

Meetings Make History.

Hunters' Rock Art and Lands of Identity in Mesolithic Northern Europe.

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INTRODUCTION

The title of the suggested project is a paraphrase of a conclusion reached in my article of 1999, on interregional contact in Late Mesolithic Scandinavia. Here, I interpreted occurrences of teeth pendants from elk and aurochs in southern Scandinavian female graves – animals already extinct in those areas – as tokens of these women's geographically distant origins.¹ Building on theories of women as the 'productive gift' my idea was that these women were representatives of Late Mesolithic inter-group gift exchange. The argument was partly based on Newell and Constandse-Westerman's article on Late Mesolithic European skeletons indicating movements, or flow, of women in the north-south direction; therefore, this interpretation did not seem too fantastic. Furthermore, meetings and contact between 'clans' involving gift exchange and renewal of bonds and affiliations, is well-known among societies of hunter-gatherers throughout the world. Indeed this phenomenon is also at the core of classic anthropological works by Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Moreover, this interpretation was propped up by what was the then emerging image of Late Mesolithic Scandinavia; a population divided into socially distinct groups ('tribes', 'clans'), and clustered within specific, more or less defined and confined landscapes ('social territories'). In this context I interpret women not only as subjects of gift exchange between groups but also as important agents in the transmission of knowledge – i.e. of ideology, and of technologies in the broad sense. The overall aim of this project is exactly this; i.e. an approach that may enable us to witness how northern Mesolithic Europe shared some common traits in social and ideological developments – what could be called a historical conjuncture.² By this approach my goal is to come to a relevant understanding of the dialectics between regional and local identity. This is about how a sense of 'us' as a social group is encountered through long distance meetings and gift exchange, and how points of contact play a role in forming a historical trajectory represented by inter-regional impulses /expressions.

¹ The full quotation goes like this: "Historical conjunctures do have a long distance aspect. The assumption that women with a long distance origin had a special value in the South Scandinavian Late Mesolithic is perhaps not very intriguing, but the implications of this interpretation do force us to think in a *concrete way* about how and why people maintained contact over various distances. In other words, *how people met and made history*"(Fuglestedt 1999: 35, italics added).

² Ultimately this conjuncture leads up to the taking up of agriculture, an issue that will not be addressed here.

The flow of impulses and knowledge through northern Europe are seen to have taken place during concrete meetings of people. Some strata of such networks are materially available to us through the archaeological record. All localities and *panels of hunters' rock art on the Scandinavian peninsula (i.e. Norway and Sweden), predating 4 500 BP*, are the primary source material for the suggested project. The famous rock art sites of Vingen, western Norway, Alta, northernmost Norway and Nämforsen mid-northern Sweden are seen as vital points in a long distance network of meeting groups. This rock art will be approached by heuristic devices derived from theories of *animism and totemism*. As part of this, one main goal is to “*map*” *social territories* and inter-territorial contacts.

The anticipated results from this mapping of rock art would, however, greatly benefit when research fellows (PhD and Post-doc) carry out research involving comparisons with results and source material from *studies of settlement*. Over the last few years a great amount of excavation projects of varying size have produced an immense body of new results. The planned project intends to extract these data and use them within a widened geographical perspective. Not least, this will provide our view of cultural flow of impulses with additional information on *settlement patterns, tool- and blade technology and eventual flow of local raw materials used in stone tool production*.

BACKGROUND OF PROPOSED PROJECT

- Theories on hunter-gatherer world views – rock art, ‘animism’ and ‘totemism’

The planned project originates from my initial project called *Animism, totemism and the Mesolithic on the Scandinavian peninsula*. Initially the project is greatly inspired by Tim Ingold’s thought-provoking essay on totemism and animism. During my work I have adjusted Ingold’s account to fit the concrete context and source material in question. Unlike Ingold I have also integrated the classic theories on totemism of Durkheim and Lévi-Strauss as well as other contributions. Finally, I have developed methodical devices to study rock art depictions with the animic-totemic approach. Even if this heuristic is adjusted to the context in question, it is my belief that it may have aspects of general or global value.

