Encounters | Materialities | Confrontations
Archaeologies of Social Space and Interaction

Edited by
Per Cornell and Fredrik Fahlander

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PRESS
CHAPTER EIGHT

KEEPING UP APPEARANCES: ON THE NORTHERN FRONTIER IN SCANDINAVIAN FUNNEL BEAKER TIMES

GUNLÖG GRANER & LEIF KARLENBY

Figure 1. “When two people meet a relationship arises”. The Italian priest and explorer Alberto de Agostini meets an Ona Indian of the Tierra del Fuego in third space.

When two people meet a relationship arises, a type of zone that is neither one nor the other, but a place where there is opportunity for new occurrences. This of course also applies to when groups of people meet. When these meetings occur between larger groups it is often described as “ethnicity”. In the space that is created between two ethnic groups a strengthened version of one’s own culture often develops. This space can be equalled to that which Bhabha (2004) has termed as the “third space”.
With this as a starting point we intend to discuss the “cultural” boundary that could be observed in Central Sweden during the Early Neolithic period. This is illustrated by examples from the Funnel Beaker Culture sites Skogsmossen, Fågelbacken, Barksta, Bäcklund and Hidinge, today situated in the provinces of Närke and Västmanland. Not far from these sites, southern agricultural technology met with the northern Mesolithic hunter-gatherer. What we see expressed as differences in the material culture can be explained through the creation of a third space between these two groups, manifesting itself in a strengthened ethnic identification. The third space allows for alternative interpretations of the dynamics between groups. An ethnicity without either historical/geographical or genetic key signatures grows forth as an ongoing process of human relationships. Or as Thomas Hylland Eriksen expressed it: “…ethnicity is essentially an aspect of a relationship, not a property of a group.” (Eriksen 2002:12).

Figure 2. Map showing the lake Mälaren region with the sites discussed in text. 1) Skogsmossen, 2) Fågelbacken, 3) Barksta, 4) Bäcklund and 5) Hidinge. Dotted line shows approximate location of border between hunter-gatherers and the Funnel Beaker Culture. Map by Henrik Pihl.
Archeological background

In Central Sweden the archeological material from the Early Neolithic shows that there are clear boundaries between areas with differing sorts of material traces. Along an approximate west-east line the set of objects and settlements of the south differ to that of the north. To the south of the line are people that were part of the agricultural Funnel Beaker Culture. In the north they were hunters and gatherers.

Approximately around 3900 B.C., the Funnel Beaker Cultures earliest settlements emerged simultaneously in an area from southern Denmark to northern part of the lake Mälaren region. But long before the agricultural settlements were established other traces of change can be seen in the region. A division of the Mesolithic society occurs already around 4500 B.C., when in the south one had begun to incorporate parts of the Ertebølle Culture way of life and symbolism (Knutsson & Knutsson 2004:16-17).

Figure 3. Maps showing the distribution of a) polygonal axes and b) green-stone axes (based on Hallgren 1998). Black lines show the Neolithic coastline. Maps by Henrik Pihl and Leif Karlenby.

It was the descendents of this southern group or groups of people that later chose to adopt the Funnel Beaker material culture and way of life, as a continuation of the cultural boundary that had been established earlier. When people south of the border assumed a partially new identity as farmers, the hunter-gatherers north of the border oriented themselves more clearly towards the north (Knutsson & Knutsson 2004:16). Most noticeable is that the use of slate objects began on a large scale north of the border at this time.
Figure 4. Examples of Funnel Beaker Culture polygonal axes (above), greenstone axes (left) and hunter-gatherer slate objects (right). Photos by Örebro County Museum, Leif Karlenby and The Museum of National Antiquities in Sweden.

Today a number of Early Neolithic Funnel Beaker sites have been identified south of the border, and they are situated mainly along the prehistoric coastline. But there also are finds of axes along the north-south oriented ridges in the inland. These axes are commonly interpreted as connected to nearby settlement activities, suggesting places for burn-beating farming (Apel et al 1995:87-95).
According to a model of the Swedish Funnel Beaker Culture (cf Hallgren 1998:65) settlements can be divided into different types. The main settlements were the inland farms with focus on burn-beating cultivation and stockraising. Inland sites that lacks traces of grinding tools and axe production might have been hunting stations or shelters. Hunting stations have also existed along the streams and coast. At the coast there were meetingplaces where larger groups gathered to fish, hunt for seals and to bury the dead.

Figure 5. Plan of house, yard and sacrificial place at the Skogsmossen site (after Hallgren et al 1997:87, figure 11).

