, attempting to grasp its calculus. The autopsy then sets about investigating the reductionist problems of essentialism and androcentrism that have spread throughout the Mesolithic project like a malign cancer. Especially the insistent practice to sex supposedly important things and activities as male is confronted. The mass grave at Strøby Egede, eastern Zealand, Denmark, serves as a very detailed example. An effort is thereafter made to convey some of its socio-historical specificity.

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The exhortation of the title to unearth social histories does not imply in any way that we can dig up the past. The dead certainly do not tell tales; even less so do the archaeological objects, of course. Irrespective of which way we arrange prehistory, whether a Mesolithic calculation of subsistence levels or a narrative of past social life, *we* are the story-tellers, responsible for making ancient garbage intelligible and sensible. In doing so the archaeologists are never suspended in an ontological and epistemological void, where every result is due to pristine analysis. On the contrary, we are always ethnocentrically entangled in a nexus of numerous, unruly, sociohistorically rooted structures, on which our knowledge and existence feed. This being so, prehistoric interpretations are more or less concomitant the sociocultural processes in which we as liable prehistorians are embedded.

In this respect, the Mesolithic project is

far too enmeshed in some of the modernist, industrial structures of capitalism. It is about time that two particularly persistent and partly interrelated threads, running through our contemporary web of culture, receive a little attention here. These strands are the reductionist essentialism and the seductive androcentrism. The chronological period encompassed by the Mesolithic construct is without doubt one of the last safe havens for a generalising and male-centered archaeology. As is well known, the Late Palaeolithic has already begun to recoil from its former status as an androcentric sanctuary, thanks to feminist archaeologists such as Margaret Conkey (1990) and Marcia-Anne Dobres (1995). In order to provide an in-depth archaeological example of how the above-mentioned strands manifest themselves, I will treat a mass grave from the Zealandic Strøby Egede site in some detail. I also hope my arguing for the sociohistorical specificity

of this sinister find will be a tiny tributary to the river of reasons for the interment of the entire, by now heavily decomposing, Mesolithic corpus, in favour of various accounts of sociocultural phenomena in southern Scandinavia prior to 4000 B.C.

Although the words are deliberately vexing at times, the serious issues of essentialism and androcentrism are *not* brought up in the spirit of reproof. This article is not a pretext for stigmatising male archaeologists as sexists, but it certainly is a feminist text that stirs the androcentric sexing of objects, contexts and activities within the framework of the Mesolithic. It has not been written in excuse of my turning some eco-determinist archaeologists to ridicule, but it has definitely been put forward to proclaim a plethora of sociohistorical perspectives. In emphasising androcentrism and essentialism as integrated parts of our own sociocultural structures, it should become clear that it is first and foremost a certain tradition of socialisation together with the practical restraints it has helped regenerate, that is the target of my critique, not male archaeologists themselves. That we as men and women are very much caught in academic grooves of androcentrism is a cardinal point which I hope this text will drive home.

But why do I use an occasionally taunting tone? Doesn't such bantering arrogance reek of disregard for past and, especially, present Mesolithic researchers? No, but still yes. I do think that many Mesolithic specialists deserve the deepest respect for their excavation experience, their knowledge of materials, and their diligent carefulness. It is their haughtiness towards approaches of socio-cultural diversity that is disturbing. And it is their constant condescension towards a stereotypically created fact-of-nature image of *the* 'female', and the taking of her supposed universal qualities and limitations for granted, that I find quite alarming. Untheorised and casually dropped statements propel a correspondingly false image, namely that of

the 'male' as the human force who mattered the most for evolutionary progress and for the inventive history of material culture, always nourished and nursed by a passive and child-rearing woman. These views certainly need a good shaking every once in a while. Such a provocation also aims to shake those archaeologists who blench at concerns with the contemporary socio-ethical context of the archaeologists who produce texts on prehistory. They call such inquiries unscientific, when, as a matter of fact, essentialist and androcentric structures do affect the very way so-called scientific archaeology is being conducted in the first place. Sooner or later all of us will hopefully realise that our bigotries and reductions are sociohistorically woven maladies to resist and overtly debate. We ought not only to recognise but also to accept and encourage the fact that archaeological texts come in many colours.

DISSECTING THE MESOLITHIC

To the very last, the specialists carefully furnished the now late Mesolithic with a two-layer make-up so strong that it could be compared to an exoskeleton. This they did for a double purpose. The Mesolithic was to be taken as a coherent whole and was at the same time not to be mistaken for dead, regardless whether we mean the prehistoric period or the archaeological speciality of today.

The topmost layer of this facade is there to persuade us of the qualitative nature of the Mesolithic, of its 'unique coherence which sets it apart from other historical phenomena' (Zvelebil 1993:63). This alleged stage of history consists of 'a socio-economic development, a particular condition in the evolution of human culture' (Zvelebil 1986:6), that is, of 'cultural adaptations to ecological, temperate conditions within the hunting-gathering mode of subsistence in the northern regions of the Old World' (*ibid.*). Consequently, Mesolithic researchers over and over again make sure that we do not forget the

Mesolithic as a specialist branch in our time (e.g., Brinch Petersen 1993:46), complete with journals and symposia of its own. Apparently, none of them took heed of Mats P. Malmer's dissatisfaction at this sectarian tendency already in the 1960s (1963:11).

The layer just beneath is there to feign life. First of all, the Mesolithic specialists wish to convince us that they are heavy contributors to an attractively growing and scientifically successful field, bustling with dynamic activity. An assorted collection of scientific specialists is regularly featured to give weighty Mesolithic works a trustworthy polish of interdisciplinary dignity (K. Knutsson 1995:10). In effect, a handful of powerful men theoretically *and* physically possess the Mesolithic (cf. *ibid.* 8), in the process keeping this immobile monolith safe from accusatory sledge-hammers that threaten to shatter its ethnocentric mirror walls. Most students are reduced to monitory satellites who 'echo' (*sic.*, *ibid.* 20) these apical males' sentinel duty, generating an academic atmosphere of surveillance, seemingly aimed at dissidents who break any of the rules of appropriate debate and research. Inertia thrives as the lingering dream of publishing an immortal masterpiece on the epoch, crowned with laudatory quotes on the dust jacket, makes sure that materials and ideas remain in the closets of a few seniors, not seldom forever (e.g. Bagge 1945:52).

Second of all, a strange picture of life is presented with regard to the prehistoric period itself. Regrettably, this version of life is rarely compatible with 'cultural change', 'social tensions' or 'varying ideological meaning'. Instead, this tainted version of life is all too often associated with the adaptive strife of some 'Stone Age hunter' in the shifting ecology (Brinch Petersen 1993:47), where even human emotion has become a reduced part of this zombie-like strategy for survival (Mithen 1991:9). Until this lifeless situation comes to a halt, Mesolithic researchers will stand clueless before the relation between

material culture and social action (cf. K. Knutsson 1995:11).

Before the laying bare of various cases of androcentrism behind the crackling cosmetic cover of the Mesolithic, and the ensuing funeral service, we seize here the opportunity to dissect the Mesolithic corpse in search of its very calculus. Fortunately, the methodology for calculating the Mesolithic is well-preserved. The fundamental, ahistorical basis is that human behaviour and its debris can be looked upon as a complex multivariate equation, solvable via a series of successfully performed arithmetic operations (Blankholm 1990: 26-28). The Mesolithic calculus is thus composed of various parameters, each correlating to the presence or absence of a particular phenomenon judged relevant to describing Mesolithic Man in Boreal/Atlantic nature. This correspondence to mathematics is no coincidence, since one main goal for the Mesolithic specialist is to force the Mesolith into foreseeable quantitative arrays (Thomas 1991:16). We are dealing here with an epistemological habit (*mathesis*) that goes all the way back to the classical age as part of an ideology of analytically ordered science and the knowledge of essentialist beings, seeking to classify identities and differences (Foucault 1970:74). An old motto from the mind of Georg Henrik von Wright, later cited by Malmer, illustrates this tradition well: 'A humanism that shuns exact reason is a cultural barbarism' (1963:11). But wouldn't it make more sense to rephrase this famous sentence? *Exact reason that shuns humanism is cultural barbarism.* Then this assertion would include those archaeologists who choose to extrude issues of cultural diversity, of social depth and of ideological thickness from the repertoire of serious Mesolithic research. Amazingly, this sacrifice is voluntarily done in favour of some dehumanising version of universal behaviourism that preferably should resemble classical primatology and traditional social psychology (Grøn 1995:10). This just goes to show that it is not enough to realise the bitter

fact that the Mesolithic material fails to live up to even minimal standards of sociologically useful mathematical and statistical analysis in order to produce an ethically defensible humanist text (Grøn 1995:7).

