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CROSSROADS OF CULTURE

Aspects of the social and cultural setting in northern Sweden during the last two millennia BC

Abstract

The principal aim of this article is to discuss the cultural significance of the material remains in the middle of northern Sweden during the last two millennia BC. Several find categories from the provinces of Ångermanland, Jämtland and Medelpad are discussed in order to illuminate the debated relationship between the coast and the interior. The material evidence consists of asbestos-tempered pottery, rhombic shafthole axes, mounds of fire-cracked stone, cairns, bronze artefacts and moulds. The interpretative discussion focuses both on the spatial distribution and on the contextual meaning of the material. It is here suggested that the cultural significance of the material from the investigation area should not be described in terms of a dualism of cultures. The cultural setting is rather to be interpreted as an intricate system of kinship relations, marriage exchange, ritual strategies and interactional contexts, in which various groups of mobile hunter-gatherers were involved.

Keywords: bronze, moulds, asbestos-tempered pottery, mounds of fire-cracked stone, cairns, shafthole axes, culture, mobility.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of culture within archaeology has for more than a century provided a model for nationalist archaeologies with its emphasis on the prehistory of specific peoples. According to Bruce Trigger, it still remains the dominant approach to archaeology in many countries and like national history, to which it is usually closely linked, the cultural-historical approach can be used to bolster the pride and morale of nations or ethnic groups (Trigger 1989, 174). The concept of culture in archaeology is generally considered to consist of an assemblage of co-ordinated objects and elements, and a *kulturkreis* is mainly held to be found in a geographical area where the maximum number of cultural features occur together (e.g. Magnus Myhre & Myhre 1972). There are, however, several problems involved when we attempt to relate the archaeological material to these concepts. Different material categories within a so-called *kulturkreis* or a geographically defined "culture" do not always coincide in uniform distribution patterns, but also overlap each other and express discontinuity, which makes the interpretation of the ancient contexts and conditions complicated (e.g. Hagen 1970; Shennan 1989).

The term "Arctic Bronze Age" has been used in the Fennoscandian discussion as a label for a northern *kulturkreis* located in the interior of northern Fennoscandia. The concept refers primarily to Bronze Age artefacts distributed in the interior of northern Scandinavia and Finland (Bakka 1976; Tallgren 1937). The concept also falls back on the discussion about whether the north Scandinavian Stone and Bronze Ages are to be considered as inseparably connected with the south Scandinavian counterparts, or if they should be seen as two different cultural areas (e.g. Christiansson 1963).

Whether the "Arctic Bronze Age culture" in northern Fennoscandia, from an archaeological point of view, can be regarded as a coherent and homogeneously defined culture in relation to the "Nordic Bronze Age culture" in the south is the point of departure for the following discussion.

Several archaeologists have held that the archaeological material in northern Fennoscandia represents a dualism of cultures between the coastal area and the interior (e.g. Bakka 1976; Baudou 1977; Gjessing 1942, 483; Stenberger 1964, 307f). According to Egil Bakka, the Nordic Bronze Age artefacts and monuments are geographically distributed to the coastal area mainly because of better preconditions for agricultural activities. In the interior of northern Scandinavia there existed no such preconditions and it is there that the Arctic Bronze Age culture belongs (Bakka 1976, 8). The question about a dualism of cultures is here intimately connected with the hypothesis that there also existed two distinctly different economical systems. The Arctic Bronze Age culture in the interior embraced a population of hunter-gatherers, and the Nordic Bronze Age culture along the coast consisted of farmers (Bakka 1976, 9; Baudou 1977, 144f; Forsberg 1993, 240ff; Kristiansen 1987, 76).

Evert Baudou (1989; 1992) describes the conditions along the north Swedish coast as an economically autonomous part within the Nordic Bronze Age culture-area. The interior of northern Sweden was an independent area in relation to the "Nordic areas", but on the other hand they were strongly influenced by eastern areas such as Finland and Russia via trade, exchange and transmitted symbols. Baudou also argues that an ethnic border appears through the middle of northern Sweden during the middle of the Bronze Age. At the same time the differences between coast and interior continue to constitute two separate and autonomous entities (Baudou 1989, 183; 1992, 110-114).

The main issue that will be discussed in this article is on what archaeological premises it is relevant to talk about a dualism of cultures between the coast and the interior in northern Sweden during the last two millennia BC, which includes the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. In trying to answer this and other questions, I will investigate the distribution of different artefacts and remains which have been connected with the Arctic and Nordic Bronze Age cultures. It is also important to note that the term's "coast" and "interior" are rather vague concepts, and that there is probably a wide range of opinions on how the coastal area and the interior are to be defined in a geographical sense. In this discussion I will regard the parishes that are directly adjacent to the Gulf of Bothnia as the coastal area. The ancient coastal area can also be defined according to the distribution of cairns, which occur almost exclusively in these parishes. This will be discussed later on in this article.

As mentioned above, the term "Arctic Bronze Age" in northern Scandinavia refers to artefacts which mainly occur in eastern areas such as Finland and Russia (Bakka 1976; Tallgren 1937). The distribution of these eastern finds within the interior of northern Scandinavia is usually held to be the result of regular contacts and influences from eastern areas (Bakka 1976; Baudou 1989; Kristiansen 1987). According to Bakka and Kristiansen, the northern hunter-fishermen belonged to the Russian Arctic Bronze Age tradition, in contrast to the coastal farmers (Bakka 1976; Kristiansen 1987, 76). The Nordic Bronze Age finds, on the other hand, refers to artefacts, which are most frequently distributed in southern Scandinavia and the so-called *Nordischer Kreis* (Baudou 1960). The occurrence of these Nordic finds along the coasts of northern Fennoscandia has, in a similar way as the eastern finds, been regarded as an external influence from the central Bronze Age settlement areas in south Scandinavia. There is no doubt that labels and concepts such as "Arctic" and "Nordic" are rather undefined concepts and basically intended for a kind of high-level classification of the material. It is therefore relevant to discuss the appropriateness of using these labels when describing the material remains in terms of external influences in northern Sweden. What is debatable, in my opinion, is that the external influence-perspective does not pay enough attention to the internal contexts, meanings and strategies that developed within these northern areas. The discussion in this article will be carried out on two levels, with one level describing what accounts for the distribution and presentation of the archaeological material. Another interpretative level aims to discuss the contextual meanings of the material in terms of its cultural significance in different parts of the north Swedish landscape.

THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE

The anthropological discussion during the 20th century about the definition and meaning of the term "culture" is very extensive. One is sometimes inclined to believe that there are just as many definitions of this multi-dimensional concept as there are anthropologists (Eriksen 1995, 9). The debate bears witness to that the concept includes a wide range of aspects concerning hu-

man activities which cannot be outlined in one unambiguous and handy definition. Anyway, on an all-embracing level it is possible to distinguish two different theoretical positions or standpoints which have developed over the years: an essentialist and an anti-essentialist approach to the study of culture (e.g. Clifford 1988; Vayda 1994). The essentialist view conceives of culture as a phenomenon that can be determined to a certain content, as a core made up of a number of selected elements. Culture is here seen as a static and coherent unit, which constitutes the breeding ground for its vital elements. The essentialist view of culture has, however, been criticised for not paying enough attention to aspects of change, variation and heterogeneity. According to Andrew Vayda, the essentialist view puts more emphasis on cultural uniformity, homogeneous structures, and stasis at the expense of diversity, lability, and change (Vayda 1994, 324). Terms like *Nordischer Kreis, Arctic Bronze Age culture* and *Nordic Bronze Age culture* are, in my opinion, typical examples of how the concept of culture in archaeology is used in an essentialist sense.

James Clifford (1988) argues that "Cultures", with a capital C, are ethnographic collections. Since Taylor's founding definition of 1871 the term has designated a rather vague "complex whole" including everything that is learned group-behaviour, from body techniques to symbolic orders. According to Clifford, the inclusive use of the concept persists despite the recurring attempts to define culture more precisely. For there are times when we still need to speak holistically of a different culture in the confidence that we are designating something real and differentially coherent. It is increasingly clear, however, that the concrete activity of representing a culture, subculture, or indeed any coherent domain of collective activity is always strategic and selective (Clifford 1988, 230). To see ethnography and archaeology as a form of culture-collecting highlights the ways and methods by which diverse experiences and facts are selected, gathered, and detached from their original temporal occasions, and given enduring value in a new arrangement. From a complex historical reality the anthropological and the archaeological culture-collectors have typically gathered what seems traditional and what gives form, structure, and continuity to a world. What is hybrid or historical in an emergent sense has been less commonly collected and presented as a system of authenticity. Expectations of wholeness, continuity, and essence have, according to Clifford, in this respect long been built into the Western ideas of culture (Clifford 1988, 231).

The question of whether specific meanings and beliefs are shared in a given society is a matter of empirical determination rather than an *a priori* postulation made on the basis of essentialist assumption. According to the anti-essentialist view, it is necessary to put more emphasis on complexity, variation and change when describing different cultural activities and ways of life. Anti-essentialism comprises a contextual mode of explanation, not only features of the physical and institutional contexts but also intentions, purposes and beliefs of the actors (Vayda 1994, 326). It is also important to have a double perspective and not only approach the individual in his or her societal context but also try to understand the social within the individual. Aspects of culture have their specific place in history and must therefore be related to process, courses and events in time. History can not simply be reduced to economic, social or ideological structures. The historical process can not be grasped if attention is not paid to what is random, unique and odd behaviour and to the individual struggle towards various ends (Ambjörnsson 1995, 196). As prehistorians we are dealing with long-term structures, but we are also interested in finding out more about the various activities and dynamic processes behind these structures. The anti-essentialist view in anthropology sees cultural variations as "fundamental reality" and not as mere accidents of norms (Vayda 1994, 320-323). A person's various activities occur in different mental as well as material contexts and culture is here, in accordance with Goody, a multi-dimensional phenomenon made up of various components, contexts and situations, and each of these components may have different boundaries (Goody 1994, 255). This multi-dimensional phenomenon is not only restricted to individual activities but to collective group activities as well. In this article I will argue that the material culture expressed in the archaeological record has to be viewed in an anti-essentialist perspective.

THE BRONZE AGE METALWORK IN NORTHERN SWEDEN

There has been some debate over the years as to whether it is relevant to talk about a *Bronze Age* in northern Sweden (e.g. Bakka 1976). The main reason for not speaking of a Bronze Age in the north is that there are very few finds that can be connected with bronze-casting activities. There are about 60 bronze artefacts and nearly 20 moulds aimed for bronze casting dated to the Bronze Age in the material record from northern Swe-

