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Log book

Stig Welinder. Ethnicity, migration and materiality. Forest Finn archaeology

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1st Referee (anonymous)

Comments on the article “Ethnicity, migration and materiality. Forest Finn archeology”, by Stig Welinder.

The article, as well as a newly published book “Skogsfinsk arkeologi. Etnicitet i det materiella” (in Swedish), by the same author, is based on long-term research including field investigations of Forest Finnish settlements carried out by the author. Also, other (few existing) investigations of Forest Finnish settlements are referred to.

Archeological research of Forest Finns is still rare, and Forest Finnish remains are seldom touched upon in rescue projects. The research by professor Welinder, as well as this article, is thus both original and an important production of new knowledge of a research field in development. It should be noted that there is no comparative research being carried out in Finland. The research, and article, is also a contribution to the fairly new discipline of historical archaeology. The article deals with theoretical themes of importance to archaeology in general, such as ethnicity, materiality and the relationship written documents – archaeology. The last theme, however not problematized in great extent, being actualized by the new Swedish Heritage Act.

The article contributes new knowledge of importance in archaeology, and should be published. However, the article would benefit from some revisions in order to increase the international and general theoretical values of the article. In the following I will shortly go through the article and present my comments.

The article starts with the section “The history of the forest Finns”, where it is noticeable that the article is based on a book, as the presentation is too brief to be understandable for a reader without knowledge of early modern Scandinavian conditions and of Forest Finns. The text needs to be elaborated in order to make both the Scandinavian context and the special traits of the Forest Finns understandable to scholars without familiarity with the field. A good background will facilitate the line of argumentation later in the article. A description of the special household system of the forest Finns, later referred to, should be included in the presentation.

Following the introduction of the forest Finns follows three sections setting the theoretical agenda of the article “Ethnicity”, “The archeological meeting of two groups of people” and “Materiality”. I find this part of the article to be the part in most need of revision, in order to match the important archaeological results presented later. First, a coherent theoretical framework around ethnicity and materiality should be worked out, as the different theoretical approaches are presented apart. It is important that the theoretical framework “meets” the discussion and conclusion in the end of the article, and there is some “tightening up” needed to achieve this. For instance, processes of change and non-change and agrarian – technocomplex / cultural complex are elaborated in the discussion but not in the theoretical sections. Second, most of the references in theoretical sections are fairly old. They are of course valid, but should be discussed against competing, younger titles in their fields in order to increase the academic value of the article. For instance, the discussion of materiality would benefit greatly from including references to currently widely used publications on new materiality (eg. based on works

by Bruno Latour and Karen Barad). I would also suggest inclusion of the concepts “hybridization” or “creolisation” (mentioned in the discussion) as part of the theoretical framework.

The archeological material, four excavated forest Finn farms, is presented after the theoretical sections. The material, in spite of being only four farms, captures the important processes and changes characterizing the short history of forest Finnish settlements and lifestyle in Sweden. There is an example of a pioneer farm (Råsjö), giving testimony to the “landnam” phase, there are two early, but established farms (Grannäs and Avundsåsen), and a farm from the late stages of the “Swedishisation” process (Svartviken). The material is fairly complex; there are archaeological excavations with analyses of structures and artefacts, detailed mapping, pollen analyses, written documents and historical maps – although not all different source materials for all four sites. The author is responsible for much of the data collection.

The different sources are triangulated into narratives of the sites, with focus on forest Finnish traits such as *rökstugor*. However, the narratives are quite differently structured for the four sites. A more uniform mode of presentation would be a better basis for the argumentation of the topics discussed later in the article. A few, personal and somewhat speculative, statements could be reformulated in a more neutral way.

The discussion-sections, “Forest Finn materiality”, “The forest Finn cultural complex”, “The process of change and non-change” and “Forest Finn materiality and ethnicity” focus on the topics forest Finn materiality, agrarian techno and cultural complex, processes of change and non-change of the whole forest Finn complex (with comparison to the frontier societies of the American west) and ethnicity. The author draws the threads together and produces an interpretation of the material as well as a coherent conclusion. The two main symbols of the forest Finnish cultural complex, *rökstugor* and *huuhtas* (swiddens), were important in the period of settlement (colonization), but were successively abandoned in the process of Swedification. The discussion is based on the archaeological results but compared with the historical narrative based on written documents. There is a great accord between the narratives based on different source material, which should have been discussed from a source critical point of view. What is the potential for archaeology to contribute to history writing in historical periods?

I would also suggest to the author to consider stating a hybridization perspective throughout the discussion. Now the perspective is present but under other “umbrellas”. Through a use of “hybridization” the different themes in the discussion-sections could be more neatly tied together.

To sum up. The article is based on original research, although published also in a book in Swedish. It presents new knowledge and results of importance not only to the studies of forest Finns, but also to other fields such as historical archaeology, material culture and ethnicity. ***The article should be published, but with revisions.*** I have listed, above, both necessary changes and suggested areas of improvement. I have especially pointed out the theoretical parts of the article, as a little reflection and work from the author on these parts would make the article much more useful also for scholars not dealing with forest Finns or neighboring fields.

