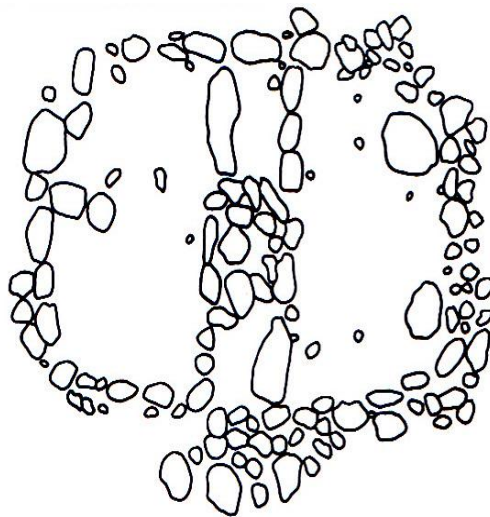




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**The Slettnes type:
Proto-Sámi dwellings in Northern Norway 0-1050 AD**



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Front page: plan drawing of a tent ring on Kola Peninsula excavated by Itkonen, T.I. After Olsen 1993.

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Abstract:

This thesis centers around the so-called Slettnes type houses appearing around 0 AD in coastal areas of Troms and Finnmark. These dwellings usually feature stone rows leading from the hearth, resembling Sámi practices of floor partitioning known from extant historical sources. Similar features are known from the Paleo-Eskimo cultures of Greenland and North-Eastern Canada. The paper loosely employs theoretical perspectives of the 'new materialist' school to better understand this cross-cultural phenomenon. In the initial literature following the excavations at Slettnes in the early 1990s, the inconspicuous remains of the small, circular turf houses or tent ring from the first millennium ADs were championed as a 'type'. On an aggregate level, the paper aims to elucidate the foundations of this definition. Survey data has also been compiled and presented. A discussion on problems relating to relative dating of these remains is also included

1. Introduction

1.1 The Slettnes type

In the initial literature following the excavations at Slettnes, the namesake ‘*Slettnestuft*’ (*tuft* - Engl. ‘house foundation or remains appearing as depressions or raised masses in the terrain’) was coined for the remains of the small, circular Iron Age turf house/hut (Olsen 1993). *Tuft* is essentially interchangeable with ‘house remains’ or simply ‘house’ in English, although the Norwegian term illustratively lends itself better to things survey-related and the like. The term *Slettnestuft* still appears in the Norwegian language literature (e.g. Nilsen 2004; Sommerseth 2009) but is in other cases disregarded (e.g. Bratrein 1996). In the English literature, however, (*Sámi*)/Iron Age turf house/tent is used exclusively in its stead (e.g. Olsen et. al. 2011; Myrvoll 2011).

At the onset of the 1990s, the Iron Age archaeology of North Troms and Finnmark was in dire need of a lead house type; indeed, concrete traces of *any* house structures were hard to come by (Hesjedal et. al. 1996: 34). Perhaps this goes some way in explaining the hasty establishment (and namesake) of the Slettnes house as a ‘type’ in its own right. While chronological and morphological demarcations are fairly adoptable with regard to the preceding late Neolithic semi-subterranean Gressbakken and Early Metal Age Mortensnes houses (though not without controversy, see Wasmuth 2005), we shall see that the basic form of the Slettnes type persists in later dwellings into the Middle Ages, and even the Early Modern Period; in which case the Slettnes designation quickly falls out of use. In the broadest terms, we are dealing here with what appears simply as a tent ring, a structure template that in some shape or form makes appearances throughout the entirety of the archaeological record of the sub-arctic (and beyond). However, I will argue that the distribution pattern, the temporal and geographical proximity of the Slettnes sites to other contemporaneous categories, as well as some minutiae pertaining to the excavated structures and their inventory, make the Slettnes type – or at least the archaeological and cultural context it represents – a discernable category. The Slettnes house is likely to be a precursor to the historically recorded *Sámi goahti* and *lávvu* traditions of turf/earthen houses/tents. As such, ethnographic and experimental sources may provide insight into the nitty-gritty of how the Slettnes houses were built and used.

Both *turf house* and *tent* are used when referring to the Iron Age dwellings, and Myrvoll (2011: 83) clarifies that the house type was in continuous use up until the 20th century. More recent instances of this type are more easily observable and therefore recorded in greater

numbers. Diminished with time, the older *versions* of these houses, Myrvoll (2011: 83) clarifies, are much harder to find. The diagnostic traits of the Slettnes house is the central hearth with stone rows – occasionally, slightly diverging - running from the entrance and to the hearth, and sometimes from the back wall (possibly back exit) and to the hearth. Furthermore, they are located in close proximity to slab-lined pits and small boathouses/boatsheds. (Myrvoll 2011: 83). The boathouses found in relation to the slab-lined pits and/or Iron Age round houses are typically narrow and shallow in morphology and mirror the distribution of the aforementioned categories closely (e.g. Olsen 2011: 57, Myrvoll 2001: 18).

1.2 Research goals

At the start of this project, my intentions were to form a chronological comparison using site configuration and inventories in order to place the sites in the background of societal changes throughout the Iron Age (0-1050 AD). Other points of interest included the familiar archaeological tropes of seasonality and settlement patterns. However, the number of excavated sites is still very low, and my findings did not differ from observations made after the first excavations at Slettnes in 1992 and 1993 (Hesjedal et. al. 1996). A synopsis of the broader conclusions made as well as inquiries raised by these contributions will be provided

While I will present these findings in a more limited form, my focus has shifted towards the mysterious stone rows leading from the Slettnes house hearths. As an undergraduate student, connections between architectural form and social space sparked my interest. The idea that architectural features or forms could facilitate and maintain ideologies was intriguing.

The main allure of the mid-passage features lies in that they have parallels in the Paleo-Eskimo of Greenland and North-Eastern Canada, preceding the Slettnes houses by almost 3000 years. Ulla Odgaard (2001) has referenced the Slettnes houses in her argument for the existence of a Pan-Arctic shamanistic idea-complex reflected in the mid-passage ruins of these cultures. The Slettnes houses, then, are an epiphenomenon of this conceptual complex. While an exotic idea, it serves as a seminal springboard into attempting to understand why the mid-passage phenomenon has occurred. One of goals of this paper is to contrast Odgaard's claims with the Slettnes house material and through this, attempt to understand what caused this great cross-cultural similarity.

The presence of mid-passage rows in the Slettnes houses has led Norwegian archaeologists to emphasize its proto-Sámi qualities. In doing so, I believe the similarities to Sámi ethnography have been exaggerated and simplified. I shall make an attempt at bringing nuance to this comparison.

As it stands, structural remains from the period in question have been treated individually in rather broad intervals in terms of time of publication, and have yet to be subject to systematic comparative and classificatory methods. Another goal of this paper is to collect and review the data at hand for posterity, and to determine problems with data reliability and definitions. These inconspicuous Iron Age dwelling remains of the high north were initially championed as the Slettnes type'. I also aim to elucidate what – exactly – is said to constitute a Slettnes type house. A great deal of these have recently been registered through surface surveys. The paper aims to examine problems relating to relative dating of these structures. For the sake of brevity, I will be using 'Slettnes type' to denote the the faint traces of round turf houses/tents appearing alongside particular boatsheds/houses and slab-lined pits in the Iron Age and into the Medieval period of Northern Norway. To avoid any contention, I should clarify that this designation is in a purely provisional.

What is clear from the above is that the Iron Age period in Finnmark probably has seen a certain degree of neglect in Norwegian archaeology. Next, I will provide a short background regarding the historical circumstances behind this oversight.

First, however, an aggregated look at the history of Norwegian archaeology's relation to Sámi material is required to explain the significance of the historical dimension regarding the development and current state of Sámi archaeology.

1.3 The Northern void

In its pre-formalised 19th century state, the discipline of archaeology concerned itself with finding the origin and character of "peoples". In the first half of the 1800s, the Sámi were considered the indigenous and "first" population of Northern Scandinavia. They were even romanticised by some for being free of the unnatural corruption brought on by the rise of industrialisation and urbanity. Other characterisations were less commendable, viewing the Sámi as degenerate or lacking in character. Towards the end of 1800s, however, the new-found discovery of human evolution resonated with nationalist ideology and was made to

adhere to the zeitgeist of social darwinism. (Hansen & Olsen 2004) Until the onset of the 1970s, Northern Scandinavia was considered a passive, distant periphery ripe for exploitation at the hands of traders, pillagers and tax collectors closer to the power centres in the South and to the East. The natural resources of the North were regarded as the contested spoils of powerful and wealthy outside agents (Mulk 1996: 48-49).

As briefly touched here, the Iron Age of North Troms and Finnmark has been neglected in large part due to the rise of nationalism in the 20th and 21st centuries. Through the 1970s, a number of political and intellectual movements cascaded and resulted in an increased interest in historical Sámi archaeology. From the outset of this renewed interest into the Sámi-Norse relations in the Iron Age, economy was the main template from which to extrapolate inquiries into ethnicity and social organisation. This is in large part due to the pioneering work of anthropologist Knut Odner (1983) having great influence on researchers at the University of Tromsø. A prime example of one such work is Jørn Henriksen's (1995) thesis on the slab-lined pits found mainly in the first millennium AD. The archaeology milieu at the University of Tromsø has been instrumental in the increased interest and growing knowledge surrounding the period (Schanche 1992, Hansen & Olsen 2004).

While we in recent years have been successful in piecing together especially the latter part of the Late Iron Age, the Roman and Migration periods remain rather barren. This perceived "void" may naturally, in part, be attributed to happenstance and the logistics of cultural heritage management. By the same token, the period yields traces of activity and habitation that are hard to spot in the terrain or that are difficult to date. Nonetheless, Norwegian archaeology's inherent relation to the interests of the state may have facilitated a disregard for archaeology with little utility in the nation-building narrative (Østigård 2000). Given that Iron Age finds in the northernmost regions of Norway are predominantly Sámi, we can appreciate this point. Despite increased interest in Sámi archaeology from the 1970s, some latency is to be expected when piecing together the Iron Age puzzle. One possibility is that a significant quantity of surveyed turf houses could have been dated to later or earlier periods in error, as postulated by Schanche (1992). We can consider the possibility that the problem is twofold: on one hand there has been a lack of research interest in the period; on the other, the archaeology from the first millennium may simply not yield many finds – or that we haven't found them.

In the next chapter, I will present some of the theoretical perspectives informing this paper.

2. Background

2.1 Theoretical perspectives

The notion that our corporeal, worldly existence is a mere veil is seemingly nigh-primordial. We can cite, for example, the gnostic tradition, or Plato's allegory of the cave. Descartes divided the makeup of reality into *res extensa* – of the physical world, and *res cogitans* – of the mind. Kant distinguished between noumena – things in themselves – and phenomena – objects accessible via sensory input. The noumena, the *ding-an-sich*, was outside the grasp of comprehension, a 'border concept'. The phenomena will always be distortions of the inaccessible, albeit ontologically present, reality (Olsen 2010: 64-67, 83).

In recent years, an 'ontological turn' of sorts towards materiality and things has taken place across several disciplines (Olsen 2010: 22). These eclectic approaches are loosely associated with post-structuralism in that they attempt to dismantle dualisms, at the same time challenging the ancient philosophical problem of identity and difference. Actor-network theory (hereafter ANT) is based on the premise that material objects have (non-intentional) agency, and that the relationship – envisioned as a nodal network – between human and non-human agents, as well as semiotic concepts, must be accounted for to understand various constituents of society (Latour 1999, 2005). Proponents of phenomenology have shown that first-person conscious experience is always directed at something; always situated within physical embodiment (Merleau-Ponty 1962) and in a field of material objects (Heidegger 1962). In the 20th century, phenomenology challenged the subject-object/ideal-material dichotomy and anthropocentric ontology prevalent in the various branches of analytic philosophy. Here, the experience and appearance of an object comes before its attributes and qualities. Espousing a form of ontological 'realism' suited for an historical-interpretive framework, along with the prominence of material objects, these perspectives have predictably come to be appropriated by archaeologists interested in these matters.

The philosophical underpinnings are infinitely complex, but a common thread is an antipathy to reductionism or demarcations of compound objects of different kinds, whether they be social or physical.

To Latour, all different actors should be viewed as being of the same kind and level of importance – all that matters is the relation, the network. But can objects be reduced to their phenomenological presentation, their properties, effects or relations?

My intention is not to slavishly follow any single theory, but rather to draw from a wealth of perspectives in different contexts. The primacy of human movers, ideological superstructure,

as well as adaptive-functionalist are a given, and serve as running themes in a majority of anthropological and archaeological research, including models and interpretations of Norway's Iron Age society. I suspect these parameters will be adequately accounted for throughout the text. However, it is in between these conventional explanations that I wish to embed the 'turn towards things' and their capacity to extract a certain nuance. Based on the material at hand – the coastal Iron Age settlements of northern Norway - I wish to stress the mutual constitution of materiality, society and ideology.

2.1.1 The conical lodge – a binding together of forces and materials

Anthropologist and theoretician Tim Ingold has been influential in 'new materialism'. Over the years he has attempted to revitalize the artisan, doing away with the legacy of mechanized industrialization. In a 2013 essay, Ingold (2013) writes about the processes of building – seen here as the binding of material forces and fluxes – that go into a vernacular tent, such as those traditional Sámi lavvu. He contends that the building of such a structure was not an instance of architecture according to prior specifications, but a continual process of binding together forces and materials. Ingold draws from Deleuze & Guattari's concept of the 'rhizome', a labyrinthine mind map without beginning or end and in constant flux. Instead of oscillating between idealist or materialist monisms, culture/nature, or imposed static states, we should here attempt to 'explore' the ontological totality without assigning causal primacy to any single part of the chain. According to Deleuze & Guattari (1987: 5-12), western intellectual traditions have a proclivity towards what can be characterized as arborescent, hierarchical and linear models of knowledge and being; an image of thought fashioned as a tree with its roots. From ethnography, we've gathered that our abstractions – dualisms between, for example, what we call culture and what we call nature - are not a priori universals in the minds of all humans. Rather, ontologies, belief systems, hierarchies and categorizations according to identity and difference etc., it is argued, are historically situated, sometimes related to particular practices and uses of the environment (Ingold 1992).

Vernacular architecture is widely recognized, Ingold holds, as being different from modern architecture in that it uses local materials, is habitual and not very self-aware. The forms – the specifications – are nonetheless presumed to be carried through the generations by means of cultural tradition, unbeknownst to the builders themselves (Ingold 2013: 15). The orthodox way of thinking about art and architecture in the western world is illustrated by Aristotle's notions of form (*morphe*) and matter (*hyle*). According to the hylomorphic model, the forms

(implying design) inhabiting the world were the result of projected ideal form in the mind of the maker onto the inanimate material (Ingold 2013: 14). Creation thus begins with a finished product, implying an inversion of the actual chain of events. The hylomorphic model is also related to a wider view of the world - from the submicroscopic, molecular level to brick buildings – as constituted by building blocks. Building with such materials is based in structural mechanics, requiring withstanding the force of gravity. A tent, on the other hand, is more akin to a sail or glider, in that it should deflect or channel the wind so as to not be carried away (Ingold 2013: 18-19). This contrasts with the geostatic ‘house’ consisting of building blocks.

The conical lodge, Ingold argues, is a meshwork gathering of materials, experience and people in flux - all dispersing and combining again in a different configuration. In this sense, a *lávvu* or tipi-like tent variant as a form has certain inherent qualities, but it is in the convergence of its inhabitants and its physicality that it actualizes its thingness (Ingold 2013: 20-21, 28) – specifically the holistic potential of its intrinsic socio-technic properties and qualities. At core, it is a combination of three crafts: the tactile frame of carpentry - the textile canvas of weaving, and the hearth of masonry. On the microscale, the transfer of building and textile techniques requires hands-on engagement, rather than passive osmosis through means verbal or conceptual. A human agent can also leave an imprint of his or her social biography in the process of creation of fashioned materials (Ingold 2000: 253-254). Affordances – inherent potential properties – in both substance and craftsman, are first actualized and activated in this synergistic coming-together (Gibson 1986: 137-140). Ingold suggests, drawing from Gibson, that the tent is both of the earth and the sky, its roots in the earth and its frame in the sky. In contrast is the striated space of the farmer, where the earth presents itself as a resistance to be overcome in discord with the sky, Ingold likens the earth of the nomad to the smooth space of a seafarer riding the waves (Ingold 2013: 26-27). From the vantage within the lodge, what is perceived and felt is the ever-changing earth underneath, and the sky, with its winds, at the roof apex – forming an earth-sky. This is in stark contrast to the notion of landscape, through which the earth and the static flooring is perceived from detached distance as separate from the sky.

2.1.2 Critical considerations

Ingold’s ‘nomad’-description seems like a bit of a non-sequitur in the context of the Sámi. Deleuze & Guattari’s (1987) nomad is a mode of thought; a post-modern subject transgressing

institutional boundaries. In a way, it's not dissimilar to the simple-complex classification of hunter-gatherers, shown to be far more problematic than assumed at the onset. The seafaring analogy may fit well with some pastoral herders, but the coastal environment of northern Norway is rife with navigable landmarks and features. Furthermore, circumpolar hunter-gatherers enculturate the landscape, assigning and leaving signatures that serve as waypoints (Jordan 2011: 28-29). Also, as we shall see in chapter 2., the internal organization of the Sámi tent seems to conform more to the idea of striated space. Despite these problems, Ingold is touching on some key concerns in the perception of the environment – which was surely, in many ways, different from our own.

A tent will not build itself. Ingold's point, I presume, is that it will not materialize itself from an ethereal mental plane either. The locus of form and transformation, in Ingold's view, is found in the creative interaction between the builder/craftsman and the materials brought together and combined in various ways. Here, the frame and canvas materials, not to mention the surrounding microtopography, the local ecosystem and even the current weather, actively inform and affect the intentional, human actors. To Ingold, form-giving is life: the processes of formation usurp the 'finished' product; materials in flux, flow and transformation supersede static states of matter as viewed from the detached and dualistic 'ontic' perspective. Form itself is death. But what about the function and value of material form as a form of memory and source of identity? As (foremostly) an anthropologist, Ingold arguments, I think, are informed by a synchronic frame of inference. Through the 'longue durée' wavelengths of archaeological time frames, forms of tools and housing structures display a temporal and geographic family resemblance, a formality and regularity often so pervasive that taxonomic methodologies (typology) can be effective for relative dating even within very small time margins. To Assmann (2006: 69), this is indicative of a transmitted cultural and material 'will to form'. From the archaeological perspective, Ingold's reduction of 'cultural tradition' is problematic. But what if 'cultural tradition' is seen more as embedded within an ensemble of people, materials and forms? However, we must concede that variation in form is actively subdued in our generalized models, emphasizing idealized patterns against outliers producing 'noise'.

Like Deleuze & Guattari (1987), Ingold is attempting to overcome the anthropocentric and dualistic way of thinking so deeply ingrained in our worldview. Following the cascading, metaphor-laden abstractions and alien rhetoric employed, it sometimes becomes difficult

remain grounded in concrete matters. Ingold (2010: 98) likens the artisanal process with incremental improvisation; always fluid and creative. But what about habitual performance? Consider the perspective of a touring musician. Performance is here second nature; notation appearing in the mind's eye as carts on a track, spider-fingered arpeggios effortlessly channeled through muscle memory and so forth. Ingold's transference of very different processes of production, such as the sawing of planks, to preparing and working pieces for a tent is ill-fitting for a number of reasons. Trying to construct and pitch a tent without a plan is a bad idea. We must also consider one of the characteristic features of the Iron Age: the mass-production and commodification of prized artefacts. So, it can be argued, the perceived abduction of form onto matter has real implications. In the minds of people, this can readily occur, and does so without the need to invoke some genealogical link to Aristotelian metaphysics. Still, any instance of manual production is, by definition, at most itinerative; similar but variable.

Whilst keeping in mind Ingold's points as well as their shortcomings, we will turn or focus to more functional modes of mundane explanation.

2.2 Floor plan, materials and mobility

In his 1993 article on newly-discovered Slettnes houses, Olsen touches on the relationship between round floor plans and high seasonal mobility, as well as the phenomenological and mythological link connecting the floor plan with seasonal movement of the group and the Sámi cosmos. In the following, I will attempt to detail the first point brought up by Olsen.

From 2000 BC to 0 AD, we can observe the following changes: from large, rectangular dug-down houses with two hearths and large wall foundations to medium-sized, oval, single hearth (usually) huts with floors only slightly lower than the surrounding terrain, and finally to the small, circular, single hearth domicile known as the Slettnes type. As Olsen (1993) touches on in his article, it may behoove us to step back and make a simple comparison between the basic properties of rectangular and circular house shapes, and to better understand why this change took place and what it entails in practical terms.

