Session 13

Human, beast and landscape

*A diachronic study of hunting and human-animal-relationships in Northern Europe and Baltic Sea area*

(Session organizers: U. Schmölcke, O. Grimm)

INTERNATIONAL OPEN WORKSHOP 2019

Socio-Environmental Dynamics over the Last 15,000 Years: The Creation of Landscapes VI
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Human-Deer spiritual connection: offering places of Northern Eurasia from Neolithic to Modern time

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Cult of the Deer, which was formed in Upper Paleolithic, has become dominant in mythos-ritual complex of the people of Europe and North Asia in Mesolithic and Neolithic time and was preserved in the world outlook in Bronze and Iron Ages. The main components of the cult were myths and rites of fertility and hunting success, which included the sacrifice of a deer. Sacred places were the material component of the cult. Numerous archaeological evidences of the Neolithic deer sacrifices were found in Northern Europe and Siberia. As usual, they were connected with the outstanding places of landscape, deer calving places, ways of deer migrations, hunting grounds. Deer cult ceremonies were held near the rock art depictions frequently. More than a hundred offering places, connected with the rock depictions, are known in Fennoscandia and Northern Russia. The stylistic diversity of images and the presence of cultural layers of different eras testify to their prolonged functioning, sometimes before historical or even contemporary times. Most researchers are tracing a clear connection of images with water, which plays the role of boundary between worlds in the spiritual culture of indigenous peoples. Through comparing of the archaeological and ethnographical materials with the synchronic and diachronic aspects we can assume, that deer/elk offering places were perceived as dwellings of the spirits-mediators between people and Great Mother, which had the form of the female elk in ancient times. Thousands of her images were reflected in rock and mobile art of Northern Europe and Siberia in Neolithic time. The inventory of the offering places included the attributes of ritual offering: deer/elk sculls, antlers and bones, weapons – sacred deer slaughtering tools; flints for making sacral fire, bowls for the sacred meal; and gifts to the Great Mother: deer figurines, jewels, coins and so on. The tradition of the deer offerings was kept in Bronze and Iron ages. There were great offering places with the sculls of the elk, bear and other animals in Northern Russia, which were common to several neighboring settlements. The surrounding area was considered sacred. Some sacral places were functioned till modern time.
Centrality of Seals: Ålandic clay paw rite on the edge of Occam’s razor

Kristin Ilves (Helsinki University)

There are just over 110 small claw paws recovered in the Late Iron Age (550-1050 AD) burials on the Åland Islands of the Baltic Sea. These paws, which have only been found in burials, were made in connection with the cremation burial ritual that was typical for this period. They are of low-fired clay with little or no tempering material. The execution of modelling is rough. Clay paws are oblong in shape, broadening towards one end, and generally, with four to five short digits at the wider end. They measure between 4 and 14 cm in length and have a rounded to oval cross-section. Often, one side of the paw is slightly concave and the opposite side slightly convex. Despite an evident uniformity of the idea, there is a notable variation in the design. Identified as bearers of symbolic meaning, clay paws have been variously associated with bear or beaver. Both these species, however, were absent in the natural environment of Åland during the period of the rite. Therefore, the symbolic significance of the either animal has been interpreted to have been carried to Åland by immigrant groups to accommodate the absence of the relevant animal in the ecology. Reasons for either one of these species becoming important for the Late Iron Age society on Åland are mainly sought outside the archipelago and/or in the mythological narratives of surrounding areas. Following the principle of Occam’s razor, I suggest that clay paws should be identified with seals – living animals present in the environment and significantly important in both diet and economy of the Late Iron Age Åland. By suggesting the paw symbol being metonymic of a seal, also, the dichotomy between symbolic and functional is broken concerning this animal becoming a totem. The clay paw rite is a distinctly Ålandic innovation. It emerged in the Late Iron Age, in connection with a rapid and large-scale colonization of the archipelago. The colonization process has been recently explained in the framework of global climate catastrophe following the large volcanic events in the middle of the 6th century AD that in many agriculturally dependent areas in the Northern Hemisphere led to famine, resulting in mass starvation, disease, and death. In contrast to the many neighboring areas with a widespread decline of settlements and concentration in to fewer villages, on the Åland Islands, settlements become visible in drastic manner. There is an agreement that in the middle of the 6th century Åland saw the greatest increase in human population and activity that cannot be understood as an endogenetic demographic process. I argue that maritime resources, seals in particular, served as a driving force for a
colonization of Åland from neighboring areas in order to tackle the effects of the climatic cat-
tastrophe. The emergence of the clay paw rite is linked to this process.
Reindeer Migration Routes and Distribution in the late Glacial in Lithuanian Territory