Only under the condition that something is trivial and simple enough is it possible to draw up a model predicting its development (Welinder 1977:15). As many an object of scientific study in Mesolithic research fulfils such a requirement, we can predict the way in which it will be approached analytically (Fig. 1). When the centre of scientific attraction is new, it usually exhibits a binary flexibility, that is, the phenomenon under scrutiny is reductionistically perceived as a question of either this (+) or that (-). Typically, an object of Mesolithic study stays in this state for quite a long time. In the case of reaching the next stage in the Mesolithic trajectory of analytic progress, the binary poles are eased somewhat (++ : --) as the compromise arrives (0). From then on, the development of analytic stages is characterised by a slow proliferation of nuances, to which the scientific sharpness of the Mesolithic analysis eventually will succumb. The situation this calculus causes may be likened to a jerky merry-go-round in a hypothetic-deductive limbo, where every spasm is mistaken for scientific progress, putatively owing new data and methodologi-

cal success. But neither more data (Malmer 1963:186) nor fresh methods make possible better analyses as long as they remain detached from an explicit and elaborate social theory and a less reductionist philosophy of material culture (cf. Thomas 1988:60). A more humble approach would be preferable in dealing with the vast complexity of interpreting an archaeological record fragmented by millennia. The same goes for the equally tricky dilemma of understanding another sociocultural web of meanings. Surely, a strategy that beforehand acknowledges intricacy, hence allowing for a multitude of angles, is to recommend instead of promoting certain simplified patterns as archaeological quasi-truths under some banner of science. As it is now, given this analytic rigidity, the calculus of the Mesolithic project is just a matter of extreme reductionism, often taking the form of various pairs of essentialist alternatives.

First, we have one of the most common forms of analytical duality in Mesolithic analysis to date. Since the Mesolithic is more often than not a field of academic practice in excuse of carelessly squeezing people into the determinist world of sociobiology, an ecological system of biotopes and niches running on organic instinct, it has invariably meant an all-systems-go for a certain eco-

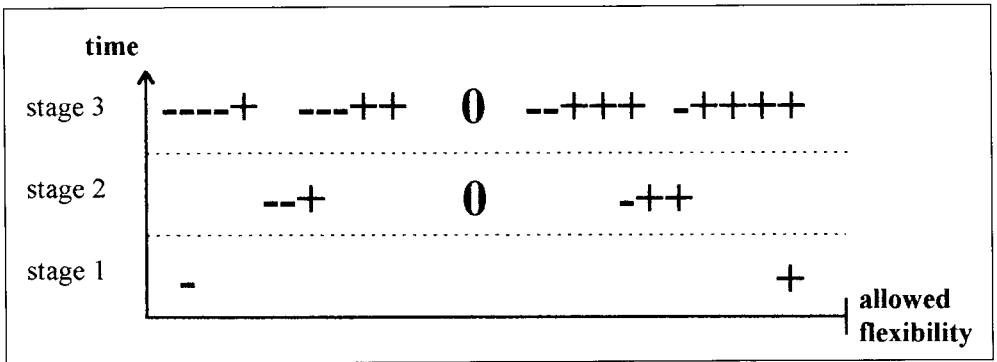


Fig. 1. A graph predicting the usual development of structural flexibility for objects of scientific study in Mesolithic analysis.

logical-topographical kind of analytic bipolarity, the most familiar being the devotion to the coast-interior dualism (e.g. Larsson 1983b:12). The relation of the coastland to the 'hinterland' is repeatedly described in conceptual opposites. Large and more or less permanent sites, continuous in time and space, are set against small temporary sites, which are chronologically and chorologically contingent (S. Andersen 1993:66). Similarly, fishermen are set against forest hunters (Gebauer & Price 1990:261), and a marine diet against a terrestrial diet (Noe-Nygaard 1988). However, having been around for quite a while, this coast-interior tool of analysis has now reached stage 2 (see Fig. 1). It thereby allows for a threefold flexibility: people living right on the coast (--+), people in the nearby hinterland with a coastal settlement pattern (0), and inland dwellers proper (-++) (Fischer 1993:62). A similar trajectory of increased flexibility in applied analysis can be traced from the clear-cut division between Mesolithic sea-based diets and Neolithic land-based diets (Tauber 1981:116), through the critique of it (Clutton-Brock & Noe-Nygaard 1990:643), to a less generalised dietary model of the same periods (Lidén & Nelson 1994:18).

Second, Mesolithic archaeology is full of analytic dichotomies which seek techno-behavioural differences in the record for the purpose of establishing chronologies, spatial differentiation and, lately, even eco-dynamic models (Yerkes & Kardulias 1993:89). Obviously, these analytic pairings are as far from intersubjectivity as a transgression-regression investigation. Any ambition to investigate these types of patterns as contextually specific fragments of culturally specific actors remains in silence. Site seasonality deals with a year cleaved in two halves, winter and summer (Rowley-Conwy 1987:74-5). The study of Mesolithic flint knapping has become a matter of pressure technique or percussion technique (Vang Petersen 1985:9), negative platforms or positive platforms

(*ibid.*), manufacturing tools or subsistence tools (Juel Jensen 1994:82), borers turned clockwise or borers turned counter-clockwise (Dumont 1987:82), settlement drop zones or waste toss zones (K. Andersen 1983), and so forth, apparently all being satisfactory patterns in and for themselves.

Third, the Mesolithic itself is dichotomised into an earlier and a later part (e.g. Constandse-Westermann & Newell 1989:405, 1990:95), a split controlled by an evolutionary gear-box, where shifting the lever from neutral to first gear sets several conceptual switches: mobility becomes semi-sedentism, serially specialised bands become dialectic tribes, small logistic camps divide into base camps and logistic camps, social simplicity turns socially more complex, individual skill differentiation is replaced by social category differentiation, a low population density grows to be a higher *ditto*, local reciprocity gives way to interregional exchange, an immediate return system makes room for a delayed return system (cf. Woodburn 1980), and so on. Naturally, the even fuller and more differentiated Neolithic is set into motion as you push the evolutionary machinery into second gear. This stark difference between no gear and first gear seems fatal enough for the integrity of the Mesolithic. And it should come as no surprise that androcentrism endures the longest in neutral gear, as the earliest Mesolithic by logic encapsulates a non-social and eco-essentialist frame.

Finally, as it is believed that the appearance of cemeteries in the Mesolithic marks the start of territorial ethnicity (Gebauer & Price 1990:261), this has engendered a few analytic bifurcations: west Denmark contra east Denmark-Scania (Vang Petersen 1985), continent contra island (Österholm 1989:3), foreign objects contra domestic objects (Larsson 1988a:30). This interest in ethnical differences is bewildering as the practical-symbolic functions of artefacts and their activity areas stay suspiciously intact regardless of any acclaimed regionality (*ibid.*), whereas any real

sense of sociohistorical context is conspicuous by its absence. If interpretations of social action are substantiated at all, this is normally achieved by a carelessly applied 'pick-and-choose ethnography' (K. Knutsson 1995:11), using well-worn analogues, such as the potlatching Northwest Coast indians (Lidén 1995:25-6) or the dietarily and environmentally extreme eskimoes (Grøn 1995:53). In such moments, the Mesolithic specialist suddenly acts in direct contravention of her or his ideal of objective science.