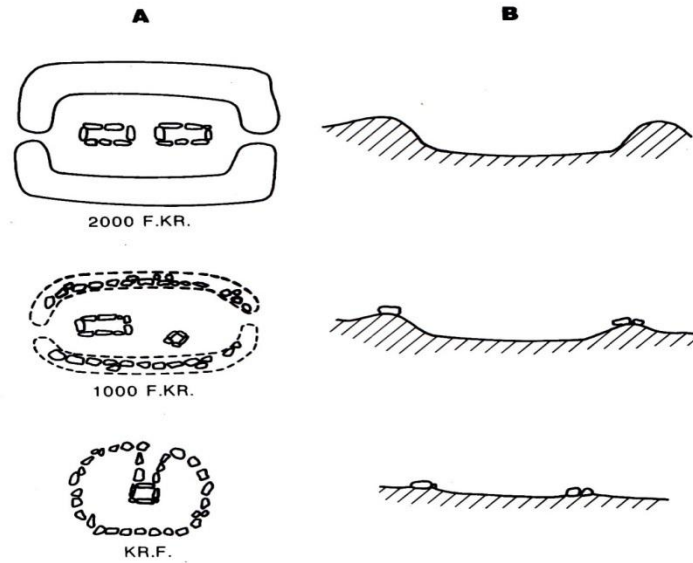


Figure 1: changes in Finnmark's house types ranging from the Early Metal Period to the beginning of the 1st millennium.

In the ethnoarchaeological 1990 article “Mobility, Housing and Environment: A Comparative Study”, Lewis Binford tackles social complexity by examining hunter-gatherer housing needs and ways in which housing is related to mobility and subsistence strategies. A large body of historical and ethnographic data is compiled specifically on the relationship between housing and mobility. In typical culture-ecological fashion, degrees of mobility are classified as nomadic, seminomadic (i.e. foragers & residential mobility), semisedentary (collectors, logistical mobility & delayed return) and sedentary. (Binford 1990: 119-122, Winterhalder 2001: 22-23). Binford's finds strong correlations between circular and semicircular house plans and the first two stages of mobility, while the sedentary stages are correlated with rectangular house plans and, to a lesser degree, semicircular ones. A tendency for mobile groups to use the same material for roof and sides is found, with a converse pattern observable in sedentary peoples – with the exception of when secondary houses are utilized in the mobile phases of sedentary organization. He contends that mobile peoples tend to use easily transportable materials such as hides or locally procured materials, depending on economic practicality. Finally, transportation of portable housing units (i.e. prepared frames, poles, hides, etc.) is dependent on means of transportation, meaning boats or snow mobiles allow for greater flexibility in moving materials. (Binford 1990: 120 – 130).

Ethnographic examples of fully nomadic peoples from higher latitudes or temperate-arctic area are fairly scarce, while Binford's 'seminomads' are the most common category of hunter-gatherers world-wide, as well as in higher latitudes. On a global scale, Binford's data clearly demonstrates a correlation between winter sedentism and harsh winters. He goes on to suggest that storage investment and mobility during the warmer parts of the annual cycle is key to survival in higher latitudes. What's more, conditions in gradually higher latitudes force hunter-gatherers to focus on animals rather than plant foods due to availability. Aquatic biomes are especially advantageous to northern hunter-gatherers, as these require smaller ranges, less annual residential movements and offer higher predictability. With subsistence security and decrease in mobility, increased population densities could in turn set the stage for different stages of social complexity. (Binford 1990: 130-149). Among others, the comparatively 'complex' Nunamiut Eskimo are known to transport cover materials as well as structural wooden poles. Binford postulates transporting housing materials is mostly beneficial (energy effective) in the case of mid-to-low mobility lifeways. In sub-arctic areas with less readily available material for use in the construction of dwellings, there may be more of an incentive to transport materials (Binford 1990: 128). What Binford seems to suggest is that the technology of housing is a result of the strategies employed by the given hunter-gatherer group – strategies that are environmentally determined (Binford 1990: 124).

Another study by Arwen Feather, this time using a different data set, also correlates circular floor plans with mobility - and rectangular plans with residential permanence (Feather 1996). We should be familiar with the explanation offered: choice of floor plan is part of minimizing energy investment and risk in a subsistence strategy (Feather 1996: 57). Feather argues for several inherent advantages to circular dwellings: they retain heat more efficiently, are more stable and resistant to physical stressors like wind and rain; their shape is highly compact, enclosing a large volume with minimal structure and building materials; and finally, structural integrity can be accomplished using portable materials (Feather 1996: 61). However, such structures lend themselves poorly to elaborate structural expansions to the base form and are not very compatible with heavy, durable roofing materials (Feather 1996: 57-61). Rectangular houses have larger interior volumes, are easily partitioned or added to, both in plane and vertically without destabilizing, and the roof distributes weight evenly. The construction of sturdy rectangular houses is a high investment ordeal, requiring high weight material for use in structural elements like posts and bracings. (Feather 1996: 61). Feather holds that communities mainly incorporating circular dwellings tend to have communal qualities, and have limited potential for social inequality (Feather 1996: 64).

In Feather's study, circular housing solutions were said to negatively correlate with structural expansions. The expansion of the arch-beamed *goahti* frame should in this respect provide a clear counterexample (see 2.3). Beyond that, it has become increasingly clear that 'modern' hunter-gatherers cannot be understood as synchronic entities, but rather as active agents interacting with surrounding groups, shaped integrally by relations to the wider world (Olsen 1994: 22). Crudely put, modern hunter-gatherers can no longer provide 'authentic' insight. Nonetheless, there are (arguably) only so many housing solutions within possibility whilst simultaneously upholding a mobile settlement pattern and nomadic way of life. The crux of the matter lies not in floor plan per se, but in the flexibility offered by the given housing solution – and it is this flexibility that is associated with circular and oval structural templates. Let's look at some concrete examples of Ingold's 'converging flows of materials' illustrated by the data accounted for above.

2.3 Sámi vernacular architecture

The Sámi residential unit, the *goahti*, is said to have seen use in the form of various iterations from the Middle Ages up into the 1900s. The *goahti* term encompasses a wide variety of housing solutions, from large, multi-room earthen houses to lighter, tent-like constructions – even including the post or rafter based 'Norwegian huts', known from 16th century fishing villages in Northern Norway (Vorren 1982: 63). Swedish ethnologist Ernst Manker distinguishes between the pronged branch and the *buestangkonstruksjon/baelljegoahti* – arch-bowed construction, deeming the latter as the oldest form seen through an evolutionist scheme; from a simple, smaller construction to one a larger and of higher complexity. The two different wooden skeletons of the *goahti* can provide bases for both a turf/peat/bark-covered 'house' – *darfegoahti* - and a canvas-covered tent - *lávvu*. The pronged branch frame utilizes three forked poles interlocking at the top, giving a conical appearance. The floor space is decidedly circular with a diameter of around 350-450 cm.

The inner framework of the *baelljegoahti* consisted of two sets of arched birch rafters (*bealjek*). Manker notes that these arched birch pieces used for the *bealjek* were procured from trees growing on sloped surfaces. Subalpine environs would yield less eligible straight birch stems, but more of these arched tree trunks. (Manker 1944: 221-230). The arch-beamed frame allows for a larger diameter without the use of larger and heavier components in addition to making the canvas walls more vertical. The four curved pieces are cut at the

contact points. With the increasing importance of animal husbandry, the beam arches were incorporated into a longer form, the ‘communal’ goahti, housing both animals and people in separate compartments. This was done by simply connecting more beamed birch piece pairs in a series (Vorren 1982: 62-63). However, this method can be traced back at least to the 1600s (Vorren 1982: 64, 67).

The arch-beamed frame leaves an oval impression, shortest along the face of the entrances. Sometimes the goahti was erected on top of a previously used hearth, then using the same stones for holding down the canvas. However, there are countless examples to the contrary as well. (Odgaard 1995: 21). Manker documented the process of decay of a select few Sámi turf huts. Firstly, the outer layer of birch bark and turf slide down at the hands of gravity and wind, forming a raised circular formation around a slightly depressed surface. The birch logs resting on the inner skeleton are last to decompose. Placing stone slabs under the outer birch beams could significantly slow the decay, allowing a robust turf house to last up to 70 years. (Manker 1960: 380, 386)

2.3.1 Vernacular forms as carriers of memory

If we (momentarily) disregard the usual objections to the myopic adaptive functionalism at display, Binford’s findings, while unlikely to raise any eyebrows, give insight into type of engagement nomadic peoples have with their environment and the materials in it. If - as ANT suggests - all societies are socio-technic assemblages, then this Binfordian characterization certainly emphasises the technic end of the equation. Since there’s arguably no real disconnect between these two spheres, we consider the implications of Binford’s results. With the large number of Slettnes sites located on Finnmark’s outer coast islands, eligible wood pieces for frameworks would have had to be gathered from the inner fjords and transported by boat to the locales (Vorren 1982: 59-60; on the utility of boats, see Ames 2002: 29-31). Given this scarcity, it could also be posited that tents were quickly dismantled, transported to other locales and then reassembled. Provided continual re-use, made especially likely on account of the earthen boat shelter and slab pit ‘installations’ (see chapter 4), on-site caching and the like is another possibility. The niche specialization hinted at by these sites was surely part of their ‘lifeline’. Starting from the 1700s, the Sea Sámi obtained construction materials and iron through the Pomor trade (Vorren 1982: 67). We should consider the possibility that a similar pattern, then involving a different configuration, was in place in earlier periods. First, let’s consider the mobile framework.

The nomadic process itself is sure to have thoroughly shaped people, as well as materials and house forms. Both house forms and materials are required to be congruent with the abided settlement pattern, as well as the group size, and in that sense they are in ways constrained. Preparing and collecting materials for the canvas, for example, could be integrated into different parts of seasonal movement, depending on the resources needed at different stages of settlement. This could even have affected the mediums of transportation; the design of the boats or sleds used (and perhaps, even more so vice-versa). The process of material transportation, the (possibly/occasional) ritual, at least ritualistic, foundation, assembling and furnishing of the tents can be said to be an intrinsic quality of the entangled socio-technic collective in question. The structural components of both the pronged-branch *lávvu* as well as the *baelljegoahti* (and other tent types) can be subject to different rates of wear and tear, requiring continued maintenance and changing of parts. Some key components could be very old indeed, prized, and perhaps even associated with mystical power. But beyond that, the dynamic of maintenance and interchangeable parts involves a very hands-on approach, at the same time continually reifying and carrying the base forms. And so one could argue that the very momentum of the nomadic (living) assemblage involves an emergent mnemonic effect through habitual repetition and continuity in form.

In Heideggerian (1962: 105) terms, a constant haptic engagement with one's materials and tools can be characterized as ready-to-hand, a consciousness towards objects that is unreflective and non-intrusive. Usually, the overt failure or malfunction of objects bring about a directed questioning – present-at-hand – in which the rationale behind the given tool or solution is contemplated. Maintenance and mobility are interrelated functions of a tent's qualities, and many of the activities surrounding its use are related to these functions. Immanent in the tent is therefore a constant presence of minor interruptions, potentially inviting 'criticism' (Olsen 2010: 163-165). However, one could argue that these deficiencies are of a different quality than those of, say, a boat or a sword, here negated by the interchangeability of superstructure components and the entangled, spatially and socially distributed ensemble. Norwegian sociologist Tom Johansen (1992: 30) holds that the longevity of material objects constitute a latent potential for change and improvement, in part due to their capacity as carriers of memory; revealing the deficiencies of past designs. In that regard, these flexible and mobile domiciles, due to their transient quality – made durable only through constant preservative efforts – could possibly be missing such a self-reflective

mechanism. As a nomad, in this wholly different mode of being, one would not be not allowed to linger in the contemplative, present-at-hand mode for long.

Of course, all of this is highly tenuous. For example, the Iron Age Sámi would have been quite familiar with their agrarian neighbors, their building techniques and culture, and would probably have seen a fair share of derelict goahti. Tenuousness notwithstanding, this sort of nomadic movement, gathering and reifying cross-fitting components and vehicles of transportation, must factor into the overall state of affairs, along with the usual processual-systemic influences, intentional agents (that are never only human) and ideological factors (that are never purely ideological). The Slettnes sites, with their special utilitarian makeup, seem to stress the constituting role of materials and resources in the entangled interethnic contact and trade network along the landscapes of Norway's northern coast.

3. Sámi ethnography

3.1 Sámi social space

Ränk (1949) devised a thorough examination of floor partitioning among Sámi groups as depicted in historical extant sources, as well as practices recorded by ethnographers in recent times. Compiling the evidence, Ränk finds an underlying pattern behind all the various recorded forms.

Among the older forms is a ninefold, grid-like sectioning, delineated by wood logs of varying dimension, flattened planks and/or twigs (Figure 1). Eight lines project outwards following the edges of elongated and rectangular árran, the hearth itself constituting the final ‘section’. This scheme seems to have seen some use across large parts of Lapland region, from Finnmark to Finnish Lapland, though it less common in the forests of Northern Sweden. With regards to living space, it is interesting to note the relationship between the shape of the árran and the oval shape provided by the arch-beamed frame.



Figure 2: The sleeping arrangement of a two-family Sea Sámi goahti from coastal Finnmark showing the floor plan sections. After Leem 1767.

The etymological continuity from Leem's time is key in Ränk's argument; *usva-kiæzhie* designating the front door lateral (viewed from bird's eye, relative to entrance) sections, *gask-loido* for the middle, and *bosshio-kiæzhie* for the back door sections, corresponding to the north Sámi *uksa*, *loaido* and *boassu* (and other derivatives). These terms also served as etymological roots for various other features, such as doorsteps or the logs, twigs and planks separating the different sections. I.e., the three laterally corresponding sections on each side of

the hearth and mid-section bore the same name. (Ränk 1949: 87-90). Etymologically, the root of “boaššu” (påsso/poásso etc) is rooted in ground/bottom or north, with *loaido* being related to the Finnish *laita*, meaning side/ width/edge. Even though the Sámi used different terms for cardinal directions, the back (boassu) usually faced the north. As such, the three lateral rows if the back can be effectively understood as the *boaššu* (Ränk 1949: 93-94).

A similar scheme was even used in rectangular huts at Inari at the turn of the 20th century, with flexible solutions to accommodate the sleeping area for a higher number of inhabitants, such as the lateral expansion of the back area – now designated ‘luóps’, and doing away with the ‘uksa-loaido’ (Ränk 1949: 91). Ränk then draws forth hexagonal huts, one of which was documented by Schefferus [1673], thus making it the oldest source on Sámi domestic space. While there were some differences here – the logs marking the “uksa” (upper) mid-section were missing, instead only placed on each side of the hearth; a log was placed perpendicular to the door axis at the back of the hearth, with another small log, also perpendicular, placed at the very back end where the angles met – Schefferus nonetheless marked these areas in the same manner as the aforementioned nine-part floor plan. Ränk concedes that, from a purely visual perspective (c.f. Sirelius in Ränk 1949), the arrangement might conflict with the nine-part scheme. However, citing Schefferus’ designations, Ränk dismisses that the physical boundaries were of any significance; what is of importance is the etymological categories as evidence of a conception circulating in the collective consciousness (Ränk 1949: 92-93).

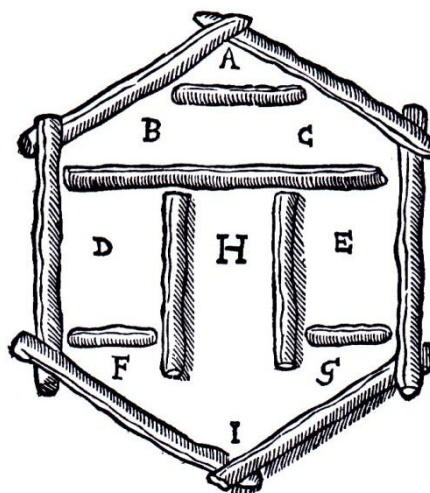


Figure 3: Floor plan of a hexagonal hut from the forests of northern Sweden. After Schefferus (1674).

A – *posse*, B & C – *lops*, D & E – *loide*, F & G – *kitta*, H – *hearth*, I – *ox* (entrance).

According to Schefferus (1973: 225), one ‘abnormal’ arrangement was particularly widespread. Here, wood slabs were to be placed solely around the *boaššu*, with firewood kept to the right of the entrance. This practice was also been recorded in more recent times in

Russian Lapland (Sirelius in Ränk 1949: 94). However, these are exceptions to the rule. Instead, the physical lineation of either the entire ukša-boaššu mid-section, or alternatively, the path from the front entrance to the hearth (ukša), features most prominently in Sámi ethnography. This lineation could run as straight lines from the door to the hearth, but also as diverging outwards from the hearth. On occasion, the boaššu was marked with the presence of a sacred boaššu-stone behind the hearth. Ränk holds thus, recalling the early extant historical sources, that the basic ordering principle can be seen as ukša-árran-boaššu with two trapezoidal loado on each side. In addition, the sectioning of the arch-beamed frame can be said to correspond with the basic categories of the floor plan, with the space between the two bealjek forming the lateral mid-section (Ränk 1949: 95 - 98). Interestingly, Ränk posits that room sectioning according to the arch-beamed frame could be much older than floor demarcation on account of the incidence of lateral partitioning in dwellings of North Eurasian ethnography (Ränk 1949: 99). Given that the arch-beamed superstructure seems to be a Sámi innovation, along with the prevalence of diffusionist thinking in Ränk's time - not to mention the eastern-origin theory – we have good reasons to be hesitant in wholly accepting this argument.

3.1.1 Conceptual practices related to floor plan

As mentioned, the most common scheme practiced (originating from the nine-part scheme) was a five-part sectioning of the floor plan with the hearth (*árran*) in the middle. The narrow compartment from the front entrance to the hearth (ukša) served as a fuel depot, critical in times of rainfall or snow. Small animals, such as dogs, lambs or calves could be kept on either side of the ukša. It also stored clothing and footwear. On the other side of the hearth was the boaššu, essentially serving as a kitchen, complete with cooking utensils, crockery and the like. In the older sources this area was considered sacred, a ritual/ceremonial area subject to behavioral rules and restrictions. Most sources seem to converge around the keeping of hunting weapons in the boaššu. The one exception, placing hunting gear in the ukša (Jessen in Leem 1767), is disregarded on the grounds of a specific taboo logic. Solidifying the notion of the boaššu being reserved for men, Ränk cites examples of taboo conceptions against women coming into contact with the shaman's drum, and specifically grazing blood stained on hunting weapons.

Thus, the boaššu with its housing of wild game, hunting weapons, as well as the shaman's ceremonial drum, was the men's sphere. Activities associated with these domains were, along with preparation and cooking of game animals, also conducted in the boaššu end of the lodge.

During the bear feast, one of the *boaššu* logs served as a chopping block, and all the animal bones from the food were to be deposited here. Ränk contends that women, residing towards the *uksa* section, tended to the animals as well as handled milk and dairy products. Generally, all food not hunted or fished could be handled by women. The women were also responsible for eking the fire and maintaining the hearth. In addition, several sources could corroborate a practice in which husbandry and dairy products were transported through the front door, while hunting prey (including birds) and fish were exclusively moved through the back door. Only hunters were allowed through the back door (the implication being that only males could be hunters). In relation to this practice Schefferus (1971: 84) nebulously notes that it was considered an ill omen for a hunter to “meet a woman”. According to Ränk, another function of the *boaššu* stone, referred to by the Lule Sámi as the “housewife’s stone” – *akka-kerrke* - was to demonstrate these gendered restrictions spatially (Ränk 1949: 101-103).



Figure 4: Seating arrangement in a two-family sea Sámi *goahti* from coastal Finnmark. After Leem 1767.

Ränk seems to suggest that the middle section on either side of the fire, the two *loaidos/luoito*, were non-restrictive with regard to gender. This space was also the sleeping and dwelling area (in the trapezoidal model). He relates this to practical convenience, as there

would be less draft here. Laterally, the three sections closest to the front door and the three back sections were still reserved for women and men, respectively. Ränk sees this division as pertaining to different economic or labor-related daily activities. He also notes that a generational divide along the entrance-boaššu axis was the ‘original’ ordering principle, known more broadly from North Eurasian ethnography. In the case of two-family households, the central ukša-boaššu axis served to separate the two families, though the vertical gender divide remained. Regardless of numerous variations, a pattern emerges: farthest towards the door slept servants, and in inward succession came guests, children, the unmarried, the adults of the family, and lastly the elders (Ränk 1949: 100 - 111).



Figure 5: Sea Sámi female headdresses. After Leem 1767.

Despite Ränk’s (and others) insistence on a pervasive and ancient root of Sámi domestic space, it is interesting to note all the variations in form. When permutations of floor ordering occurred, subtle changes in terminology often followed alongside. Returning to Leem’s illustrations, we can see the women sitting on each side of the *boaššu*, presumably alongside their husbands (figure 1 & 3 c.f. figure 4). The two-family configuration generally seems to bring about variations in these patterns. Ränk (1949: 103) acknowledges the variation, but considers the single-family arrangement more widespread, authentic and ancient. It begs the question: if these rules were inscribed so strictly into people’s mentalities, what facilitated a breach? And what is this archaic and authentic cultural essence Ränk speaks of? We shall return to these questions shortly. To be sure, the gender division - particularly in the older sources – was very real and seemingly quite pervasive, though less uniform than depicted.

3.2 Structuralist approach to Sámi domestic space

An oft-cited piece in literature dealing with social space in traditional Sámi dwellings is Timothy Yates' 1989 article '*Habitus and social space: some suggestions about meaning in the Saami (Lapp) tent, ca. 1700-1900*'. Yates attempts to link the Sámi arrangement of domestic space to cosmological and symbolic conceptions using Bourdieu's theory of habitus and Levi-Strauss' anthropological structuralism. Although a full account of Bourdieu's concept of habitus is too comprehensive, a condensed version can be presented: habitus in the internalization of the collective way of thinking, rules and norms of conduct and tradition; the imprint of the cultural collective, by means of socialization, onto the individual in an interplay of free will and of structures providing dispositions. These dispositions are created and maintained mainly within the home and in relation to commonplace activities. Habitus implies a slowness or inertia, only overthrown after sudden situational changes or long periods of time. (Bourdieu 1984: 169-171). Thus, Bourdieu's interest in the material world is mainly in the ways it can be related to power, capital and production.