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During the Late Glacial in the territory of East Baltic region after retreate of the glaciers, the main hunting object was reindeer (Rangifer tarandus L.). Baltic region specimens would considerably help in the reconstruction of the origin and migration routes of the extant wild reindeer populations in northern Europe. In 20 localities of the territory of Lithuania and radiocarbon dates from antlers of reindeer between 12 085 and 10 435 yr BP were collected. The majority of radiocarbon dating results show that reindeers colonized the eastern Baltic region quite rapidly and possibly all at once – 13400-12300 yr BP. The results of cosmogenic dating of boulders indicate that the ice sheet which covered a large East Baltic area melted at almost the same time – about 13500-13000 yr BP. Along with the reindeer population, the first inhabitants – the reindeer hunters must have appeared who produced different tools and weapons from the reindeer skeletal parts. On both sides of the Nemunas and other rivers shoals, most sites and finding-places of the Late Palaeolithic period occurred (Fig. 8). They were left by communities of Hamburg-, Federmesser-, Bromme-, Ahrensburg- and Swiderian cultures. Analogous campsites of the Late Palaeolithic period in Lithuania were at the Neris-, Ūla-, Šešupė rivers and other water basins where reindeer crossed waters through wades and shoals. The earliest reindeer antler of the Older Dryas period was found in Debeikiai (Anykščiai district). However, among the radiocarbon-dated Upper Palaeolithic artefacts, the earliest are a Lyngby axes, discovered in Nemunėlio Radviliškis (Parupė ) (Biržai district), Kalniškiai (Jurbarkas district), Šnaukštai (Klaipėda district) in 2014-2015, which provides new data on the Eastern Baltic area population processes and the economic activities at the end of the ice age. The traceological, isotopic and zoo-archaeological analysis of the artefacts and reindeer skeletal parts, as well as the palynological and archaeological studies of the find spots, proved that the dated back to c. 14000-10000 BC and was to be assigned to the Older Dryas – Younger Dryas period. As witnessed by the radiocarbon date, the artefact perfectly fitted in the general context of the Upper Palaeolithic in Northern Europe and, on the basis of the radiocarbon dating, it ought to be considered one of the earliest items not only in the Eastern Baltic Region, but all over Northern Europe.
Significance of caribou and reindeer fur for arctic hunters

Kerstin Pasda (Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte, FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg)

The arctic climate requires an effective protection against the coldness. The significance of caribou fur in the past became obvious in interviews with Greenlandic hunters. However, caribou fur was the warmest accessible fur in Greenland. Some interviewees suggested that the fur was for a time even more substantial than the meat. At least since the Thule period until the beginning of the 20th century the fur played a major role in Greenland. Historical and archaeological sources in the 18th century about mass hunting and lists of fur trade indicate, that this mass hunting was mainly aimed at getting caribou fur. The evidence of the hunt taking place with the specific aim of obtaining the fur is difficult to render osteoarchaeologically. However, there may be indications of reindeer being hunted for their fur in European Palaeolithic sites, as in the Ahrensburgian site of Stellmoor.
Carved bird pendants of forest hunter-gatherer-fishers (East European Plain, 3500–2700 BC) – the edible totems