Indeed, ‘animism’ and ‘totemism’ are not precise concepts: they are theories, not reality. The rationale for appraising these analytical concepts is their efficacy in capturing real phenomena observed in rock art. Thus figural elements and patterns gain significance which serve to explain other traits in the archaeological record. It is important to make clear that ‘animism’ and ‘totemism’ can be present simultaneously; the one may well develop into the other and vice versa, and this is exactly what is seen to happen during the Mesolithic period. Here follows a very brief description of the two concepts:

Animism is generally a system focusing on human and animal society as being different, but still the same. Animals are included in the social universe. Hunter-gatherers are centred on the sustaining of life-generative vital forces, and among animists, this is maintained through cooperation with the animal communities. Their approach to the animal is therefore similar to the way one would approach a human person; in fact being a person is not necessarily about being human, therefore, the human and animal communities are conceived by humans as being the same, but different. Sustaining the life

forces involves humans hunting the precious animal, yet the killing is never complete unless the animal itself decides to offer itself to the human community. Hunting is not only about technical skill and mere luck; it represents a field of powers that is not under the full control of the hunter. Within this field, different types of “negotiations” with the animal community take place, involving ‘correct’ treatment of the animal bones when the hunt is over (e.g. burial and sacrifice), to avoid offending the master soul of the animals.

This common field of ‘give-and-take’ between animal and human communities yields definite notions about human-animal relationship. One of these is the possibility for persons of both “parties” to shift guise and visit the community of the others. This produces conceptual images of animals dressed like humans, or humans in the guise of a bear on trips to human communities. Sometimes the human / animal’s real persona is either marked by the face / head, or at other times by a mask. Animal-human ambiguity and transition are therefore common epitomes among animists; a phenomenon which often means this world view is closely associated with an “original” Eurasian shamanism, but in fact also strongly similar to the animism / shamanism found among San groups of southern Africa. In such systems, trance, transcendence and transgression to the communities of the animals – and of the dead – are strong conceptions. Life and world are seen to be vividly “on the move”, or in constant flux and potential alteration.

Totemism can be explained by a point of departure in the general human categorizing capacities. Unlike the animic approach, the world is not in flux, but is more fixed, and created once and for all. Therefore, *identity*, *essence* and *categorization* are at stake among ‘totemists’. This is about social classification by way of categories of nature. The commonly held notion on totemism derived from Durkheim, is of the totemic animal as insignia of clan identity. Later on, Lévi-Straussian thinking radicalized understandings of totemism and now totemism proper is only when animals (or other natural categories), are seen to make *constitutive elements* of a whole and confined universe. These are the principles and elements of the world as conceived by the ‘totemists’. The social universe is thus created with help of natural categories. The human groups are categorized and conceived as mere extensions, or mirrors, of nature. The universe and the social universe are, in fact, the same as they are principles of parallel matrices. A clan group has significance only as part of and as a constitutive entity in this “whole”; its unit is meaningful only through its difference from other units. Therefore, the totemic ‘clans’ altogether make a whole social universe, mirroring the principles of the natural universe with its contrasts, oppositions and resemblances.

With its centre of attention on *identity*, totemic thinking will naturally be focused on people’s *origins*. Therefore, origin myths tend to have a stronger status among totemists than among animists. This follows from notions of the world as a finished work. World genesis is often seen to have taken place in mythic times and as having been instigated by ancestors. Life and ritual revolves around the repetition of the world’s creation, and renewals of identity. Life is seen to regenerate by the praising of ancestral power. Totemic societies hold precious objects that are conceived as being imbued by ancestral power, what Durkheim called *mana*, and later termed by Mauss’ as *hau*. Mana is seen to reside within some specific precious objects, like powerful axes or hatches of stone or wood. Such tools are experienced as being bodies of ancestors. Often they are engraved with