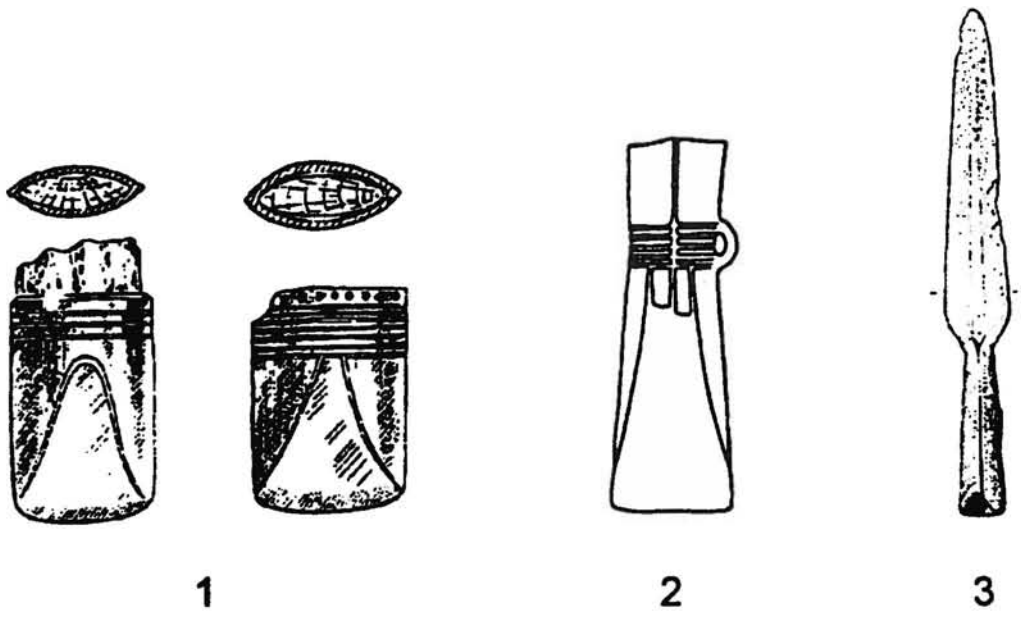

Fig. 1. Different types of eastern bronze objects that have been found in Sweden: 1) Two bronze celts of Ananino-type, 2) Mälar-celt, 3) Spearhead of an eastern type (after Meinander 1985, 24; Baudou 1960; Äyräpää 1942, 3). Not actual size.

den. Northern Sweden is here roughly defined as the area north of the Mälar Valley in central Sweden. In my opinion it seems relevant to use the term "Bronze Age" when discussing the bronze artefacts in northern Sweden, mainly because it enables comparisons with other areas.

The main part of the finds (31) consists of celts, axes and chisels. In addition there are 16 fibulas, pins and dress-accessories and also about 15 weapons in the form of swords, daggers and spears. Most of the artefacts are chronologically determined to the later part of the Bronze Age, Montelius period III to period V, and only a few objects can be placed in the Early Bronze Age.

According to type and identification of the artefacts, the repertoire of bronze finds and moulds is far from uniform. Different influences in the material seem to occur in the form of Nordic and eastern types. The term "eastern type" refers here to artefacts which predominately occur in Finland and Russia. The determination of eastern types is here based upon discussions put forward in Bakka (1976), Lundholm (1970) and Meinander (1954). Eastern celts of Ananino-type (Fig. 1) are characterised by a relatively small and flat shape, usually with a sharp oval or hexagonal cross-section. These celts sometimes have encircling strips and can also be decorated with zigzag patterns (Lundholm 1970, 32; Meinander 1954, 44). Spearheads with an open socket holder are also held to be an important characteristic of the eastern find-types (Äyräpää 1942, 4). The number of eastern bronze artefacts in northern Sweden can be estimated to five objects. Among these five there are three Mälar-celts. Whether the Mälar-celt should be considered as a Nordic or an eastern find-type is, however, not at all clear. The Mälar-celt is most frequently distributed in eastern Russia, Finland and in the middle part of Sweden, and its typological provenance and "cultural identity" is a matter of debate (Meinander 1985; Hjärthner-Holdar 1993; Kuz'minych 1983; 1996).

In Bakka's study (1976) of the bronze finds and moulds from the Bronze Age in northern Scandinavia it appears to be rather unclear to what extent the metal artefacts can be regarded as eastern and Nordic types respectively. Only a few bronze objects from the interior of northern Sweden have these typical eastern characteristics, and it is therefore relevant to question Bakka's conceptual division into an Arctic and a Nordic Bronze Age culture in Sweden (Tab. 1).

A list of eastern bronze artefacts that have been found in Sweden is presented in Table 1. Finds of Mälar-celts are not included in the table. One can note

Find-type	Parish/province	Provenance
Celt of Ananino-type	Sorsele parish, Lappland	Russian area
Celt of Ananino-type	Lycksele parish, Lappland	Russian area
Celt of Seima-type	Sparrsätra parish, Uppland	Russian-Siberian area
Celt of Maaninka-type	Fröslunda parish, Uppland	Finnish area
Celt of Ananino-type	Gamla Uppsala, Uppland	Russian area
Spear-head of Ananino-type	Gärsnäs parish, Skåne	Russian area

Table 1. Table showing bronze objects of eastern types that have been found in Sweden according to Bakka 1976, Hallström 1929 and Äyräpää 1942.

that only two Ananino-celts out of six eastern bronze objects have been found in northern Sweden. Three celts of eastern types have been found in Uppland, and one spearhead of a type that is most frequent in the Ananino-area of Russia has been found in Skåne (Bakka 1976, 18; Äyräpää 1942, 4). This picture partly illustrates the problems concerning Bakka's discussion about a dualism of cultures in Scandinavia, because eastern bronze artefacts are not exclusively distributed to the northern interior.

There are approximately 35 finds of Mälar-celts in the Mälar Valley area (Baudou 1960, 174), which is more than ten times the number of finds of Mälar-celts in northern Sweden. The question about the provenance of this artefact type is, as I have already mentioned, a matter of further debate. Despite its place of origin the distribution of the Mälar-celt shows a stronger connection or contact between eastern Russia and the Mälar Valley than it does with northern Scandinavia (Fig. 2). The question of whether the Mälar-celt from a typological point of view should be regarded as either Nordic or eastern is, perhaps a blind alley approach because this

Fig. 2. The distribution of the Mälar-celt in Scandinavia, Finland, Eastern Europe and Russia. The map is arranged from Hjärthner-Holdar 1992, 27 and Kuz'minych 1983; 1996.