SUBSISTENCE PERSISTENCE

That the concept of hunter-gatherer society lies at the heart of the Mesolithic construct (Zvevibel 1986:7) is clear enough, judging by all the suggestions as to how this mode of subsistence should be labelled: 'gatherer-hunter' (Bender 1978), 'collector' (Dolukhanov 1979), 'forager' (Ehrenberg 1989:51), 'fisher' (Tauber 1989), and so on. Heedless of these tags, subsistence itself refers to 'those materials that are necessary for the physiological well-being of a community (e.g. food and fuel) and the technologies needed to obtain them' (Lidén 1995:6). Hence, Ecosystems Man optimally extracts calories from the environmental resources (Welinder 1988:52), always as a soon-to-be sufferer of nutritional stress. If ever the ideosocial domain is mentioned, it is still considered as functionally adaptive (Bender 1978:207). From the cultural ecological flank we are told that the level of genetic determination of behaviour diminishes as the complexity of cultural response increases (Rowley-Conwy 1986:29). So the deeper we get into the Mesolithic (and beyond), the more genuine a hunter-gatherer we should meet. From the ideo-essentialist flank we are implored not to be sceptical of the idea of a Mesolithic foragers' belief system that 'remains essentially unchanged for millennia' (Zvevibel 1993:57-8). Both these flanks clearly attempt to force us into accepting the Mesolithic as some kind of frozen-packaged epoch 'suspended in an eternal

"ethnographic present"' (Spriggs 1977:13). Apparently, many hunter-gatherer specialists are keen to squeeze the evidence into a generalised, globalising model that rides roughshod over sociohistorically specific processes (Thomas 1988:61). Despite a time-span of thousands of years, and despite the huge geographical areas involved, social, cultural and ideological matters before 4000 B.C. are either reduced to a state of near non-existence as matters of course, where any expected variation is just frills, or to some structural serfdom in a regularly undulating wave of history. Silence falls upon those anthropologists who recently have been arguing for the vivid historicity of the ethnographically documented peoples commonly stigmatised as primitive and natural, freeing these from the ethnocentrically imposed shackles of cyclical time and from the bonds of socio-biological processualism (e.g. Swain 1993). It is not just rhetoric when Ian Hodder claims that a *truly* processual approach can only be achieved by the so-called post-processualists (Hodder 1992:86), the theoretical mongrels of archaeology.

We are dealing here with no less than a persistent and inescapable subsistence bias every time we hinge our studies upon the hunter-gatherer concept. Kjell Knutsson critically suggests that we should start to really understand hunter-gatherers (1995:19). Tove Hjørungdal rightfully wishes there was more written on typical hunter-gatherer societies from a gender-critical point of view (1995:110). Though fine criticisms in their own right, they still tend to fall smack into that trap of nutritional determinism. A universal hunting-gathering economy does not exist (Orme 1981:32). Far from it. I would contend that there are no hunter-gatherer economies whatsoever, only culturally specific agglomerates of social actors.

The Mesolithic is very much constituted by an industrial and military taxonomic discourse: base camp, logistics, hunting station, subsistence strategy, flint industry, etc.

The technical variability on sites thus labelled is brushed aside as archaeological 'noise' instead of being ascribed varying social agency (Dobres 1995:125). The very way these kindred concepts appear in Mesolithic texts betrays a structure originating in the eighteenth century. It involves a celebration of the militarily disciplined, docile body, serving in optimally created, artificial sites of strategically supervised and applied uses (Foucault 1979:143-4, 171). These locations are 'manufactories' - spaces for surveilling the mechanical production of the human organism (ibid. 174). The instrumental behaviour is carefully mapped; 'their skill, the way they set about their tasks, their promptness, their zeal' (ibid.). The Mesolithic site closely resembles the contemporary order of barracks, of factories, of hospitals, of prisons. The Mesoliths are nothing but political puppets of today, small-scale models of modern power relations (cf. ibid. 136). Prehistoric persons may well have been slaves to routine, but then we must talk historically specific, culturally significant routine, not cybernetics.

HAPPY HUNTING-GROUNDS

As if the subsistence persistence is not bad enough, it is itself lop-sided, leaning towards some implicit fixation of the fearsome hunter in action on the stage of nature. The Scandinavian tongues frequently denominate the entire Mesolithic as 'the Hunter Stone Age' (Sw. *jägerstenåldern*). Already this fact is an indicator of how mesmerised the Mesolithic specialist is by the androcentric image of the hunter-warrior (Conkey 1990: 74; Welinder 1991:87). Foraging theory, we are told, characterises the hunter's behaviour as that of a Bayesian decision-making, bio-emotive machine that makes rational patch and prey choices (Mithen 1991:10). Evidently, every single detail of the hunting process deserves minute attention; acts, movements and implements. The active, progressive man ameliorates a passive, regressive nature.

Early on, the male big-game hunters alone supposedly set an entire evolutionary process in motion (Bender 1989:86). In the shift from the Palaeolithic to the Mesolithic there occurred decisive technological improvements, changed hunting techniques and new kinds of game, while the women did not change their activities notably (Bennike & Alexandersen 1990:54). Lately, however, the image of expedient hunters zealously tracking down reindeer by the melting glaciers has become badly battered, as the first humans in southern Scandinavia have proven to be late-comers and mainly interested in procuring fish (Fischer 1996:157).

The arrow let go from the bow is indisputably *the* weapon of the hunter. '[C]onsidering the importance of a predictable and successful outcome for each arrow released by the hunter, it is hardly surprising that *the evolution of missile heads* appears to *have progressed much faster than that of all other tool types of the period*' (Fischer 1989:38-9, my italics). The development of the arrow and its strategically demanding use is seen as the vital warrant for the continual intellectual honing and economic productivity of the Mesolithic society. Conflated typologies of flint projectile points even stake off the very shifts of time in the Mesolithic (Vang Petersen 1985:9). In reality, these typologies probably reflect no more than local, socially significant site variations. Further, although repeatedly denied (Fischer 1989:31), some sharp-edged projectile points have been found suitable for cutting, slicing, graving and drilling (Odell 1988:335). If we go on and include microliths in this category, pointed pieces of flint have proven to be usable for just about any other purpose than killing game (Clarke 1978:8). And obviously, as any object, missile heads have now and then carried information about language group, ethnicity and individual status (Gendel 1987:66).

Ensuing this fetishism of the hunter in action is the over-emphasis on the prepared

remains resulting from hunting activity. Consequently, we observe an almost unerasable meat fixation in Mesolithic research (Clarke 1978:6-8). If we take the intensely studied area of southern Scandinavia, meat – prestigious or not – would very rarely exceed one-third of the diet by weight. Therefore, frequent use of the eskimo analogy ought to be seen as an activity lurking among the shadows of androcentrism. Seeing is believing for too many Mesolithic specialists. Gradually perfecting their sieving technique, bones and shells from mammals, as well as birds, fish, shell-fish, and nuts are detected and thus immediately acknowledged to be the very grounds for Mesolithic survival. On the contrary, this sort of preserved material may often reflect exceptional meals for feasting and variety. Leaves, seeds, berries, fruits, flowers, fibers, buds, bulbs, shoots, roots, tubers, fungi, algae and insects were often the real staple foods, but a preservation bias renders them invisible. Even in the field of adornments, the eminence of tooth beads, because they are from killed game, is taken for granted (Larsson 1983b:74). Hunting must be recognised as a changing cultural component among others in a given community, and not constantly as the killing of mobile organisms in order to fulfil a physiological subsistence need or a manhood bravura (Strassburg 1994:120).

Conspicuous mammal bones become associated with equally eye-catching flint tools when spotted by the androcentrically myopic archaeologist. Implicitly, then, they sex most of the productive and progressive procedures in the Mesolithic as acts performed by hunter-warrior craftsmen. This image of men as toolmakers is indirectly supported by a few microwear analyses which have supposedly revealed that settlement flint waste is just waste (Brinch Petersen 1993: 49). In any argument in this direction, there opens up a possibility to sweep aside David Clarke's insistence that a major proportion of this 'waste' was in fact simple tools for now

specifically undetectable vegetal and other kinds of food-gathering and processing (1978:8). Maybe we do sense here a slight eagerness to rid the male-dominated Mesolithic of a discomfort, but what discomfort? It has been shown once and for all that women *did* make and use flint tools (Gero 1990). Therefore, given that women and children perhaps were less mobile, there is the 'disturbing' possibility that these groups are responsible for the greater part of any settlement layer in the Mesolithic (Vinsrygg 1987: 29). The apparition of the hunter-warrior cannot be secured as long as the hunter-focussed specialist fails to determinately discard Clarke's assertion above. Until he or she does succeed, it will hold as a near-truth that the massive amounts of flint waste on Stone Age settlements, including of course the pointed pieces, may very well have represented one-time use of flint pieces for various processing tasks on soft materials, not detectable by microwear analysis.