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Bone bird figurines used as personal adornments disseminated during the period between 4000–2300 BC in the territory of the current Baltic states, Republic of Belarus and the center of East European Plain, at the interfluve of Volga and Oka Rivers. The excavation of several sites seems to show year-round habitation, due to the presence of large semi-subterranean dwellings in locations where fish was very abundant. Additionally, these communities’ spiritual life is reflected in mobile art, mostly small sculpture pendants, depicting humans and animals made of bone, flint, and amber. This talk focuses on carved bird pendants morphology, technology, functional use, and symbolism. There are two kinds of pendants: the full-figure bird representation and the partial one. All full-figure sculptures represent bird silhouettes and lack any details except drilled holes for fastening, but partial sculptures (bird head and neck/rod) usually have drilled eyes and carved mouth line, and also a perforated hole or carved incisions for fastening. In the Baltic region only full figure pendants are known, while both kinds are common in the central part of East European Plain. In terms of species, waterfowl (small ducks, swan and geese), merganser), marshland (crane, heron, sand-piper) and woodland species (capercailie, partridge, grouse) are present. The species with the highest representation is the capercailie (Tetrao urogallis, 40 of circa 100 pieces), which is of great interest for the discussion of pendants’ functional use and symbolism. The total absence of raptor birds is also remarkable, which drove me to compare species representation in both pendants and bird bones. According to research into the faunal remains, performed at three sites of the Oka River basin, it can be said that the bird species represented in pendants were pretty much the same as those which were hunted. Ducks (especially Anas platyrhynchos) is the most represented (near 50%). Their wing bones (antebrachium) were used for making awls, humeri for making awls/tools for sinew-thread treating, and feathered carpometacarpi could have been used for decoration. The capercailie usually comes second among bird bone remains (near 10%). The significant number of finds allows us to suggest that each community member obtained the bird pendant and wore it in everyday life. According to my recent studies, bone, amber, and flint zoomorphic pendants could represent a totem ancestor of a community/kin. The presence of various bird species images buried in one dwelling may be the evidence of
different clan members communal living. The abundance of duck and capercaillie bones in faunal collections means that obviously no nutritional taboo existed regarding all bird totems. The capercaillie pendants is the most represented and disseminated pendant in the Volga–Oka interfluve, which suggests that they reflect the possible existence of a large number of kin. The choice of this particular totem animal could have been driven by the similarity between animal behavior and that of humans. It seems that capercaillie fitted quite well for this purpose, considering these birds’ abilities to stay at the same place during winter season (sedentarism), to hide in snow caves (semi-subterranean dwellings), to consume berries, to dance, sing and fight during the mating period, and so on.
Hunting mentality in agrarian environments. Wild animal skins in the Iron Age and medieval graves in eastern Fennoscandia

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In this paper, we discuss the role of big game hunting among the Late Iron Age and medieval (AD 800-1500) farming populations in eastern Fennoscandia. In Finland, the importance of hunting and fur trade as supplementary economies have been considered an outgrowth of area’s location at the northernmost limits of the cultivation zone in Europe. The study area is situated on the palearctic zone, having characteristics of Continental fauna (pine marten [Martes martes]) as well as Siberian species (European elk [Alces alces], wild forest reindeer [Rangifer tarandus fennicus]) and marine mammals (ringed seal [Pusa hispida], grey seal [Halichoerus grypus]). The transition to productive livelihoods in the southern Finland took thousands of years, and in the northern and eastern parts of Finland hunting retained its central role up to the Modern Age. Our study indicates that from cultural and mental point of view the change was even slower than previously suggested. We base this argument on the animal hair and skin material collected from Finnish and East-Karelian inhumation burials, in which the wrapping of the deceased in European elk and (wild forest) reindeer skins indicates the longevity of a hunting mentality long after having adapted to farming. Our first argument rests on on the tradition of wrapping in hunting cultures. The earliest evidence of wrapping bodies in Northern Eurasia derives from the Mesolithic Stone Age, after which animal skins were repeatedly used for wrapping the deceased. As a second argument, we suggest that the act of wrapping had its origins in hunting rituals, in which the wearing of a skin helped the hunter to become an animal. Rane Willerslev (2007) has interpreted that this ritual was practiced especially in big-game hunting, which demanded close contact with the game animal. In burials, the act of wrapping controlled the liminal stage of death and facilitated the transformation from a human being to an animal-ancestor. This is in line with the Finno-Ugrian worldview in which animals such as brown bear (Ursus arctos) and reindeer were ex-humans, fore-fathers, or relatives. We suggest that wrapping of bodies in wild animal skins during the Iron Age has a direct continuation to the prehistoriv hunter-gatherers, and represents a several thousand-years long, unbroken tradition. For interpreting our results, we estimate the interaction between food supply and ritual treatment of bones and skins, and, on the other hand, past
cervid population history in the accumulation of archaeological data. The results are based on a somewhat heterogeneous and fragmented body of source material, but they clearly underline the importance of hunting and wild animals in the Late Iron Age and Early Medieval world in northern Europe.
Environment and human subsistence on western coast of Sweden during the Mesolithic and Neolithic