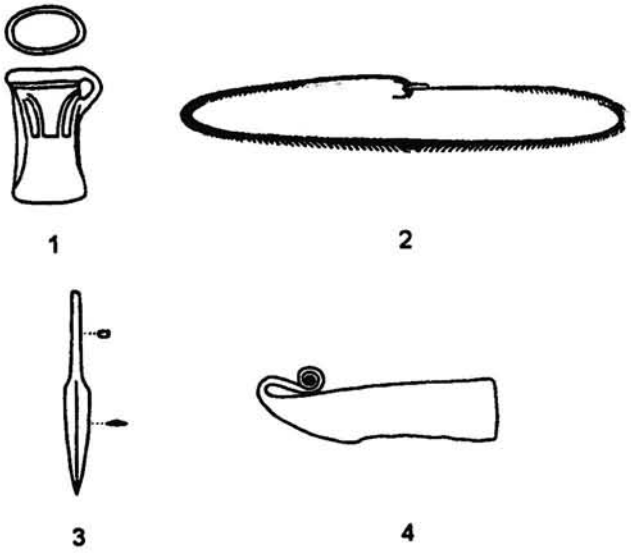

*Fig. 3. Objects of Nordic types found in the middle of northern Sweden: 1) Bronze celt of VII A type, 2) Twisted necklace (*Wendelringe*) resembling Montelius type 1296, 3) Spearhead resembling Montelius type 1087, 4) Razor with a back bent spiral handle of XI B 4a type (from Baudou 1960, 1989; Montelius 1987). Not actual size.*

type of artefact seems to appear in a number of variants (Meinander 1985) and has also a vast distribution.

The determination of Nordic bronze artefacts in northern Sweden is in a similar way as the eastern artefacts connected with difficulties concerning typological criteria. The problem is partly empirical and related to the extensive typological variation in the material record. We can neither postulate that all artefacts are to be classified with reference to a matching lead type, nor can we expect that every type is to be regarded as a result of exchange or other external influences. Besides, many indistinct types may as well be interpreted as local mixtures or transformations (e.g. Bakka 1976, 24; Meinander 1969, 53).

A few examples of Nordic types found in northern Sweden are presented in figure 3. The Nordic find-types in northern Sweden are most frequently distributed along the coastal area, but some of them are also found in the interior and it is worth mentioning some of the evidence for the sake of argument. A hoard in Boteå parish in Ångermanland consisted of a Hallstatt sword and a dagger (SHM 11996). A spearhead of bronze

Mould/find-type	Type-identity	Parish / site / province	Inventory No. / Reference
Mould for a celt	Ananino type	Pajala parish, Keppaniemi, Nb	NM 8755
Mould for a celt	Ananino type	Råneå parish, Sörbyn, Nb	SHM 18740
Mould for a celt	Indistinct type	Lycksele parish, Busjön, La	LMV 8075
Mould for a celt	Indistinct type	Villhelmina parish, Grundsjön, Raä 231, La	SHM 25960
Mould for a celt	Indistinct type	Villhelmina parish, Lappvallen, Raä 239, La	SHM 25960
Mould for a dagger	Indistinct type	Villhelmina parish, Lappvallen, Raä 239, La	SHM 25960
Mould for a celt	Ananino type	Arvidsjaur parish, Sandudden, site NA 54, La	Christiansson 1980
Mould for a pin	Indistinct type	Arvidsjaur parish, Snotterholmen, Sandudden, La	Christiansson 1980
Mould for a dagger	Eastern type	Arjeplog parish, Långudden, La	SHM 18283
Mould for a spear/dagger	Indistinct type	Stensele parish, Kaskeluokte, La	SHM 25465
Mould for a spear/dagger	Indistinct type	Stensele parish, Kaskeluokte, La	SHM 25465
Mould for a celt	Indistinct type	Norsjö parish, Vajsjöbäcken, Vb	SHM 27913
Mould for a celt	Ananino type	Stugun parish, Dusnäsbäcken, Jä	JLM 20354:a-b
Mould for a blade/dagger	Indistinct type	Tåsjö parish, Sundsjön, site 638, Ån	SHM 25138
Mould for a socked chisel	Nordic type	Tåsjö parish, Sundsjön, site 638, Ån	SHM 25138
Mould for a celt	Ananino type	Bodum parish, Flyn, site S16 (raä 10), Ån	SHM 24946
Mould for a celt	Ananino type	Bodum parish, Lesjön, between site 593-595, Ån	SHM 28387
Mould for a spear	Indistinct type	Bodum par., Bölensvattnet, site 1356 (raä 63), Ån	SHM 27963
Mould for a dagger	Eastern type	Nordmaling parish, Ledusjö, Ån	SHM 23319

Table 2. List of moulds found in northern Sweden. The list is based on data from Bakka 1976, 12-20, Christiansson 1980, 56, Lundholm 1970, 30-34, Oldeberg 1943, 295 and SHM.

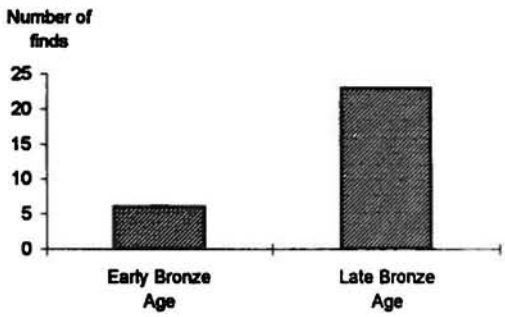

Fig. 4. The frequency of bronze objects and moulds from Ångermanland, Jämtland and Medelpad chronologically divided into the Early Bronze Age and the Late Bronze Age. The graph is based on 29 dated artefacts.

(SHM 24322), resembling Montelius type 1087, has been found in Bodum parish (see Fig. 3). In Revsund parish in Jämtland a dagger of Nordic type (JLM 13692) has been found and yet another dagger (SHM 17669) in Borgsjö parish in Medelpad. Another find, from Borgvattnet parish in Jämtland, contained a twisted necklace (SHM 26992) of *Alte Wendelringe* type, resembling Montelius type 1296 (see Fig. 3). The occurrence of these finds shows that Nordic types not only circulated in the coastal area but also in the interior.