specific graphic designs, and are known among anthropologists as *churingas*, another of Durkheim's terms. Later reviews on totemism have confirmed the strong connection between a group's conceptions of common material origin and the land they inhabit. Totemic groups are more than "animists" focused on the importance of origin myths and identity by adherence to a specific landscape. They have notions of *common essence*, or substance of the *land and the beings that dwell in it*. Interesting for the present project is Howard Morphy's observation that clan groups mark their identity by specific geometric / graphic designs that slightly differ from those of the neighbouring group. Thus, specific designs that are present on *churingas* are not only markers of exactly *my* clan, but also symbolize this specific essence, and *our* ancestral power.

'Totemists', by their "obsession" with notions of *common material origin* are more focused on the essence of things – of what unites people, living beings and land through a common essence. They will, therefore, be interested in the *inner* parts of being; of flesh, blood and bones. Consequently they will be more inclined to develop systems of kinship and lineage structures.³ Animists also have kinship, however, within a world view dominated by totemism, lineage structures relate to creation myths; thus power structures may be cosmologically sanctioned.

Where totemists see big game animals as prey, animists will regard them as friends and persons. Animists are, therefore, more inclined to regard the *outer* appearance of the animal. Animism operating with shamanism will furthermore be focused on transformations (in general and through trance). This again is about outer appearances, one's guise or when changing of the outer dress through trance - of disguise. Indeed, 'totemists' may perform rituals which involve taking the guise of and transforming into an animal. This may have different explanations, among other things related to the status of shamanism within the context in question. Nonetheless, these totemic transformations are probably performances of world creation – and of 'our' place in it: in other words, of 'what we are'.

The opposition between outer focus (animism) and inner focus (totemism) is the main and immediate opposition between animism and totemism. Even if "inner" and "outer" perspectives have been acknowledged in Nordic rock art studies before, especially by Anders Hagen, no satisfactory explanation as to how to understand this phenomenon has so far been offered.

- Theory in operation: method / heuristics – and preliminary results

Theories on animism and totemism as I have developed for this context, has led to heuristic devices for studying rock art, of which the premise is that animism and totemism

³ The categorizing aptitude is fully in-line with the classificatory interests among totemists. Ultimately the development of kinship structures is also the prerequisite for developing lineages of extended social power. Status objects, like *churingas*, would be central partners in gift exchange and power negotiations between meeting social groups.

are manifest in more or less distinct figural elements of the hunters' rock art. The heuristics derived from my accounts on animism and totemism, are as follows:

ANIMISM	TOTEMISM
<p>Generally a rock art focusing on the <u>outer appearance</u> of the animal</p> <p>Details:</p> <p>Animal as subject / friend, i.e. social person / personhood</p> <p>→outer parts of animal – its ‘guise’</p> <p>= <u>outline</u> figures or figures in <u>bas relief</u>, markings of <u>head</u> (animal person in disguise?), ‘<u>life line</u>’ (personal soul)</p>	<p>Generally a rock art focusing on the <u>inner parts</u> of the animal</p> <p>Details:</p> <p>Animal as an object of social classification</p> <p>→inner parts – flesh, organs, bones – or fully stylized ‘grid designs’</p> <p>= ‘life line’, heart, abomasums, ribs, geometrics</p> <p>= same grid design repeated in bodies of different species, and in geometric figures</p> <p>=grid design as clan marker</p> <p>=grid design as marking (our) origin, essence, material origin in <i>this</i> landscape, our ‘mana’</p> <p>=grid design, as ‘churinga’ (ancestral power, essence, origin)</p>

Table 1. Figural elements and focal points in animic vs. totemic rock art (compare Fuglestedt 2010: Tab. 2).