The activities at the individual settlement site appear to have been divided into strictly separated areas of activity, for example one area for grinding, one for the production of axes, another for special quartz workshops etc. This pattern was very pronounced for example at Skogsmossen. The meticulous organisation of space at settlements and other places of special function might reflect a society that was carefully organised and strictly governed. Personal freedom was restricted by many rules and laws.

The northern border of the Funnel Beaker Culture is also defined through the spreading of polygonal battle-axes and finely pecked greenstone axes south of the border. These show signs of a farming region based on burn-beating and stock-raising. Interestingly enough, along the northern Mälaren shore is an area lacking the characteristic Funnel Beaker Culture axes (figure 3). This can
represent a meeting zone between the hunting and trapping people of the north and the Funnel Beaker farmers. This piece of shore and the wooded area north of it, might have been the hunter-gatherers territory. The Funnel Beaker site at Skogsmossen, situated on a peninsula just south of this area, might therefore have been seen as the last outpost to the north.

Figure 6. Finds from the Skogsmossen site: example of ceramics (left) and slate knife (right). Drawing by Gunlög Graner, photo by Gabriel Hildebrand, The Museum of National Antiquities in Sweden.

**Sacrificing to farming gods at Skogsmossen**

The Skogsmossen site has been interpreted as a combined living and sacrificial site, as a farm that had been included in a burn-beating economic cycle. It consisted of a living area with a two-aisled house. In front of the house was a courtyard and a concentration of axes. Stone packings with traces of raised posts separated the house and the area with axes from the kitchen area with hearths and grinding stones.

East of the house was a small marsh where a large number of objects were found. There were amongst other things a quantity of ceramic objects, grinding stones and both burned and unburned axes. Macro-fossil analysis show that grain had been put into the marsh. There was also cores of quartz stone, flint arrows and a slate knife of northern swedish origin. This is especially interesting
because the knife shows that the people of Skogsmossen in some way have had contact with the northern groups.

The objects reflect a large number of sacrificial offerings and have a clear connection to a fertility cult (Graner 2005:9-34). The sacrifices have been carried out during the greater part of the Early Neolithic sequence in Central Sweden (Hallgren & Possnert 1997:113-136).

Gatherings at Fågelbacken and Barksta – and death

Fågelbacken is today situated on a ridge just outside the Middle Swedish town of Västerås, but was during the early Neolithic a peninsula where people from different inland farms gathered twice a year, as argued by Sundström (2003:131). The site was used during the whole Funnel Beaker Culture sequence. Some kind of common funeral rituals have been carried out. For instance there are traces of structures like a mortuary house, stone packings with raised posts, and pits containing potsherds and burned human bones. The pits normally contained bones from more than one individual. The funeral activities might best have been carried out during the summer. In the winter one gathered for seal hunting, which is most successful on the ice during the winter. Bones from seal, otter, roe deer and different fish have been found at the site, which also included a living area with huts. (Apel et al 1995).

Figur 7. Ceramics from Barksta, Kolsva parish, Västmanland. This place was in use at the transition between The Funnel Beaker Culture and the Pitted Ware Culture. Photo by Jenny Holm.
Barksta is situated some 20 km west of Fågelbacken. It was a Funnel Beaker Culture site in use at the very transition when society began to change towards the Pitted Ware Culture. Once situated at the point of a peninsula, Barksta had the same type of location as Fågelbacken. Also the combination of stonepackings and pits with burned human bones and ceramics (interpreted as graves) seems to be common traits. At Barksta a pit was found containing potsherds and human burned bones. Alongside there was a stone packing with more potsherds and burned animal bones. A cultural layer containing potsherds and burned animal bones from seal, badger, swine, dog and different fish covered it all. (Holm 2005:45-58). At Fågelbacken there were, as mentioned above, huts and a mortuary house, none of which were found at Barksta. The Fågelbacken site was more extensive and maybe the two settlements show on a differentiation in size for this type of seasonal gathering-places.

Figure 8. View of one of the houses at the Bäcklund site. Post-holes are marked by white paper plates. It was about 10 meters long and 4 meters wide. The preserved construction consisted entirely of post-holes that formed an oval shape. It is most likely that the posts were bent towards the middle and connected to a raft and to each other. In that way a rather sturdy construction was created that would stand for both strong winds and heavy weights. Photo by Leif Karlenby.
Funnel Beaker Culture axes have been found about ten kilometres north of Barksta and they probably indicate the location of an inland site. Barksta can either be interpreted as one family’s place for funerals and other cultic or ritual activities, or maybe as a smaller gathering place for more than one family, settled over a vaster area, of which we have as yet only identified one settlement north of Barksta (Holm 2005:57-58).