The axis mundi of the Sámi consisted of five levels: the higher, the lower, the terrestrial, the subterranean and the bowels of the earth. At top, the thunder god Tiermes and sun god Peive reigned. The level beneath was the domain of the ruling father, Radien-Attje and the ruling mother, Radien-Akka. Yates contends that the cosmological order is reflected in the outlines of the floor plan. Layering the cosmological, vertical axis atop the house space itself even reflects the following patterns in the floor plan (Yates 1989: 256). The hearth itself was the domain of a daughter of the Máttaráhkká (mother earth) diety, Sáráhká. Two other daughters of this diety were bound to the ukša – Uksáhká – and the boaššu – Juksáhkáh/Boaššoáhká, goddess of the hunt, respectively. Certain associations can thus be grouped in the male area: wild animals, hunt, hunting blood, slaughter, death, north, winter and back. These form the category of the sacred. In the opposite female area, the unclean and profane, were corresponding binary oppositions: tame animals, milk, menstruation blood, life, summer and front.

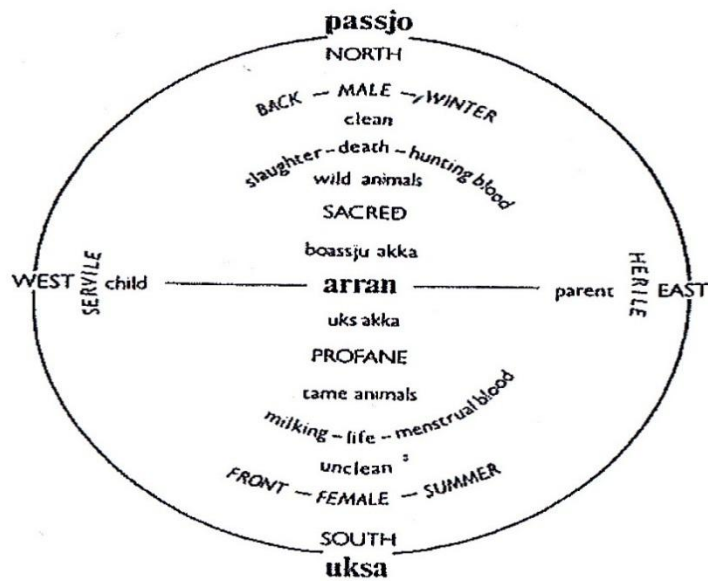


Figure 6: The binary oppositions underlying Sámi social space. After Yates 1989.

Mirroring Bourdieu (1977: 89), Yates holds that the space of the household was the main locus for the “gender ideology” encompassing Sámi life, an ideology behested by, and at the benefit of men. The cosmological model was even tailored in men’s favor, legitimizing the gender imbalance (Yates: 1989: 258). Ritual enactment and worship was to be performed exclusively by men. Exemplified here is the bear feast, during which women coming into contact with the bear or the hunter could risk spiritual contamination. (Yates 1989: 255). Yates’ men are imbued with a certain calculated craftiness: it was all really a clandestine game of power.

Other sources contradict Yates’ characterizations of Sámi cosmology and ritual activity. The sun god Peive was more commonly viewed as a goddess, and women did participate in ritual worship and offerings pertaining to all the household dieties (Mulk 1995: 206-209). The fact that the goddess of the hunt dwelled in back portion of the living space also escapes Yates’ analysis (Grydeland 2001: 97). Grydeland stresses the ambiguity of the written sources. For example, there are accounts of female shamans, as well as a female cosmological progeny for newborns of both genders. A history written exclusively by men can provide a skewed image of the actual affairs (Grydeland 2001: 99).

While Yates acknowledges broad variety in the ethnographic source material pertaining to the floor partitioning of the Sámi, he holds that the symbolic structure and content remains the same through the entirety of this 200-plus year period (Yates 1989: 251). As Torsetnes (2004:

98) points out, this statement may be particularly puzzling to archaeologists. In archaeology, constructs of meaning are often inferred, namely, through physical forms – in that they sometimes can be read as symbols or texts. Furthermore, changes in form are interpreted as reflective – traditionally in a passive sense - of changes in meaning, etc., and a stable form can even be subversive, stifling social turbulence (see for example Glassie 1975 for a converse dynamic). The latter entails, of course, that stable form (architectural or feature-wise) isn't necessarily an indication of stability in the social/cognitive sphere. We must also concede that Yates' analysis fails to account for variations in time and space. After all, Sámi society was quite heterogeneous, consisting of many autonomous groups and spread across vast areas. Many have argued for an affinity towards male dominance resulting from historical developments related to reindeer pastoralism and missionary influence (Grydeland 2001: 99).

In his analysis of the Kabyle Berber tent, Bourdieu (1977) demonstrates a set of oppositions categorically and conceptually reversed compared to Yates'. In the Kabyle tent, fire, light and boiling is associated with men, while water, darkness and raw meat is associated with women. Death, too, is now connected to the feminine. Some interesting patterns appear: boiled – raw can be understood as analogous to the Sámi opposition of tame – wild, whilst light – shadow can be said to mirror the Sámi summer – winter (Grydeland 2001: 97). In spite of these conceptual reversals, Yates argues that both cases demonstrate the presence of ubiquitous – though historically contingent (Yates 1989: 250) - male dominance. In a later work, Bourdieu (2002) holds that the gender dynamics of the North African Kabyle household represent a continuity in the entire European cultural tradition – that they are the 'canonical' opposition of western and mediterranean culture.

While Yates' work is based strictly on ethnographic records of the period 1700-1900 AD, the article is also interesting in that it is very demonstrative of the focal theoretical themes in the archaeological research of that particular time. Hodder (1982), along with Wobst (1978) and others, had previously revitalized the symbolic aspects of material culture, demonstrating that it was *used actively* (in itself, inert and passive) and could communicate symbolism. In the development of the early post-processual critique of the 1980s, the binary oppositions of structuralism and the symbolic-communicative qualities of artefacts were key in legitimizing interpretive and (human) actor-centered approaches (Olsen 1997) – which is ironic, given the espoused aversion towards determinism. Through the symbolic-semiotic paradigm, things became epiphenomenal representations of the non-material. In material culture resided very

real ideal abstractions such as status, power, or ethnicity. These categories were even more real - of higher importance - than the things themselves, and they made their presence known as symbols, metaphors or 'texts'. Material culture was thus a tool to be fashioned and subjugated by human agents, and things could only be said to exist by virtue of their contextualization through the sensory and reasoning faculties of the human mind and subsequent ascription of meaning. (Olsen 2010: 25-26).

To Yates, the physicality of the Sámi tent is epiphenomenal. Since the household is the locus of the production of habitus and doxa, it becomes a mirror image of society. In other words 'society', with its cognitive traditions and adhering practices as units of transference, is what gives shape to the Sámi household (Yates 1989: 260). But, in a sense, Yates has given the different constituents of the Sámi house, including non-physical (though spatially delimited) as well as physical structures, a form of agency and hybrid thingness. Despite the rigidity and instrumentalism in Yates' analysis, I think there's much to be read between the lines (literally; *the house* is the principal locus of generative schemes) about the significance of the material and corporeal space in the Sámi tent.

Before delving into the presentation of the Slettnes house material itself, an understanding of the historical setting of the Iron Age in the north is required.

4. The Iron Age: Outline of Setting

4.1 The Lyngen border

The Lyngen Fjord constituted an ethnic border in the Iron Age and early medieval period as witnessed archaeologically by the distribution of predominantly Norse cultural idioms south of here and the predominantly Sámi signatures in the north. That is not to say there weren't any liminal or hybridized expressions, such as mixed graves. It is fair to assume that there were enclaves belonging to either group beyond their respective bounds, as suggested by Audhild Schanche (1986). Historically, this picture fits fairly well with chieftain Othere's 9th century account to King Alfred of Wessex. Othere claimed to be the northernmost chieftain of all, and that the land north of him was wilderness, only sparsely populated by Finn hunters and fishers (the Sámi). It is believed that Othere's homestead was located in the vicinity of today's city of Tromsø, just west of the Lyngen fjord. Othere describes traveling into the Northern lands, collecting Sámi products as tribute – a tribute that was of utmost importance to the chieftains of the far North. Although not explicitly stated by Othere, the Norse likely reciprocated in some form, perhaps through military protection or supply of iron (Odner 1983; Hansen & Olsen 2004).

Furthermore, it is on Skjervøy and Arnøy, located in the midst of this border zone, that the greatest concentration of slab-lined pits – the most prominent of Northern Iron Age remains - is found. According to Myrvoll (2011: 83), the national register cites 664 slab-lined pits along the coast, though a greater number still is likely yet to be entered into the registry or have simply eluded surveys. However, unlike the faint dwelling remains of the Iron Age, the impressions made by the slab-lined pits are far from inconspicuous.

4.1.1 Slab-Lined Pits

The slab-lined pits are an important and substantial category for the North Norwegian Iron Age. Previously believed to be graves, in part due to local folklore, or even houses, the slab-lined pits are now widely recognized as implements used to siphon oil from marine mammals. Slab-lined pits feature abundantly across coastal swaths between Ringvassøy in North Troms and Vadsø in East Varanger. The greatest concentration is found just north of the Lyngen fjord inlet, which corresponds well with extant historical sources' placement of the Sámi-Norse border. At core, the process likely involved heating the rock-packed pits by burning wood and removing the charcoal before placing the blubber in. The blubber would then, perhaps helped by added heated rocks, rise to the surface (Schanche 1992: 33).

Though not unprecedented, the whalebone in the excavated slab-lined pit at Slettnes house site Mellanaset - accompanied by another piece of whalebone protruding from the neighboring pit - serve to further bolster this hypothesis (Myrvoll 2011: 91). In some cases, the slab-lined pits also feature drains (Bratrein 1996). In addition, lipid analyses have confirmed that the charred fatty material often found in the bottom of these pits stem from marine mammals (Henriksen 1995: 63-65; Hesjedal et. al. 1996: 231).

Kjersti Schanche (1992) examined a field of 25 slab-lined pits, 11 of which were partially or fully excavated, with the expressed goal of elucidating the scanty 1st millennium in Northern Norway. The dates ranged from around 200 AD to 900 AD. No household remains could be located in the near vicinity, which Schanche interpreted as an indication that the activities surrounding this field of slab-lined pits required short, provisional stays. She further suggests that the field served as a type of trade hub, gathering different groups of people – both Sámi and Norse. Although found from 200 – 1200 AD, the slab-lined pits feature most prominently in the period 600 – 900 AD. The number of slab-lined pits decidedly indicate a volume of production far beyond own consumption. The slab-lined pits point to a booming trade developing through the first millennium, peaking at around 600-900 AD. It has been suggested that the Sámi traded oil, furs and other specialized products for Norse textiles and iron goods (Olsen 2003, Henriksen 1995).

4.2 Categories of the Northern interior

The emergence of Sámi ethnicity has been linked to increased trade and interaction between the hunter-gatherers of Northern Fennoscandia and Eastern metal-producing groups in the tail end of the last millenium BC (Olsen 1984; Jørgensen & Olsen 1988; Hansen & Olsen 2004). In Barthian terms, a complex process of ethnic differentiation was set in motion when Northern hunter-gatherers began specialising in (presumably) niche resources like furs and tusks to procure raw metals from the East through inland networks and trade routes. The emphasis the instrumental explanation places on the inland is somewhat problematic in lieu of the empirical situation. In Norway, the archaeology of the Northern interior has long suffered from a lack of systematic surveying and registration, although recent efforts have been made to redeem this situation (e.g. the LARM project). The abundant pitfall systems of Finnmark see considerable lull in activity with interior clusters concentrated around 3000 BC – 1800 BC and pits in the Varanger region relavately estimated to 1200 – 1600 AD (Myrvoll, Thuestad & Holm-Olsen 2011).

Another Sámi category from the Iron Age is the talus or scree graves, ranging from single graves to burial fields holding hundreds. Located in scree slopes or areas of rocky debris, this burial tradition utilized crevices or chambers in-between boulders and enveloped the deceased in a birch bark shroud and less commonly in pulka (sleds). Frequently, a great deal of work had been put in to make room for a sizable burial chamber. On occasion caves have also been used for scree graves. Though usually appearing as pits or slab-covered chambers, cairn burials can also be found in the same areas and share categorization. The Mortensnes site on the North coast of the Varanger Fjord is the largest scree grave burial field (or perhaps fields?) holding housing more than 300 graves. The use of this tradition is said to range from 900 BC to 1700/1800 AD. (Hansen & Olsen 2004: 116-122; Schanche K 1992; Schanche, A 2000: 315-317) Interestingly, aside from the assumed continuation of the scree grave tradition at Mortensnes, the first arguably idiomatic expression of Sámi ethnicity appears with the Iron Age turf houses of the outer coast and with the Stallo sites appearing from the Viking Age onwards.

During the Viking Age and Early Medieval Period we observe a significant shift in Sámi habitation patterning along with changes in dwelling types and spatial features. This shift is exemplified by the extensively distributed hearth row sites: linearly placed, large rectangular hearths, usually numbering 3-8, found in vast regions of the Fennoscandinavian deep interior. Settlement patterning prior to this transition seems to have been concentrated alongside the outer coast and interior waterways and lakes. By contrast, hearth row sites appear further inland on moraine ridges, forested areas or near heathland areas. Alongside these apparent changes in economy, settlement pattern and social organisation, evidence suggests increasing ritual and religious expression, as well as increased ritualistic conformity and formalisation throughout the entirety of the Sámi region. Grave goods are richer and display more variety, possibly indicative of increasing social differentiation within Sámi society. (Broadbent 2010: 41) In Northern Sweden and Lapland, the Stalo sites range from 400 – 1600 AD. The vast majority of dates, however, fall within the 640-1180 date range (Broadbent 2010: 145). A significant shift in Sámi lifeways appears to have occurred in the Viking period, with Sámi hearth sites moving from river valleys to reindeer grazing areas – indicating the rise of reindeer pastoralism. These factors suggest a change from a hunting/gathering-based economy to semi-nomadic herding featuring territoriality and individual ownership.

The Slettnes type houses somehow fit into this picture. In the following chapter, I shall present the excavated sites.

5. Slettnes type sites

5.1 Hammerfest municipality: Excavations at Slettnes, Sørøya

Slettnes is located on a cape on the South-eastern side of Sørøya Island in Hammerfest municipality. Following Norwegian oil and gas company Statoil's plans to build an installation in the area, Tromsø Museum conducted comprehensive rescue excavations through the field seasons of 1991 to 1993. Preliminary surveys rendered an abundance of archaeological sites with just over 200 surface-registered structures (the vast majority of which were house structure remains – other categories included pits, cairns and a farm mound) along with supplementary test-pitting indicating activity in areas not readily apparent. In line with the entrepreneur's planned progression, the southern portion of the ness was prioritized early on in the project, eventually moving northwards as time went on. It is also along this southern lateral axis that the Iron Age sites are located. (Hesjedal et. al. 1996: 9-11).

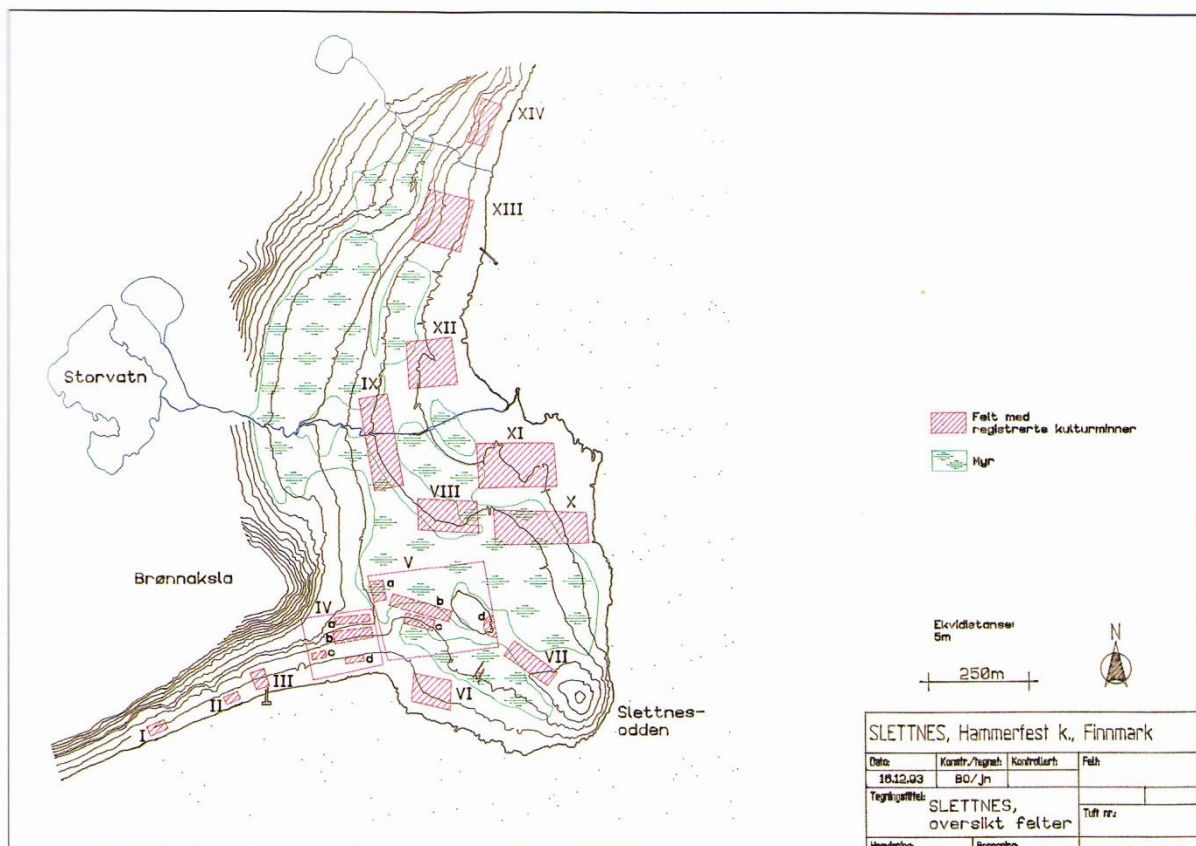


Figure 7: Excavation areas at Slettnes. Iron Age sites in fields I through III. After Hesjedal et. al. 1996.

5.2 The excavated structures at Slettnes

Iron Age structures west of F204

Field I (see figure x) was comprised solely of three slab-lined pits and boathouse/shed. Two of the slab-lined pits (F207 and F209, see Hesjedal et. al. 1996: 27-28) were excavated, along with digging a test pit in the boatshed. Appearing as an oval depression in the terrain dimensioned 1.9 x 0.8 m and orientated slanted slightly vis-à-vis the shoreline, F207 is the lowest-placed of the slab-lined pits in field I. Prior to excavation, the bottom of the pit was measured to 3,75 masl. Excavation revealed a rectangular pit, measuring at 2.3 x 1.1 m, with walls consisting of beach gravel, charcoal and fire-cracked rocks. A charcoal sample (Beta 52378) from the wall produced a date of 1300 +/- 80 BP (650-790 cal. AD). Bottoming out 50 cm below the surface pit level measurement, the nethermost layer of the structure was comprised of fire-cracked rocks, charcoal and pieces of charred and fatty organic material. This material is residue from the process of extracting blubber oil from seal and/or whale in implements of this type (Hansen & Olsen 2013: 57, Henriksen 1995). Two samples (Beta 52379, Beta 67190) from the bottom layer indicated 1520 +/- 70 BP (cal. 430-610 AD) and 1250 +/- 60 BP (cal. 680-880 AD), respectively. The younger date places this structure in the usage vicinity of dates from dwelling structures in fields II and III (F204 & F205). Nearly identically aligned, another slab-lined pit (F209) was found 5 meters NW of F207, with a surface bottom measurement of 4.2 masl. However, the structure could not produce any C14 samples as it was devoid of charcoal. Another slab-lined pit - F208 - lying parallel to F208, and roughly between the two excavated structures, was not examined. Due to the uniform and organised appearance of the pits, a conjoint interpretation is fair.

The boathouse - F206 - appeared as a rectangular 5.2 x 2.2 m depression orientated towards the sea, framed by raised lines of stone. Slightly inclined, the lowest point of the surface level prior to excavation was at 2 masl, with the highest at 2.5 masl. Hesjedal et. al. (1996: 30) holds that while this structure might have been a boathouse, we could also be looking at a shed burrowed into the beach gravel. The authors also posit that the relatively high masl indicates considerable age and could possibly be seen in connection to the slab-lined pits in fields I and/or III. (Hesjedal et. al. 1996: 25-30).

F204

In field II, a stone ring formation topped with moss and heather sat in plain sight. This was to be the first known, recorded and excavated Iron Age dwelling in Finnmark (Hesjedal et. al.