Finally, the article presents new knowledge and important interpretations, but also – as all good research – raises new questions and a wish to know more about the forest Finns and their material culture.

Reviewer: Charlotta Hillerdal

Ethnicity, migration and materiality. Forest Finn archaeology, *Stig Welinder*

The Forest Finns are a group of people that has been a neglected part of Sweden's and Norway's history, and as Welinder points out, very few archaeological investigations have focused on these settlements. Therefore, his paper is a welcome addition to our current understanding of the archaeology and history of northern Scandinavia. It is likewise important to emphasise the heterogenic culture and lifestyle of the north and different interactions and migrations that have taken place up until present times.

Welinder suggests that the process of settling the forests of Finnmark as well as the changes the settlers go through after the encounter with their new environment can be studied through the archaeological material. The history of the forest Finns are known mainly through written documentation, and as a marginalised group in the Swedish and Norwegian societies, it is not as well documented as other groups in society. In addition much of what is known of the Forest Finns is based in prejudices and the Swedes and Norwegians accounts of their neighbours, the 'others' in this northern society.

The aim of Welinder's paper, to put an archaeological focus on the forest Finns, is commendable, but the study does not hold enough evidence to convincingly make any conclusions of the material ethnicity of the forest Finns. It is rather a pilot study, or a proposition of a research area, and should maybe have been presented in this way.

Welinder's paper contains many interesting facts and he makes some intriguing suggestions for further discussions – such as the relation between people and place in questions of identity. However, he does not follow up on them, which may be down to the fact that his article is quite extensive already. At times, it is lost in detail, which makes the overall discussion hard to follow.

The description of the four excavated farms Welinder bases his paper on is very detailed and reads almost like a report, too detailed for this paper. This section would gain from some editing. Different details are given more attention between the different sites. It is hard to get an overview, and the comparison between the different sites is not clear. For example, the results from the pollen diagrams should be summarised focussing on the changing landscape rather than core levels. The tables in this section are not easily comprehensible. They also vary between percent and number of fragments, which makes them hard to compare, nor do they add up. It would be useful if they all kept to the same format. They also need some explanation.

I question whether 'rökstuga' is a significant enough term in Swedish not to be translated into English.

In general, there are quite a few repetitions throughout the text. I think the discussions under the headings *Ethnicity*, *The archaeological meeting of two groups of people*, and *Materiality* would be improved if merged under one heading.

I do not think the reference to the American frontier add anything to this study.

As previously stated, Welinder bases his paper on four partially excavated forest Finn farms, identified through written material. Which such a small material there is a huge risk that it is interpreted according to preconceived ideas of forest Finn identity. Welinder is aware of this danger, but still attempt to sketch a general pattern for the development of forest Finn identity over time. I do not find it very convincing. In light of Welinder's material and discussion, it is rather heterogeneity and local variation in 'forest Finn ethnicity'. Can we really identify one forest Finn identity, and one development pattern?

Welinder makes many interesting, but speculative, suggestions in relation to forest Finn identity, but because of how the discussion is structured, is it sometimes hard to separate our preconceptions & ideas and knowledge of the Forest Finns and the evidence based on empirical material. This could be made more evident.

I find Welinder's study a very interesting contribution to contemporary northern archaeology. However, the paper is in need of some editing. The section on the archaeological investigations can be shortened and given some clearer focus. The text is at times repetitive; the structure could be improved to give the discussion a clearer direction and aim. The text is also in need of proofreading, and would benefit from a language revision.

Author's comments

Stig Welinder

There are advantages in the author not being known by name by the referees. The opposite anonymity is less obvious. In my view, a referee that will not disclose her name shows a lack of courage. My manuscript "Ethnicity, migration and materiality. Forest Finn archaeology" has been commented upon by one referee of each kind.

One of the referees has suggested changes that will lengthen the text; the other one has suggested what ought to be excluded, thus shortening the text. Both have good arguments, and I have followed some of their advice. The result is that the second version of the manuscript is about as long as the first one. The reason why the referees have made these remarks and some others on the disposition of the manuscript is that it is an abbreviated version of a full book – *Skogsfinnsk arkeologi. Etnicitet i det materiella (Archaeology of the Forest Finns. The ethnicity of material culture)* (Finnbygdens Förlag, Falun 2014). Perhaps it is not a good idea to turn 278 pages into a tenth of that number.

However, as both referees have kindly remarked, the manuscript presents a new field of archaeology that is interesting and worth an article, especially as the book is printed in Swedish with only a very short abstract. The problem appears when the article should discuss concepts of the current debate in the humanities and social sciences at the same time. Both referees ask for that. I have emphasized the former, merely defined the concepts that we have chosen as the starting-point in our discussion of a number of questions together with the field-data, and done that referring to the ideas that were of importance for us in the beginning of our research program.¹ Is it desirable or tiring that all articles describe the same current theoretical authorities and position themselves in relation to these authorities? In my view, it is the latter.