**Sacrifice and liminal behaviour Bäcklunda?**

In the Neolithic the Bäcklunda site was on a small island just off of the mainland. At the site there were houses and huts and cooking pits. Just at the ancient waters edge, there were ten trenches of varying length and depth containing postholes. They were situated in a row and appeared to form a stockade or an enclosure. It was not closed and would have functioned quite poorly as a physical structure for keeping people out – or in. It probably had more of a symbolic function.

In the area we know of several more sites and they are generally found in two topographically different positions. They have been situated either on small islands off of the mainland or directly on the mainland shore, in the latter case the sites often are larger and indicate a more extensive usage, maybe as meeting-places. On the island sites, stone axes and occasional finds such as cores and flakes of flint are found. There are of ten no ceramics found at these locations. They probably had a special purpose in relation to the larger “real” settlement sites (for a model, see figure 10).

As already mentioned, it appears as though people divided the various activities spatially during the Early Neolithic period. Sometimes, but not always, one has also arranged particular areas for religious activities. The earth gave life and most certainly had its gods and tales, but still birth and death and maybe ancestry were strongly associated with the sea. The graves at Fågelbacken and Barksta points in that direction. We also have interpreted Bäcklunda as a site for special religious and ancestral activities connected to the Sea (cf. Karlenby 2005).

**Inland hunting or farming at Hidinge**

Our last example is the site at Hidinge where there were a large number of structures from the Early Neolithic. Amongst other things there were three houses or huts of the same type as those found in Bäcklunda. There were finds of flint, quartzite and quartz. Within a small, deposited layer there were burnt bones from pike and pig. In a pit we found pieces from several clay vessels of the Funnel Beaker type and also pieces of a clay plate, typical for the period.
Hidinge has many traits in common with Bäcklunda, for example the occurrence of huts and the location of the site on a weak, sandy elevation surrounded by water. Although there are differences as well. For instance that Bäcklunda was situated on an island in the sea and Hidinge was situated a good distance inland, alongside a lake and next to the mouth of a small river. The site also differs from the inland settlement site Skogsmossen, for Hidinge is missing the obvious connection to sacrificing. Hidinge is an example of places with a more indistinct character, where traits from both inland and meeting place settlements are found. This probably depends on the fact that the Funnel Beaker Culture reality was much more complex than shown by our model.

Figure 9. Plan of house at the Hidinge site. Postholes are black, cultural layer marked by dotted line.

Society’s duality and the system’s collapse

For the Late Mesolithic, social structure has, with the help of ethnographical parallels, been suggested to have been non-hierarchical and equal. In an effort to maintain equality in the community, the hunter-gatherers applied an exchange system, created rules against a concentration of prosperity and maintained a certain degree of mobility (Sundström 2004:181-188). It has been argued that this ideology was also maintained within the Funnel Beaker Culture (2004:191-194). Starting with the careful polishing of the greenstone axes, Lars Sundström
suggests that behind the identically looking axes lay the importance of maintaining an egalitarian structure. In fact this is characteristic for societies with a hunter-gatherer economy.

If this was the case, equilibrium was constantly threatened by the agricultural existence, but was strengthened through legendary hunter-gatherer forefathers and an idealisation of the old style of living. This was – according to Sundströms model – maintained at the coastal meeting-places (2004:189-191).

![Figure 10. Model of the idealised Funnel Beaker cultural system, organising life in different multipurpose sites.](image)

The archaeological record gives us a glimpse of a community with a strong internal social control, maintained through an intentional division of space into specialised settlements and ritual areas but also through a deliberate division of the space within these sites. The Funnel Beaker identity must have been extremely vulnerable and exposed as a result of the closeness to the hunter-gatherer culture north of the border, and there were also problems within the local Central Swedish Funnel Beaker society due to the ambivalent attitude towards its own identity. As an example, there are lots of places in southern Scandinavia, and specially in Denmark, where Funnel Beaker ceramics have been sacrificed in wetlands. But no other place in Scandinavia corresponds to the amount of finds in the marsh at Skogsmossen. In that respect the extensive
sacrificial offerings could be seen as a reinforcement of the southern Scandinavian tradition. The group’s way of life seems to have been threatened. This is most likely due to a closeness to the hunter-gatherer groups. The reinforcement of the own identity is thus a border phenomenon.