A final example of the hunter-warrior bias inherent in the Mesolithic project is the regular tendency to 'make' weapons, particularly blunt weapons such as maces and clubs, out of unidentified artefacts (S. Andersen 1981:40-1; Larsson 1978:32; Sørensen 1988:57). It is apt to ask whether it is a prehistoric man's club or just a Mesolithic specialist's club of today. Perhaps we are dealing here with the last remnant in Stone Age archaeology of the image of the brute caveman bashing the woman of his desire. Weights for digging sticks or nets (Vinsrygg 1987; Nancke-Krogh 1988:9) seem out of the question when interpreting the archaeological material, just as non-functional elaborations of structures or composite objects do. Even in those cases where such artefacts were weapons, they may primarily have been symbols of authority (Orme 1981:209).

SEX AND GENDER BINARISMS

The simplistic views on hunting and gathering would not exist were it not for the

essentialising, biology-based conceptions of 'man' and 'woman' which abound in the Mesolithic project. Despite there having been sharp critique of Elman Service's extremely rigid and evolutionary view of the Mesolithic (Price & Brown 1985:4), the strict spirit of his eternally universal sex binarism has been left intact in the texts on the period. So, the following still holds true. The sexual behaviours of the two sexes are biological and constant (Service 1971:25). Since such a divide between men and women 'is universally found as a status criterion at all stages of cultural evolution, sex distinction does not figure in the theoretical problems of social organization' (ibid. 42). Thus, chromosomes and genetic predispositions somehow induce men to hunt and fight, while women for their part naturally gather vegetable food, cook, and bear and care for children (ibid. 30). These standardised 'sex roles' are perfectly in line with patriarchal capitalism, which insists on keeping work and home separate, gendered, and differently valued (Gero 1985). The same androcentric mechanisms also make sure that no distinction is made between biological sex and sociocultural gender.

A sample of how this sexual binarism affects the archaeologist is Ole Grøn's postulate that millennia of Maglemose huts follow the 'cultural universal' of being distinctly and internally divided into a male (micro-liths, flint working) and a female (hearths, cooking) space (1990:81). This spatial split is supported by Murdock's 'Ethnographic Atlas', as it shows how men do the hunting while women do the cooking regardless of culture (Grøn 1995:53). Such simplistic gender divisions of flint assemblages have already been convincingly criticised, although amazingly avoiding the issue of androcentrism altogether (Olausson 1986:11; Ravn 1993a:65). The pugnacious androcentrism saturating the 'Human Relations Area Files' renders the ethnographic statistics, which is the basis of these supposed archaeological pat-

terns, dubious at best, since most of the anthropological work conducted in the twentieth century has been a case of men asking men about important 'man-things' (Ardener 1972:136-138). Any stereotypical interpretation of male hunter-warrior-toolmakers and female childrearer-cook-gatherers *cannot* under any circumstance be assumed, but must instead be discussed and argued for in each particular study.

Early feminist archaeologists parried Man the Hunter with Woman the Gatherer. In doing so, they achieved little more than ethnocentric reiteration of the male-female dyad and at the same time support of the supposedly egalitarian nature of hunter-gatherers (Bender 1989:84-5). The sense of sexual binarism remained unharmed. Today, it certainly is time that we are 'liberated from the binary prison' (Barthes 1977:133). Dragging other factors than gender into the analyses, factors that cross-cut gender, is the only way to get at gender without sacrificing any sense of a sociohistorical whole, however fragmentary (Wylie 1990:39; Strassburg 1995b:81). Furthermore, it would be very helpful if we could begin ignoring the ethnocentric concepts of man and woman, both in the sense of sex and in the sense of gender. Only then, I think, will we assemble a historical atmosphere of culturally specific categories.

MAKING MALE GRAVE DATA

Provided there is a sufficient skeletal material available, the way of sexing graves biologically is of course through the methodology of physical anthropology, or nowadays, of the culturally sensitive biological anthropology (Alexandersen *et al.* 1993:60). The methods for establishing the sex of such ossuary remains, however, are alarmingly fault-ridden in so far as they are inclined towards sexing human bones as remnants of prehistoric men (*e.g.* Shennan 1975). Since many skeletons are seldom preserved in a complete, undecayed state, we need to seek secondary sex characteristics. To find these,

the physical anthropologist often employs a highly generalising classificatory system for robustness and muscle size evaluations (Celin 1994:7): hypermasculine (+2), masculine (+1), neutral (0), feminine (-1) and hyperfeminine (-2) (note the pejorative value of femininity). Celin rightly criticises this for being usable only in its extremes, and even then elements of subjective arbitrariness are present throughout (1994:10). Categories lying next to each other are indistinguishable. This system ought to be in shambles after the discovery of Vedbæk and Skateholm, where the anthropologists admit having initially made faulty sex-determinations, since Mesolithic women were much more robust ('masculine') than expected (Persson & Persson 1984:44). Alterations in the adult skeleton can be related to age, that is, a certain robustness in a skeleton does not necessarily mean that it must be a man; it may just as well be an old individual of *either* sex (Celin 1994:28). Add to that the consideration that in societies where individuals of the female sex are made to work very hard, their skeletons will also often appear as being masculine (*ibid.*). Furthermore, physical anthropology cannot provide in any acceptable way the sex of a skeleton aged in the vicinity of 15 and younger. Not even odontological analyses of the size of children's dental crowns (Brinch Petersen *et al.* 1993:66) contribute in any scientifically qualitative manner to sex determinations of children, or adults for that matter (Celin 1994:13). In reality, so-called 'sex determinations' of the young are based solely on find-associative comparisons between children and sexed adults.

The other way of sexing graves can be implemented in any grave containing at least one artefact, as it is based on ethnocentric ideas of which artefact goes with which gender. To make this method work, the archaeologist first needs to establish the functions of each artefact, say an axe, by analogy to a similar object of today, preferably with comparable use-wear. Although such an

analogy presents itself as extremely safe and almost superfluous (Ravn 1993b:87), this safety is illusionary. At best, we may empirically establish a few of the practical functions of a prehistoric artefact. Missing are still the rest of its sociocultural functions and, more importantly, its multitude of prehistoric contexts, each and every one potentially gendered in its own specific way. In making the grave goods appear immediately translatable to contemporary objects, we have already travelled half-way down the ethnocentric road to the Mesolithic never-never land of gender essentialism.

The second and final methodological step entails a more or less conscious imposition of binarily opposed male and female essences onto Mesolithic life in general, as has been discussed above. In addition, there are quite a few androcentric stowaways at the back of our minds in the form of coeval gender associations, not only in relation to the great number of activities we 'think with' as we imagine past ages, but as aggregated parts of their definitions. This ruinous practice completes the journey to our androcentric never-never land. Having kept to the same old beaten track of behaviourist half-truths, Mesolithic specialists can do nothing but claim such things as: in Mesolithic graves the men have the tools and the women the adornments (Brinch Petersen 1990:22), without realising that they reason in a circle. If archaeologists approach the Mesolithic graves with ideas of this kind, consequently, they will come up with confirmatory results. And even if they were to find 'support' of their essentialist view on sexual behaviour through some pattern of repeated associations between grave objects and satisfactorily sexed bones, ethnographic experiences have shown that there is no given relationship between grave goods and real-life gender divisions (Mauer 1991:417). Wouldn't it be better to cease repeating our ahistorical assumptions of what gender and sex imply? Instead, we could commence thinking inter-

pretatively of sociohistorical constructions specific to the cultural context studied, and of the ways in which they differ from our concepts of sex and gender.