1996: 31). Structure F204 was situated at 3.7 m.a.s.l. and had an outer diameter of around 6 metres. Removal of the humus rendered a leached podsol sand layer (layer I) spread patchily around the floor area along with a medial concentration of charcoal (layer II) – both based atop a layer of coarse gravel and rock (layer III). During the clearing of layer III, nine evenly-placed possible postholes surfaced, most of which were found just outside the southern wall. After the removal of layers I through III, the outer wall lay bare and appeared quite sturdy with large, heavy rocks and stacking in certain portions of the ring. The box hearth, by contrast, appeared somewhat dilapidated. Two C14 samples were taken; one from the medial charcoal concentration (Beta 58219 – 1250 +/- 80 BP) and another from the bottom of layer III (Beta 58220 – 1160 +/- 70 BP). The C14 samples from F204 were calibrated to 670-880 AD and 780-970 AD, respectively.

The axial features in F204 are, one could argue, rather atypical and category-defying, with a formidable single row running along the middle North - South axis, following the eastern edge of the hearth and leading to a slab doorsill in the south. A line of slabs also runs diagonally from the hearth to a possible opening in the North-West wall corner of the dwelling. However, the opening appears shut off, as the slabs run under the outer wall. Just SW of the NW opening there appears to be another entrance (Hesjedal et. al. 1993: 204). The area between the hearth and the southern exit was rife with cookstones and charcoal. Olsen suggests that the entrance could have been moved and that we could be looking at several contexts. Also of interest to note is the placement of the hearth, not situated in the middle of the dwelling, but in the south. Further, it appears to be orientated E-W, with its longest side against the shorter axis of the dwelling.

Three nuggets of iron slag, along with three pieces of iron fragments were discarded in and around the dwelling. Lithic debitage was scarce, of which only one core and ten flakes could be counted. Three stone fishing weights and one whetstone were found related to the F204 context. 300 to the west of F204 are, as mentioned the three slab-lined pits and boatshed from field I. (Hesjedal et. al. 1996: 31-32). Hesjedal et. al. suggest (1996: 32), that the postholes may indicate a pronged-branch, classic baellje construction. While the rock wall could have served as a supporting foundation or, along with turf and birch bark, to shield the interior from winds, one would expect to find the postholes *inside* the perimeter, not outside - as is the case with F204. Possibly, the dwelling has been rearranged at some point, the post-hole construction taking place at an earlier point in time.

SLETTNES, Hammerfest k., Finnmark

F204
Plantegning, lag 3

14.08.1992
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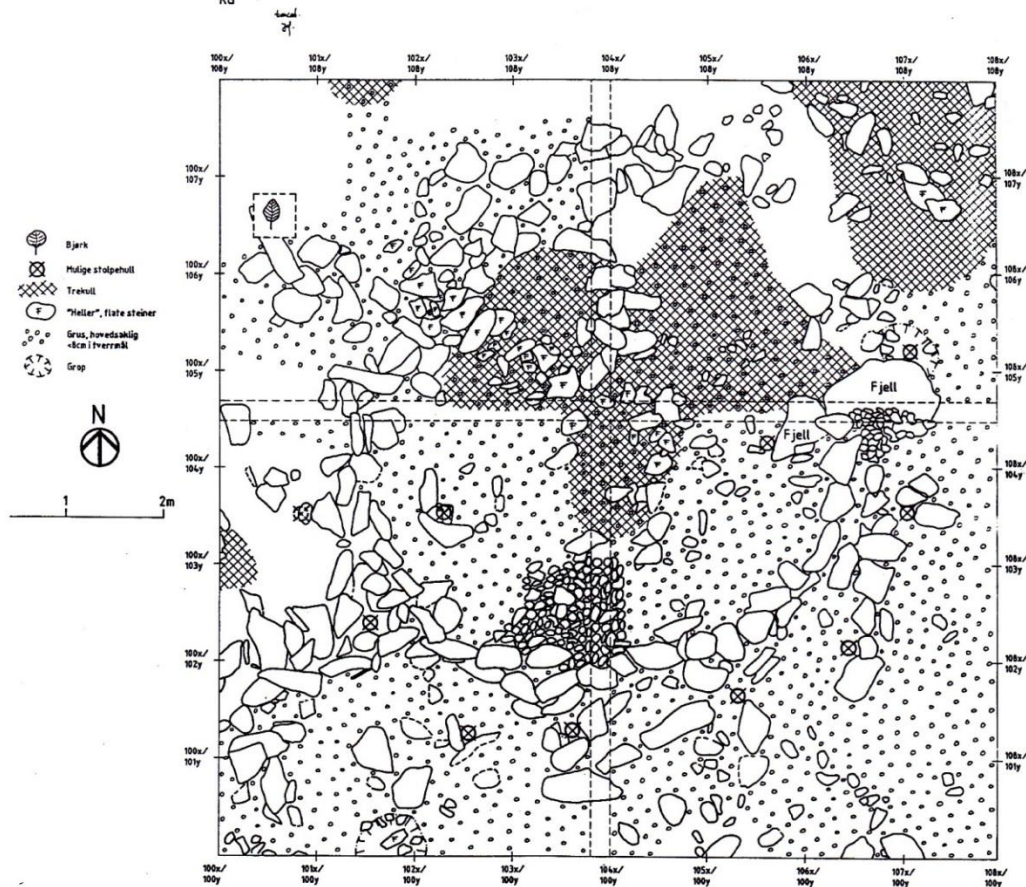


Figure 8: Layer 3 F204 plan. Concentration of cookstones can be seen in the South and outside the East wall.

Legend: Birch, possible posthole, charcoal, slabs, gravel, pit. After Hesjedal 1996.

Miscellaneous features West of F204

Whilst uncovering F204, two stone rows appeared to run from the outer wall and westwards. An additional 90.5 m² were opened, confirming several suspected, smaller structures just west of F204. The northern row stopped just after barely breaking into the expanded field, revealing no clear discernable context. Hesjedal et. al. (1996: 33) suggests we may be looking at a component of a door entrance windbreak. The southern row forms a small rock enclosure before merging with a 1.1 diameter rock semi-circle feature containing charcoal and gravel, with a slab opening in the north (feature 1, see fig x). No C14 samples were taken, and no artifacts were found. Adjoined via the west wall of feature I was another stone enclosure, rectangular and measuring at 3 x 3 m (feature 2). No artifacts were found here either, and no C14 sample was taken. North-East of feature 2 sat a 2 diameter, semi-circular structure with a small, four-stone rectangular hearth just outside the opening, which was facing the sea. A

layer of charcoal was spread across a large surface between the northern wall of feature 2 and all the way to feature 3. A C14 sample from the hearth (Beta 58673) gave the result 870 +/- 90 BP (cal. 1030-1260 AD). Hesjedal et. al. (1996: 33) interprets the feature as a tent ring or temporary windbreak, possibly to be seen in relation to excursionary fishing or marine mammal hunting. No artefacts were found. In the west end of the field another circular, central hearth feature could be discerned with an inner diameter of around 3 metres (feature 4). The outer wall, in places diffuse, was placed against the bedrock in the West. A C14 sample (Beta 58674) was taken from the rectangular hearth, providing the result 830 +/- 70 BP (1160-1270 cal. AD) – thus matching with the date from feature 3. In terms of artifacts, the two finds – two flakes and one whetstone – could not be linked to any of the presented features. (Hesjedal et. al. 1996: 33-34)

It is puzzling that the dates from the two features are considerably younger than F204, given that the structures seemingly connect. While an unlikely stretch – it is conceivable that the F204 tent ring and the hearth (with postholes) are separate contexts, the former being connected to the various features to the west. More likely, the closest non-dated structures – feature 1 and 2 - are linked to F204, the remaining two being unrelated.

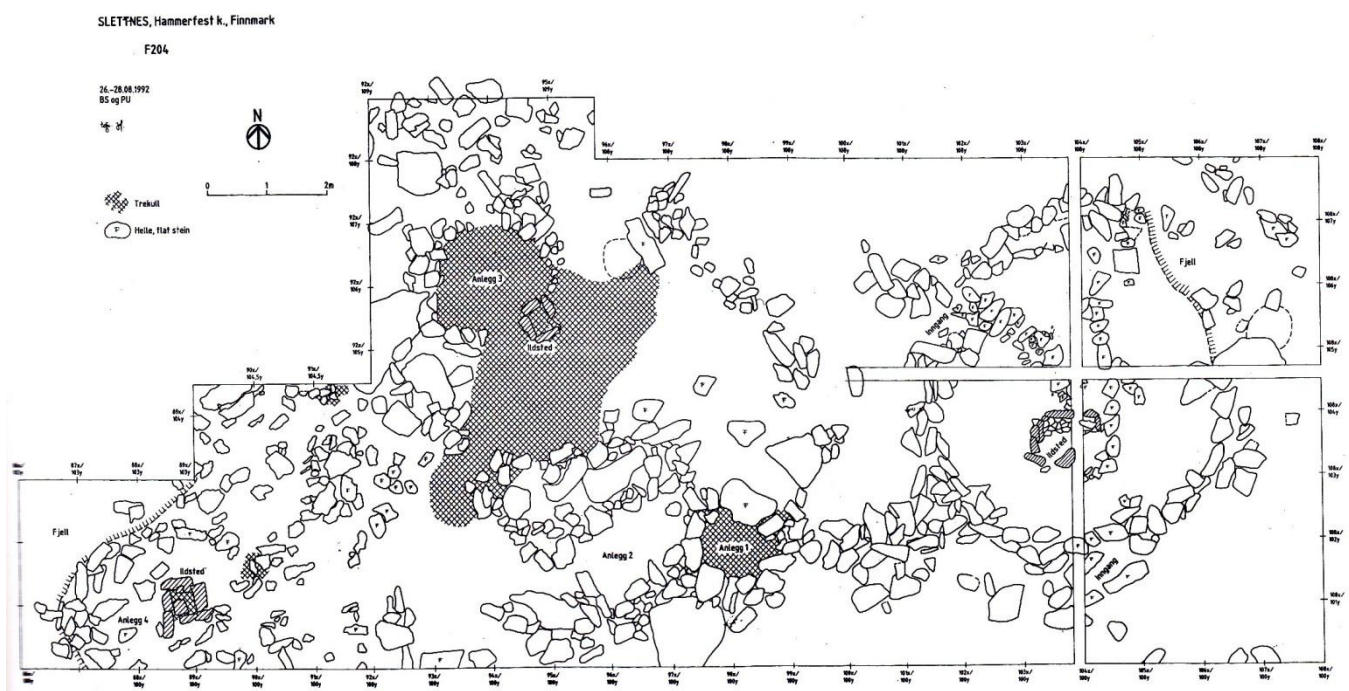


Figure 9: F204 (East) with features (anlegg) 1 to 4 (East to West). Legend: charcoal, slab. After Hesjedal et. al.

1996.

There were several traces of secondary contexts in the older houses in field III. A secondary context hearth sample (Beta 58679) from house structure F13 (approx. 4000 years old) was dated to 1330 +/- 90 BP, but no artifacts could be linked to it. East of F13's outer wall was a 1.05 diameter, 5-8 cm deep pit filled with fire-cracked stone, charcoal and what appeared to be charred clay. A C14 sample (Beta 58677) from the pit returned the date 1830 +/- BP (110-250 cal. AD), indicating that the pit was secondary to the house itself (Hesjedal et. al. 1996: 40-42). Hesjedal et. al. (1993: 27-28) posit that this could have been a calcination oven, separating impurities iron-rich sand or iron ore. In Early Metal Period house F12 an evidently secondary lone hearth - judging by its place in the stratigraphic sequence, and given a 1590 +/- 70 BP (400-550 cal. AD) sample (Beta 58687) date - was found in the western side of the dwelling. (Hesjedal et. al. 1996: 49).

SLETTNES, Hammerfest k., Finnmark

Felt III, F7

Plantegning, topp lag 4 (bunn)

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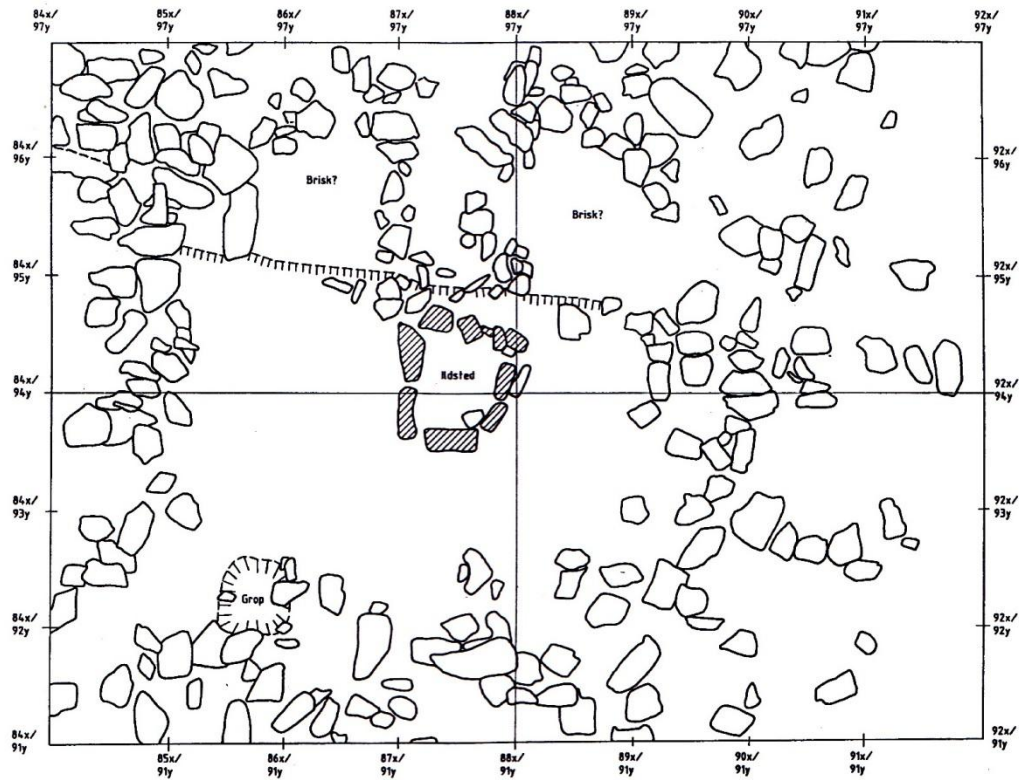
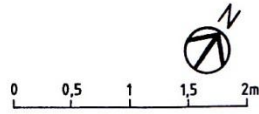


Figure 10: F7 plan, layer 4 (fin).

F7

Located 7.3 masl in field III, F7 was barely visible from the surface, appearing with the semblance of a rectangular frame. As with F204, a 9 cm podsol sand leach layer (layer 1) covered the middle and southern portions of the floor area, followed by coarse gravel (layer 2). Marked by a line of smaller stones, the floor area appeared slightly raised in the northern end on each side of the stone row behind the hearth (10-15 cm), possibly indicating stockpiles or sleeping platforms (Hesjedal et. al. 1993: 60). In and around the hearth, on top of layer 2, there was a large of concentration of charcoal. Fully excavated, the shape of the inner wall appeared more circular, slightly oblong along the stone row axis, and with an inner diameter of 4.3 metres.

Two C14 samples (Beta 52327 & Beta 49035), both from F7's hearth place it at 1840 +/- BP (80 - 250 cal. BC) and 2110 +/- BP (340 - 40 cal. BC) respectively. Parallel stone rows lead

from the northern side of the hearth and to a NW opening in the outer wall. Another exit is seen in the South-Western end of the wall, along with a 20 cm deep, charcoal-filled pit with a top diameter of 0.6. The charcoal appeared, according to Hesjedal et. al. (1996: 52), as if may have served as lining in the pit. This pit was dated (Beta 58672) to 1610 +/- 70 BP (380-540 AD cal.), indicating it was of secondary nature (Hesjedal et. al. 1993: 60). Just outside the east wall is a small stone enclosure with a large concentration of asbestos-tempered ceramic of the Kjelmoøy variant. Overall 57 artifacts were found in F7: 28 sherds of Kjelmoøy ceramics (in the annex); 19 flakes; two slag clumps and finally; one whetstone. (Hesjedal et. al. 1996: 51-52)

F205

F205 was outlined by a slight raised circular shape. At 3.7 masl – identical to F204 - it was the lowest situated house structure in field III. Its excavated inner diameter was 4.2 metres. The stratigraphy presented a mere two layers below the humus: a 1-4 cm layer of grey/brown gravelly sand (layer 1) covering the floor, thicker in the southern portions followed by beach gravel (layer 2). Several potential postholes were found within or alongside the outer wall – again possibly indicating an arch-beamed frame (Hesjedal et. al. 1996: 53). In terms of axial features, a broad row of flat slabs were lined from to south end of the hearth to the southern wall. Hesjedal et. al. (1996: 52-53) suggests that elongated stones lying north of the fireplace may have been arranged in two rows of stones originally, as seen in F7 (figure x cf figure). It is difficult to discern doorways

A sample (Beta 67188) from the bottom of the hearth provided a 1370 +/- 110 BP (700-900 AD cal.) period of use. Another sample (Beta 67189) from layer I provided a 580 +/- BP (1310-1420 AD cal.) result unlikely to be representative. There was an opening in the eastern outer wall, with two concentrations of charcoal in layer 1. A sample (Beta 67187) was taken from the southern concentration, yielding a date of 1150 +/- 80 BP (790-990 AD cal.). North of this opening was a large concentration of cookstones. Another smaller opening was found in the western wall joined to a small hearth. Flint strike-a-lights, charcoal and charred bones were spread in and around this hearth. A sample (Beta 67186) from this hearth was dated to 960 +/- 120 BP (980-1220 AD cal.). Hesjedal 1996 et. al. (1996: 53) views this as hearth as secondary, formed by stones removed from the western wall. The sample from the bottom of the central hearth corresponds relatively well with the eastern wall date, likely placing F205 in the 1100-1200 BP/700-900 AD bracket.

SLETTNES,
Hammerfest k., Finnmark

Topplag 2/bunn, F.205

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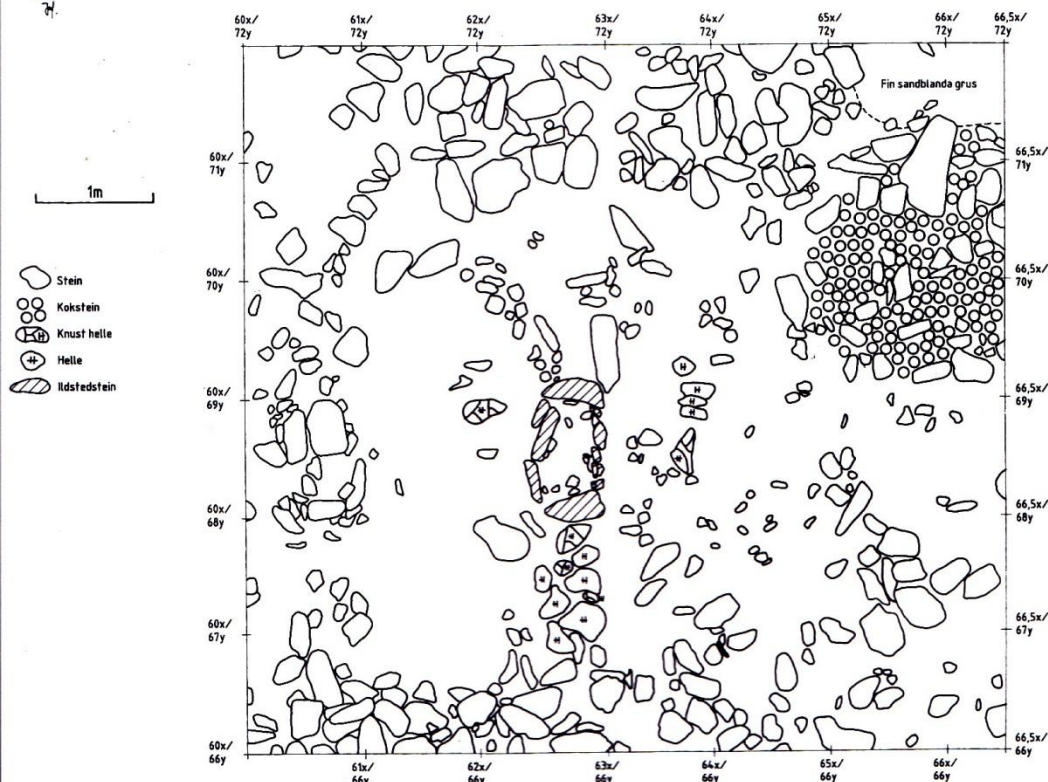


Figure 11: F205, Layer 2 (fin). Legend: rock, cookstone, cracked slab, slab, hearthstone.

In total, 172 artifacts - mostly flakes and iron fragments - were found in F5. The entire floor area was littered with 109 highly corroded iron fragments likely to be boat nails. Mainly concentrated around the central hearth, 47 flakes were found, 70% of which were flint. Most of the other flakes were found in and around the outer wall, likely brought in from surrounding peat (Hesjedal et. al. 1996: 53). A fishing stone and iron slag were also found, along with some asbestos-ceramic potsherds in the northern wall, perhaps from an older context. Other finds include fragments of cold-hammered copper and four potsherds from the rim of a casted bronze pot. (Hesjedal et. al. 1996: 52-54).