From a temporal perspective, the results so far indicate an age of ‘pure’ animism proper in the Early Mesolithic. To date, rock art of the Middle Mesolithic age has not been found, even if the life way changes structuring totemic modes of thinking are seen to develop in this period. Thus the Late Mesolithic is characterized by a “wave” of ritual activity observable to us in rock art. This is accompanied by a wave of totemism covering most of Norway. On the archaeological timeline this covers phase 1 of the Alta rock carvings. However, by the transition to phase 2, totemic elements have totally disappeared; now exclusively animic elements are present. Throughout the defined period, all of Sweden is mostly dominated by animic rock art, of which the rock art site of Nämforsen along the Ångerman river in Jämtland is the greatest and most spectacular. So, the story of animism and totemism may be summarised like this:

This tentative outline is a scheme of historical development that will be pursued in future research; i.e. the Early Mesolithic as the time of “animism proper” and the Late Mesolithic as being subjected to a strong totemic wave, which does *not* affect the entire area. It is also a process leading back to (an original?) animism. The Mesolithic and Early Neolithic can therefore be viewed as totemism gained, animism sustained and animism regained (Fuglestedt 2010b).

Totemists are concerned with the inner aspects of the animal. In-line with earlier rock art research, these depictions of more or less natural organs develop into designs and patterns that bear absolutely no resemblance to nature. The originality of my present research is to approach these different designs as clan markers. So far

this method has turned out to be ‘effective’ in that it has great explanatory potential. So, an essential feature of this research project is the tracing of different designs, and their geographic dispersion: the mapping of the diverse totemic groups. Simultaneously it looks at the dynamics and contacts with the groups that stay animic, or relates it to a dominant world view.

The results so far, are best illustrated by work in eastern Norway (Fuglestad 2008; 2010). Here, two, but probably three distinct areas of grid designs derived from studies of rock art panels can be traced. The first centers around the Drammen drainage system in Buskerud, the third in the interior of Hedmark and Oppland. The second is only represented by one site, but is distinct and so far seems to cover the inner parts of the Oslo fjord. There are, however, great possibilities for tracing totemic clan markers in other regions. For instance, at the sites of Vingen, Western Norway, a number of distinct designs are present. Within these, there is one dominant. However, among this ‘hosting’ design, ‘visiting’ elements are represented by the clan group markers from eastern Norway (clan group 1 and 3). Similar examples can be made for other large sites throughout the study area. *An important aim of this project is to systematize ‘lines of contact’ between the great rock art sites.*

Great places were places for great events, of meetings and gift exchange and ultimately of social processes that were laden with dynamics of gender. Great ritual places were the places for transmission of people, local and long-distance identity and ideas. It is intriguing to witness how rock art figures not only have a very local aspect, but also have similarities with geographically distant groups. My idea is that rock art mirrors the transmission of ideas in other fields of life: they materialize the dialectics between the local and the interregional. The main goal of this project is to create a synthesis of Mesolithic history in the Scandinavian area, told through contacts, meetings, and how changing roles of the sexes serve as driving forces for historical change. The primary empirical material is the hunters’ rock art. This image of animism and totemism, contacts and ritual meetings between groups visiting over long distances involves not only the tracing of clan group marking, and their offprint within a core area, but also its manifestation at distant sites.

ROLE OF THE SEXES⁴ AS A DRIVING FORCE IN HISTORY

An important driving force in history is the way the two sexes are organized in terms of division of labor and how female and male is categorized practically and symbolically. Phrased differently, historical trajectories are closely intertwined with society’s specific gender system. No society evolves without a specific dynamic between the sexes. This approach has not yet been pursued on such a scale in studies of the Mesolithic in Scandinavia.

⁴ Even if I use the term ‘gender’ I am not fully confident with its use and theoretical consequences, cf. my article in progress *Declaration on behalf of an archaeology of sex*.