As is well known, Mesolithic science has produced a few scandalous cases where graves have been labelled 'male' androcentrically, intending to cover both the sex and gender of the buried individual, when they, gender aside, actually should have been labelled 'individual of unspecified sex' or 'anthropologically female'. The androcentric certainty of the attribution of gender onto buried individuals through their grave goods has in some cases overruled osteological sex determinations. The most infamous case is of course that of the Barum grave at Bäckaskog in Scania (Gejvall 1970). Obviously what happened was that an advanced, delicate, and often decorated tool such as the slotted bone point, was simply unthinkable to have been associated with a woman. Hence, most archaeologists ignored the osteological findings, turning the skeleton into a fisherman instead. Although many archaeologists today admit that it is an individual of the female sex, they still continue the androcentric tradition. The woman is deprived of one of her grave attributes by archaeologists falsely declaring that the flint-edged tool was the weapon with which she was slain (Albrethsen & Brinch Petersen 1976:4). The inspiration was derived from the Stora Bjers grave, where a skeleton estimated as male had been hit by a slotted bone point (Munthe 1954). In fact, this explanatory campaign is by now so successful that even feminist archaeologists think of this claim as being plausible (Hjørungdal 1995:110). Ignoring the great bulk of contexts where flint-edged bone points and harpoons appear in fishing contexts (K. Andersen 1983), Mesolithic specialists go to great lengths, supported by preposterously few cases, to make these artefact types the weapons of male hunters (*ibid.* 164,171; Lidén 1942). Similarly, when finds of slotted bone points have been identified as constitu-

ting Mesolithic hoards, they too are referred to as arrows or weapons (Trönn Dahl 1993: 14). Still, sometimes one or another flint-edged artefact is considered a possible fishing tool, as long as it remains part of a man's equipment (K. Andersen 1983:98). What we have here is the following scenario: 'Man and Sea in the Mesolithic' (Fischer 1995). Any real fishing is done by brothers, not sisters, of the angle. The very thought of women paddling dug-outs is rejected outright (Bennike & Alexandersen 1990:53).

No matter that slotted bone points are comparable to what we today call 'fishing spears', 'daggers', 'arrows', or 'weapons'. Is it so hard to accept individuals of the female sex in gendered roles which involve hunting and warfare? Surely, we can get used to the idea of women making, employing and associating themselves with complex composite tools with a deadly potential. We should start by forgetting the modern image of the submissive housewife as (we think) we know her. The man at Stora Bjers, for instance, may well have been a victim of an aggravated woman, since there are so far only anthropologically estimated women associated with flint-edged bone points. Apart from the woman at Barum, a female skeleton at Nederst was found with a slotted bone point (Kannegaard Nielsen 1991:45). Moreover, there is grave No. 4 at Bøgebakken in Vedbæk, which was androcentrically sexed as male just because of such a tool (Albrethsen & Brinch Petersen 1976:21-4), but which most likely is a female skeleton, judging by the anthropological description. In fact, if it was not the cause of death as in the case of Stora Bjers, the only flint-edged point which may have been part of the grave goods of a male skeleton is the fragmentary one discovered in a mole-hole in the vicinity of Grave IV at Skateholm II (Larsson 1988b: 118-24). This rummaged-about grave is said to contain a man who died in his forties, but perhaps we are instead dealing with an old, very robust woman who worked hard all her

life.

Not only graves with slotted bone points have been sexed in a male-centered way. Also graves with an impressive amount of objects, or with 'obviously manly' objects, have proven to be too hallow to the hunter-warrior image to let them become the final resting places for women's bodies. The existence of such a grave at Dürrenberg in Germany – with a biologically female skeleton sharing the pit with a polished axe, an antler axe, microliths, bone bodkins, and tooth beads – is so unlikely that it is classified as a grave that 'remains a big problem' (Albrethsen & Brinch Petersen 1976:24). Such a 'big problem' was another German grave, but now from the Rössen cemetery. It was 'solved' accordingly by dismissing its anthropological result (a female skeleton) in order to give priority to the 'male' grave goods (an axe, a flint blade, a bone bracelet, three vessels, and beads) (Lichardus 1976:41-4). A skeleton in the grave at Melby, Zealand, was sexed as 'undoubtedly male' (Lund Hansen *et al.*

1972:244), though all parts between its shoulder region and its thighs were gone, and though the bones were recognised as being quite slender and coming from a short individual (155.9 cm). The real reason for it being sexed male was surely the two round-butted axes by its head. But the discovery of how robust the women were in the Mesolithic would make it a fairly certain woman or, at least, an individual of indeterminate sex. At Nederst there is a grave considered one of the richest in the Mesolithic with the heavily decomposed skeletal remains of a c.155 cm tall individual (Kannegaard Nielsen 1989: 145-6). With this seductive wealth in mind, the individual was assessed as male. Suspicious is also the grave at Fannerup, where the skeleton was estimated as male, partly under the influence of its rich grave goods (Hougaard Rasmussen 1990:34-5), partly by a wave of the science-magician's wand which made it 'grow' six cm or so, from the average female stature of c.155 cm to the more sexually neutral ground of 161 cm (Bennike & Alexandersen 1990:53-4). In fact, most of the skeletons mentioned above are expected to grow in the near future as if by androcentric magic. The goal seems to be to put as much distance as possible between the individuals buried in these graves, already man-sized in their sheer splendour, and the average height of a Mesolithic woman. If there is any conclusion to draw from this it must be that we cannot trust grave data, or any data for that matter, construed within the Mesolithic project as far as their sexing is concerned.

PROBING STRØBY EGEDE

Before we delve into the mass grave at Strøby Egede, a site situated on the coast of Køge Bay in Zealand, Denmark (Fig. 2), there is another Ertebølle grave 50 m away that is worthy of attention. It contained the remains of a poorly preserved 'male', 25-30 years old and slenderly built (Sørensen & Tornbjerg 1994). The body appears to have rested in an extended position on the back, with the head

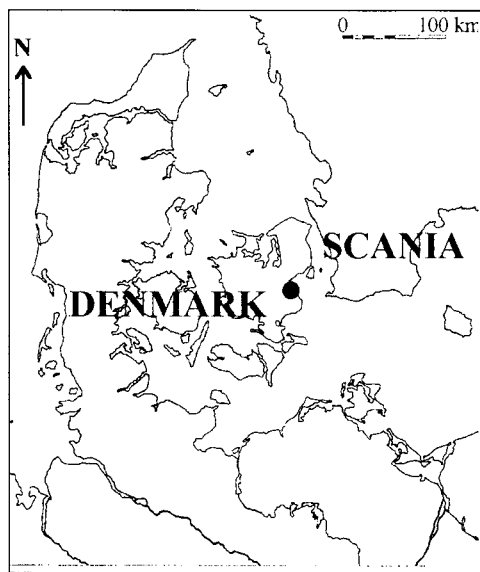


Fig. 2. A map of Denmark and Scania. The dot marks the location of Strøby Egede.

