

Saami Archaeology in Sweden 1985-1990 – An Overview

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A short discussion of Saami archaeology, its history and definition is given, as well as the author's own demarcation of the subject. The period which is treated is 1985-1990. A brief comparison of the Nordic literature shows clear differences between the topical focus of the Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish literature. Two main themes are considered as important and dominant in the Swedish articles: ethnicity and settlement history and pattern. It is suggested that the advance in the knowledge about Saami settlement during the Iron Age in the interior of northern Norrland is an important one. The discussion of Saami ethnicity is focuses mainly on the question of the population inhabiting southern Norrland during the Iron Age. There are suggestions that it is either a Saami or a Germanic population. In order to better distinguish between these two interpretations, increased knowledge about the settlement of the area during the Iron Age is badly needed.

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SAAMI ARCHAEOLOGY AS A SUBJECT

Saami archaeology in Sweden is a rather heterogeneous and ill-defined subject. That excavations and analyses concerning settlements and features from the Late Iron Age and Middle Ages in northern Norrland should be considered as belonging to this area of research, is clear. It is, however, more problematic when considering the limits backwards in time. How do we, for example, define research done on the early Metal Age in northern Sweden? It would seem that a definition of what Saami archaeology is should differ among different researchers, depending on their position on the question of Saami ethnicity, and of which archaeological remains clearly reflect such ethnicity. This is not only a question of limitations in time but also in space. The position concerning the question of ethnical affiliation of Late

Iron Age finds in the interior of southern Norrland has also bearing on whether such archaeology should be considered as Saami or not.

The concept of a specifically saami archaeology emerged together with the concept of a Saami Iron Age. It was introduced by Solberg already in the beginning of this century in connection with the finds at Kjelmøy in north Norway (Solberg 1909). The concept of the Saami Iron Age is also weakly defined. Most researchers using the concept view it simply as the period following the early Metal Age. The criterion for its beginning is mainly that stone artifacts cease to be used and metal tools are introduced instead. The criteria for its ending are several, mainly the introduction of Christianity, the appearance of written sources and the economic differentiation process mentioned by, among others, Simonsen (1979). The beginning of

the Saami Iron Age is set by the different authors between 1 and 400 AD and the ending between 1500 and 1700 AD (Carpelan 1975, Johansen Kleppe 1977, Olsen 1984, Simonsen 1979). Other writers prefer a more neutral time classification; Baudou, for example, suggests the terms Early and Late Metal Age (1992:52).

The question of how far back in prehistory the Saami can be traced has been a major undertow in the archaeological and historical research concerning Norrland, during this century. The subject has frequently been articulated with the problem of the emergence of reindeer breeding. Many different views have been put forward concerning when the Saami came to Norrland: whether they are the original inhabitants of the area or have migrated here. A complicating factor in this discussion is that the concept of ethnicity means different things to different writers. That the issue of the origin of the Saami has had a decidedly political significance in society, has also influenced the debate. Earlier archaeologists had a primarily empiricist view on the subject, and did not admit that research is done in a societal field part of which is political. Even those who hard-headedly have taken the position that their results are strictly scientific, have been forced to see that the results are being used politically.

Many researchers today hold the view that the changes and processes that occurred during the Epineolithic and Early Metal Age (2000 BC - 1 AD) are pivotal on an understanding of the emergence of the Saami society as we see it in historical times. The definition of Saami archaeology used in this review is therefore dependent on the above view. I will not only consider papers written on the Saami Iron Age, but also papers concerning the hunting societies in Norrland from the Epineolithic and Early Metal Age.

When reading the literature from the actual period (1985-90), a comparison could be made of which themes were the most

common. It also gave a picture of the variation between the three Nordic countries concerned with the subject. This served as a backdrop for considering the topics chosen in Sweden.

Sweden and Norway had 25 published works each, while Finland had only five. The most common topic in Sweden was ethnicity, followed by settlement history and settlement pattern, while the Norwegian literature showed a clear emphasis on settlement history. The Swedish literature was dominated by three topics (the above mentioned plus material culture studies), while the picture of the Norwegian topics was more varied. Here there were papers on, for example, politics and ideology in connection with Saami prehistory and social borders, and also overviews of Saami archaeology – topics which were missing from the Swedish literature. The few Finnish contributions mainly concerned trade and transactions between the Saami and Finnish populations.