Great meetings at rock art sites were probably motivated for several reasons related to the human social faculty. Long-distance contact is about alliances, mutual joy and curiosity. Central to the research tradition which formed the basis for the work of Lévi-Strauss is how collaboration and contact between groups is mediated through the gift, and how gift exchange is the glue of intergroup solidarity. Totemic clans and animic groups are inclined to meet and have contact. It involves feasting and ritual. On the panels, both men and women are depicted, in some phases as active agents, in others in more passive ways. Yet other times, sexual markings have not been the focus; they simply display human activity.

Going back to my article of 1999, the topic was related to the meetings of groups and their mutual gift exchange of female marriage partners. This exchange of women – an activity orchestrated and taking place between men, i.e. fathers and brothers giving away their women – is at the core of Lévi-Strauss' totemism. This image has been much criticized due to the discriminating view that women are 'mere objects' of exchange. This critique is very relevant. However, for two reasons described here, it is also misleading. Firstly, Lévi-Strauss derived his theories from his ethnography, i.e. from what he had observed. Indeed, it is the case among several traditional societies that women are subject to exchanges that are orchestrated by fathers and brothers. Secondly, Lévi-Strauss does not make woman a mere object. His argument is that pre-modern societies have different notions – there is no such thing as 'mere economy', and concerning gift exchange woman is at the core of the exchange and the 'ultimate gift'. In Lévi-Strauss' thinking, this system of men exchanging women is due to an underlying strong bond between brother and sister. Due to the universal prohibition against incest, a group has to give up its women to men of other groups. The archaeological material of Late Mesolithic Scandinavia seems to support this, and the interpretation of women as being of great symbolic value in graves in southern Scandinavia, is not something I would diverge from in my ongoing research. As mentioned above, this "flow" of women in a north-south direction is also supported by results from studies of skeletons in graves.

Even if strongly intrigued by Lévi-Strauss' theory on kinship, and the theoretical approaches that may entail, I am also critical of it; both for "feminist" as well as empirical reasons. As a feminist, I do not fancy the idea of women being exchanged. On the other hand, patriarchy in various versions is a fact of human history. Accordingly, we must be able to face prehistories we do not like. Still, the cardinal challenge to this way of approaching the Mesolithic gender system belongs to areas of which Lévi-Strauss seems to have had little knowledge that is the more egalitarian hunter-gatherers. A wide range of studies indicate egalitarian relationships exist between women and man in hunter-gather societies, not very dissimilar from the lived, or desired, egalitarianism of western societies today. Central to this egalitarianism is the right of both sexes to do as they like, for instance ending a marriage. Still other studies 'discover' female hunters, and in the latter part of prehistory, female warriors. Thus, women had more agency than the image of women being at the core of gift giving, would seem to suggest. This project will aim to study sex roles in a dialectics between the "old gift giving hypothesis" on the one hand, and the newer data on women among hunter-gatherers on the other.

ORIGINALITY OF THEORY, METHOD AND AIMS OF THE PROJECT: SUMMARY

The suggested project involves an original and pioneering approach to rock art. Over the last few years, the approach has been presented at international conferences, and has so far materialized in three articles (Fuglestedt 2008; 2010a; 2010b). The approach is promising in that it reveals a level of meaning which is compatible with studies of settlement patterns and stray finds of the Mesolithic age. During the last few years many large Stone Age research projects have yielded an immense body of results on Mesolithic settlement. The reports and books on “local” settlement structures will be taken onboard in the present study, as important comparative material for the results on ‘totem clan group areas’ and animic groups. In the proposed project, this new information will be compiled and used in a wider and geographically much larger context.

Rock art studies are inclined to produce results that reside in a ritual sphere ‘outside’ society and social processes. ‘World views’ and rituals are thus detached from society. By operating with the concepts of animism and totemism, I intend to unite the area of world views with social processes. As a core element in such social processes are the dynamics of gender. Brought into its wide context, and systematized and synthesized, this will be a contribution to an engendered history of the Scandinavian Mesolithic. A ‘complete’ history of social development throughout the Mesolithic has never been presented for the Scandinavian Mesolithic. Given that the division of labor – and division by other categories between the sexes – always will be at the core of historical change, it is high time this question is addressed in studies like this. Especially women have been invisible as agents throughout this early part of Nordic history.