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The earliest immigrants to the area were heavily dependent on marine resources. It is also likely that they were migratory spending the warmer part of the year on the coast and the colder part on the continent in the south. When local, stationary populations of deer, aurochs and wild boar had become established hunter gatherers could also form more or less sedentary groups. Marine resources remained the prime source of food throughout the Mesolithic. The introduction of agriculture was done by immigrating groups from the south but marine resources remained important to varying degree. In middle neolithic times the marine environment goes through great changes with abundance of fish and marine mammals, especially harp seal and southern fish species. During this period a new group of people settle at the Coasts of Southern Scandinavia, the Pitted Ware Culture. This group were mainly hunter-Fishers but also had some domesticates. Their relation to earlier farmers is not well understood. Later the PW culture dissapear and are succeeded by farmers but their economy is poorly known.
Human-bear interactions in Lateglacial and Holocene Britain

Hannah O’Regan (University of Nottingham)

The brown bear (Ursus arctos) is Europe’s largest terrestrial carnivore, and it has played an important symbolic role in cultures throughout its geographic range from Europe to North America. How can we begin to determine what role bears played in these societies? Were they predators, competitors, companions or prey? Using Britain as an example, this paper will examine human-bear relationships from the Lateglacial to early modern periods. Although bear remains are known from all periods, there are big differences in how they are incorporated into the archaeological record. For example, two Lateglacial bear tooth pendants were found in Kendrick’s cave, North Wales, and skull fragments and a cervical vertebra are known from the Mesolithic wetland environment of Star Carr. These finds contrast with the Bronze Age and Iron Age record, when bear remains are only found with human cremation burials, and again in the early medieval period when considerable numbers of phalanges are also found in cremations. This paper will examine what these differences might mean in terms of human-bear interactions, and will also consider when the bear became extinct in Britain and what impact this might have had on how bears were subsequently perceived and treated.
The aurochs (Bos primigenius) in prehistoric Switzerland: humans and wild cattle in a diversity of landscapes

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The area now occupied by current day Switzerland has an incredibly rich prehistoric archaeological record, due in part to the fantastic preservation conditions at waterlogged sites by many of its lakes. These lakeside settlements - dated mostly to the Neolithic period - have produced very well preserved organic remains, including many large assemblages of animal bones. During the Neolithic period domestic cattle, pigs and sheep/goat provided an important part of the economy, but a number of wild animals were hunted to supplement this. Although red deer is the most commonly found wild animal aurochs remains are also found frequently, and in much higher concentrations than during the Mesolithic period. There are, however, fluctuations in the intensity of hunting across time and in different landscapes. This paper will present the current evidence for aurochs remains in Switzerland. We will bring together data from multiple sites in different geographical regions and across time, and will consider the role of different landscapes in the exploitation of these animals.
Animals and the human social landscape in medieval Icelandic sources

Harriet Evans (University of York)

