

# Applications in Household-economic Archaeology

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Household-economic considerations should be used in archaeology in order to elucidate the living conditions within a region. Consumer behaviour, socio-economic status and male/female activities have been surveyed by using relative "grave values" and frequency values based on material from cemeteries on Bornholm and Lovön and from the Genesmon settlement in northern Ångermanland. Future work is suggested regarding the grave-goods in the Birka graves and the artifacts from the recently excavated Valsta, Fresta and Sanda settlements.

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## HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Household economy in a modern consumer policy context implies economizing scarce resources. It can be seen as based on the so-called *formal* economics according to Polanyi's terminology (Polanyi 1957:245-247). A household is a specific organization which consists of one or several co-residing individuals, and which depends in various ways on the environment. Such an organization can be viewed as a pattern of relations, which takes different expressions. The household provides the products and services needed for daily consumption. It utilizes the resource time, labour, money and knowledge. The supply and use of these resources decide how the household manages to satisfy the needs of its individuals. The welfare achieved in this way by production and consumption is due, thus, not only to existing resources but also to the use of them. Existing problems are analysed on the household-economic level (Ringstedt 1992:13).

The production factors (natural resources, labour, capital, power/organization) in a region determine the economic situation of

the households and their possibilities to accumulate a surplus for exchange and trade. Problems related to households and their subsistence have also a social dimension, considering, for instance, the household's dependence on the interaction with the environment for sustenance and for maintaining and establishing social relations. Household economy could thus be discussed in *substantive* economic terms as well.

It is the author's belief that an economic perspective or model - i.e. household economy as a "mix" of economizing behaviour and social consideration - is one of several archaeological perspectives or models that can be used in the interpretation of archaeological material. Factors which affect the households' economy should be taken into account, such as exchange and trade, considerations regarding the size of households, their subsistence economy and socio-economic position. Socio-economic stratification affects consumer behaviour and can be discerned in e. g. an Iron Age context. Male and female roles/activities deduced from preserved artifacts should be considered as part of the household-economic

analysis. Conclusions regarding consumer behaviour and socio-economic status, etc. can be drawn from material from graves and settlements.

### MALE AND FEMALE HOUSEHOLD ACTIVITIES

It is problematic to discern between male and female roles/activities. Male and female behaviour is said to be conditioned by the society in which people live (Mead 1970: 238-247). The conception of female or male work is not a foregone conclusion (Stjernquist 1975: 5-8). However, recent Swedish

research has shown that, with regard to the position of women in ancient Scandinavia, a strict division existed as to the role of the sexes (Sawyer 1992, *passim*). A simple hypothetical model regarding division of labour between the sexes could illustrate some possible male and female household-economic activities during the Iron Age. It is not to be regarded as complete (Ringstedt 1992: 48).

The list makes no pretension to cover all possible male and female activities. Based on the model, the artifacts from graves or settlements can be allocated as to sex in

Activities	Female	Male
Childcare/nursing/rearing	X	
Making fire	X	X
Milling/Baking	X	
Cooking	X	
Brewing	X	
Textile production/mending clothes (spinning, weaving, etc.)	X	
Care of animals	X	?
Sheep-shearing	X	?
Milking/cheese-making	X	
Slaughtering	X	X
Preparation of animal products (drying, salting, smoking etc.)	X	
<u>Fieldwork:</u>		
- fencing of the fields	?	X
- manuring	?	X
- ploughing (with ard)	?	X
- sowing	?	X
- mowing	?	X
- raking/binding hay	X	
- reaping	X	X
- threshing	?	X
- growing vegetables	X	?
- harvesting vegetables/berries, etc.	X	?
- care of fallow land/weeding, etc.	X	X
Pottery production	X	?
Forest work (lumbering/wood-cutting)	X	
<u>Production/maintenance of:</u>		
- tools	?	X
- household equipment and furniture	?	X
- houses/sheds	X	
- fishing-nets (mending/binding)	X	X
- weapons		X
- carts/wagons/boats		X
<u>Production of:</u>		
- iron/ironsmithing		X
- semi-finished objects (nails, rivets etc)		X
- jewellery		X
Exchange and trade	?	X
Various transport activities		X
Fishing	X	X
Hunting/fur preparation	?	X