PROJECT MANAGER, PHD- AND POSTDOC RESEARCH FELLOWS – DIVISION OF AREAS OF RESEARCH

As project manager the bulk of my work will be on rock art, gender and the synthesizing aspects. This is not to say that the two research fellowships applied for could not have such aims. The research fellows will have to define their own research interest; however, their choices of source material – as well as objectives of study – must be in tune with the issues and aims of the overall project, as defined in this document.

Compiling results from settlement studies can be carried out in several potential ways and on different levels. 1) One important aim would be the systematization of settlement structures (i.e. degrees of sedentism). 2) Another aim would be to study stone tool technology and how local and regional blade technologies are dispersed through space of different scales (local, regional, inter-regional). 3) A third possible aim concerns raw material use. A totemic world view entails notions of people and their land as being the same; it involves giving significance to the landscape’s specific *materiality*, i.e. potent places in the clan’s *land of identity* as yielders of exactly ‘our’ substance / essence. When material from such quarries are made into tools, they have the potential to become a status weapon, an object of gift exchange

and eventually 'churingas'. Studies of dispersion of status weapons through the landscape are already well represented; an aim of this project would be to compile existing results and pursue the issue further. 4) The fourth possible aim of the project would be to pursue the issue of the slate-using groups of the Late Mesolithic onwards. One hypothesis of the presented project is that the slate-users very much overlap with the groups / areas I so far have defined as 'animic'. The dispersion and flow of slate artefacts is therefore a highly topical potential research question, which concerns the understanding of intergroup contacts between 'animists' and 'totemists'. 5) Last aim, but not of less importance, would be to compile existing local chronologies of rock art and see how they are temporally placed in comparison to each other. Such an approach would address issues like how, for instance, are the phases in Alta placed in comparison with phases in Vingen.

RESOURCES / ENVIRONMENT

The proposed project is attached to two existing networks in which I participate. The one network is represented by my membership in the research council of the NFR-supported project *Structure and History*, located at the Museum of Cultural History at the University of Oslo. Cooperation between the suggested project and *Structure and History* by Håkon Glørstad is now formalized. Moreover, I have been part of initializing a *Nordic Blade Network*, of which formal agreements and links are made to *Meetings Make History* by Kjel Knutsson, Uppsala University (see upcoming web page). In addition to this, agreements are made with a number of key researchers of the Nordic countries and Britain (see application form).

The persons involved in this project are also potential members of the project's research council. The council's mandate will be to assist in overseeing the project's quality, by taking part in annual meetings / work-shops and giving feed back on presentations and drafts. The planned research council will revive and extend existing networks, but also create potentially new sets of connections.

Concerning theoretical issues addressed in the proposed project, it should be pointed out that I have designed courses and lectured on issues of general theory and gender archaeology at University of Oslo since 2003. Furthermore, I have just been granted a guest scholarship at the *Centre for Gender Research*, University of Oslo. I will be stationed there in the spring semester of 2011.

PUBLICATIONS AND POPULARIZATIONS

As concrete results of this project I plan one scientific monograph published in English, preferably by a British or American publisher. In addition I plan two articles in internationally renowned archaeological journals.

Rock art, due to its strong visual qualities, are very well suited for popularizations. I plan a popularized version of the results, illustrated by high quality photos and tracings of rock art panels. This popular monograph will be written in Norwegian, and presented in 'coffee table' format. In addition to this I hope to publish newspaper articles addressing the issues raised in this process.

Additionally, there will be publications by the research fellows (post-doc monographs, PhD-theses or articles, and hopefully also a number of master theses).

For more complete reference lists connected to *Meetings Make History*, see Fuglestedt 2008, 2010a and 2010b.

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