In Finnboga saga (ch.11), a bear who is causing trouble among the communities of Halogaland is outlawed by the assembled farmers, before being hunted and killed by the hero of the saga. In this episode, the bear will only fight with Finnbogi once the man has removed all his armour and his sword, and the saga depicts the bear having the desire for the fight to take place on equal terms. In addition, the need to outlaw a bear before hunting it suggests that this wild animal is perceived as part of the community who must be excluded for its actions before it can be dispatched. This is the only instance of such an animal outlawry in the Sagas of Icelanders, and it takes place in Norway. In contrast, the laws of medieval Iceland known as Grágás suggest that certain animals, including bulls, pigs, horses and dogs walk the border between legal inclusion and exclusion, and can be legally outlawed for certain actions. However, these are all domestic animals, and in the Icelandic settings of many of the Sagas of Icelanders, depictions of wild animals are rare; these texts demonstrate instead that the line between the categories of human and domestic animal was capable of being breached. This presentation will explore the depiction of these animals as both objects and agents in the legal texts of early Iceland, and how both Viking age funerary contexts and later medieval narratives offer us interpretations of animal-human relations that seem to engage with conceptualisations of animals as persons capable of interacting with both human legal codes and the social landscape of medieval Iceland.
Seal exploitation in Šventoji subneolithic sites (SE Baltic) during 3900-3000 cal BC

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Šventoji sites are of supra-regional importance due to brilliant preservation conditions and the degree of research done there during the last decade. Some of ca. 60 Stone Age sites are contemporaneous and represent highly elaborated settlement systems with dwelling areas on the eastern bank of the ancient lagoonal lake and fishing stations on western part of the lagoon. Bone collagen stable isotope analysis combined with zooarchaeological data demonstrate seals being of high importance to coastal Subneolithic people. First seal bone analysis (NISP=2132) made in 2016 show already significant differences in seal species, skeletal part distribution and animal age among sites that generated preliminary ideas about the differences in Šventoji sites chronology, function and seasonality. However, analysis of the complete zooarchaeological assemblages from studied sites and additional detailed microscopic analysis of seal bone fractures were necessary for final conclusions. In 2018, microscopic analysis of seal bones fractures, technological and use wear analysis of seal tibia scrapers were completed and they demonstrate new evidences concerning the technology of seal hunting, butchering and even possible rituals in Šventoji sites. Furthermore, we obtained new and very significant data concerning the sites seasonality. In this presentation we’ll demonstrate our final conception about seal hunting and exploitation in Šventoji Subneolithic sites.
European bison hunting and butchering at Vilnius Lower Castle during the 13th-17th c.

Giedre Piliciauskiene (Department of Archaeology, Vilnius University, Lithuania)

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Vilnius Lower castle and the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania (13th-17th c.) are objects of an extraordinary importance for Lithuanian state history. Dwellers of various social stratus – kings, dukes, bishops, knights, officers, soldiers as well as craftsmen and servants lived in the territory of the castle through the centuries. Since the middle of the 20th c. an area of about 18,000 m2 was excavated there. Dozens of latrines, sewers and water-supply pipelines were examined, more than half of million archaeological artefacts were collected and ca. 70,000 animal bones fragments were analysed. Hunting was very important in the life of the residents of Vilnius Lower castle. Therefore, remains of wild game consist even 11-28 % of the zooarchaeological assemblages. European bison was the second most hunted animal during the all historical stages of the castle, despite permission of the king was needed for bison hunting. Almost 2000 bison bones fragments were found in Vilnius Lower castle, most of them were dated to the end of 14th-15th c. Synthesis of zooarchaeological and historical data allow us to take a look at royal hunting, consumption and value of this animal during the 13th-17th c. Moreover, in this presentation we also would like to demonstrate unique material of one waste pit, dated to the end of 14th – beginning of 15th c., where remains of at least 29 bison were found. Zooarchaeological data and historical sources concerning the royal bison hunting, butchering and meat conservation allow us to reconstruct this one bison hunting and butchering episode.
A preboreal relation with Elks - the ritual elk deposits from Lundby Mose

Kristoffer Buck Pedersen (Museum Southeast Denmark)