*Fig. 1. Possible female and male household activities*

*X = mainly female or male activities*

*? = activities which may have been carried out also by the opposite sex*

four *categories* based on their possible household-economic function:

1. Various tools and objects for the household (of various metals)
2. Various tools and objects for the household (bone, stone and clay, etc.)
3. Personal items (of various materials)
4. Various other items (rivets, nails, etc.).

This allocation can be used for an approximate frequency distribution of possible male and female objects concerning at least categories 1 - 3.

#### APPLICATIONS IN HOUSEHOLD-ECONOMIC ARCHAEOLOGY

The household-economic perspective has been tested in three case studies. These concern the Bækkegård and Glasergård cemeteries on Bornholm, the Lunda RAÅ 27 cemetery on Lovö in Lake Mälaren, and the Genesmon farmstead in northern Ångermanland. The cases concern the Iron Age (the 1st millennium). A few aspects of the case studies will be presented in the following.

The approximate *socio-economic status* of the deceased in the graves or of the households is assumed to be shown by relative "grave values" based on "type values" of objects in graves. Type values are estimated according to a method used by a Danish scholar (Jørgensen 1990: 63).

For *Bækkegård* the relative values clearly indicate the leading (richest) graves during each time phase (1A-B: A.D. 530-600, 1C-D: A.D. 600-680/700, 2A-C: A.D. 680/700-775/800). The majority of the leading graves with high relative values are female. As a matter of fact, female objects dominate in the Bækkegård cemetery. The average value for female objects in the graves is almost three times the male value. The approximate frequency distribution of male, female, and indeterminate artifacts is as follows (categories as shown above):

Category	Male	Female	Indeterminate
1	33 %	15 %	73 %
2	9 %	4 %	4 %
3	58 %	81 %	12 %

Personal items predominate in the male and female graves but constitute a minor part of the indeterminate material. *Male* household-economic activities such as, perhaps, hunting and various kinds of maintenance or repair work are reflected in grave-goods like knives, awls and whetstones. *Female* household-economic activities seem to be spinning and weaving as reflected by grave-goods like spindle-whorls and textiles. Cooking and food preparation (pottery and knives) can possibly be discerned. Indirectly the jewellery, though having decoration and possibly status functions, might indicate craft activities at the nearby settlement of Rytterbacken or elsewhere (Ringstedt 1992: 92-108).

For the *Lunda* cemetery, type values and grave values have been estimated on the basis of material published by Petré (Petré 1984 a - c). The relative values indicate that one grave is "leading" in socio-economic display during each 50-year interval, followed by a few or more rich graves existing during the same interval. Most rich graves seem to be female. The total grave value for female items is nearly twice the male value. Female personal items dominate in frequency in the female graves. Further, female items including beads constitute 84.1 % of all items in the Lunda cemetery and 50.5 % of all objects if beads are excluded. The following frequency distribution has been discerned (categories as shown above):

Category	Male	Female	Indeterminate
1	10.8 %	5.6 %	12.5 %
2	42.2 %	22.6 %	56.2 %
3	47.0 %	71.8 %	31.3 %

The *male* objects reflect household-economic activities like e.g. hunting, maintenance or repair work (knives, bone arrows, tools like awls/prickers/chisels/

whetstones). The making of fire seems to be mainly a male prerogative judging from the finds of strike-a-lights, but in reality this task should have been carried out by both sexes. Bone urns probably have been used as household ware by both sexes. The few weapon parts may mirror the need to defend oneself or a social need to appear as a warrior, according to Jakobsson (Jakobsson 1992: 126-128). Some personal items have decoration and toiletry purposes (pendants, rings, combs, tweezers), while others are details in men's dress (agraffe buttons, buckles, strap-end/belt mounts). They may also represent gambling activities (dice and gambling items).