While Hesjedal et. al. (1996: 53) suggests a similar mid-passage arrangement as north of the hearth as seen in F7, the western row does appear to tangent towards the west, with the eastern row running straight north. This could, of course, be due to various disturbing forces, but it is difficult to see any reason to assume that this newer dwelling was ascribed the exact same ritualistic principles as one 1000 years before it – especially considering that all of these domiciles have idiosyncratic features. Given the large number and spread of boatnails in

F205, one could imagine the tent/turf house serving as a makeshift boatshelter for storage over the winter.

5.3 Summary

It should be added that three samples from field IV B (Beta 49011; 52370; 49064), one from IV C (Beta 67184); one from V B (Beta 49039); two from V C (Beta 58706; 58707) and; one from VIII (Beta 49044) were found to fall within the 0-1000 AD timeframe, but all were either secondary or singular without informational context (Hesjedal et. al. 1996: 68 – 70, 86, 111, 127, 143, 190). A slab-lined pit (F179) at 3.4 masl in field XI was partially excavated to provide a C14 sample (Beta 52377), lending a date of 1290 +/- 70 BP (660-786 AD cal.). This structure over 200 metres from the shoreline. (Hesjedal et. al. 1996: 147, 226-227).

Both F204 and F205 fall within the 700-900 AD, while F7 likely sits somewhere between 0 and 250 AD.

The material from F7 is especially informative, in that it clearly demonstrates a significant shift in from the previous period (Kjelmøy phase – 900 BC – 300 AD) in terms of material culture. Prior to the excavations at Slettnes 1992-1993, it was widely held that stone tools were used in parallel conjunction with iron by the Sámi throughout the first millennium (Hesjedal et. al. 1996: 224-226). Although no Iron artifacts were found, the two pieces of slag and whetstone may be interpreted as implying the presence of metallurgy. The soil conditions around F7 were also harsh, diminishing the chances of finding any iron artifacts (Hesjedal et. al. 1996: 183). While 17 flakes were found, no stone tools were recovered from in and around the structure. The relative absence of lithic tools further strengthens the case for a shift in technology. In F205, alongside large amounts of iron, we also see cold-hammered as well as cast artifacts of copper and bronze. Finally, the small pit east of structure F13 in field III is similar to known iron roast ovens from Northern Sweden (Hesjedal et. al. 1996: 184). Hesjedal et. al. (1996: 225) sees the above factors as indicative of both chipped and ground stone essentially having fallen out of use – at last pertaining to this particular group of settlements. A gradual transition to the production and use of iron, then, began already from 900 BC on in the Kjelmøy ceramic phase (Olsen 1994: 132-133). (Hesjedal et. al. 1996: 189-190, 224-226) The asbestos-tempered Kjelmøy pottery tradition, also known as Säräisniemi 2, has been linked to the Central Russian, metal-producing and agricultural cultural complex Ananino – also serving as cultural marker in the coast-inland / Risvik-Kjelmøy dichotomization in Norway. It is spread widely across the Baltics, Finland and Sweden (Olsen 1994: 106-32).

The configuration of slab-lined pits and boathouse at Slettnes appear to have seen most activity from around 700-900 AD, concurrent with the two dwelling structures – F204 and F205 - to the east. It would appear that the two categories – the slab-lined pit and the Slettnes house – might be seen in a kind of symbiotic feedback loop relationship, one part contributing to the proliferation of the other. Quite possibly, the boathouse should also be included into this constellation. Indeed, as we shall see, all three categories are almost invariably intertwined.

5.4 Berlevåg municipality: Excavations at Kongshavn and Mellaneset, 2001

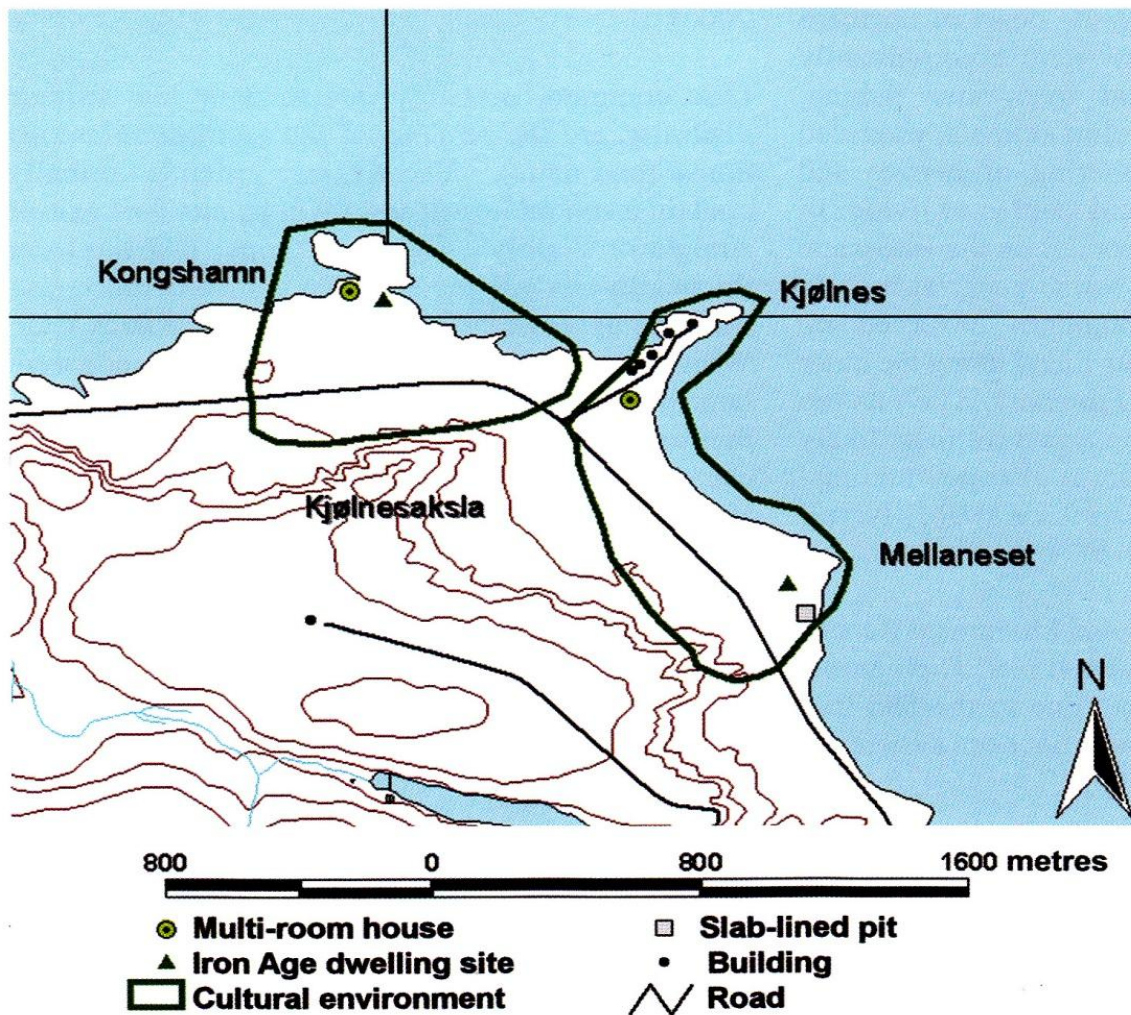


Figure 12: The Iron Age sites selected for excavation. After Myrvoll 2011: 84.

The three Iron Age excavations made under the heading of the the multi-room house project were limited to several localities a small 1 km radius on the Northeastern end of Varanger peninsula. The sites were located on a narrow NW-SE strip of land just east of fishing village Berlevåg.

Kongshavn II

At Kongshavn II, an exposed ridge at 5 metres asl, was a group of four round structure remains; two classified as turf houses and the remaining two as probable tent rings, all oriented NW-SE. (Myrvoll 2011: 85). Upon initial surface survey in 2001, several of the structures were plainly visible. Most of the area was covered in tundra vegetation barring the northernmost turf house, which was nearly laid bare. The turf house, around 3 metres in diameter and 4.9 masl, was easily noticeable from the surface with the inner floor area leaving

a shallow depression. The slightly raised outer perimeter wall was also clearly visible from erosion, along with some pieces of whalebone near the center. By contrast, the adjacent tent ring, 5.1 masl, was not depressed but appeared as an area cleared of stone debris. The tent ring itself, consisting mostly of flagstones, appeared highly diffuse and irregular and measured around 2.8 meters in diameter. A test pit was dug into the center of this larger structure, coming upon the central hearth. Here, a C14 sample (Wk-10193) was taken and given an 1150 +/- 140 BP (600-1200 AD) date. Both the tent ring and the slightly overlapping turf house were excavated in 2002.



Figure 13: Turf hut from Kongshavn II facing east, fully excavated. Photo: Bjørnar Olsen. After Myrvoll 2003. A field of 55 m², uncovering both structures in one fell swoop. Some modern pottery as well as fish bones was found in the thin turf layer. Following the turf layer was a brown, gravelly turf-like soil (layer 1). An entrance was indicated by stone slabs in the northeast end of the turf house wall following a shallow depression in the terrain. As evinced by the test pit from the year before, a charcoal-filled central hearth feature was uncovered. The hearth was relatively well preserved, clearly showing the original shape and alignment. In the back end of the hearth, several whale bones were placed neatly in a row. Several of the whale bones had cutmarks on them. Just inside, to the left of the entrance another piece of whale bone was retrieved. A number of fire-cracked rocks were found in the floor area, mainly concentrated around the hearth. No postholes were seen, however a lense of reddish-brown soil could be observed to the left of the entrance. Myrvoll posits that this could be the remains of a framework pole from an arch-beam framework. Besides ecofacts, no artifacts were found in relation to the turf house. (Myrvoll 2011: 85-87).

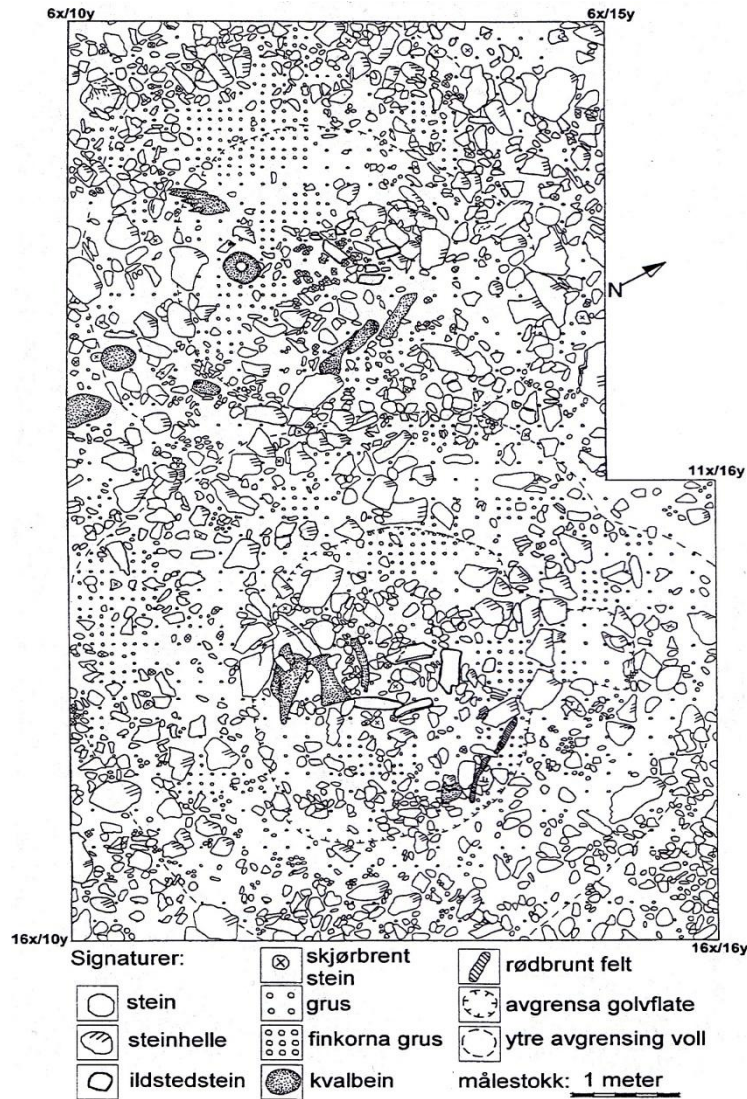


Figure 14: plan of the tent ring (NW) and turf house (SW) fully excavated. Legend: stone, flagstone, hearthstone, FCR, gravel, fine gravel, whalebone, reddish-brown soil, floor area demarcation, outer wall demarcation. After Myrvoll 2003

Mellaneset II

East of Kjølnes yet another Iron Age round dwelling was examined by way of a test pit. Northeast of the hearth was a small cache. A hearth flagstone showing signs of heat wear was found along with charcoal, as well as quartz and slate flakes (Olsen 2011: 67). Mellaneset II was located on another exposed ridge around 8-900 metres SE of Kongshavn, in the middle of the Mellaneset cape. The dwelling was spotted initially as a conspicuous stone circle with a cleared middle area situated at an altitude of 7.9 masl. Constituting part of the eastern wall was a stone heap or cairn-like feature. The inner floor measured a modest 2.8 metres in diameter. Otherwise mostly barren, the uncovered floor revealed two concentrations of fire-cracked rock and charcoal: one in the middle and another just east of it, bordering into the aforementioned cairn in the eastern wall. This could simply indicate two separate camp

itches. Beneath the cairn was a layer of dark brown turf and soil. Myrvoll (2011: 87-88) suggests this may have been some kind of cache, perhaps representing a secondary phase.

The inventory of the Mellaneset tent ring revealed a scraper, quartzite flakes and sherds of Kjelmøy ceramics along with a piece of raw asbestos. All these items were found in a thin layer of soil resting on the floor. The test pit sample (Wk-10321) from 2001 returned the result 1875 +/- 74 BP (50 BC – 340 AD cal.). However, the sample – taken from charred non-local spruce and larch driftwood – was not reliable. Another sample (Wk-12187) from the medial fire activity area was dated to 1979 +/- 43 BP (90 BC – 30 AD cal.) (Myrvoll 2011: 87-88).

East of the tent ring at Mellaneset I was a field of exceptionally large slab-lined pits, one of which was excavated. Measuring 4 x 2 m, it presented as a rectangular hollow surrounded by a low and wide earthen wall around the top edge. Prior to excavation, the bottom of the pit was situated 4.9 masl. Unlike the pit at Slettnes field I, this structure appeared very sturdy, with vertically lined, well-fitted slabs packed around the entire chamber wall. Carbonized blubber spots, presumably, were sprinkled across the floor flagstones. Henriksen posits that chambered pits such as this one were likely to be used repeatedly due to ease of maintenance (Henriksen 1995: 70). It would also follow that the builders of the pit had reasons to make it durable. Lying in situ above a layer of charcoal-mixed layer of fire-cracked rocks was a whale vertebra. A sample (Wk-12189) was taken from one of the floor slabs, presenting a date of 1417 +/- 42 BP (540-690 AD cal.). The Mellaneset II tent ring, then, is older – the turf house at Kongshavn II slightly less so – than the slab-lined pit. However, there are other groupings of slab-lined pits in the area which may suggest use of the area – by means of these Slettnes house/slab-lined pit (and possibly boathouse) constellations - throughout the first millennium. While whaling could have occurred at Kongshavn II or Mellaneset I, obtaining pieces of stranded whales may well have been the order of the day. The group of slab-lined pits here does not seem to hint at any large-scale intensive whaling.

Myrvoll stresses the similarities in floor spatial features between the Kongshavn II turf house and Sámi ethnographic sources, as well as patterns found in Sámi archaeology. Indeed, this continuity is characterized by Myrvoll as both astounding and impressive (Myrvoll 2011: 88-89). However, noting the absence of any floor portioning features in the tent rings at Kongshavn II and Mellaneset, Myrvoll draws on other equivalent example - for instance Grydland's (2001) excavation of a medieval Slettnes house at Vapsgedden on Spildra,

Kvænangen municipality. She goes on to suggest that the tent rings near Berlevåg may represent provisional dwellings pitched and used by male hunters, negating the need for gendered ritualization of the internal space. Alternatively, the internal division may have been marked by decomposable, organic materials. Lastly, she calls for a need to modify the impression of a fossilized structural pattern in relation to Sámi archaeology. (Myrvoll 2011: 88-89).

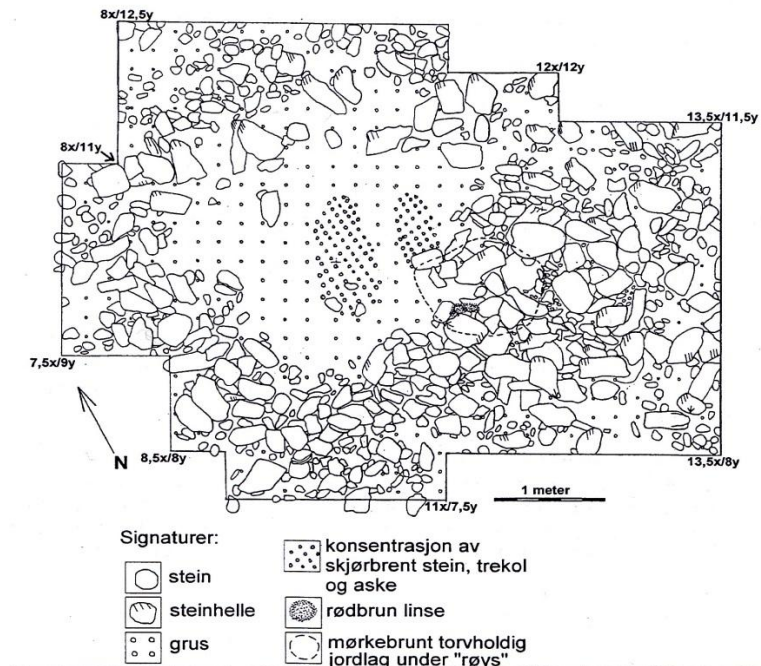


Figure 15: The excavated tent ring at Mellaneset II. Legend: stone; flagstone/slab; gravel; concentration of FCR, charcoal and ash; reddish-brown lens; dark brown layer of turf and soil beneath small cairn.

5.5 Hammerfest municipality: Skjærvika/Fjellvika 2009-2010

In the field seasons of 2009 and 2010, laborious excavations were undertaken at two separate bays around 4 kilometres North of Hammerfest, across the strait from Melkøya. The background for the project – a rescue excavation - was an expansion of the oil and gas facility on Melkøya impinging on the archaeologically extensive bays of Skjærvika and Fjellvika. As the crow flies, the distance between the northern site of Skjærvika and the southern site Fjellvika was about 400 metres. Both bays provide ample shelter from both sides thanks to cliff walls. The shoreline at Skjærvika was armored with large pebbles – a so-called shingle beach. Fjellvika had a smaller plane habitable zone due to inclining terrain inland. (Henriksen & Valen 2013: 29-41).

Preliminary surveys at Skjærvika in 2005 had already established a number of probable Iron Age structures, making these a priority objective in the planning stages. The excavation presented a rather complex picture, with many overlapping or huddled structures yielding a large chronological spread. Good spots were likely reused, resulting with trace remains of secondary activities in older structures. Nine houses returned Iron Age dates. Four of these, however, have been dismissed as representative of secondary activity. In the following, I will give a short presentation of some the more pertinent and informative excavated structures.

Slab-lined pits at Skjærvika/Fjellvika

A total of six slab-lined pits were found: five at Skjærvika and one at Fjellvika. Henriksen & Valen observe a change from oval pits without wall slabs, to sharply rectangular, more elaborate slab-lined pits with flagstone-packed walls. They see the development giving the impression, in its own right, of an established industry around these implements – with cemented rules around their construction and use. (Henriksen & Valen 2013: 386-387). The C14 dates from the pits point out a pause in activity between 400 and 550 AD. The slab-lined pits saw use from 150-400 AD, again resuming from 550-900/1000 AD. Palynological analyses strongly support this dating. Charred birch bark was found in the dump zone of one of the slab-lined pits, perhaps having been used to line the floors or walls. As with the two sites at Kongshavn and Mellaneset in Berlevåg, whale bones featured prominently in relation to the slab-lined pits at Skjærvika and Fjellvika. (Henriksen & Valen 2013: 382-383).