Given that aim of the article, of course the remark that the section "The history of the Forest Finns" is too brief for less informed international readers is adequate. I have stressed that persons migrated to an area where they met people with a partly different material culture. Of most

interest to add is perhaps that they migrated because of protracted war along the Russian border, particularly severe outrage by their own army, oppression by the nobility, a poorly failed rebellion, and bad times as concerns crops. The Crown gave the migrants free land and freedom from taxes during 6–8 years. Both individuals and full families migrated. Some cleared farms in the *finnmarker* to be, i.e. areas with almost only Finnish-speaking immigrants in the Swedish-speaking part of the early-modern kingdom, including both approximately present-day Sweden and Finland. Others became workers in for example mines and on the land of the nobility.

Another adequate remark as concerns the cultural-historically descriptive part of the manuscript is that the presentation of the four excavated sites ought to have been more uniform.

Unfortunately, that is not possible. The potential for field-surveying and excavating the four sites were not the same. It is a matter of taphonomy that the landscape, the farmyards, the buildings, and the objects in the refuse have not been uniformly researched. The matter is hinted at in the introduction to the section “The excavated farms”. An alternative might have been to form one ideal Forest Finn farm out of the fragments. Instead, we chose to bring out variation and temporal change. As the referees have commented, our model may seem speculative based on scanty data as it is. Multi-paths models of change may be the interesting models. We certainly believe that is the way to go when more Forest Finn sites have been excavated. Today we can only point at different times of some features of change in different *finnmarker*, e.g. the time of abandonment of the characteristic Finnish rökstugor, i.e. living-houses with stone-built ovens without a chimney. The hope in the near future is the – in other ways controversial – wind power-mills. The Forest Finn sites are located in the many of the areas where such mills are planned to be built.

We have organized our Forest Finnish sites according to a number of models on migration and the meeting between different groups of people. That was a common research strategy during my archaeological youth in the 1970s. The referee with a name claims that “the reference to the American frontier adds [no]thing to this study.” That is the point – there are different kinds of migrations and the Forest Finn migration has only little in common with the European one across the prairie. Readers that agree with the referee may utilize the possibilities of an Internet

journal and omit the paragraphs in question. They begin with the phrase “A classic in this area” and ends with the phrase “the local societal context”.

If the manuscript is written as a text discussing theoretical concepts to be used in an analysing interpretative discussion, it is to be noted that we have used the concept ‘ethnicity’. That concept was introduced in Scandinavian archaeology in my generation in Saami archaeology in the early 1980s, first in Norway. The concept was much debated, worn out, and eventually replaced by the concept ‘identity’ or ‘cultural identity’. I have mentioned that in the second version of the manuscript. It is of little importance for our discussion. Scanty, almost prehistorical archaeological data is not the best basis for an in-depth discussion of complex human relations.

On the other hand, archaeology is good on discussing landscapes and places. One of the referees asks for a more extensive discussion of “the relation between people and place in questions of identity.” That is a good idea. I wish that that idea had emerged within our research group years ago. Living in the *finnmarker* in the marginal parts of the pre-migration parishes was something else than living in the old Swedish villages in the centre of the parishes around the church-village. I doubt that such a discussion can start with the excavation of a few single farms, but an overall discussion of the location of historically known Forest Finnish and Swedish farms and villages, respectively, may be an idea, maybe in relation to the from the excavated farms known process of change towards living in the Swedish way in the *finnmarker*. Perhaps someday, I will write that article.

The final paragraph touches upon a third aim of the article proposed by one of the referees. She (?) asks for a discussion of “the potential for archaeology to contribute to history writing in historical periods.” That is a good proposition, although I believe that archaeology does not only contribute – archaeology writes history in its own right from other kinds of data on other aspects of what it is to be humans and form human societies. Well, someday I may write that article, too.

A last a few words in defence. I have used a few Swedish words, e.g. *rökstuga*, after a hopefully sufficient explanation. We have found no good English equivalences, which will not bring with it

misleading associations. I have again and again hit upon such words in my writing on early modern archaeology, e.g. *fåbod* (= Eng. chalet, shieling, summer farm).

The two tables are not organised in the same way, which has irritated one of the referees. She asks for percentages and total numbers in Table 2 to make it comparable to Table 1. The only figure in common is the percentage of domestic and wild animals in the refuse faunas. Those percentages are not quite easy to calculate for the Grannäs fauna in Table 2, because there are bones determined to either cattle or moose. The approximate percentage is given in the text. The point that hunting contributed little to the subsistence economy of the household is obvious, as is the difference compared to the Råsjö household, and between the early and late houses at the Råsjö site.

The remarks by the two referees have made me able somewhat to improve the article by rewriting some of it. When the referees have asked for another article than the one I had written and intended to write, I have not followed their suggestions as explained above.

¹ The manuscript is based on archaeological fieldwork conducted by the Department of Humanities at the Mid Sweden University, the Värmlands Museum (the County Museum in Värmlands län County) and the Länsmuseum Gävleborg (the County Museum in Gävleborgs län County) during 1997–2008. The book “Skogsfinsk arkeologi. Etnicitet i det materiella” was written by a dozen persons.