In addition to the finds of bronze artefacts there are at least 19 finds of moulds for bronze casting in northern Sweden (Tab. 2). When classifying the moulds it appears that eight moulds probably can be determined as eastern find-types. My main references when classifying the moulds are Lundholm (1970), Bakka (1976), Christiansen (1980) and SHM (Statens Historiska

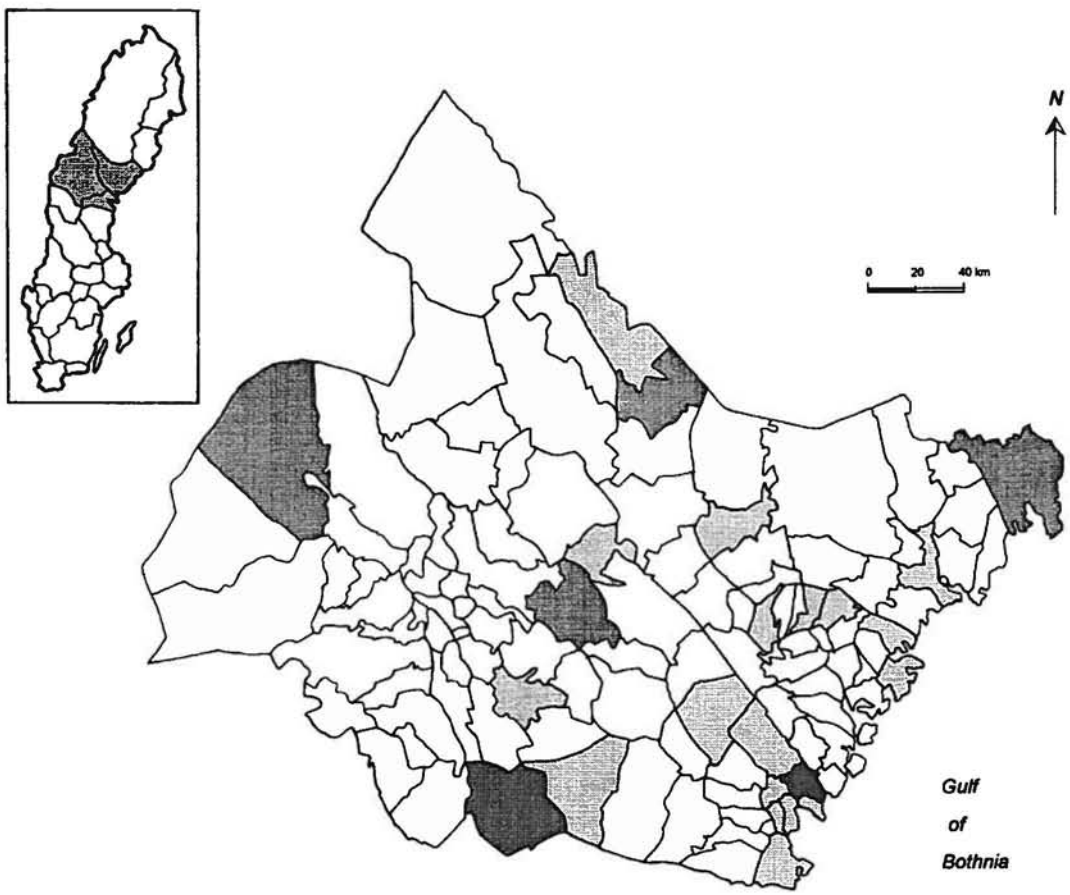

Fig. 5. The distribution of bronze objects and moulds which have been found in Ångermanland, Jämtland and Medelpad. The darkest markings represents parishes where also eastern find types, such as different variants of Ananino moulds and Mälar-celts, have been found. The distribution is based on data from Baudou 1960, Bakka 1976, SHM and ATA.

Museer, catalogue of finds). Six of the moulds, aimed for casting bronze celts, can with a fair amount of certainty be determined as Ananino-moulds. Two additional moulds of eastern types, intended for casting daggers, are found in Arjeplog parish (Äyräpää 1942, 5; Hallström 1929) and in Nordmaling parish in Ångermanland (Stenberger 1964, 312). In addition, one Nordic mould aimed for a chisel (SHM 25138) has been found in Tåsjö/Bodum area in the interior of Ångermanland. The remaining ten moulds are not determinable and have here been classified as indistinct types. These moulds may, in a similar way as the uncertain bronze artefacts, instead be interpreted as local types.

If we reconsider Bakka's description of an Arctic and a Nordic Bronze Age culture in northern Sweden we find that there is a lot of material evidence that speaks against his approach. The conclusion we can draw from the discussion about the moulds and the metal finds is that we can not point to any one particular direction of influence, neither in the coastal area nor in the interior. Instead we have influences from many directions, although more frequently from eastern and southern areas. As mentioned earlier, only two bronze artefacts from northern Sweden can with a fair amount of certainty be determined as eastern types (Tab. 1). The remaining bronze artefacts consist of finds which are rather common in large parts of Fennoscandia. In my opinion it is not possible to refer them to either Nordic or Arctic influences. The distribution of various Mälar-celts in Sweden can illuminate the problems that appear when making this division between a Nordic and an Arctic culture in Scandinavia. If the Mälar-celts hypothetically were to be counted as eastern find-types, which is quite possible, it would abruptly change the prerequisites for Bakka's point of view. The eastern find-types would in this scenario have their core-area in the Mälar Valley and not in the northern part of Sweden. Bakka's dualism between a Nordic and an Arctic Bronze Age culture should then comprise both the northern and the middle part of Sweden.