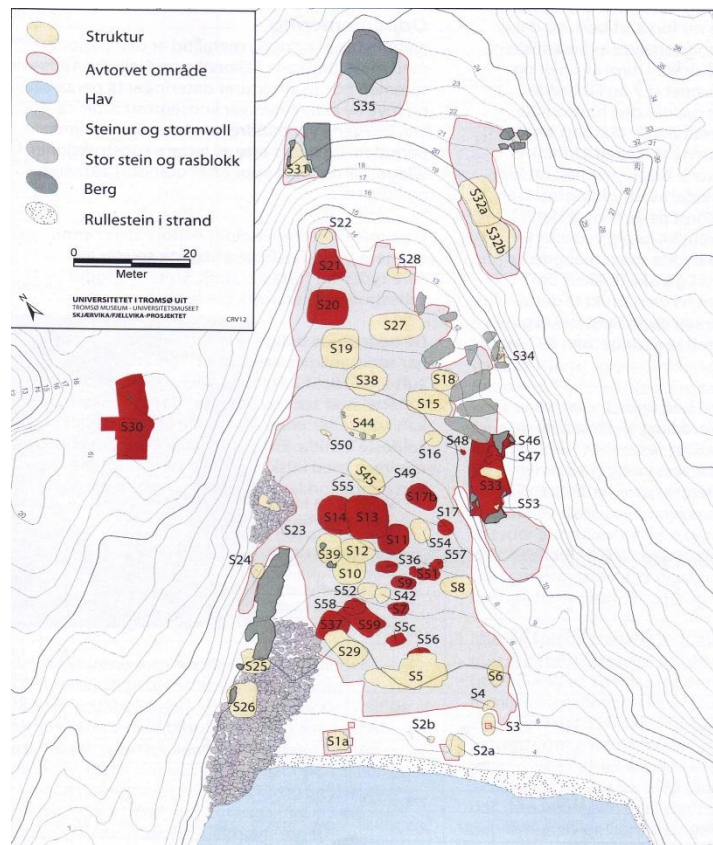


Figure 16: structures returning Iron Age dates at Skjærvika. After Henriksen & Valen.

Structure features at Skjærvika

Some of the structures excavated were unprecedented in the Iron Age of North Norway. S13 appeared rectangular, but with rounded corners and a large circular hearth in the centre. 7 masl in elevation and with a depressed floor, the inner floor was measured to 5.5 x 4 metres. A sample from the hearth (WK29903) places the house at 1783 +/- 25 BP (135-335 cal. AD). Another sample (Wk31250), this time from the west side of the hearth stone circle and in a higher layer yielded 1261 +/- BP (665-860 AD cal.), likely representing a secondary context. The samples coincide with the punctuated periods of use for the slab-lined pits in the area. Appearing quite sturdy in build, the structure also featured double walls in the SW and SE portions of the wall. Between the walls were traces of turf and soil, however no opening could be located. While it was difficult to determine and isolate contexts pertaining to S13, finds include a metal button, a grindstone and a fish net weight. (Henriksen & Valen 2013: 220-227)

Overlapping S13's west wall was a somewhat similar, but oval depressed construction affixed S14. Placed slightly west of the centre of the dwelling was a small, circular hearth. A

sample (Wk29904) from the hearth gave the result 1620 +/- BP (385-535 AD cal). A piece of raw asbestos was retrieved from the hearth. Scattered around the floor was small number of quartzite, quartz and flint flakes (20 of all categories in total) along with three quartz cores (Henriksen & Valen 2013: 228-230).

Parallels to S13 and S14 are found in Västerbotten, Northern Sweden. Also utilizing shingle beaches in their construction, these Sámi dwellings have been linked to fishing seal hunting – with dates primarily ranging from 500 AD to the medieval period (Broadbent 2010: 66-95). These huts similarly feature circular hearths, but mid-passage traces are absent from the material. In addition, the huts are associated with iron forges which, as we shall soon see, is another parallel to Skjærvika (Broadbent 2010: 166-168)

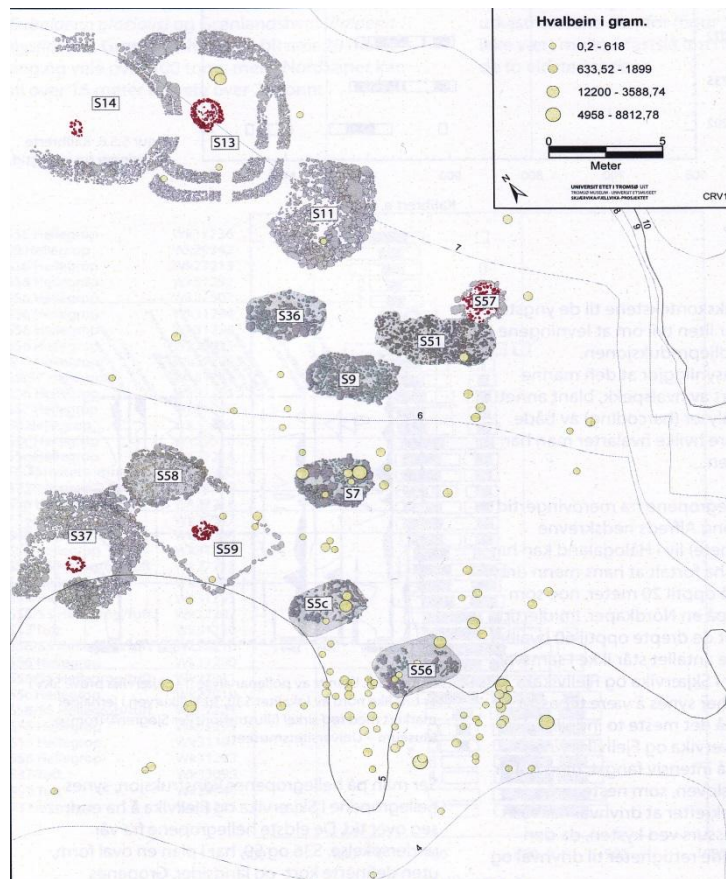


Figure 17: Iron Age structures and features in lower Skjærvika.

S59, a clean and angular rectangular structure with a round central hearth was identified in the lower parts of Skjærvika. A fragmented bronze ring brooch was recovered from the hearth, with a Viking Age date confirmed from several samples (Henriksen & Valen 2013: 166). The ring brooch likely has an eastern provenance (Henriksen & Valen 2013: 388). Overlapping S59 was an oval, possible Slettnes type turf house/tent ring dubbed S58. Samples

gathered from the seemingly displaced hearth rendered an approximate date of 425-600 AD cal. However, no finds could be linked to the S59 context. Connected to S59 in the east through a poorly-defined wall was a cleared rectangular floor, S37. A date from the round central hearth places S37 at approximately 700-900 AD. (Henriksen & Valen 2013: 172 – 174; 388-399).

An iron fire striker, not related to any structure, was also recovered from lower Skjærvika informing a latter half of the 1st millennium dating. In hearth of S57 – with dates spanning the range of 420-645 AD - a steatite spindle whorl was recovered. Lastly some indications of metallurgy in the context of a hearth dated to 355-535 AD cal. was found secondary to a Neolithic pithouse (S20). A cone-shaped mass of charcoal and fine sand along with pieces of glazed clay and some iron slag led Henriksen & Valen (2013: 293-295) to suspect a smithy once stood here.

The most pertinent takeaway from the Iron Age sites at Skjærvika and Fjellvika is that none of these show rectangular hearths or any signs of a mid-passage or axial feature. Furthermore, far from being defined by a monolithic blueprint matching restrictive locus requirements, the structures at Skjærvika and Fjellvika seem to display great variety, or perhaps an improvisatory quality. This can perhaps be explained by the properties of the shingle beach, and the nature of building structures in such a location. Alternatively, as suggested by Myrvoll (2011) in relation to the sites at Berlevåg, some of these may have been special-purpose sites without the need to enforce rules required in other situations. The inventories with established contexts also fall in line with what's been observed at Slettnes and Berlevåg.

5.6 Tromsø municipality: excavations at Tønsnes, 2014

At the rich locality Tønsnes, a cape just Northeast of Tromsø, excavations in 2014 uncovered a field of several hearths with twin stone row mid-passage features mixed with fire-cracked rocks. There was little indication of tent rings or walls in the field. Some of these mid-passages extended in both directions from what would be the short hearth wall axis. (Cerbing, M, personal comment, 2015). Two of the hearths rendered dates from around 0 AD, while several others surprisingly returned dates ranging through the entire Early Metal period. (Kjellman, E, personal comment, 2014) I was present in the early weeks of the excavation at

this very field, but was not able to see any of the structures fully excavated. The excavation report is under progress, and is not to be released until completed.

Olsen has informed me (Olsen, B., personal comment, 2013) that the Itkonen house on the Kola peninsula referenced by himself (1993) and Odgaard (2001) must be dated post-Iron Age based on an inspection of the ceramic material found here.

6. Surveyed and registered sites

At the starting point of this project, the Slettnes sites had yet to be entered into the Norwegian National Sites and Monuments Record (Askeladden). Having taken a more recent glance at the database, I was presented with alleged Iron Age dwelling sites survey-registered in the 70s and 80s. To avoid any false entries, I have exclusively gathered data from reports, published literature and simply asking around. Although some sites may have been missed, a representative selection is presented. I will begin by presenting the findings from the multi-room project. Other entries are provided mainly by Nilsen (2014) along with single entries from Myrvoll (2009) and Grydland (2001), and will be presented by municipality West to East.

6.1 Surveys and registrations – the multi-room project

As part of the international collaborative project Cultural landscapes from the Iron Age and early historical times in Coastal Finnmark focusing on the medieval multi-room houses distributed along the coastlines of Northern Norway and the Kola Peninsula (see Olsen 2011), 19 Iron Age sites were also recorded in conjunction with fieldwork conducted between 2001 and 2004. Two or more of either the Slettnes type, slab-lined pits or small boathouses were present at 11 of these sites. As Myrvoll concedes, only a few of these can be definitively affixed an Iron Age date. However, the main periods of use for the slab-lined pits as well as the small boat landings strongly indicate an Iron Age date. (Myrvoll 2011: 84). The survey reports mentions Sámi round houses found in locations with one or more of the aforementioned diagnostic categories that nonetheless receive medieval-modern dates (see for example Myrvoll 2002). The methods used to determine relative age are not made explicit.

North of the Ryggefjord inlet and on the north side of *Værbukta* bay is a field containing (amongst other remains) numerous house structures of various forms, six slab-lined pits and two boathouses. Some of these have been listed as Iron Age remains (Myrvoll 2002: 10-11) Hearth charcoal samples from a test pit provided dates of 937 ± 102 BP and 943 ± 62 BP. The test pit also revealed a typical rectangular hearth along with iron fragment pieces (Olsen 2011: 61).

Along the eastern side of the *Skonsvika* bay towards Berlevåg airport one Iron Age round impression was registered along with nine slab-lined pits and two boathouses. The bay opens to the Northeast Barents Sea (Olsen 2011: 61, Myrvoll 2011: 12f).

At *Slotten* in Måsøy municipality, surveys recorded one “round house”, two slab-lined pits and two boatsheds. (Olsen 2011: 75).

The Iron Age is represented at *Store Mollvik*, an east-facing bay, by two Slettnes houses and eight slab-lined pits. The bay is located just south of the town of Vardø (Myrvoll & Henriksen 2003: 13)

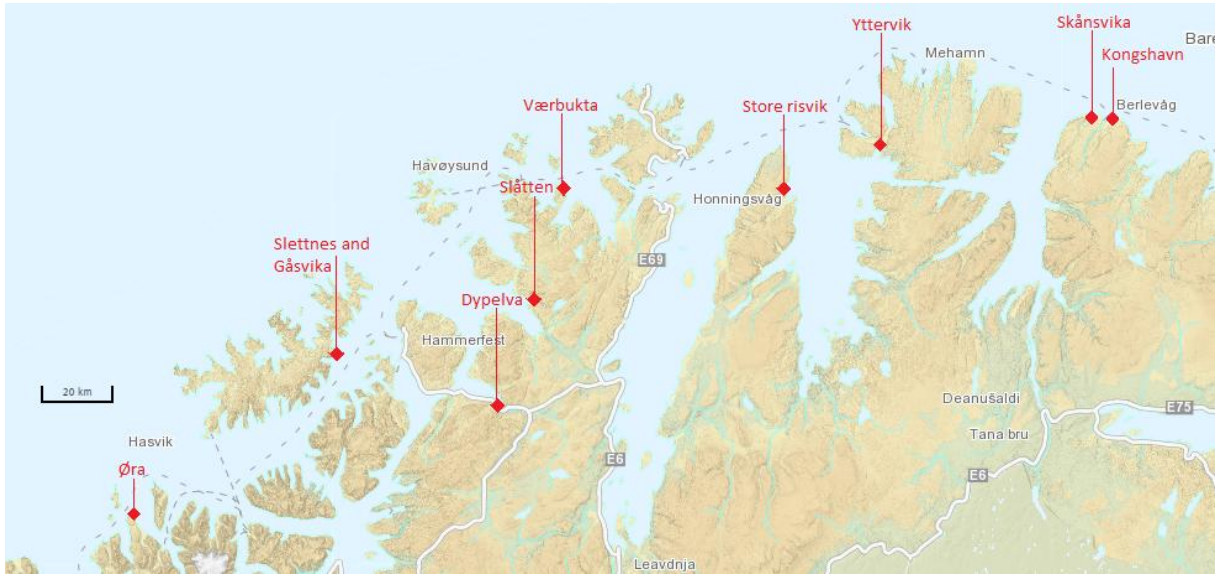


Figure 18: Surveyed and excavated sites in Finnmark.

On the west side of Magerøya is *Yttervær*, a bay in Vannfjorden. A field of six Iron Age round houses was recorded in the SW portion of the bay. They form an evenly-spaced line oriented SE-NW. Just north of the row of Slettnes houses are two boathouses and two slab-lined pits. The pits are placed on each side of the northernmost boathouse. Symmetry is emphasized in the arrangement of the location. The site is sheltered from wind from the south (Myrvoll & Henriksen 2003: 16-17)

One Slettnes house is recorded in *Store Risvik* in Lebesby municipality. Store Risvik is located on the northwest side of Laksefjorden. The bay also housed four slab-lined pits. (Myrvoll & Henriksen 2003: 19-20).

Overall, Iron Age constellations featuring all three categories – slab-lined pits, Slettnes houses and small boathouses – were found at *Værbukta*, *Skonsvika*, *Slotten* and *Yttervær*. In the rest of the locations, the Slettnes houses were always accompanied by at least one of the other categories.

6.2 Other surveys

Karlsøy municipality

On the east side of Grunnfjorden, a field of presumed Sámi roundhouses and boathouse was found at *Sandbakken*. The boathouse was dated to the Viking period (Nilsen 2014: 83).

Lyngen municipality

On the east side of Ullsfjorden, at *Futvik* in Nord-Lenangen, a field of 20 round wall features was registered, along with 3 possible boathouses. Nilsen (2014) suggests a possible Iron Age dating for the field. Around 8 km north of this field were five slab-lined pits. (Nilsen 2014: 82).

Skjervøy municipality

The North-facing *Nord-Rekvik* on Arnøya contains upwards 30 tent or turf house remains. These houses are spread widely across the elevation curve, the highest situated of which may well be ascribed a first millenium date (Bratrein 1995: 22, Holberg 2002: 80-82). Slab-lined pits are also heavily present, with several sizable fields sometimes paired with overgrown piles of whalebone. Between Nordrekvikelva and Stormyra we find the only indication of boats in the area in the form of a Sámi boathouse/shelter 300 metres from the shore (meters above sea-level not proportionate – the area is long and flat). Just south of the boathouse, a few metres inland, five tent circles can be seen. The distance from the sea indicates that this locality is quite old.

In an area rife with slab-lined pits, at *Nessøra* on Arnøya, Nilsen has pegged a lone roundhouse as belonging to the Iron Age. The cape is located on the western inlet of Akkarvik and Langfjorden (Nilsen 2014: 115). Across the fjord, on eastern inlet is *Haugnesodden*, a locality holding five slab-lined pits, a boathouse and one Sámi roundhouse, registered in 2001. One of the roundhouses proved to be a very large slab-lined pit following a research excavation (Nilsen 2014: 118, 195-196).

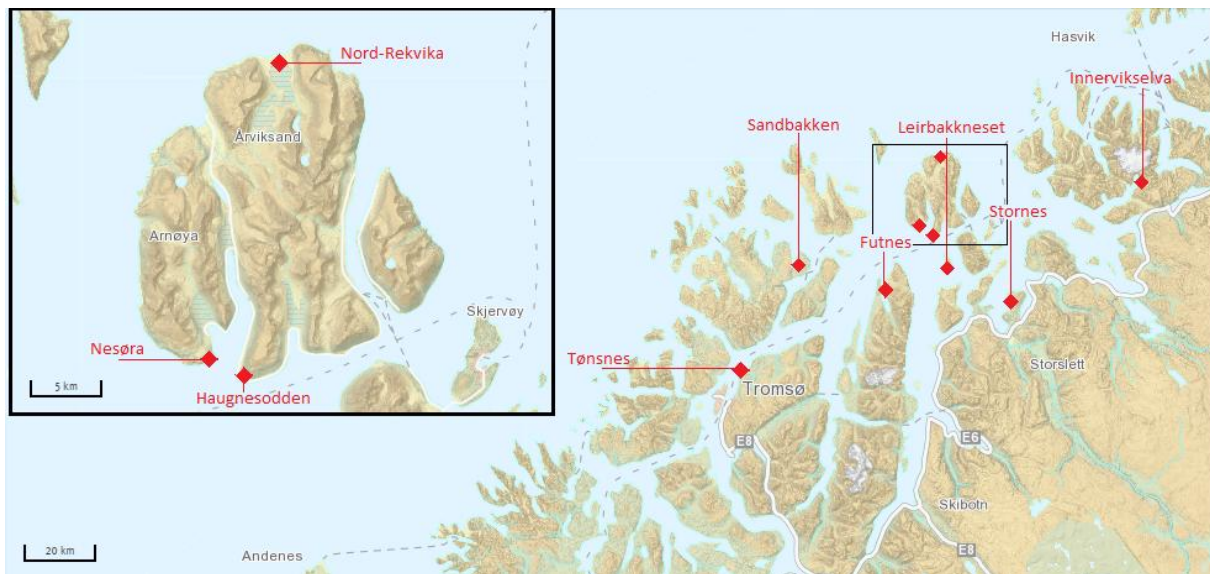


Figure 19: surveyed and excavated sites in Troms.

Nordreisa municipality

In *Lillevika*, South-West of Stornes in Nordreisa municipality there are two circular features with low walls, previously registered as Iron Age houses. Nilsen indicates these are markedly different from medieval Sámi roundhouses and may well be ascribed Iron Age dating. Around a kilometer North-East of the Lillevika site is a boathouse. (Nilsen 2014: 102).

On the southwest side of *Vorterøya*, at *Leirbakkneset*, a collapsed cairn was found along with two stone circles and the remains of a round house. A single slab-lined pit is found on the southeast side of the small island with another two in *Krøkebærvika*, just north of it. A small boatshed is found on the same ridge as the slab-lined pits at *Krøkebærvika*.

Kvænangen municipality

Sven-Erik Grydeland conducted a series of research excavations aimed at elucidating the Sea Sámi *siida* from the high medieval period onwards in the Kvænangen region of North Troms. On the eastern side *Jøkelfjorden*, 50 metres NE of the river outlet *Indre Vikselva*, Grydeland came across a field of structures sat on a beach terrace. Four of these were circular, one being more pronounced – structure I. The field also contained more recent rectangular huts that were hybrids of Kven and Sámi building traditions. Surrounding structure I at 4.5 masl was a tall wall, around 40 cm thick and with a gap marking an entrance. A 1 x 3 metre field drawn from the centre and through the back wall was opened. The test returned a fish vertebrae and a modern fish hook from the top turf layer. As the full excavation commenced, Grydeland was adamant that he was dealing with a turf hut - a *darfegoahti*. A concentration of fire-cracked

rocks and charcoal was found in the centre of the structure, though no samples were retrieved. Another similar concentration was found in the wall, with a bottom sample dated to 2065 +/- 65 BP (160 BC – 5 AD). This was also the only Iron Age date from Grydeland's project. Grydeland believes the field could be linked to sealing and reindeer trapping, as the inner fjord has been known to house both seals and migrating caribou in the spring and fall months. Parallels are drawn to Grythaugen on the Varanger peninsula, a sacrificial site consisting of a cairn surrounded by six pits. These walls of these pits contained fire-cracked rocks and a bottom layer of charcoal. However, these were dated to 1000-1200 AD. Grydeland also points to structures around the Lule River in Northern Sweden interpreted as implements for smoke-drying meat. The earliest dates can be traced back to around 100 AD. (Grydeland 1996: 26-28).

Aside from not resembling the Slettnes type, the structure has no diagnostic finds. Slab-lined pits or Iron Age boat houses are also absent. I have therefore decided not to include it among the excavated structures. It is, however, included in the survey-registered sites for posterity.

Loppa municipality

Near the outlet of Sandlandsfjorden, at *Øra*, three cairns and three roundhouse remains were found on a ridge overlooking a field of slab-lined pits (Nilsen 2014: 131).

Hammerfest municipality

As mentioned by Hesjedal et. al. (1996: 190), the cove Gåsvika just north of Slettnes has an Iron Age locality featuring boathouses, Sámi house structures and a slab-lined pit.

Kvalsund municipality

A 2009 NIKU survey registered two 3.5-4 metres in diameter round houses near Dypelv in Kvalsund municipality. They are located deep on the western side of Repparfjord. (Myrvoll 2009).

From these surveys, we can see that presumed Iron Age houses can appear in locations immediately free of slab-lined pits or boathouses (*Lillevika & Leirbakkneset*). However, one of the other two categories can be found within 1 km or less.