A society with a strong tension between the old and the new emerges. On the one side it had its farmer identity (as at Skogsmossen) with all its special rituals and a fertility focused cosmology, on the other side was the old hunting-gatherer identity, re-lived and never abandoned at the coastal meeting-places (as at Fägelbacken, Barksta and maybe Bäcklunda). Two social ideals collided and needed to be linked together. That such an identity dilemma arose at the border between the Funnel Beaker Culture and the hunter-gatherer groups is hardly a coincidence. This conflict between ideology and practice has possibly existed within the entire Swedish Funnel Beaker area. But it should have been especially tangible and of a constant current interest in the border zone near neighbors who lived as did the idealised forefathers. Some time around 3300 B.C. the situation became untenable. The Funnel Beaker groups came to let go of their ambivalent lifestyle. On the northern border the solution was that one actually abandoned the Funnel Beaker Culture way of life and made the transition to a hunter-gatherer existence, with the new characteristics of the Pitted Ware Culture.

Referring to the site Skogsmossen again, it is common that sites with accumulated wetland offerings have been used for long periods of time and continually for the entire Neolithic period or longer. This is not the case with the marsh at Skogsmossen. The sacrificing there gives more of an impression of having had come to a powerful crescendo and then an abrupt ending. The depositing ceased when the farming Funnel Beaker Culture disappeared from Central Sweden. The sacrificing was closely tied to a fertility cult. That they ceased shows clearly that the reorganisation of the society towards a Pitted Ware Culture involved an ideological-religious change where sacrificing in marshes no longer was of interest or desirable. The transition meant that one no longer had an interest in the farming gods.

In the southern Scandinavian Funnel Beaker area they had another strategy. There instead one held tightly onto the Funnel Beaker Culture. This society continued to develop during several hundreds of years, forming the megalithic Funnel Beaker Culture.

The Funnel Beaker Culture’s ethnicity

An important concept in order to understand the processes we speak of here is “ethnicity”. Used and misused in archeology during the 20th century the concept has only unwillingly been used in later years. Our discussion is based on the
definition of the concept *ethnicity* that has been presented by the Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1998). From that it is clear that ethnicity is not necessarily the same as culture. Cultural phenomenon – this also applies to the material culture – is spread between different ethnic groups and simply because one group uses the same types of objects as another, does not mean that they consider themselves to belong to the same group of people. However, in some cases, as in the relationship between the northern hunter-gatherer groups and the Funnel Beaker Culture farmers, the means – or one of the means – for expressing ethnic affiliation consists of the material culture, as the differences in material culture are so clearly articulated.

The need to express an ethnicity is the greatest at places that border towards other ethnic groups. In a lengthy ethnic situation it is necessary that both groups are interested in maintaining a difference between the two. It is obvious that the Funnel Beaker Culture was very eager to keep their ethnic sense of belonging clear and safe from alteration, but also the Mesolithic groups seem to have been anxious about this. Ethnicity does not exist in a vacuum. “It takes two to tango.”

The Funnel Beaker groups have accentuated themselves against the Mesolithic groups and they in return have made their mark. The lake Mälaren region groups have further distinguished themselves from other Funnel Beaker groups by abandoning this “culture” and moving onto the Pitted Ware Culture. This joint and simultaneous change could possibly indicate an "emic attribution category" shared by people in this area – an understanding of oneself as a group as opposed to both South Scandinavian Funnel Beaker Culture and northern Mesolithic groups.

How then can we understand the pronounced ethnicity that emerges through the material culture left after the Funnel Beaker groups and the Mesolithic hunters from the north in a “third space” perspective? The transition from being a farming funnel beaker maker to being a hunting and fishing pitted ware maker was just as little a return to something that had passed as the transition from a hunter-gatherer to a farmer was a development towards something, like a more developed and better existence. Changes should rather be seen as continuous, as a process that is driven forward through the meetings that occur in the third space. The ethnic definition of a group occurs in collaboration with other groups and changes are a result of discussions, meetings and conflicts. Bhabha speaks of a hybrid process that creates the third space. That which we encounter there is not a blending of two original elements that form a third, but the third space is the creative space where completely new positions are developed. The hybrid

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19 *Emic* as in the "natives" own perspective, its opposite being *ethic*, the researchers perspective (Eriksen 2002:12).
Encounters – Materialities – Confrontations

process involves a sort of negotiation situation. The third space allows for negotiation.

Bhabha’s concept of “the third space” constitutes a confrontation with the concept of binary opposites as for example man:woman, nature:culture etc (Bhabha 2004:53 ff; cf Odin (2005) and Hannula 2001). Naturally the same applies to the division that groups of people create when they choose to identify themselves with one ethnic group or another. The idea itself behind the ethnic thought is the dichotomy between Us and Them, but the result is more a melting pot where elements from both sides will be shaped by – and in turn reshape – one’s surroundings. The conditions for new ideas, thoughts and ethnic definitions are created in the third space. It was in just such a space that the conditions for the transition to a Pitted Ware Culture were “negotiated” forth.

References