In the more detailed discussion of the Swedish literature, two main topics have been singled out as the most important; settlement patterns and ethnicity. There are, however, several papers not discussed here connected with these topics (Andersson 1988, Fjellström 1988, Ortman 1989, Westerdahl 1986), as well as others dealing mainly with material culture studies (Sundström 1988, Zachrisson 1986), trade and transactions (Zachrisson 1987c, 1988), religion (Zachrisson 1987d) and physical anthropology (Iregren 1986, Madrid 1986).

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

Most archaeological interpretations of Saami culture in prehistory and early history in Sweden were up until 1985 mainly based on a mixture of stray finds, historical sources and the investigation of Saami sacrificial sites. This meant that the picture of Saami society was quite diffuse, especially concerning the prehistoric period. There was a huge gap between the Saami as known from his-

torical sources and the so-called "Stone Age sites" which were found in connection with the construction of hydroelectrical power stations. There was a consensus that a large share of these sites was from the last two millennia B.C., despite their being called Stone Age sites. The datings of the sacrificial sites were mainly from the early Middle Ages, which meant that the gap was about 1000 years. This gap was filled with evidence of a Saami Iron Age population in the interior, the evidence being stray finds (Serning 1960, Zachrisson 1976).

The question of which sites the Saami had used during this period was not being raised until the discovery of the stallo-sites in the mountain areas and the onset of the discussion of the ethnicity of their inhabitants, i.e. whether the sites were the remains of Saami hut beddings or if they were used by Nordic people from the coast of Norway taxing the Saami for reindeer (Manker 1960, Kjellström 1983). It was also noted by some authors that there were sites along the main rivers in Norrland which had a similar location as the "Stone Age sites" but which had materials of mediaeval or even later character (Zachrisson 1976). Part of the picture was also the hearths found in the interior of Norrland, which were generally thought to be of late date and mainly being the remains of Saami pastoralists from the last three centuries.

This picture was, however, to change radically as several important investigations were carried out in the interior of northern Sweden. All of them focused on excavations and surveys of the "Saami hearths" mentioned above. In the Lule river area, Mulk excavated several types of remains from Iron Age and Middle Ages. In the mountain area, hut beddings of the stallo type were being used from 500 to 1400 A.D., with a peak usage between 800 to 1200 A.D. (Mulk 1988). Coupled to these sites were also earth ovens/storage pits and often, in the vicinity, hunting pit systems. In the forest area there

were sites with hearths as well as earth ovens with datings from different parts of the Iron Age. This, together with sites on the shores of the large lakes in the pre-mountain zone led Mulk to propose a model in which the findings in the forest zone, mainly in the Sirkesluokta/Älloluokta area near Porjus, were considered to be the winter settlement, and the stallo sites in the mountain area the summer sites mainly used as hunting camps. The sites along the lakes were fishing places occupied intermediately between the two poles in the settlement pattern.

Mulk saw this as evidence of a *siida*-system centered on a major river with relatively long seasonal moves between the poles in the system. The economy was centered on the hunting of wild reindeer; and the stallo sites in the mountain area were interpreted as base camps employed for the collective hunt. As evidence of this, she cites datings from hunting pit systems in the vicinity of the hunting camps, which suggest they have been used roughly at the same time. She also identifies an intensification of the hunting of reindeer during the course of the Iron Age.

Bergman has studied Saami settlement patterns in the forest area in the vicinity of Arjeplog, Lapland. Her investigations at Rackträsk and Stora Mattaure centered on large agglomerations of hearths (1988, 1990). These were arranged in rows with 3 - 5 hearths in each. The average distance between the hearths was 5-10 m, which Bergman interprets as the result of tents being erected at each hearth. The hearths were also frequently oriented in the same direction, which was taken as an indication that the entrances were in the same direction. This in turn is taken as evidence of a special social structure - the *siida*. This group - 5-10 families forming a co-residential and mobile unit - emerged according to Bergman, during the Iron Age. At Rackträsk there is a correlation between hearths, cooking pits and hunting pits. At Stora Mattaure, hunting

pits and hearths go together. The location of the cooking pits is taken to be connected with fishing as they occur near good fishing waters (larger coves), and not along the smaller tarns, where hearths also occur.