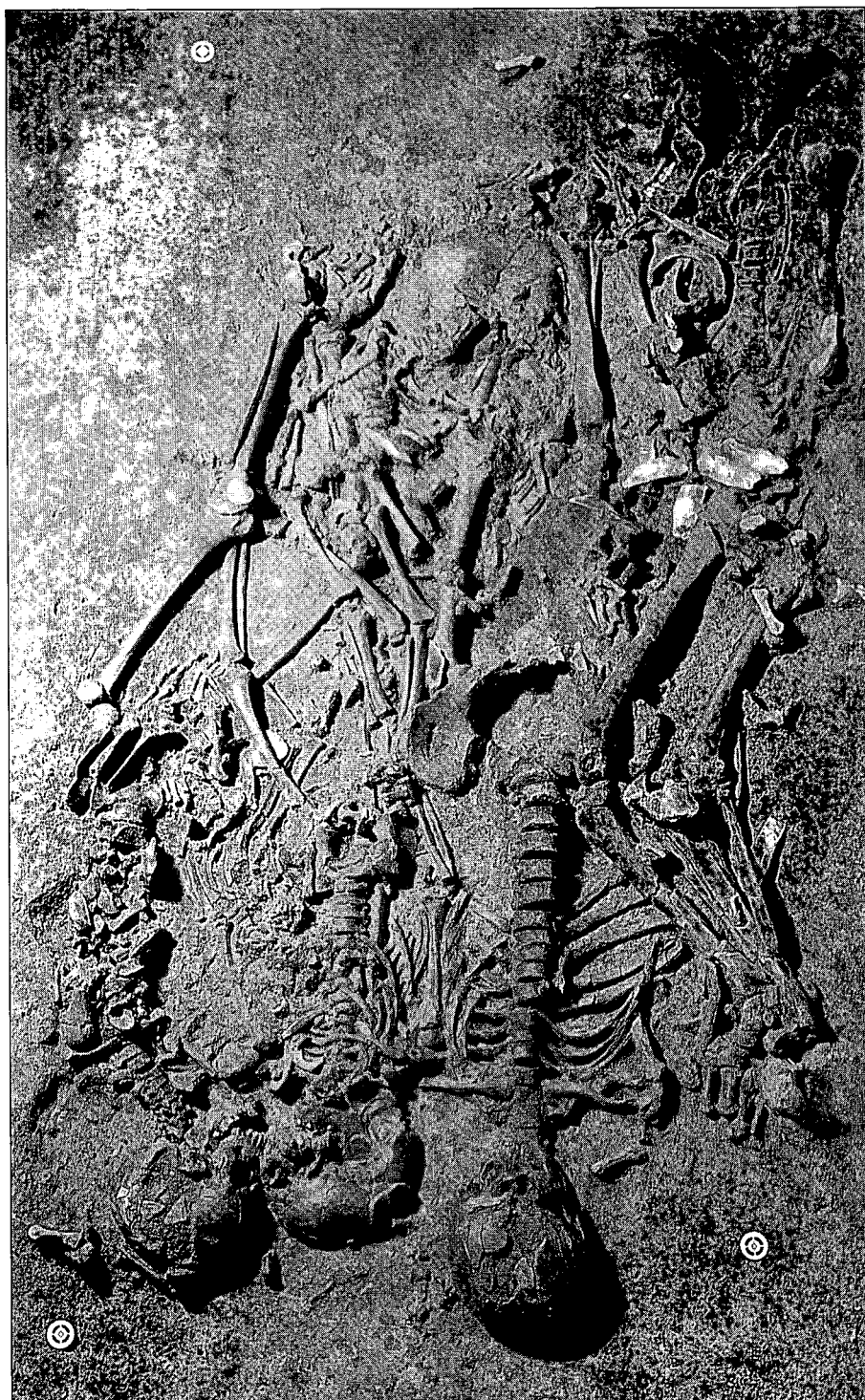


Fig. 3. A photograph of the Strøby Egede grave (source: Brinch Petersen 1990:25).

in the west, and with a concentration of ochre in the pelvis area. Given the slenderness and the quite messy field conditions from which they were unearthed, these remnants of an individual may just as well be those of a biologically female skeleton (Torbjerg pers. comm.). The flake axe found above the head and the two long and heavily eroded bone points by one of the calves do not contradict such a claim (*ibid.*).

Turning now to the mass grave (Fig. 3), it may be of interest to know that it was discovered in 1986, during the planting of a carp-pond. A collaboration between Køge Museum, the National Museum, and the archaeological institute at Copenhagen University, made sure that the grave was removed and thoroughly excavated indoors. After a number of painstaking working sessions in prostrate positions, wielding teaspoons and brushes, the archaeologists involved were able to ascertain that the crowded grave contained the skeletal remains of eight individuals, deposited on one occasion. The following presentation and discussion of its archaeological contents draws upon the texts that have treated this grave (Brinch Petersen 1987, 1988, 1990; Kannegaard Nielsen & Brinch Petersen 1993). In the list of the eight buried individuals and of the artefacts associated with them, the southern skeletons

will come first, starting from the southeast corner, hence the helter-skelter letter denominations (Fig. 4). An antler axe found considerably higher up in the grave (Torbjerg pers. comm.) and two flint blades are left out from this account as their association with a particular skeleton is unclear. Why will be discussed below.

Skeleton A. A 50-year-old woman. Inside her skull, a bone hairpin.

Skeleton B. A seven-year-old child. Across its pelvis, ca. 10 red deer tooth beads.

Skeleton F. A new-born infant on the chest of Skeleton C. On its head, an elongated boar tooth, plus parts from two roe deer hooves.

Skeleton C. A woman, 18 to 20 years of age. Across her pelvis, ca. eight red deer tooth beads. At her right hip, a small blade knife. On her head, a bone hairpin.

Skeleton E. A six-year-old child. At the left side of its pelvis, two blade knives.

Skeleton H. The tiniest new-born infant. On its head, one elongated boar tooth, plus 12 red deer tooth beads.

Skeleton G. A new-born infant on the chest of Skeleton D. On its pelvis, two small blade knives.

Skeleton D. A 30-year-old man. On his head, a flat bone 'dagger'. Around his waist, five large flint blades/blade knives.

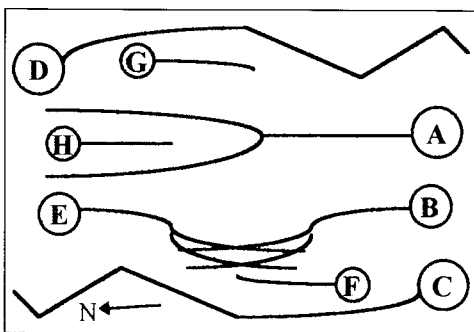


Fig. 4. A stylisation of the positions of the eight buried individuals.

In a crowded grave such as this, the problem of which objects go with which body is bound to emerge. That is why two flint blades have become troublesome. Oddly, they both seem to involve the old woman's skeleton (A). The first case was observed already by Brinch Petersen (1990:22), namely, the dilemma whether the blade knife on the old woman's right lower arm belonged to her or to the 30-year-old man's (D) left calf. Considering the virtual tool-belt, we could of course question the probability of the man having yet another knife arranged at his left calf. The second case carries the very similar dilemma of whether the smallish unretouch-

ed blade on the old woman's left thigh belongs to her or to skeleton E's left calf. Once again, we could well argue that the skeleton with the 'obtrusive' left leg is sufficiently equipped with blade knives. The resolving of these associative dilemmas once and for all, is not the real issue here. What is at issue, however, is the androcentric undertones in the archaeologist's choices of when to be scientifically sceptical and, more importantly, when *not* to be scientifically sceptical. The at least 20-year-old bias that says that a large blade knife is always a prominent male attribute, especially when it exhibits a thorough retouch (Albrethsen & Brinch Petersen 1976: 21; Kannegaard Nielsen & Brinch Petersen 1993:81), is definitely part of finding the large flint knife problematic in its possible association with the old woman, on the one hand, and the smaller, unretouched blade unproblematic, on the other hand. Another Mesolithic example of this association bias is how the very suspicion that individual C in Grave 19, at Bøgebakken, could be a woman was enough to deprive this individual of the blade knife by her/his neck with the excuse that the blade was a symbol of her/his having been slain, or even the very cause of death (Albrethsen & Brinch Petersen 1976:21-2). Juel Jensen was encouraged to find micro-wear proof of such a macabre use and arrived at the conclusion that the knife had not decapitated anybody (pers. comm.).

The third object in the grave that has proven to be problematic, as far as relating it to an individual is concerned, is the artefact labelled 'antler axe'. The 'axe' component of this label automatically puts too much implicit emphasis on the similarity of this artefact group to the axe we know ethnocentrically. It has been noticed for a long time that many of these objects simply cannot have been axes in our sense of the word (Klindt Jensen 1947:23). Further, if we take a look at a specific site such as Ageröd I:HC we find, besides the hazy 'antler axe' category, a variety of objects made out of antler and bone that

come close to this artefact: mace-heads, a mattock-head, antler adzes, antler tines with shaft-holes, antler axe sockets, unclassifiable artefacts with shaft-holes, worked antler tines, perforated antler burrs, an adze with a tubular shaft socket, and, finally, rough-outs of many of these objects (Larsson 1978:30). Shafted antler artefacts quite often exhibit a shaft-hole with little or no blow resistance (ibid. 35). We also have a number of cases where shafted antler artefacts have two shaft-holes (Rydbeck 1929:137), which cannot always be explained away as repairs. Many ornamented antler shafts were certainly more than just shafts; they were symbolic as well (S. Andersen 1981:24-36). The only truth is that we have a great range of antler artefacts, whose contextual and sociopractical functions we do not know.

The ornamented antler 'axe' in our mass grave, placed in one corner, was the only object in the grave that could not be described as being functionally applied on the body. We know that it clearly had a more shallow position compared to the rest of the grave contents. What does this mean? I will suggest three interpretations of the role a so-called antler axe can play in a grave from this period. With each function, not only does the antler 'axe' change its meaning, it is transformed into an entirely different object. And, as if it needs any mention, any of these functions seems to work equally well in graves for members of either sex.