6.3 Discussion on house forms and survey reliability

While the ethnographic material on the flexible goahti forms is extensive (see 2.2, Sommerseth 2009) there are some critical aspects to consider with retrospective use. I think we can deduce from this particular body of ethnographic research that the shift towards a more robust form of goahti isn't tantamount to some kind of technological development. Given the vague impressions left by the Slettnes structures, we could postulate that the inhabitants of the Iron Age Slettnes houses didn't find it necessary to use copious amounts of insulation material, perhaps only using hides weighed down by stone slabs. Ad-hoc modifications could presumably be made to the base arch-beamed frame at any point. However, form isn't always determined by function, and 'function' comes in many forms. The pertinent question then becomes finding reasons for the choice and long tradition of light construction. Continuing our functional line of reasoning, we may bring house form to bear on matters relating to relating to seasonal use and economy. Lighter constructions may fit well with the established and developing models of intergroup interaction related to the slab-lined pits as well as with suggestions on the outline of the period derived from ethnographic models of Sámi settlement and seasonal patterns (Henriksen 1995, Myrvoll 2011). Judging from the light construction of the Slettnes houses, both Hesjedal et. al. (1996: 228) and Olsen (1993: 45) suggest they represent shorter, seasonal stays in the summer – similar to the Sámi four-location pattern known from a 16th century source. In the warmer parts of the year, the sea Sámi ventured out to islands and fjords. Nothing in the Slettnes material conflicts with this assessment. However, many lighter forms *could* conceivably fit the criteria for practical survivability. Even modest amounts of insulation could have gone a long way in providing sufficient protection from the elements, even during Finnmark's long winter. The suggestion provided by (Olsen 1993) and (Hesjedal 1996 et. al) remains the strongest assumption.

Fields with numerous slab-lined pits indicate a level of production exceeding local needs. However, in the case of the Iron Age settlements at Slettnes and Berlevåg, we can safely assume that the chief concern was production for own use.

Assessing the informational potential in distribution as well as in site inventory of future Slettnes sites, may go some way in making inferences about the degree of sedentism or sustained re-use.

One could posit, as many have, that a large number of the region's inland sites from the period 0-700 AD remain undiscovered; perhaps in part due to natural formation processes. However, this gives cause for some concern. The relative dating of Sámi house sites as either from the Iron Age or Medieval Ages is based on place, context, sea level and appearance; the vague structures, often near slab-lined pits, are deemed Iron Age, while more pronounced imprints are assumed to be from later periods. Furthermore, the relative obscurity of the means by which to identify a tent remain as belonging to the Iron Age, may result in field surveyers seeing different things (field archaeology is learned by doing). So there's a certain self-fulfilling dynamic of mistaken identities at play here. As mentioned in chapter 1, Schanche (1990) recognized this as a potential cause for the Iron Age 'void', but was unable to find corresponding date samples. I should add that identifying the modest walls of the Slettnes houses will be near-impossible in grassy vegetation.

A number of problems come to mind: if the Iron Age Slettnes house is no different in construction from a continual tradition of Sámi dwellings, how can one reliably determine chronology with regards to surface survey registrations? Proximity to slab-lined pits and/or boathouses may be good indicators, but both can be found some time into the medieval period. Further, the former category is very common and widely distributed across the entire coast. In addition, this method is very imprecise as the accompanying categories have large chronological spans. In other words, the problem lies not only in the difficulty of separating medieval from Iron Age structures, but also in gaining any precise knowledge from survey data. For instance, differences in chosen locations between early Iron Age locations and later ones could be very telling in terms of societal changes or practices taking place around the slab-lined pits. Alternatively, the introduction of the slab-lined pits may have restricted summer settlement activity to the same locations throughout the period and up until around 1200 AD.

If I understand him correctly, Olsen seems to suggest that a turf layer or ring visible from the surface may be indicative of a turf house – something along the lines of a *darfegoahti*. When tent stones are exposed, a tent ring interpretation seems apt (see Olsen 2011: 65). However, it is also possible that the turf ring is a result of peat-packing along the bottom edge of the tent to provide insulation. If local conditions permit it, vegetation growing on top of an outer stone wall can naturally also make the structure more pronounced. At Kongshavn II, however, the differences in vegetation coverage on structures in such close proximity may well be

explained by the observation above. A strict dichotomization between a turf hut goahti and a lighter tent can be problematic, going back to Ingold's (2013) characterization of the creative process of craftsmanship. It recalls the hylomorphic way of thinking; completed forms being projected from the mind of the architect and onto the world. There could be an infinite number of permutations between a light tent and something like a darfegoahti, highly dependent on the locally available affordances and practical circumstances. Determining archaeologically with a great level of certainty which type of construction we could be looking at is, of course, almost impossible. The presence of a mid-passage feature does, however, provide indications of longer periods of habitation, and perhaps a single/two-family household composition.

While the upper limit of occurring slab-lined pits is set to 1200 AD, Slettnes-type dwelling features found in their proximity may well be younger than the 1200 AD limit. The Lørvik site proves illustrative of this problem. On the east side of Lørvik cove in Sandfjorden, some 7 km east of Kjølnes, four round houses and two slab-lined pits were recorded. The round houses had erroneously been affixed Iron Age status. (Myrvoll 2002: 14-15 cf. Myrvoll 2003: 24-26). A test pit from the northeastern structure hearth revealed a fire-cracked flagstone and charcoal layer yielding a $602 \pm$ BP date. The southwesternmost structure was also test-pitted, revealing a group of fire-cracked rocks and a fire flint. The birch charcoal sample was dated to 490 ± 116 BP. (Olsen 2011: 70). At Forsøl, Kirkegårdsbrukt in Hammerfest municipality, a test pit was dug in one of the "Slettnes" house and a sample of charcoal and charred whale bone was dated to 825 ± 75 BP. The location also houses slab-lined pits and shallow boatsheds (Bratrein 1996, Olsen 2011: 55).

From the distribution of the Slettnes sites, one noteworthy observation is that they appear in mostly the same environments – around bays and inlets, occasionally inner fjords, on the outer coast of Northern Norway. They figure exclusively in Iron Age beach zones, from around 4-7 masl.

7. Understanding the mid-passage

7.1 The Paleo-Eskimo mid-passage

the different Paleo-Eskimo cultures – Pre-Dorset, Independence I & II as well as Saqqaq, are regarded as migrational and cultural offshoots of the Arctic Small Tool tradition (4200 – 2800 BP) brought over from Eastern Siberia, the first people to occupy the northernmost regions of Canada and Greenland (Odgaard 2001: 52). Research into various the cultures of Greenland's and North-Eastern Canada's prehistory is of comparatively high resolution, incorporating both elaborate culture history methodology as well as DNA studies. The mid-passage house is here seen as part of the fuzzy “common ancestry”.

Danish archaeologist and explorer Eigil Knuth was instrumental in the mapping of Paleo-Eskimo archaeology in the late 1960s (Odgaard 2001: 55). Documenting and excavating a large number of sites in high arctic Greenland, he identified and laid the culture-historical groundwork for the archaeology of Greenland and North-Eastern Canada, demonstrating separate migration waves originating from the Bering Strait. To Knuth, the oldest finds – age-indicated by sea level elevation as well as musk-ox bones C14-dated at around 2400 cal. BC - coalesced into a demarcated cultural unit: Independence I, named after Independence fjord in Greenland's northeast. Independence I would appear to gradually disappear from North Greenland and Pearyland around 2000-1600 cal. BC, while a Northeastern bastion remains until approx. 1600 cal. BC.

Only one third of the Independence I dwellings surveyed by Eigil Knuth displayed mid-passages. Knuth posited that the mid-passage might have been a territorial marker, and that other residential configurations may have represented other clans (Knuth 1967: 47).

Commenting on room arrangement in Independence I & II sites featuring mid-passages along the fjords of Northeastern Greenland, Eigil Knuth (1967: 47) notes that a five-part sectioning of these dwellings “comes about quite naturally...” with “...numerous examples...all over the earth, both within earlier culture periods and from the ethnographical world.” Knuth is here referring to the mid-passage hearth as placed in a front-to-back, straight axis, forming three separate compartments, along with the two sections on each side of the passage. He cites numerous examples of similar occurrences, among them in Japan's Jomon period, China's Yan Shao neolithic, dwellings from the paleo-Aleut Bering Strait village Chaluka, as well as early (poorly documented) North American Indian tents. In the case of the Amerindian tents, accounts tell of platform skins securing an uncluttered mid-passage, with one end given

religious significance. (Knuth 1967: 47) Gjessing (Gjessing 1947 in Knuth 1967) argued that the Sámi baelljogohti could be traced back to structures of the Komsa Mesolithic (note: the Komsa term is generally considered outdated), and although neither he, nor anyone else, pursued this proto-gohti thread further, one could consider the possibility of traceless mid-passages in light, round dwellings of earlier periods.

The sprawl-like nature of the mid-passage as a cross-cultural phenomenon seems to hint at a complex, multi-causal explanation, whilst also lending credence to Knuth's gist - that the arrangement "comes about quite naturally". We can speculate as to the significance of an open room, single-family households and the mid-passage in the aforementioned causal equation.

As we shall see in the following section, the mid-passage structures of the Paleo-Eskimo are a multi-faceted beast, encompassing both practicality and spirituality.

7.1.1 Early Paleo-Eskimo: Independence I, Saqqaq and Pre-Dorset

The most prominent Independence I dwelling comes in the form of an elliptical tent ring featuring a mid-passage and a box hearth, sometimes with five or more dwellings in one site, indicating flexible and situational social organization. It is suggested that compound sites, usually found in the inland, saw use during fall/winter, dispersing coastward into single tent/smaller groups come spring/summer time (Mikalsen 2001). In the northern, high-arctic tundra occupied by the Paleo-Eskimo, structural remains are often readily seen from the surface, and much information has been gleaned non-invasively. Interestingly, this has resulted in an abundance of knowledge about subsistence and resources in southern and western Greenland from fully excavated middens and structures (Odgaard 2001: 54).

The signature of the Independence I dwelling is a square hearth. These "box hearths" are constructed placing flagstones vertically to form a box shape. Usually dimensioned around 40 x 40 cm, these hearths can be found in tent rings or with an axial feature also consisting of thin, vertically-placed flagstones. The inner surface of the box hearth may hold a layer of round fire-cracked cookstones or irregular flagstones along with charcoal, char bone and sand saturated with fat (Odgaard 2001: 55-57). Although no kettles have been found in Independence I dwellings, they may have placed cook-stones in leather, plant or wood containers (Odgaard 2001: 131, 140).

Dissimilarities of note in Saqqaq dwellings of western Greenland are cookstone-filled hearths that span the entire mid-passage without any clear section demarcations, as well as diffuse open fireplaces with axial flagstone placement. Olsen (1998: 62) argues that the former are more likely to be base camps, with the latter being special purpose expeditionary camps and the like. The mid-passages of the Saqqaq differ from the northern Independence I structures with the use of thicker stones laid flat. (Odgaard 2001: 61, 63). Despite large amounts of rock, some mid-passages display very little evidence of indoor fire activity, instead suggesting that rocks have been warmed outside for use as convective heating elements. In other cases, long driftwood trunks could have burned across the entire length of the mid-passage. (Odgaard 2001: 180-181 c.f. 194). Nearing the transition to the Dorset period, the quantity of cookstones used dwindles slightly. This is explained by the introduction and availability of soapstone lamps and kettles, development continues in this inverse direction. However, cookstone depots are still common. (Odgaard 2001: 145, 189).

7.1.2 Independence II and Mid-to-Late Dorset

Towards the Southwest, spread out all directions from Baffin Island we find most of the foundation of the Pre-Dorset tradition. The main distinction stems from the marine mammal-oriented specialization. In Pre-Dorset, the Paleo-Eskimo began using seal blubber as a supplemental source of fuel leaving blackened spots atop hearthstones (Odgaard 2001: 73, 181). This shift may well be attributable to driftwood shortage (Odgaard 2001: 146).

As the name suggests, the later structures of Independence II first appear at around 800 cal. BC, ebbing out at around 400 cal. BC with bastions further south remaining until 200 – 0 cal. BC. Similar to Independence I, Independence II dwellings chiefly come in the form of tent rings with sectioned mid-passages marked with vertical flagstones. The mid-passage vertical flagstones tend to be thinner while the hearth itself appears less encapsulated (Knuth 1967: 203, Odgaard 2001: 79). Independence II mid-passage features are often accompanied by an adjacent cache-like flagstone box outside the tent ring, perhaps serving some culinary purpose (Odgaard 2001: 80, 89, 182). A tendency towards working and traveling in larger groups is seen, with most sites harboring 4-6 tents as well as gathering places featuring hundreds of dwellings. In the north, most dwellings are situated around inland lakes, while a costal dispersion is seen in the east.

The Mid-Dorset period (Greenland Dorset I) sees colder temperatures, along with continued use of soapstone lamps and kettles. With increased focus on marine mammals, hunting bows fall out of use. Previously scant hearth row sites are now fully introduced in addition to hearth burials. The staple mid-passage hearth sees a slight change with the placement of only two upright flagstones, each on opposite sides of the hearth along the mid-passage axis with a single slab in the bottom. (Odgaard 2001: 87-89). The upright stones may have been used to rest a kettle or plate, or to protect a central lamp against entrance and exit drafts. (Odgaard 2001: 149, 156).

The mid-passage persists through the first millennium AD to the end of the Paleo-Eskimo culture in the Late Dorset period. Here, mid-passages often feature two fireplaces along with implements like lampstones and pot rests. The auxiliary open fireplace may have been reserved as a light source and for quick roasting of food. Late Dorset is characterized by a great deal of uniformity in material culture in the entirety of the Paleo-Eskimo arctic. It was also a time of contact with the Thule and the Norse (Odgaard 2001: 167-168). A new addition to the record is the megalithic longhouse, with its 60-100 cm tall flagstone walls and varying between 6-45 metres in length. On David Site in North-Western Greenland, hearth rows are situated in a parallel arrangement between adjacent longhouses, though they were not likely to be in contemporaneous use. Lacking traces of household activities, along with finds of figurines within the structures suggest a cultic function. Although the function of the longhouses is unclear, most house an axial feature. Lastly, hearth row sites become commonplace. (Odgaard 2001: 94-105, 159-163, 183).

A confounding aspect of the hearth is that it has different household functions and can be rearranged and dismantled through use – thus being crystallized in situ at different points in a dynamic process. We must be cautious about establishing a typology of hearths based solely on static morphological features (Coudret et. al. 1989 in Odgaard 2001: 17, 22, 28)

7.2 Pyrotechnology

In the Disco Bay Saqqaq site Niivertussanguaq, fire-cracked rocks in between the flagstone pavement may indicate rocks used as heating elements under the seating/sleeping space – which again may point towards fall or winter habitation. (Olsen 1998). The quantity of cookstones in a hearth can be related to length of occupation or seasonality, in that longer stays will produce more debitage, while colder temperatures will require a more frequent

supply of cookstones (Odgaard 2001: 61). However, this is confounded by a number of factors. Additionally, the volume of ash and charcoal in a fireplace may provide information about seasonality when comparing hearths inside dwellings with those outside. In the warmer months, the outside hearth will tend to see more use than the inside one and vice versa come winter (Odgaard 2001: 140-141).

The various elaborate ways of using stones in the Paleo-Eskimo hearths are characterized by Odgaard (2003) as a pyro-technology. The shortage of firewood, along with harsh weather conditions made the Paleo-Eskimo masters of this technology.

Sedimentary rocks, such as coarse sandstone or chalk, crack easily and can even pose danger to anyone inside the radius of a tent ring. They will also produce more debitage. Metamorphic (e.g. gneiss) and igneous (e.g. granite) rock can be reheated a higher number of times without cracking. However, the properties of local materials may vary a great deal. Through heat retention, heated rocks allow some heat to remain whilst not having to tend the fire too often. Jackson (1998: 34-35) postulates rock types with suitable properties will see greater use. Fine granite, for example, endures heating well, but the heat dissipates too quickly. When rock is subject to intense heat, it loses its ability to retain heat due to the forming of microscopic fissures (Odgaard 2003). Coarser materials retain heat more effectively than fine materials. Regardless - if a rock becomes frail and fire-cracked its ability to retain heat is reduced. (Odgaard 2001: 133-134). Materials that crack easily are more cumbersome to work with given that new rocks have to be acquired and brought in at a higher rate than with more durable materials (Odgaard 2001: 139-140). In some instances, rocks used as cookstones or fire stones were procured by the Paleo-Eskimo from non-local sources (Odgaard 2001: 67).

Smaller stones are more suitable for the purpose of boiling water, as they quickly and effectively absorb and transfer heat. Once a small cook-stone has been depleted, it can be swiftly removed from the container and onto the fire. Larger stones are slow to absorb and give off heat and make for good room-heating elements or for roasting (Odgaard 2001: 130-131). It may stand to reason that smaller rocks are generally more practical in most scenarios due to the speed with which heat is absorbed.

The use of heated rocks as dispersed heat sources in dwellings is supported from Indian ethnography. They could be placed near the fire, or moved out into the periphery to keep

people seated in different places warm. (Michael 1998: 19-20). Among North-American Indians, rocks would be heated in the hearth and moved to a platform. Food could be prepared on the remaining heat left in these stones (Jackson 1998: 10). Heated rocks were also used in sweatlodge ceremonies where water was thrown on the rocks to produce steam (Michael 1998: 18).

Interesting in this regard is the presence of cookstones outside F204 and F205 at Slettnes. Here, as documented among the Indians, people may have chucked rocks that have outlived their use and become ineffective (Jackson 1998: 12). Some of the structures and pits at Slettnes could be remnants of this type of activity. For instance, some kind of non-fire proof material could be packed into a pit. Heated rocks would then be submerged into the container with the items that are to be cooked. When the heat from the stones dissipates, they are replaced by warmer rocks until reaching optimal results (Jackson 1998: 10-12). Another possible explanation for these implements is they were used in activities that produce large amounts of smoke. Preparing larger rocks for use as heating elements may have happened outside the tent, as smoke holes have been closed to prevent heat from dissipating. (Odgaard 2001: 140-145).

7.3 Conceptual aspects of the mid-passage

Odgaard (2001: 163-164, 199-200) views the mid-passage feature of Paleo-Eskimo hearths as a part of a cross-cultural shamanistic idea complex. Seeing as the makeup and structure of the mid-passage changes through time and according to location, various practical functions may have been of merely transient importance. As a portal to other planes, the hearth fulfilled a role that the new oil lamps could not. Over time, due in part to the very mild natural formation processes of the region, the tent rings and mid-passages would serve as reminders of the past and of their own cultic significance. Odgaard contends that, because the basic elements persist through 4500 years, we should assume that the explanation for the mid-passage must lie in the symbolic and meaningful aspects. Drawing from Evenki cosmology, the mid-passage is an expression of a specific shamanist idea, the clan river – a horizontal axis mundi embodied by the mid-passage. The mid-passage unites the Paleo-Eskimos with a durable, historical cross-cultural complex and the specific idea of the clan river. (Odgaard 2001: 164-165, 200)

Коренные народы Севера, Сибири и Дальнего Востока Российской Федерации Indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East of the Russian Federation



Figure 20: Map of indigenous peoples across Siberia. Dallmann, W. K., Norwegian Polar Institute.

Odgaard takes special interest in an account by Russian ethnographer Anisimov A.F. (1968a & 1968b in Odgaard 2001: 40-41) of a séance in an Evenki tent. Here, the space between the entrance and the hearth symbolized the celestial tier of Gods as well as reincarnated souls, while the hearth itself represented the earth plane. The area rear of the hearth pertained to the underworld and realm of the dead. While similar to a classical axis mundi, this cosmology is horizontal, rather than vertical. Upon death of the body, one soul travels to the underworld, while the other (both being of the same individual) is reincarnated into the clan. The fire in the hearth served as a buffer between the underworld and the mortal realm, allowing the shaman passage into the underworld spirit realm. (Anisimov 1968a in Odgaard 2001: 41, 49). Childbirth was facilitated by the protective female hearth-diety, Togo Mushun, who received souls from the clan river and transferred them to the wombs of females. (Anisimov 1968b: 204 in Odgaard 2001).

Similarly, the Ngenasan of the Siberian Nenets' female diety Tu-njami (the fire mother) is protector of the domicile, warding off disease and aided in childbirth. Some form of protective female diety is present in the religious conceptions of numerous Siberian peoples, and commonly symbolic of claimed land (Odgaard 2001: 40).

In Tunguska, fire was associated with cleanliness, and the living flame could be either male or female. Maintaining the fire went beyond mere practicality, requiring appeasing offerings in

the form of blubber or alcohol in return for divine favors. Among the Nenets and Enets, the living fire of the hearth was connected to clan-kinship. When leaving home (for long travels or when establishing a new home following wedlock), the eldest son would bring ashes and embers from the family hearth. Further, kindling the hearth of a neighboring tent was only allowed if a member of the family resided there. (Odgaard 2001: 41-42). Another broadly applicable conception is the ritualized quenching of fire being associated with death, and the rekindling of fire being associated with new life, or contact with the spirit world (Odgaard 2001: 49.)

After a broad cross-cultural ethnographic and historical comparison of conceptions surrounding the hearth, Odgaard identifies three ideas; the female diety – a fire mother; fire symbolizing life with the hearth serving as a bridge to the spirit world, and lastly; the spirit of the hunt. Because these ideas are so pervasive across geography and through time, their use as analogies, Odgaard holds, is less problematic than formal analogies. (Odgaard 2001: 49, 51 cf. Wylie 1993).