Hedman's study of the settlement pattern during the Viking Age and Middle Ages was based on the realization that the Saami sacrificial sites and the settlements from Arjeplog and Arvidsjaur parishes documented by Nordarkeologi and by Bergman (cf. above), were roughly coterminous (Hedman 1989). Was there a cultural connection between these two categories? In order to see if this was the case, surveys in the vicinity of the sacrificial sites were done. Hedman mentioned three criteria which were used to evaluate the cultural connection between the two categories. The settlements should consist of groups of hearths, sometimes connected with cooking pits and/or hunting pits in topographical situations similar to Rackträsk. They should have a proximity to the sacrificial sites in order that the latter could be reached from the settlements. Finally, there should be a temporal connection between the settlements and the sacrificial sites. In the seven areas studied, Hedman discovered such settlements located close to the sacrificial sites which formed the center of the survey areas. Excavations of some of the hearths gave datings from the early Viking Age to the late Middle Ages (Hedman 1993). There were also some finds from Rackträsk which showed similarities with finds from the sacrificial sites, and which also showed similarities with the stray-find material mentioned by Serning (1960) and Zachrisson (1976).

In a paper published in 1989, I wrote an overview on changes in economy and society in the prehistory of the interior of northern Sweden (Forsberg 1989). The paper was an attempt to apply a long time perspective often mentioned as an asset of archaeology but seldom applied. It tried to demonstrate that there are long-term trends leading up to

and conditioning the transition to reindeer pastoralism. These trends are several: there is an increase in mobility through time and an increase in the size of resource territories. There is also a decrease in the diversity of the subsistence base from the Bronze Age to the Late Iron Age. Reindeer begins to be utilized during the Bronze Age, and there is an increasing dependence on reindeer as the primary resource. It is suggested that these processes should be seen as a backdrop against which to evaluate shorter, more historical "causes" of the transition.

To summarize, there has been a major leap in the knowledge about Saami settlement in the interior of northern Norrland, which should enable a focussed and detailed discussion of many aspects of Saami society during the Iron Age. This is in contrast to the situation before 1985, when only stray finds, historical sources, and the investigation of Saami sacrificial sites were the basis for interpretation. This should be kept in mind as we turn to the ever present question of Saami ethnicity; how, why and when it appeared.

ETHNICITY

The most important contributions to the discussion of Saami ethnicity and archaeological remains in Norrland during 1985-1990 was published in a topical issue of *Bebyggelsehistorisk tidskrift*. Here, Zachrisson and Baudou raised two different views on the ethnicity of the people inhabiting the interior of southern Norrland during the first millennium A.D.

Zachrisson suggests that the area inhabited by Saami during this period may have been the whole of Norrland down to Dalecarlia and Hedmark fylke in Norway (1987a: 25-26). As indications of this, she mentions iron arrowheads of a special type; bone/antler objects with plaited band motifs and skis of the Bothnian and Scandian types. All these signal Saami ethnicity, according to Zachrisson. As explanations of the paucity of

typical saami sites in southern Norrland, she suggests that south Saami settlements leave faint traces in nature - most of their material culture is made of organic materials. The richer vegetation in southern Norrland is stated as a cause of the lack of settlement finds, as is the fact that anyway, typical Saami objects do not appear until 1200-1300 A.D.

A dichotomy between a late hunter-gatherer culture in the interior and a farming culture along the coast of southern Norrland is proposed. Following Selinge, a division is made of the hunter-gatherer culture into an old tradition with fishing, elk and reindeer hunting as the major subsistence pursuits; and a subneolithic culture closer to the coastal area with some minor streaks of Neolithic elements. In connection with this, the hunting pits are taken as an indication of Saami utilization of the area; they occur over the entire area traditionally attributed to the Saami during historical times (1987a: 29). Zachrisson suggests that the hunting pits have been used by a "pure" hunter-gatherer culture, and when farmers during historical times have used them, this can be seen as a cultural loan.

The so-called inland graves between the rivers Dalälven and Ångermanälven are also suggested to be connected with Saami activity. As arguments for this, Zachrisson cites their spatial correlation with the so-called Stone Age sites in the interior of Norrland. The grave forms differ from the farming culture's graves; the topographical location of the graves on peninsulas in inland lakes are also different from the farmers' graves, as is the occurrence of bone/antler sacrifices on some of the graves. She also wants to connect the hunter-gatherer culture from the first millennium B.C. with the Saami material from the Middle Ages by trying to show that chipped stone artefacts have been manufactured and used during the first millennium A.D. (Zachrisson 1987b).