The early preboreal in southern Scandinavia is an enigmatic period. As the environment was recovering from the severe cold of younger dryas, people were re-colonizing the barren landscape. But the earliest traces of people in the preboreal are not settlement sites, but bones from elks deposited in small kettleholes. At Lundby Mose bones from at least 13 elks were deposited in 6 different concentrations. The Elks were deposited at - at least - four separate events. The earliest elk-deposits were made in the very early part of the preboreal (L1, L2 & L3). The deposits consisted only of elk-bones, and they are interpreted as an expression of a ritual human-animal relationship, a communication between the hunter and the souls of the elks. A large concentration of bones from elks (L5), and other animals, is dated to a later part of the preboreal. Its composition and characteristic is more reminiscent of settlement waste as we know it from the subsequent Boreal period. Together with similar finds from Skotte-marke and Favbo, and some newly interpreted sites of same age, it is proposed that Lundby mose is part of a special ritual horizon. This could be seen as the newcomers attempt to colonize the new landscape with souls - a ritual game management - to secure a good stock of game for the future.
The hunter`s path. Some remarks on the role and meaning of osseous hunting equipment in the Final Palaeolithic and Mesolithic

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Hunting equipment made of osseous materials of the Late Glacial and early Holocene hunter-gatherers is most commonly represented in archaeological record with various types of points, harpoon heads and fish hooks. Studies on these types of prehistoric weapons have a long-standing tradition and are important way of discovering information about the societies that existed in those days. The main objective of our study is to present results of extensive traceological analyses concerning Late Glacial and early Holocene bone and antler artefacts usually associated with hunting from Polish Lowland. Examined prehistoric material for most consist of so-called stray finds and represent various forms of harpoon heads, points and fish hook. During the traceological analysis of the included artefacts a wide spectrum of technological traces was identified that allowed to reconstruct chaîne opératoire of their production process. It allowed also to make some suggestions concerning probable function of the prehistoric specimens. Moreover, traceological analysis enabled to the identification on selected finds specific traces that were possibly not purely practical, but served a symbolic purpose. These information were a starting point for discussion about non-utilitarian behaviors associated with these kind of artefacts and their symbolic meaning for people that used them. For the purpose of the project we gathered also morphological, technological and functional data about similar finds from Europe and discussed them with our results.
Herding, husbandry, and predator hunting in medieval Sámi contexts

Marte Spangen (UiT - Arctic University of Norway)

The Middle Ages constitute a time of transformation for Sámi societies in northern Fennoscandia. Previous subsistence strategies were largely based on fishing, hunting, and gathering. During the medieval period, larger scale reindeer herding and husbandry were introduced in Sámi communities, which had profound influence on their societies, culture, and landscape use. The introduction of herding and husbandry was not, however, a linear or unidirectional process, and there are clearly regional and local differences in when and how the Sámi economic adaptations changed. Despite several decades of extensive debate, especially about the emergence of reindeer herding, the details of these regional and local developments are still in need of further investigations. Improved research methods, for example concerning aDNA and isotope analyses, have recently provided new approaches to such detailed studies. New theoretical strands, such as postcolonial critique of stereotypical images of indigenous groups in the past, have also led to new realizations. For instance, recent research suggests an earlier introduction of both sheep husbandry and reindeer herding in Finnmark, northern Norway, than previously assumed. It is highly likely that this “neolithisation” altered human-animal relationships in the Sámi communities in question. I would claim that this did not only concern the relationships people had with the herded or domestic animals, but also their conceptualisation and practical handling of animals that posed a threat to the livestock, i.e. the plentiful predators inhabiting the Sámi landscapes. According to ethnographic, historical, and archaeological sources, the hunting practices and facilities used to decimate or curb such animals have varied extensively between different Sámi regions and localities. This is partly due to topographical conditions and local differences in predator behaviour. However, it is also an expression of local options and needs in terms of what the predators were threatening, where they were encountered, and how the hunt was organised. Hunting installations for predators consequently reflect aspects of animal herding and husbandry, while also indicating social organisation and settlement patterns.