I will now leave the overarching perspective and instead take a closer look at the distribution of the Bronze Age metalwork in the middle of northern Sweden. I will henceforth discuss the archaeological material in the provinces of Ångermanland, Jämtland and Medelpad, primarily because the material record in these areas makes it possible to compare different categories of finds which will hopefully throw more light on the material and cultural relationship between the coast and the interior.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF BRONZE AGE METALWORK IN THE MIDDLE OF NORTHERN SWEDEN

There are 33 bronze objects and moulds found in the provinces of Ångermanland, Jämtland and Medelpad (Tab. 3). The most frequent find categories are weapons, celts and moulds. One can clearly notice a major change during the Late Bronze Age, ca 1100-500 BC, when the number of bronze objects and moulds begins to increase. The composition of objects also changes during the late Bronze Age, and now also comprises personal accessories such as razors, pins, necklaces and fibulas. The information about the find contexts is generally very meagre. Usually most of the bronze artefacts have been found during different kinds of private land exploitation. The moulds have mainly been found on sites containing scattered flakes and debris from different processing activities. These sites are generally hard to classify, but it is reasonable to interpret those sites containing moulds as metal workshops of some kind (e.g. Spång 1997, chapter 4).

There are a few find contexts that can help us throw a little more light on the practice of deposition during the Bronze Age. Four of the bronze objects – two knives, a razor and a pin – have been deposited in cairns, and two bronze swords have been reported as offerings, each deposited beneath a block of stone (Stenberger 1969, 170). A Mälar-celt and a spearhead of bronze have been recovered in watery contexts on riverbanks. All of these find contexts indicate a purposeful deposition. Studies of the Norwegian Bronze Age hoards show that the majority of the depositions can be interpreted as votive offerings (Johansen 1993, 157) and we can hence relate the north Swedish depositions to different kinds of sacrificial activities. Very few bronzes in northern Sweden have been recovered on so-called ordinary settlement sites.

The main part of the bronze artefacts (23) can be chronologically determined to the Late Bronze Age, 1100-500 BC (Tab. 3). Only six finds out of 33 are dated to the early part of the period (1800-1100 BC). One can also notice that the moulds start to appear during the Late Bronze Age and, as can be seen in figure 4, there is a dramatic increase in finds during this period as well. The distribution map (Fig. 5) shows the occurrence of bronze finds and moulds in the middle of northern Sweden. One can notice that the bronze artefacts occur in both the interior and the coastal area. The 33 finds from the investigation area are distributed among 24 parishes. Less than half of the finds (42 %) have been recovered in coastal parishes adjacent to the Gulf of

Find-type	Sword/ Dagger	Spear/ Arrow	Axe/ Celt	Razor/ Knife	Necklace/ Fibula/Pin	Mould	Σ
EBA	2	1	3				6
LBA	4	2	7	2	2	6	23
BA			1	1	1	1	4

Table 3. Bronze Age artefacts and moulds from Ångermanland, Jämtland and Medelpad divided into different categories. The artefacts are also chronologically divided into the Early Bronze Age and the Late Bronze Age. The table is based on data from Hallström 1929, Bakka 1976, Lundholm 1970, Baudou 1960 and SHM.

Bothnia. Moulds have mainly been recovered in three areas, namely Tåsjö/Bodum and Nordmaling in the province of Ångermanland and in Stugun in Jämtland. Five finds of moulds and one spearhead of bronze of a Nordic type have been found in the Tåsjö/Bodum area, which makes this area the richest in respect to bronze-casting activities. The external influence in the Bodum/ Tåsjö area consists of two Nordic and two eastern objects. Two objects are of indistinct type. Four of the seven moulds found within the whole investigation area are of eastern types and one mould is aimed for the casting of a Nordic chisel (Bakka 1976, 11-16; Lundholm 1970, 30-34; Stenberger 1964, 312; Hallström 1929, 63). The other two moulds are of indistinct types. One mould of eastern type is found in the coastal area (Nordmaling parish, Ångermanland), which indicates that eastern objects were also made along the coast.

The external influences that can be observed in the find material show a varied composition of types. The Mälar-celts, which occur most frequently in the middle of Sweden, Norway, southern Finland and Russia, appear within the investigation area both in the interior and along the coast. Mälar-celts have been recovered in Hässjö and Haverö in Medelpad but also in Kall parish in Jämtland. As mentioned earlier, it is not unusual that the bronze objects of Nordic types appear a long way into the interior. One of the two bronze swords of continental European types was found in Boteå parish in the interior. Moreover there are several bronzes that are more indistinct when it comes to determining their type identity and these may very well be interpreted as locally cast mixtures (e.g. Baudou 1989, 180).

These examples from the investigation area speak clearly against the earlier suggestions for a dualism of cultures between the coastal and the inland area. The distribution of bronze can be regarded as having been equally significant in both areas. The following conclusions can be drawn from the presentation of the bronze finds: 1) The Bronze Age societies in the middle of northern Sweden were involved in different external exchanges with the surrounding world, both with eastern, western, southern and probably also with northern communities. 2) The number of bronze artefacts and moulds started to increase during the Late Bronze Age, and during this time the casting of bronze objects also seems to become a more important part of the local tradition. 3) Different types of bronze objects circulated among groups and individuals in the interior as well as along the coast. In the following I will discuss how the people of northern Sweden apprehended and related to bronze and to the bronze-casting process, but I will also comment on some aspects of the social setting in the northern area.

THE MEANING OF BRONZE IN SEGMENTARY SOCIETIES

The distribution of different bronze objects in the middle of northern Sweden bears witness to their widespread significance all across the investigation area, but what was the meaning of these metal objects and what was the meaning of handling and casting bronze? Usually the studies of Bronze Age metalwork have been aimed at illuminating social-hierarchic structures that stress the economic significance of the bronze artefacts. Many of these approaches have focused upon the material situation in southern Scandinavia, where different bronze artefacts have mainly been seen as exotic prestige items from which the social elite in the differentiated community received its symbolic fuel (e.g. Kristiansen 1987, 1991; Larsson 1986).