One of her strong points in the argumen-

tation is the cemetery of Vivallen in the Härjedalen mountains. Here, many graves were excavated by Hallström in 1913. Many finds in them are good for usage as Saami ethnic criteria, according to Zachrisson: the occurrence of iron arrowheads of Wegræus type B; bronze pendants; ring fibulæ of bronze; the occurrence of beads in graves attributed to men and boys; and above all the finds of sewn body containers of birch bark. The dating of the cemetery is between 1000 and 1200 A.D. She correlates an excavated hearth of rectangular type with the cemetery. The hearth is dated to the late Iron Age.

Baudou bases his paper on the question of when and why Saami ethnicity emerges. Ethnicity as a concept is discussed, and he follows Barth's definition of ethnicity as the self-ascription and identification of the group as ethnically distinct by the actors themselves. Two main lines of differentiation chisel out ethnic groups; overt signs or signals (for example, clothing, language, housetypes and life-style); and value orientations and moral norms (1987:9). Baudou's realization that there is no direct correspondance between ethnic and cultural similarities/dissimilarities is fundamental to the whole discussion of Saami ethnicity. Following Olsen (1984) and others, he suggests that certain find groups are well suited as markers of ethnical idioms and therefore relevant to the determination of ethnical borders.

That the ancestors of the Saami have lived in the area for a long time, does not mean that they had become a separate ethnic group according to Barth's definition. Baudou's suggestion is that this happens during the first millennium B.C. The finds of Ananino axes and the occurrence of the Säräisniemi 2 ware signal a coherent area in north Fennoscandia with a similarity in cultural expressions. This is taken as evidence of the division of the social world into *us* and *them*. The context for this ethnogenesis is a situation of stress between two cultural forms; one easterly influenced and one with influences

from the south. In the northern part of Norrland this leads to the formation of a Saami ethnicity; in the southern part a Germanic ethnicity is formed.

It is this division of the interior of Norrland into a northern Saami and a southern Germanic part that marks the difference between Zachrisson and Baudou. Baudou's main arguments are these: The inland cemeteries of Krankmårtenhögen and Smalnäset, which have been attributed to a late inland hunter-gatherer population by Zachrisson and Ambrosiani, are taken as the remains of a Germanic population by Baudou. The outer construction of the graves is similar to many graves in Dalarna, Gästrikland, Uppland and southeastern Norway, which should indicate a Germanic ethnicity. Baudou detects a borderline between northern and southern Norrland somewhere along the Indal river, where the above-mentioned ethnic idioms - Ananino axes and the Säräisniemi 2 ware-stop.

During the Iron Age, farms, rune stones, grave construction, iron bars, silver treasures and the inland graves all belong to the Germanic population. The inland graves have a southerly distribution and stop approximately at the above-mentioned border. Unlike Zachrisson, Baudou interprets these as the remains of a Germanic population occupied with the hunting of furred animals, the production of iron, the keeping of livestock, some cultivation, and also trade with the central areas of the Mälars valley and the southern and middle Norrlandic coasts. The cemetery of Vivallen, which plays such an important role for Zachrisson's interpretation, is also taken by Baudou as representing a Saami population, but is taken as a temporary settlement south of the border.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

To summarize, there is disagreement on the ethnicity of the population in the interior of

southern Norrland. Both Zachrisson and Baudou have their arguments which can be valued differently by different persons. If, however, we had as good a knowledge about the settlement in the southern interior as that which has been advanced in the north, there would be a better chance to distinguish between these conflicting interpretations. Since Zachrisson seems to mix ethnic arguments with economic categories (Saami or proto-Saami hunter-gatherers as opposed to Nordic farmers), a detailed picture of the settlement history and structure of the debated area should greatly focus the discussion on relevant interpretative categories and clearer theoretical positions than is the case today.

This would, for example, also be the case for Baudou's interpretations of the inland graves, since these seem to have the same role as earlier held by the Saami sacrificial places in northern Norrland. There is no good settlement material to connect them with. This is not to say that the solution of the ethnicity problem lies in the material, but only that in the absence of knowledge about the everyday life, economy, and settlement pattern of the interior of southern Norrland in the Iron Age, the graves and hunting pits constitute very few and thin threads from which to weave an interpretation.

It is also astonishing to find almost no discussion of when, how and why the Saami went from a hunter-gatherer mode of life to a pastoral one. This is a topic that is often mixed into the debate of Saami ethnicity, and in the Norwegian literature from the period reviewed, there occur several papers with this problem in mind. In the few years following the period (1985-90), there are, however, several important works dealing with this question, but they fall outside the scope of this article.

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