The *female* objects (knives, ceramic vessels) reflect household-economic activities like, for instance, food prepara-

tion and cooking (grave urns previously used in the household), fur preparation or the like (awls, fur scrapers), maintenance of tools (whetstones) and personal care (toiletry articles and combs). The jewellery - if beads are included - represents objects for decorative purposes and indirectly distant or nearby craft activities (Ringstedt 1992: 135 - 160).

For the *Genesmon* farmstead, the household-economic considerations are based on material published by Ramqvist. A total of nine house foundations have been fully or partially exposed and investigated with over 1 000 features uncovered (Ramqvist 1983, *passim*). The finds from two excavating areas, A and B, could be compared in frequency according to various "household functions":

	A	B
1. Tools and objects (bronze and iron)	27.3 %	28.0 %
2. Tools and objects (stone and clay)	21.2 %	28.0 %
3. Personal items (bronze and iron)	18.2 %	16.0 %
4. Personal items (glass, bone, clay)	3.0 %	20.0 %
5. Moulds	30.3 %	8.0 %

The relative frequency comparison shows that tools and objects with a "household function" constitute for A about 49 % of the finds and for B about 56 % of the finds. Taking into account the moulds, too, items connected with various household-economic activities amount to about 79 % of the finds for A and to about 64 % of the finds for B.

Distributing the objects between female and male, the following frequency distribution can be presented (categories as above):

Category	Male	Female
1	43.4 %	18.9 %
2	54.7 %	29.7 %
3	1.9 %	51.4 %

The number of female personal objects

amounts to more than half of all female items. In relation to all identifiable objects on the *Genesmon* site (excluding items like rivets, rods, etc.) female and male personal items constitute only 22.2 % of the items. *At the settlement the domination of objects related to household activities is apparent, which is contrary to what has been the case in the cemetery studies.*

*Female* household-economic activities reflected by the objects are spinning, weaving, food preparation, cooking, harvesting, grinding and whetting. *Male* household-economic activities, according to the finds, are various kinds of maintenance and repair work, fishing, possibly hunting (knives), carpentry, iron-working, casting/crafts (Ringstedt 1992: 169 -182).

One possible conclusion based on the

cases is that an economic evaluation of graves may not correctly simulate a real household-economic situation, as objects from excavated cemeteries most probably have been deposited according to specific norms. Settlement excavations, however, seem to better illustrate real consumer behaviour and possession of objects for household purposes since random discarding of objects must have taken place.

#### FUTURE WORK

Some aspects of the household-economic model have been presented in this article. It is the author's conviction that household-economic considerations, when applied in future investigations and excavations, may yield additional information about the economic situation and behaviour of households during different time phases. The concept of household and household economy should be given more focus in future archaeological analyses. The methods to undertake a household-economic analysis can be improved and broadened. More applications on various types of cases should be attempted - not least on settlements. The

author considers two studies to be of interest to undertake:

*Study 1* concerns excavated graves on Björkö (Birka) in Lake Mälär. Type values for artifacts and relative grave values based on type values should be estimated. Male and female graves should then be ranked to find out the relative socio-economic distribution between graves as well as to find out the spatial distribution of ranked female and male graves. The relative socio-economic ranking among the various Birka cemeteries could also be shown and conclusions drawn with regard to socio-economic status and relations, as well as e.g. household-economic activities based on the artifacts in the graves. This study could supplement the results from ongoing excavations.

*Study 2* could draw upon material from the recently excavated settlements of Valsta, Sanda and Fresta in Uppland. Frequency estimations of male and female household objects should be used for conclusions about consumer behaviour and household-economic activities.

*English revised by Laura Wrang.*

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