The occurrence of bronze artefacts in northern Scandinavia has also been approached from an evolutionary centre-periphery perspective, in which areas with very few bronzes have been viewed as a periphery which was less developed in relation to areas where bronze occurred more frequently. Kristian Kristiansen (1987) describes the relationship between southern and northern Scandinavia as two regions that are on differ-

ent levels in terms of organisation, complexity and economic capacity to accumulate prestige items such as bronze objects. According to Kristiansen, it is only in southern and part of central Scandinavia that we find all diagnostic material features of a fully developed system of tribal elite ideologies (Kristiansen 1987, 79). In the "periphery areas", especially those north of central Scandinavia, there is a declining degree of social complexity and stratification which reflects a decreasing dependency on the central areas. The centre and periphery relation between coast and interior in northern Sweden is suggested to be of another character. According to Kristiansen, "the relationship between coast and inland is different from that of central Scandinavia as the two groups do not conform to the same culture and subsistence" (Kristiansen 1987, 82).

As this study has shown, there are no concentration areas or clusters of accumulated bronze objects which can be interpreted in terms of a centre-periphery relationship or a cultural dualism between coast and interior. As an alternative approach, one will instead find several areas representing a rather scattered and decentralised distribution of prestige goods ideology (Fig. 5). The distribution of bronze objects does not coincide exclusively with the distribution of cairns, rock carvings or any other material manifestations connected with a centralised communication of ritual prestige. Instead, I believe that it is more relevant to interpret the distribution of bronze as a relatively dispersed communication of ritual knowledge all over the coastal/inland area.

Evert Baudou (1989) also approaches the situation in the middle of northern Sweden from a centre-periphery perspective, but partly in contrast to Kristiansen he also brings the eastern Volga-Kama areas into the discussion. Baudou argues that northern Sweden was under the influence of two important areas, the Nordic Bronze Age culture in the south and the eastern Ananino culture in the east (Baudou 1989, 182f), and he describes the changing situation, especially during the late Bronze Age, as a result of "internationalisation". According to Baudou, the increasing number of bronze artefacts in northern Sweden during this time makes it more relevant than before to talk about trade and the exchange of artefacts. The eastern and southern influences in the material are further suggested to be linked to a stress situation causing an ethnic division in northern Sweden (Baudou 1989, 175-184; Baudou 1992, 95).

In my opinion there is no need to exaggerate the significance of the external influences by using anachronistic terms like "internationalisation" and "trade" when describing the situation. The main objection to this approach is that the external influence-perspective tends to avoid the contextual meanings of the material. I am also sceptical to the use of large-scale centre and periphery descriptions, which in its most simplistic form results in a schematised diffusion of the objects (for further criticism of the use of the centre/periphery approach in archaeology see Hodder 1992; Shanks & Tilley 1987, 164). The discussion about the economic consumption value of bronze and its significance as hierarchical symbols within the social system has contributed to maintain a much too simplistic picture of a centralised social organisation (e.g. a chiefdom) whose administrative means were far-reaching over large areas. I will neither deny the existence of hierarchical structures in the northern Bronze Age societies, nor that they had contact with other societies (e.g. Kristiansen 1987; Baudou 1989). But in addition to these general assumptions we have to discuss whether it is reasonable to ascribe these societies the very extensive administrative authority and political range that this kind of centre and periphery relationship implies. If we again look at the distribution of bronzes and moulds, there is nothing that speaks for any major organisational difference which can be interpreted as a dualistic relationship between the coast and the interior in terms of autonomous socio-economic organisations, ethnicity or culture.

As an alternative to the centre and periphery model, I will instead suggest that we are dealing with a form of uncentralised and segmentary society which is primarily organised according to the local lineage system. The term "segmentary" has been used in reference to several types of social systems, but the essential features consist in being in a state of continual segmentation and complementary opposition (Middleton & Tait 1970, 6f; Sahlins 1968). In these societies there is no holder of political power at the centre, and specialised roles with clearly defined political authority are less easy to find. Certain social relations are instead expressed in terms of kinship, and the concept of lineage structure may be used in various situations. Even if members move from one local group to another they usually still remain lineage members and the network of their personal kinship ties remains unchanged (Middleton & Tait 1970, 5).

In segmentary societies lacking ranked and specialised holders of political authority the relations between local groups are seen as a balance of power, maintained by competition between neighbouring groups. The number of levels of lineage segmentation within the community is continuously variable. The nuclear units

are bound together by genealogies, and the organisational form varies according to size, structural properties and organisation. According to Sahlins, no segmentary tribe is really as equally structured as the other (Sahlins 1968, 14).

Another characteristic of the segmentary tribal society is that it is built up of several levels, each of which is organised in respect to both closer and more distant relations of kinship between the members. The overarching tribe is in reality just an abstraction, but it can be said to be "activated" and organised under certain specific circumstances and situations, for instance when larger conflicts arise (Eriksen 1995, 150). The essential trait among these societies with a segmentary structure is a state of continual division and complementary opposition within the system. In all these societies the range of the total society varies over time, just as does that of its constituent groups. The limits of the society are usually not known to its members, unless defined by incidental environmental features (Middleton & Tait 1970, 27). Perhaps it is more proper here to use the term "structure" instead of "system" since the segmentary tribe is not always a long-lasting or internally close-connected unit, primarily because of its latent instability and the flexible relationships among its members. I will in the following make use of this organisational form as a background when discussing the social setting during the Bronze Age in northern Sweden.

