

Small scale archaeology. Remarks on Synnøve Vinsryggs paper

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It is assumed that it is possible in the material from the Stone Age sites to recognize the result of the process of teaching children how to survive. Analysing «the refuse material» and «poorly» made artifacts from camp sites on such a basis will definitely prove rewarding.

In her lecture on sex roles and age-groups Vinsrygg has suggested that her ideas on hunter and gather societies result from the current sex-role debate and that the results of research are influenced by the researcher's sex. I have reached rather similar conclusions and would like to illustrate them with examples from my own experience, although on a smaller scale. I make these remarks as I am confident there is much to be done along these lines.

I will present some ideas that were not clear at the time I was struggling with them. It is well known that our way of thinking often become apparent as an afterthought when a kind of conclusion has been reached. My ideas are of the sort.

My point of departure is my work at the museum processing archaeological material, mostly from salvage excavations and stray finds. I describe and classify all types of finds from settlements, burials, houses etc. from the Mesolithic, up to our time. I come across artifacts with which I am not familiar, for example from the Stone Age. In retrospect I see my own rather unreflected attitude towards the material. It was only to be catalogued. My mind wandered freely between classification problems and the down-to-earth problems of daily life. And so I have been working while sorting dwelling place material from the Stone Age in nice little heaps.

I sort out types that are distinct and clearly defined which meet the standard set up for the types and I sort out the refuse. Each time the same thing happens if only the quantity is large enough: some pieces are always left behind; pieces between intentional forms and refuse. When this happen I start rounding up the experts. In most cases the «between» pieces are «relegated» to the refuse piles, and I am supposed to conclude that my questions in the first place were caused by my lack of knowledge of the Stone Age material.

Still, both from the literature and from the answers

I get from Stone Age specialists, there is no doubt that the classification systems of Stone Age dwelling place material has become less and less satisfying.

What is this «between group»? What does it consist of? It may be described as refuse that to my estimate looks almost like a type. The expert says no: a knife must have those and those elements to be considered a knife. Some would not even call it a knife but a blade with an oblique retouch. We will skip that question here. Secondly there is material that looks like deformed artifacts. Then there is refuse with a little retouch which one has to classify separately from the refuse. Lastly there are artifacts small in size. It is obvious that with my restricted knowledge of Stone Age material I have to rely on and learn from those who have studied Stone Age artifacts more thoroughly, and that I must depend on the classification system of the experts.

Then suddenly one day I was sitting with a stone in my hand – an ordinary and smooth beach stone of quartzite where only a single knock had been effectuated. Under the microscope the knock was clear and evident. Someone has taken this stone in the hand before me. Why? Was it to try the material? No, it is too coarse and with a quality too poor for a cutting edge. Tampering then? Or was it for practice? Allow me at this point to introduce some reflections on women and motherhood.

For me, as a mother of three children it was natural to ask, practice for whom? There is no more than a few hours between the sorting of these heaps of stone and my other work cleaning the playground at home. When for the first time I consciously thought of training, I started to look at the refuse heap with different eyes. Not that I was particularly concerned about children at the time, but the refuse heaps became something left behind by *individuals*. I started more consciously to search for children when soon after I

decided to put together an exhibition case «Hidden and Forgotten. Children in Prehistory». Then I definitely knew how I was thinking and why I came to look at the material in this manner.

Our knowledge of children in prehistory is limited, so limited indeed that scepticism about my search to find out, has been very apparent. Either the questions were not in the main stream of research or I was thinking along the wrong lines. This unfavourable point of departure has been fruitful. It has forced me to go back to the more fundamental aspects of human life. I have chosen to start looking for children in prehistoric societies on the same basis as Vinsrygg, namely that of human survival. In her paper Vinsrygg stressed gathering as a natural activity for women in a season with poor food resources. By focusing on children's ability or possibility to survive, it is impossible not to see that children must learn and be able to cope

with the world they are born into. For me this gives a new importance to the refuse piles.

Besides working with cultural concepts connected with playing and learning, I have tried to classify artifacts according to function and size, all the time questioning whether this is enough. I have also returned to the refuse piles. Until the opposite is proved I will continue to suggest that we in addition start identifying the products of inexperienced hands; those of children, with little practice in the techniques of tool making.

I therefore suggest that we continue our search for women, men and children in the places where they are to be found: in different types of site, especially inside the settlement areas. We also have to start looking into the classic settlement studies from e.g. the excavations of Iron Age farms by asking for the archaeological evidence of individuals.