First, I think it would do no harm to seize upon the idea that the antler 'axe' at Strøby Egede was not part of the grave goods, but rather part of the grave context and the grave structure itself. To be somewhat simplistic, we could say it served as some sort of grave marker, similar to the antler sticking up out of one of the ends of a grave from Dragsholm, Zealand (Brinch Petersen 1974:115). The decorated antler 'axe' by the child in the grave at Nivågård, also in Zealand (Lass Jensen pers. comm.), was probably employed in a similar manner. The Jutlandic Fannerup

grave mentioned above displays an antler axe high up in one end/corner of the grave. The shallowly found flake axe in the other Strøby Egede grave should be mentioned too.

Another way to interpretatively approach antler 'axes' in graves from these times, but now probably with a different meaning, is to consider them as parts of the grave goods, as tools in the 'equipment' of the dead. This phenomenon is visible in graves such as Grave 22 at Skateholm I (Larsson 1982:14-5) and the already discussed grave at Nederst.

A third way to view some of the decorated antler artefacts is as objects for some kind of symbolic reverence for the material 'antler', as pieces of a valuable working-substance, and as soon-to-become artefacts. Perhaps flint cores with decorated crusts (e.g. Vang Petersen 1993:143; Larsson 1994:30) and the ovoidish stone together with greenstone axes of equable size in Grave 43 at Skateholm I (Larsson 1983a:13) are all part of some cultural complex of paying respect to different working-materials.

Before I present a reinterpretation of the mass grave at Strøby Egede, I will give a final example of ethnocentric labelling of archaeological data through its contents. The label I refer to is 'bone hairpin'. We have an ethnocentric idea of what a hairpin looks like and who would use it (a woman). Sometimes we even provide ahistorical essentials as to women's fashion and its character (Brinch Petersen 1990:24). Naturally, such false certainty was the major reason for disqualifying the elongated boar teeth on two of the children and the flat, oblong bone object right by the man's head as plausible 'bone hairpins'. To really be on the androcentrically safe side, the bone object on the man's head was labelled 'bone dagger'. A thin bone pin by the above-mentioned Grave IV individual at Skateholm II was labelled 'tattoo needle'. These data tags are there to resist the image of male coquetry. Most archaeologists will consider that bone pins can be fish hooks (Larsson 1978:38) or dress-pins. We have

merely begun to see some of the long and pointed objects by crania as hairpins. How long a time will pass before we acknowledge nosepins (Orme 1981:27)? The thought of something like lip-discs is conceivably beyond such a query.

STRØBY EGEDE ELABORATED

Doubtlessly, the mass grave at Strøby Egede deserves a socio-ideologically elaborated interpretation. So far, there is just one sentence available hinting at its sociocultural dimension. I am referring here to the suspicion, delivered by Brinch Petersen, that the grave may display a male-female binarism (1990:22). Therefore, I hope to concisely argue not only for its being quite a unique and potent grave for qualitative interpretation, but also for its being structured in the form of certain intersecting conceptual vectors, which I have summarised in a structuralist diagram (Fig. 5). These vectors, however, are not enough for any serious attempt at understanding this grave. Were I to stop here, satisfied with drawing a nice-looking pattern of binary scales, I myself would be just as guilty of severe essentialism as many a Mesolithic specialist.

Deepest in the grave we have a south-north vector, where the oldest individual (woman A) lies opposite to the tiniest, newborn infant (H). Although we know that the elder is of the female sex, neither her body nor that of the infant is associated with any evident gender-marking objects. Hence, already with the observations on this axis, we can rule out any simple male-female scheme in this grave. Instead, the infant's 'bonnet' probably demarcates in some ethnically specific way that it is a small baby of a certain lineage, with a certain sexed body, etc. The senior woman's bone hairpin is presumably a similar token, but for an adult. As the symbolic arrangement stands, this vector seems to simultaneously represent the start of life and the end of life. For instance, infant H is the only body symbolically covered in

ochre, a symbol of blood and birth used on many other new-born babies in eastern Zealand from this time (Strassburg 1995a:27).

Higher up we have a second vector, also making up a south-north line. Two children (B & E) between six and eight years old lie as mirror images of one another, closely sharing both posture (twisted supine) and stature, according to my calculations of bone measurements from the plan (Trotter & Gleser 1958:84). Employing observations done on sex-specific grave goods from many other graves from roughly the same period in east Zealand, two flint blade knives by the waist and a string of tooth beads across the waist may tentatively designate bodies of the male and female sex, respectively (Brinch Petersen 1990:23-4). Child E differs in its head being red, as it intrudes on infant H's intense ochre patch. All in all, this vector appears to mark a new age-grade or the forming of an age-set in the community responsible for this

grave.

On the same plane as the second vector we have a west-east axis, both its ends stopping at an adult lying on the right side with slightly bent legs and with an infant clinging to its chest. In the west end we find a woman (C) adorned with a quite similar string of beads as that on the female child (B) plus an equivalent to a bone hairpin found on the senior woman (A). Further, a small blade is by her hip, a tool we also see at least once by the old woman. Her stature is remarkably similar to the elderly woman, if we compare their bone lengths by the Trotter & Gleser equation (op. cit.). The infant (F) on her chest has a 'bonnet' and shares the component of the elongated boar tooth with that of infant H, but also differs from it in having roe deer hooves instead of red deer tooth beads. In the east we find a man (D) equipped with five flint blade knives and a coarser type of hair pin. His infant has two such blades, but

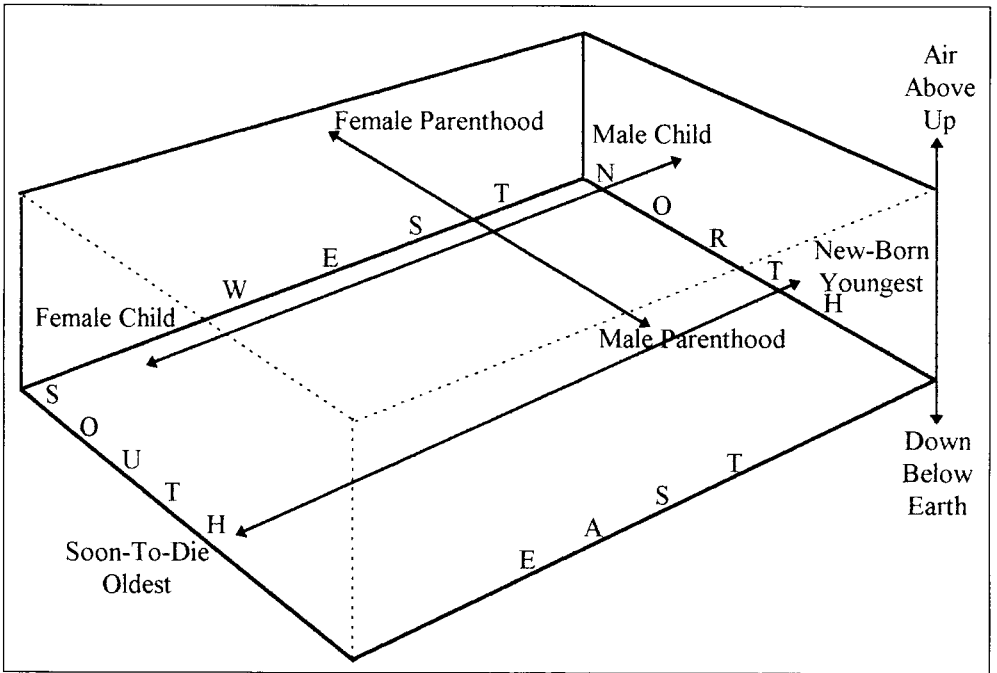


Fig. 5. A structuralist diagram of the intersecting conceptual vectors interpreted in the Strøby Egede grave.

interestingly no 'bonnet'. Altogether, this vector feasibly represents some historically specific aspects of marriage and parenthood.

A fourth up-down vector resides among the three other vectors, perpendicularly transecting them. It is probably embodied by the 'grave-marking' antler artefact, connecting an underground with a heaven above ground. There, in the space between these conceptual extremes, the other axes intersect.

Before attempting to make some sense of the structural intersection discernible in the mass grave, we need to account for the circumstances leading to its existence. Sinister as it may seem, its strict order and its confounding similarities clearly indicate that the bodies in all probability have been picked out from a sufficient amount of people, who were either dead or alive when the choosing took place. Whatever, the bodies have *not* been stuffed in this grave pit hastily and haphazardly. Hence, any explanation referring to a sudden lethal disease can be dismissed. Two alternatives remain. Either a community suffered dearly from a deadly foray, after which the perpetrators could collect adequate victims. Or a community decided to perform an extensive project of ritual sacrifices to counter some vast socio-ideological meltdown. For reasons which will soon become apparent, I support the latter suggestion.

