

A NEW TREATMENT ON SETTLEMENT ARCHAEOLOGY IN SW FINLAND¹

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Henrik Asplund. Kymittæ. Sites, Centrality and Long-Term Settlement Change in the Kemiönsaari Region in SW Finland. (Turun Yliopiston julkaisuja/Annales Universitatis Turkuensis. Sarja – Ser. B osa – Tom. 312. Humaniora.) Turku, 2008. 584 pp.

Archaeological studies in Finland were recently supplemented by a comprehensive doctoral thesis on settlement archaeology in the Kemiönsaari region, written by Henrik Asplund (University of Turku). This region is located in south-westernmost corner of Finland and covers both the island of Kemiönsaari, which was called Kymittæ in early written sources, and some neighbouring municipalities on Finnish mainland. Archaeological research of the area was already started in the late 19th century; yet the most significant fieldwork belongs to the recent decades and was mostly carried out by the author.

The author himself labels his main research method as settlement-archaeological. Although this branch of archaeology is already known for one hundred years, it has strongly altered and developed during this time and the term itself is rather complex (see more Lang 2006). Settlement archaeological research has had remarkable peculiarities both in different countries and in different times; its nature (e.g. research topics and questions) depends on local conditions (achievements of earlier research, specifics of archaeological material) as well as on general development of archaeological theory (what are the questions to be answered). Therefore the settlement-archaeological research in south-western Finland cannot be similar to, and use the same methods as, that in northern Finland, for instance, not speaking of more distant areas. In the same way this research in south-western Finland in the early 21st century cannot follow the same pattern and ask the same questions as the corresponding research in the same area 30 years ago (when the first modern settlement-archaeological project was carried out in Finland, see Schauman-Lönnquist et al. 1986; Uino 1986; Schauman-Lönnquist 1988). It is important to underline that this settlement-archaeological research method used by Asplund in his thesis is original and partly developed by himself on the basis of earlier studies both in south-western Finland and neighbouring countries (particularly in Scandinavia and Estonia).

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The text of the book is clear, written in style adequate for archaeology, easy to read and understand. The structure of the treatment is well-grounded and logical; it starts from the introduction into the topic and research area and the presentation of the author's theoretical framework, then continues with the presentation of archaeological material in chronological order, and then reaches the discussion of many particular problems concerning the development of settlement, land use, material culture and society. The main emphasis is on the Bronze Age and particularly on the Early Iron Age, which is understandable due to the available material and the author's own research interests.

The main objective has been defined as the explanation of causes for the differences between the Finnish archipelago and neighbouring mainland, particularly regarding the Iron Age. Yet, there are dozens and dozens of other questions, of both bigger and smaller scale, presented in the whole text in corresponding chapters (e.g. the specifics and problematics of archaeological sites, the causes of continuity and discontinuity in archaeological record, man-and-environment relationships through prehistory, forms of social organization in different periods, development of land use, etc.). As much as possible in the light of the current state of research, these questions have also been answered by the author.

As to the main objective mentioned above, the settlement development followed approximately the same paths both on the island of Kemiönsaari and neighbouring parts of mainland until the early Roman Iron Age. Then the finds, particularly stone graves (cairns), seem to disappear in the archipelago; the cairns did not occur again there before the Late Iron Age. This discrepancy had to mean a major areal re-organization, as the author describes it (p. 158 ff), and can be interpreted as the change in settlement patterns based on the corresponding developments either in economic utilization of the archipelago or in social and ritual behaviour of people, or in both. Of course, the Kemiönsaari area is not unique then similar processes are considered. The best comparable example comes, perhaps, from the Estonian bigger islands of Saaremaa, Hiiumaa and Muhu and the neighbouring western Estonian mainland, which became 'empty' of cemeteries in the early Roman Iron Age (Lang 2007, 90–93). The reasons for such developments may have been different in details; yet, there were most likely also some common underlying causes for such 'fluctuations' in the archaeological record. As to the Kemiönsaari region, it is likely that the reasons of abandonment were not of environmental character; i.e. no remarkable changes in climate, vegetation or fertility of soils can be observed.

Consequently, as Asplund states, there had to be other reasons for the abandonment of the archipelago. He draws attention to intensifying territorial behaviour in the mainland areas since the Pre-Roman, but particularly since the Roman Iron Age. This phenomenon was reflected in the foundation of cemeteries, which are interpreted not only as ordinary funeral places but also as territorial markers and means for the expression of social power. In certain regions such developments led to the establishment of core areas, which served as power centres of the time. Such central areas are observable throughout the Iron Age and can be taken as evidence of the establishment of administrative territorial units comparable to Estonian *vakus*-institution (see Lang 2002); they were most likely initial forms of prehistoric parishes, *pitäjät*. According to Asplund, there were no firmly established territorial organizations of larger scale (e.g. *maakunta*) during the Iron Age in south-western Finland (as often suggested by earlier studies; see e.g. Salo 1999, 55 ff).

When territorial organizations with power centres started to develop in mainland areas, the archipelago gradually lost its attraction for people as a living area and was marginalized. This standpoint is at variance from an earlier suggestion (Tuovinen 2002) that the archipelago was continuously and densely settled throughout the Iron Age. The settlement there was sparse and the archipelago mostly served as hinterland for the settlement centres on the mainland. Such a situation started to change in the Viking Age: both archaeological and pollen analytical evidence shows the increased habitation and utilization of the islands. Most likely there was some colonization from the mainland centres. Yet, it is interesting that cemeteries were still built and used only in old core

areas and it was only at the beginning of historical times that earlier peripheral areas were occupied. This happened now as a result of the colonization of the Swedish-speaking population.

This is briefly the main skeleton of settlement-archaeological developments in the Kemiönsaari region as pointed out by Asplund. In addition, special attention is paid to the sites and finds of the Pre-Roman Iron Age. This is mostly due to two reasons: first, this had to be a period of crucial developments when different scenarios became dominant in the archipelago and mainland; and second, this period is still less investigated in comparison either to the Bronze Age or the Iron Age AD. Asplund has succeeded in specifying several pottery styles and artefact chronologies. The author is well aware of what is going on in the archaeologies both in Finland and elsewhere, particularly where his field, i.e. settlement archaeology, is concerned. The very nature of his study has required thorough knowledge of all archaeological periods and their problematics since the Stone Age until the historical times; and his treatment clearly demonstrates that he possesses that knowledge. The author's attitude to earlier studies is critical but also respectful: he always tries to understand why certain standpoints have been developed and what the reasons for certain opinions or theories were. After doing so, it has become easier for him to go further and develop his own views.

For conclusion I would like to stress that there is no archaeological work of similar nature as that of Asplund carried out so far in Finnish archaeology. Therefore his research topic is, without doubt, original and innovative, the more so as it is mostly based on the author's own fieldwork. This research is especially significant because it puts the south-west Finnish settlement history into the same general and theoretical framework as we already have in Scandinavia and Estonia; that is, it makes the south-west Finnish archaeology comparable to that of the neighbouring regions. The innovativeness of Asplund's study can be seen even in the circumstance that a number of his achievements and interpretations, which are new in the comparison of earlier research (concerning e.g. artefact chronologies, pottery styles, agricultural developments, territorial behaviour, social structures, etc.), are valid for other regions as well and can be used for further studies there. Asplund's work is therefore highly valuable and will be certainly referred to in many treatments to come.

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