7.4 Variations on a theme?

Among the Yamal peninsula Tundra-Nenets, division of social space is negotiated through the use a cognitive line – the Siyangi line. Sven David Haakanson has conducted a study of this traditio (Haakanson 2001). The practice is highly ritualized: the men's reindeer driving pole (tyr) is struck into the ground, marking the middle point and fire pit of the soon-to-be erected choom (or chum, similar to the Sámi lavvu. The plunging of the tyr establishes the symbolic siyangi line, stretching out infinitely in the direction opposite of the entrance.). Pitching of the choom, around 3 metres in diameter, is to be done by the women of each respective family. (Haakanson 2001: 82). The entrance is placed in an East-West with a sled – the ngoto – placed in the west end, behind the tent. Women are not to cross the line until the camp has been fully set, lest they bring bad luck to their husband and the entire camp. It should here be mentioned that the men leave the vicinity of the camp site to retrieve water in preparation of an obligatory meal. Haakanson was told from several interviewees that the siyangi tradition was 100 years old, which he ascribes to the nature of oral history.

The household itself is divided into two parts along the symbolic line. The two families residing in the tent are assigned to a specific side. As one enters the nenets' tent, either side of entrance is storage area for the respective families' women's tools and resources and work

area. The same applies for the corresponding areas in the back end of the choom. Between the women's corner spaces are general unisex sitting, sleeping and eating areas. The space surrounding the hearth is considered the men's area. The back area, contiguous to the ngoto, is considered sacred and otherwise reserved for food. Once inside the choom, the line between the two tent hemispheres is not to be crossed by anyone in fear of bringing bad luck to the reindeers or the camp. Outside the dwelling, however, only adult women are restricted by the siyangi line, leading women to do their foraging in an outwards cone from the front of the tent. If the line is crossed, a cleansing ritual can take place. Dogs and individuals under the age of 16 can move freely around the outside of the choom. Men work outside the back, free to cross the line. (Haakanson

While the Yamal Nenets certainly operate with a mid-passage, it is entirely non-material, existing only in a conceptual state. Rather than being aligned across a lateral gender divide – per Yates' (1989) Sámi household – the Nenets' domicile main division occurs vertically between the two families. It also only pertains to the back hemisphere of the dwelling. While we can recognize a familiar resemblance to the mid-passage, it is in many ways dissimilar.

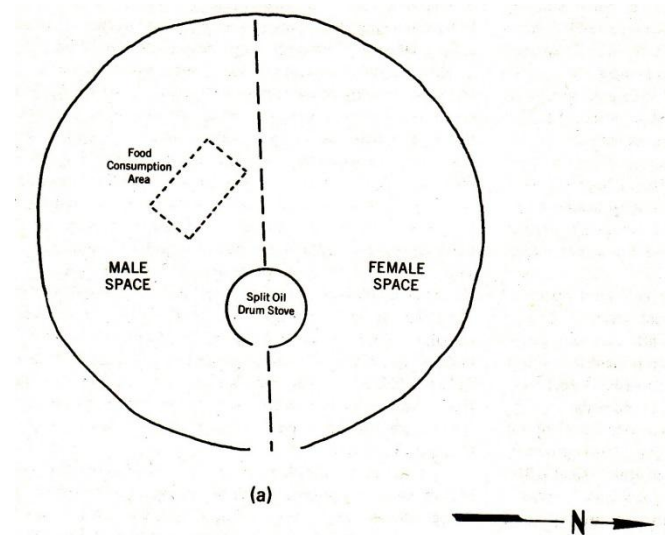


Figure 21: Spatial restrictions in Navajo hogan. After Kent 1990.

Susan Kent's account of the Navajo Indians has demonstrated very different rules towards navigating space in their circular winter dwellings – hogans – and in their rectangular summer houses – ramadas. The hogan follows a familiar scheme of gendered partitioned space cardinal to the entrance, while no locus-based restrictions are observed in the ramada. This

line is purely conceptual. Kent relates this to the sacred nature of the hogan reflecting the cosmos and its circular shape. The ramada, on the other hand, is considered profane. Examples of conceptual divides like that of the Navajo hogan are not limited to Siberia and North-America: similar examples are found among Kenya's Maasi and Ilchamus (Kent 1990c: 136).

The governing structural principle of the round vernacular dwellings – and the Slettnes houses - may not derive from a specific idea of a specific divide across a specified line. Instead, such principles may be seen as dynamically emerging in social practice and tradition as a result of the tent's spatial properties interfacing with human (animistic) predispositions - that is to say the tent itself is influencing and prompting – triggering – *some* modular-esque configuration of internal division. This also means, of course, that the human actors' experience of practical inhabitation may be instrumental in understanding how and why the mid-passage phenomenon occurs. That is not to say that a circular dwelling necessarily results in a segmented internal arrangement; there are many cross-cultural examples of the opposite (Kent 1990c: 135). However, given the frequent and ubiquitous examples of restrictive space in circular dwellings, synchronic snapshots of socio-spatial practice may not be very informative to the task at hand. The assertion that built environments influence behavior cross-culturally is not novel (see Kent 1990). It has been recognized that architecture is suggestive to new behavior and that it can serve a mnemonic function, reminding users of certain behaviors (Kent 1990b: 2). In previous works on the relationship between architecture and social use of space, the onus of primacy and focus has been placed on human actors with culture as a structuring force (Kent 1990b: 2-3). My suggestion is that the ways which different types of architectural environs and dwellings influence culture may have different causal relationships depending on the qualities of the built environment, and must be analyzed in a particularistic manner.

Coincidentally, the global distribution of the stone-paved mid-passage is limited to the far North. In the case of the North Greenland Paleo-Eskimo, driftwood, though plentiful, only amassed in certain natural current traps. (Odgaard 2001: 145). As a limited resource, it stands to reason that it would be used as fuel or equipment rather than as mid-passage markers. If the lack of firewood were to explain the distribution of the mid-passage, one would expect to find it in the Norwegian Mesolithic, for instance. Nonetheless, this stands as a possible contributing factor. My suspicion is that mid-passages have existed in many cultures through

the ages, and that most were either made of perishable materials or were purely symbolic/conceptual lines.

As a side note, I should mention that a modern informant has said that the partitioning of inner space in the goahti was simply to keep things tidy (Sommerseth 2009).

7.5 Understanding the mid-passage redux

As it stands, approaches to interpreting domestic space in the Slettnes houses have relied primarily on Sámi ethnography. Olsen (1993) and Myrvoll (2011) both suggest an interpretation of daily life and social space strongly analogous with historic and ethnographic accounts – accounts mostly recorded post 18th century. The general temporal and historical proximity is of implicit importance, but the Iron Age mid-passage becomes key by means of being indicative of floor partitioning, the specifics of which are to be understood as largely mirroring the later written sources. These strict rules of conduct in Sámi domestic space undoubtedly seem indicative of pervasive conceptual structures in the collective consciousness. Whether we shall understand the gender-specific norms as mere difference; fluid, possibly functional, or as a struggle for dominance, they must have been permeated through some means outside of “the mind”. Upholding the entire “collective consciousness” is, perhaps, too much for the mind to handle. The material and the spatial itself must have informed and assisted in making the performance norms and traditions habitual (c.f. Connerton 1989).

The modern, linear perception of time entails a forward movement between segmented points in time, leaving the past not only behind, but makes it irretrievable. In the spirit of progress fashion trends and technological gadgets, this way of thinking comes quite natural to many. In archaeology, we’re presented with schematic visualizations of different periods accompanied by tool typologies and dwelling forms - a conceptual synchronization of materials, things and cultures into neat temporal segments. Inside these discrete segments, the given lapse of time can be said to be represented as occurring all-at-once, or with a certain specificity. With our terminology - Iron Age society, Iron Age tools, Iron Age houses - we encapsulate all these domains, isolating them in a temporal vacuum. (Olivier 2001: 63-64). Of course, we can say the same about the “Sáminess” in the models of domestic space. Through these ethnographic snapshots, the dynamic and chaotic life of daily activities has all but disappeared completely, and we’re left with what appears as a static, monolithic segment. It all ties into an a priori understanding of material remains as being products of a specific culture and its idiosyncratic way of appropriating the material world.

With the more (or less) recent theoretical developments around materiality, some have argued for a rehabilitation of time. Instead of viewing time as linear or cyclical, we’re better served understanding the passage of time as “duration(s)”, particularly with things of a physical

nature projecting across temporalities in different degrees. Thus, the things of the past are visibly accumulated into the present. Most culturescapes are a patchwork of “bygone” eras and rhythmic wavelengths (Ingold 1993). Of course, this accompanies a similar effect on our perception in that we see and feel the presence of the distant and near past all around us. The duration and permanence of the corporeal world, in a sense, projects it into the future. Intuitively, we know that the physicality of the world with all its things is unlikely to disappear the next day. (Olivier 2001). The multiplicity of temporality is arguably another aspect factoring into upholding Sámi society through the years.

Through the course of the last millennium BC, the pit houses of the region seemingly become sparser, the end result being that these flexible arrangements fully take their place - at least on the outer coast. In what could, in terms of linear cultural evolution, be characterized as a ‘retardation’ of sorts, the pithouses become smaller from around the onset of the Early Metal Age (1500 – 0 BC) compared to dwellings in the 1000 years preceding it, with signs of lower degrees of sedentism and dwindling social complexity (although the evidence for said social complexity is disputed, see Hood 1995). Along with a suspected general decrease in the number of houses on the coast, there are indications of increased activity in the inland, exemplified by open air sites (Hood & Olsen 1988: 120, Olsen 1994: 104-124). Concerning the emerging Iron Age settlement, some pertinent questions relate to the causes for this development in the grand scheme, but also why these round houses now become continually reproduced in place of these previous forms. The mid-passage is already present – albeit (physically) only from one entrance and to the hearth - in this earliest-known iteration of the Slettnes house, thereby making it the first appearance of such a feature in the whole Fennoscandian region. Tentatively, then, it seems the axial feature isn’t gradually introduced (or in memetic terms - ‘selected’) after some long period, but rather nearly - if not wholly - coinciding with the change in housing. Herein clearly lies a potential inductive fallacy, which we will defer for later discoveries.

As detailed previously, Myrvoll interprets the whale bone found in a Kongshavn II house as a symbolic feature, and in turn classifies this portion of the mid-passage as the *boassu*, citing that males were traditionally in charge of handling meat procured from hunting and trapping. If we return to the Forsøl site on Kvaløya, however, we recall that the sample from the hearth revealed a concentration of charred bone, believed to be of whale. The use of animal bones as fuel is known from arctic ethnography, and is frequently observed in Paleo-Eskimo mid-

passage houses, usually from sources high in blubber like musk oxen or seals. Scarcity of viable kindling material is a common denominator in both cases. But in the ethnographic material from the Sámi pastoralist era, firewood was kept in the ukša. So, which category does the whale bone fall into?

The critique directed at the use of analogy becomes relevant in this context. Martin Wobst (1978) writes about the “tyranny of the ethnographic record”: in anthropological fieldwork, the researcher is limited in terms of time, space and in the interpretation of meaning. There are aspects of behavior that are intentionally hidden from the observer, as well as the problem of the inescapable distortion, the platonic doxa – the figurative veil between “true” comprehension and belief - for both observer and informant source. Crucial in Wobst’s critique is the impossibility of observation across large units of time. Ethnographic accounts are snapshots; parochial and synchronic. Moreover, there is so much variability in the worldwide record of different behavioral patterns and practices, belief systems and so forth, that one basically always can find something, somewhere to support (or bend) the narrative in the desired direction. Failing to recognize this dynamic risks a continual reproduction – careless transference - of (imperfect) ethnographic snapshots in models of archaeological explanation. (Wobst 1978: 303). Wobst argues that archaeology has the potential of providing a unique diachronic vantage of the structures underlying historical contingency. Which sounds appealing, of course, but is admittedly easier said than done. We may also question the notion that archaeology is necessarily diachronic, or that diachronic generalizations are inherently better. Surely, that would depend on the context at hand.

Going about their daily lives, the inhabitants of the Sámi lodge needn’t have consulted their “ideological canon” to enact the proper way of doing things (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 146-153). Instead, it was all around them – in the various furnishings and draperies of the tent, in personal objects and their interconnected embodied practices, in the attire and so forth, the workstations and their objects – as a resource of sorts (c.f. Belk 1988). Indeed, according to Merleau-Ponty (1994), space and spatial orientation forms the fundamental quality of hybrid embodied existence. The external world *requires* of us to be cognizant of the space around us; the distance to the other side of the room, the distance to the person sitting beside us, the distance to other side of the fjord etc. The affordance offered by space is not something mediated through distant contemplation, but is rather informed in a blunt and immediate manner. As we can see plainly, the space inside the tent was limited, and could thus only

afford limited movement - not just for the women, we can safely say (Mulk 1995) - but for every person dwelling inside. The rules and norms could be seen as providing a certain existential belonging through the naturalization and perceptual habitalization of the “social-space”. At the same time, navigating and using the space would instill a form of unreflective enskillment.

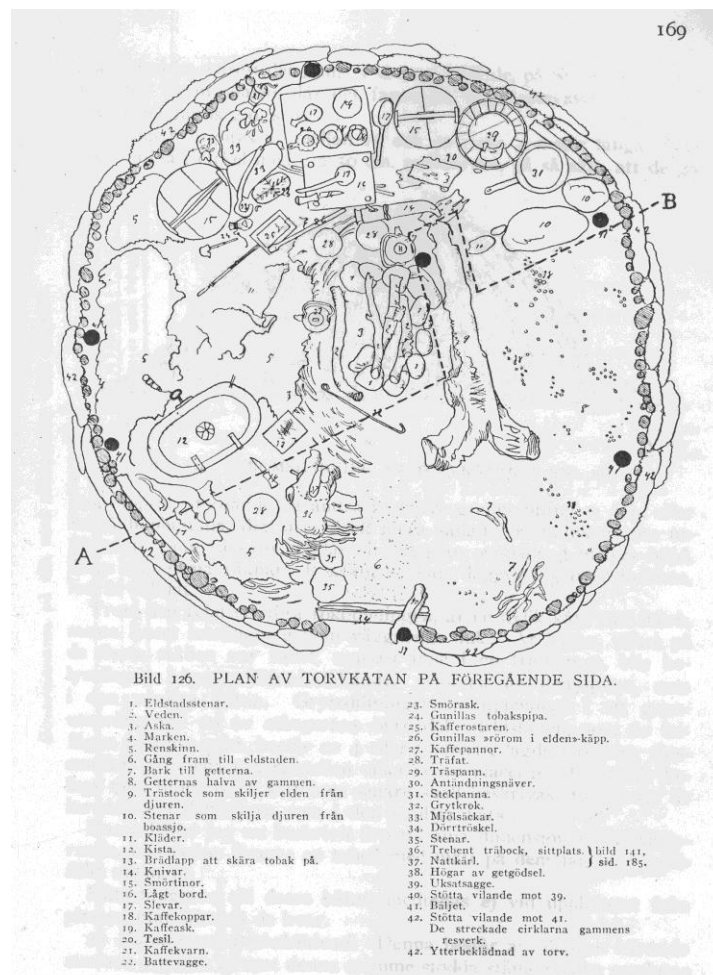


Figure 22: the cluttered interior of a 20th century Sámi goahti. After Elgström 1922.

As we’ve seen, the bipartite arrangement of a small, circularly enclosed living space is seen over large periods of time in various hunter-gatherer cultures across the world.

Most commonly, the line is laid across from door to door. This isn’t arbitrary. It is a cognitive line, but also one situated in physical space. In practical terms, the front door is the locus of traffic moving in and out of the tent. Naturally, sitting in this path surely would prove problematic. It also follows that one would want to store the more spacious objects, such as firewood or crockery, along this space. Like the hearths of the Gressbakken and Mortensnes houses before it, the Slettnes house features an oblong rectangular box hearth, situated so as to

accommodate the bipartite arrangement described above. Like Ränk (1949) suggests, wind drafts could play into this. But as seen in the Sámi tents – as well as cross-culturally, a transverse partitioning is also common, and in such cases the back of the tent is usually a special place, situationally reserved for the shaman.

How many different ways are there of organizing space inside a tent? This question is what's known as "the principle of limited possibility". Ockham's razor holds that the explanation involving the least amount of complex steps, the lowest number of extraneous or convoluted circumstances, be the explanation opted for. When separate aspects of a phenomenon (recalling the famous parable of the mysterious elephant) begin to form the outlines of a totality, we can talk of parsimonious concision (Ariew 1976). The mechanism of cultural transference – Odgaard's shamanistic complex - requires an "idea" to survive a long series of obstacles in its path. Odgaard posits that the vast tundras of Siberia, shrouded behind the veil of the Iron Curtain, might further illuminate the traces of the clan-river mid-passage. Here, I must concede that my explanation bares the hallmarks of what's known in analytic philosophy as an ad-hoc hypothesis. Even if we were to find more of these mid-passages (which, to my knowledge, has yet to occur), the explanations I've offered would still apply. So, my explanation-through-concision is poorly testable. Odgaard's suggestion is more testable, provided that this spread suggested by Odgaard was shown to follow a linear temporal and geographic sequence. However, the mid-passages of the Slettnes tents precede those of the structure excavated by Itkonen in 1918.

If we return to the non-authentic variations of form that Ränk struggled to overcome, we can conjecture that these variations represent, perhaps, actual displacements and reorientations of the social order in the body-space interaction – in part caused by higher or lower numbers of occupants. That's not to say the overarching influence of collective culture wasn't there, just that the physical form of the tent played a constituting role in its stability and change (Olsen 2010: 145-147). It thus follows that the "collective" is more entangled and engaged in the physical than we're led to believe. If we view the codes of behavior described by Ränk (1949) as expressions of ephemeral figments of collective and individual (the smallest unit scale) consciousness, the house and its mid-passage become the stage set for ever-changing manifestations of these figments. Whether we call these transient ideas myths, world views or 'spiritual resources', they do not provide directives in and of themselves; there is no central authority; no limited set of affordances; no force of nature informing realms of possibility.

It shouldn't be surprising in the least to see patterns breaking up and changing through time. The opposite - that systems of meaning and rules behavior remain largely unchanged through vast periods of time – is the extraordinary claim. And that is even disregarding the situational, mundane reality; the impracticality of incessantly watching one's step trying to eke out a fire or prepare a meal in a (relatively) small tent when cold, wet and tired - there's a certain autonomy at play here, and we see the exaggerated primacy of meaning and symbolism. But perhaps this particular mid-passage stage and social, historical context would favor certain expressions, bring forth “archetypes”, or alternatively; facilitate an ideological and cosmological “principle of limited possibilities”. There's no blank slate here, but an ebb and flow, a degree of disorder. In this sense, we ought to approach any potential cross-cultural principal staple with skepticism. “Shamanism” cannot be viewed – barring considerable reductionism - as some static disembodied idea, but rather as an evolving bricolage of the environment, of physicality and materiality, of being, learning and interaction, of history and time – all woven together in various ways.

One might argue that, in the bigger picture, some asymmetrically placed hearth and line of slabs, or the mundane paradox demonstrated by the whale bone in hearth at Forsøl are of little consequence, not seeing the forest for the trees. In the aggregated sense, that is true. The historical argument - that the patterns observed by historical sources have earlier roots - certainly bears weight. However, adjusting historical situatedness to the level of the individual, cf. Heidegger's (1962: 425-7) concepts of Dasein and historicity, urges a more grounded perspective. Both the “cultured” landscape of coastal Finnmark and North-Troms – the mid-passage ruins left those who came before – as well as the socialization (or thrownness) into a mobile household with this mid-passage as a central, anchoring feature - was integral in the reproduction, but also the permutation of the stage set.

Consequential to the material at hand, the content of meaning and symbolism of the mid-passage in the house from around the start of the first millenium (F7) wasn't necessarily the same as that of the mid-passage from 700 years later (and so forth). Certain schools of thought dealing with different types of memory and ways of remembering delineate between social and cultural memory. Social memory is the type of collective memory content transferred through communication, oral traditions and the like, and has an unpredictable but usually short life span (in the area of 80-100 years). But this type of memory is supplemented and

strongly affected by cultural memory, the type of memory given longevity and solidity through shared texts, iconography, images and rituals. (Assmann 2006). The latter conserves and stabilizes a society whilst at the same relaying that cultural content to other, separate collectives (cf. Barth 1969). Aleida Assmann holds that cultural memory transcends the human lifespans and projects into all three temporalities: past, present and future. We see through consumption and production of text how an earlier text is influenced by the memories preceding, textual and otherwise, as well as by the anticipation of the future, in turn influencing subsequent texts – this forms an important basis for cultural memory. (Assmann 2011). Relating this concept to archaeology means expanding the effective horizon of archaeological ruins, seeing the ways in which the mid-passage remains, for example, could have formed landscape memories akin to cultural memories, and been part of an evolving temporal narrative. One could object that this way of remembrance is a product of modernity, but there's arguably a permanent, forceful quality to things. The mid-passage ruins left by ancestors were reminders of the river clan and the spiritual resources afforded by this idea. Moving into unknown areas, the presence and familiarity of these ruins provide a sense of belonging to the Paleo-Eskimos.

In her introductory remarks, Odgaard states that the material world is perceived, created and structured by the world of ideas – i.e. mankind makes itself (Odgaard 2001: 7). I believe instead that we ought to consider the possibility that the mid-passage(s), on occasion, have eluded human imbuelement and done things, meant things, not intended for them by their originators.

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