The key to understanding the grave lies, I think, in the realisation that it was not intended as a mass grave at all. Instead, it was a grave made exclusively for one person – the senior woman. The seven other bodies had been put in solely to impersonate important social identities she had passed through in her life, including how and when she acquired her husband and her children. The hints available to such an interpretation are manifold. The elder woman was the first to be laid in the grave (Brinch Petersen 1990:22). Her corpse was allowed to occupy the space it craved on the bottom of the grave. As was mentioned above, the equipment and size of the young woman (C) are much like those of

the old woman. In turn, the female child (B) is similar to the young woman, but of a more gender-associative nature. The new-born infant (H) opposite to the senior woman and the infant on the young women's chest (F) share in their bonnets the component of a slender boar tooth, while the adult women share the occurrence of slender hairpins. Both of these artefact types may plausibly be called lineage-markers, but they are not gender-markers of any weight. Seemingly, the five above-mentioned bodies were recognised as part of some female sex category, but infants F and H together with the old woman do not in any way signal clear gender membership. From this follows that the southern part of the grave, a space emphasised by a stone row at the end, was probably reserved for sexed female bodies, all with their heads to the south, but it was not a female-only gender zone. Hence, the senior woman is acknowledged as an individual of the female sex but not as a member of some female gender, whereas the bodies impersonating her, except for infant H, are all gendered, as is the female infant (personifying her child).

In the northern part of the grave we can identify, although less distinctly, similar find- and posture-associative ties between the man (D), the male child (E) and the male infant (G), such as all their heads pointing to the north. These somewhat vague bonds seem to integrate culturally specific male sex attributes *and* male gender markers. The bodies personify the senior woman's husband in two age stages and a male child of theirs. This part is not, however, a zone for male bodies, since, as we saw above, infant H appears to be a member of the female sex.

Having come this far, there are a few questions to ponder. Why is infant H on the otherwise all-male side of the grave? Why does the old woman appear to be the only non-gendered person in the south zone? What can the ochre signify? What does it mean when some of the objects on the bodies presumed to be of the female sex are both sex

markers and lineage markers? To bring some clarity to these questions, we need to unmask the narrative concealed in the conceptual scheme. In order to succeed, I will approach our grave as a myth, following the method of Lévi-Strauss. According to him, we should separate two aspects in a mythical structure: sequences and schemes (1969:68). Sequences constitute the content of the myth, a series of chronologically arranged events of importance. These sequences are organised by overlapping schemes, a structure analogous to a polyphonic melody, which is bound partly by a horizontal melodic line and partly by a vertical counterpoint scheme.

The narrative structure of our grave consists of four sequences concerning the life of the elder woman. All are crossed by a geographical scheme of the four cardinal points (N-S-W-E), by a cosmological scheme positioning the sequences between the extremes of heaven and underground, and by an identity scheme defining her gender and lineage. Thus as the narrative unfolds, its elements oscillate between these sociohistorically defined conceptual schemes, which can be reduced to an integrative sequential diagram (Fig. 6).

Before unravelling this diagram, I deem it necessary to add that the society arranging this burial some time in the earlier part of the

Ertebølle period appears to have been a case of patrilocal matrilineage (cf. Turner 1967: 4), not only because of its focus on the female 'apex' but also because we can follow different life passages of the female sex, where sex- and gender-marking items are always at the same time possible lineage-markers. Elsewhere, I have put forward the interpretation that a matrilineal community is responsible for the killing and burying of male new-born babies at a supposed birth house at Gøngehusvej, eastern Zealand (Strassburg 1995a), thereby countering the commonly assumed, all-pervading patrilineage in the Mesolithic of Scandinavia (Strassburg 1995b:78).

A short summary of the old woman's life story is contained within the structure exposed in the graph. It all starts with her 'coming up', that is, being born and hence being covered in ochre-blood. Initially she (H) was no more than a non-gendered member of the female sex, born favourably in a matrilineage. At the age of about seven (B) she had to move westwards, from her local group on the coast to an inland community, in order to become a fully gendered member of what seems to have been something of an age-set, to which her projected male partner (E) also belonged. The ochre on his head may have symbolised his being born into her life. At

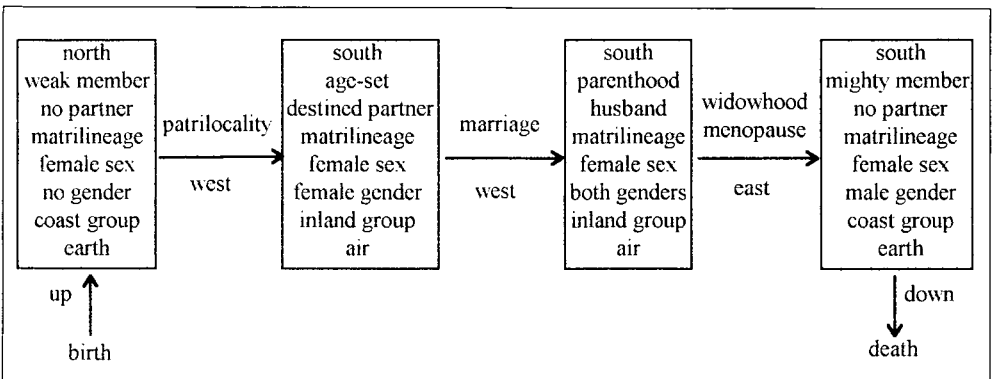


Fig. 6. A suggested narrative structure for the life of a senior woman, inherent in the Strøby Egede grave.

18 to 20 years of age she (C) was finally married to her destined man (D). They had children of both sexes (F & G), who, as it seems, had become half-gendered only in a matter of months. It is noteworthy how strictly they seem to have separated the mates on the basis of sex in the inland group. At this stage, she began to acquire a powerful social position, which rendered her gender shady. Approaching the fifty-mark, either her husband died or she went through some kind of menopause rite, for she (A) went all the way back to the coastal group, the land she once came from. In this new situation she was a very authoritative member indeed. She managed to summon so much power that she was possibly assigned somehow to the male gender while still being a member of the female sex. Soon thereafter she died, or even worse, was killed, because of her 'unnatural' authority.

If we once again follow Lévi-Strauss, we learn that a narrative or myth is a way of covering up short-comings in the social order, of hiding some unresolvable contradictions that the society cannot understand and thus prefers to forget (1969:85-6). The discrepancy of such a powerful woman in a male-dominated sociality is the very contradiction that had to be mythified in order to get rid of this 'impossibility'. As these communities seem to have gendered individuals through some of their sexual differences, this woman became a definitional crisis, which explains why she (A & H) disrupted this culturally specific ideology of dividing the sexes and, consequently, why the attempt of the undertakers to separate the grave into a northern male zone and a female southern zone failed. The dominating males painfully faced what Foucault called a temporary inversion of power relations, a side-effect of any power exercised (1979:26-7).

EXIT MESOLITH, ENTER CULPRIT
 Eventually, it must be said that the Mesolith has turned into an androcentric and essentialist monolith which ought to be dashed to pieces to leave room for all those social histories that so far have been squelched by the Mesolithic project. Strength through diversity! We can then leave the palaeo-economic orthodoxy of Mesolithic research behind us and inject a little history and social intentionality into the cybernetic wasteland created in the name of the Mesolithic (Thomas 1988:64). Societies reproduce themselves as cultural societies, not as energy-searching biological units (Bender 1989:93). The fundamental characteristics of humanity are not fixed, set on immanent survival, but are themselves contingent and historically situated (Thomas 1991:15), including the human body and its material surroundings. Exit the cybernetic machine, enter the faulty culprit!

We need to begin producing emotionally engaged writings of social history. Although I find her arguments somewhat naïve, Helene Knutsson's thesis (1995), in which she emotionally defends the thought of the happy mobile family, is a good example of what I mean. We should write texts that ethically take an explicit stand when discussing past relations between social groups, instead of distancing ourselves by selling our souls to a supposedly mute, socio-morally immune 'objective science'. Some say we should avoid intuition and empathy in favour of scientific credibility (Mithen 1991:14), I say we should embrace them.

English revised by Laura Wrang.

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