I will now shift attention to the meaning of bronze among segmentary hunter-gatherers in northern Sweden. An interesting question is whether the bronze objects were seen as individual prestige goods or if they were regarded as a kind of "common property" within the community. The varied distribution of bronze objects in the middle of northern Sweden may very well have resulted from intricate gift-exchange strategies between tribal segments. Colin Renfrew has described this sort of exchange between autonomous groups with the term "peer polity interaction" (Renfrew 1986). In a study I made of the asbestos-tempered pottery and its distribution, I argued for the relevance of applying this concept to the situation in northern Sweden (Bolin 1996). Bronze objects may have circulated from hand to hand for political reasons, but that does not imply that the meaning of bronze should always be exclusively associated with socio-political relations.

There are several studies made showing that the smith (Burström 1990; Hammarstedt 1921) as well as the bronze caster in various historical and cultural contexts did have a special position in folklore, myth and traditional imagination (Budd & Taylor 1995, 133-143). Ancient metalworking was itself a highly specialised process involving a number of arcane and even dangerous procedures, and it may well have been accompanied by what we would identify as ritual (Bradley 1998). The ethnographic record offers a lot of examples suggesting that the core of smiths' activities often seems to lie in the knowledge and powers of sorcery rather than mere technology. Craft specialisation often has a hereditary factor, and craftsmen such as bronze casters must often be "called upon" by an ancestor to take over a skill (Barley 1994, 63). The casting of bronze and metalworking in many traditional small-scale societies has been considered as an activity related to individuals belonging to a particular caste or status who in many respects have lived separate from the rest of the group (Budd and Taylor 1995, 139f). These individuals usually cannot share food or even draw their water from the same source as others and never eat from the same vessel (Barley 1994, 64).

It is reasonable to expect that the bronze smith had a specific position in the ancient hunter-gatherer society. The art of casting bronze objects requires certain skills and it was probably not an everyday practice. Instead we can assume that bronze casting required a certain person who was legitimated to deal with the dangers involved in the process of casting. It is possible that the bronze smiths were able to move among different groups (Weiler 1994, 133) and perhaps were called for when it was time to perform the casting ritual. There are very few sites in northern Sweden where crucibles, moulds and slag have been found together and which empirically can indicate the location of bronze casting (Hulthén 1991; Spång 1997). It is difficult to determine in what proportion this activity was carried out in northern Sweden. From the sparse evidence it seems reasonable to exclude any regular or large-scale bronze working on any site. Neither is it convincing to argue that the casting of bronze objects was primarily aimed at developing utilitarian work tools or instruments exclusively for practical use. An alternative interpretation is that the earliest metalworking can be associated with the practice of politico-religious power. Metalworking and magic-making are very often inseparable in still extant folk traditions (Budd & Taylor 1995, 138f). The bronze objects found in the middle of northern Sweden may, in my opinion, have been regarded as "magical objects" or as powerful instruments that were made by a supernatural process, passing through embers, smoke and fire. Metalworking was regarded as a magical and perhaps dangerous process involving a number of mysterious procedures,

and it is reasonable to argue that this transformation process to an equal degree was subordinated to ritual beliefs as to technology.

That bronze objects very seldom are recovered on ordinary settlement sites may be explained by the fact that a bronze artefact was regarded as a supernatural and magical phenomenon, and therefore deposited on sites separated from the settlements. Many stray finds of bronze objects can be interpreted as ritual depositions, perhaps in an attempt to incorporate different mythological conceptions into the landscape. These strategies were perhaps also aimed at warding off different threats or curses, whether real or imagined, directed to the community. The intention behind the ritual deposition of bronzes was in a wider sense to maintain the ritual significance and meaning of the landscape. I will now leave the bronze artefacts and turn the discussion to another find category that is connected with a similar transformation process, namely the asbestos-tempered pottery.

ASBESTOS-TEMPERED POTTERY

Pottery was born in the smithy. The smith's wife was drying in the sun a pot which she had modelled like one of the spheres of the bellows; but, finding it did not harden quickly enough, she put it near the fire. She then discovered that the clay was baking and becoming hard, and so she got into the habit of putting the pots she modelled by the fire. (A Dogon story quoted in Barley 1994, 53).

The quotation above is borrowed from a book about African pottery by Nigel Barley (1994) in which he describes different thoughts and beliefs associated with pottery. Of course it is not true that pottery generally appears as a result or a side-effect of metalworking which the quoted story suggests. In most societies pottery appears long before the introduction of metalworking. What is interesting here is that pottery as well as metalworking seems to have had a special place in traditional myth and thought. From a purely technical point of view it is metalworking that is dependent on potting and not vice versa, even if the moulding and beating of clay and the moulding of metal seem to employ similar techniques (Barley 1994, 57). In this section I will discuss the meaning and significance of the asbestos-tempered ceramic ware in the middle of northern of Sweden and its connection with the introduction of bronze. But first a short introduction is in order.

The most frequent types of pottery in northern Scandinavia during the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (1800 BC-AD 200) are tempered with asbestos. Asbestos-tempered pottery has been recovered on over a hundred sites in northern Sweden. Earlier research has mainly focused on the chronology and the practical use of the asbestos-tempered pottery (Linder 1966; Hulthén 1991), but a thorough and all-embracing study of its social and symbolic significance in northern Fennoscandia has also been presented by Jørgensen & Olsen (1987). A fairly comprehensive history of the asbestos-tempered pottery can also be found in Carpelan (1979). Asbestos-tempered pottery is a generic term for ceramics of which the temper is composed of asbestos fibres. It can further be classified into several groups according to stylistic form, temper and distribution. Here I will primarily deal with the most frequently occurring asbestos pottery in northern Sweden and discuss the significance of its distribution, decoration and change during the last two millennia BC.

The most commonly occurring pottery is decorated with various patterns of comb impressions, incised lines and textile impressions (Fig. 6). Some archaeologists make a distinction between asbestos pottery and asbestos ware (Sär2-/Kjelmøy pottery). According to Birgitta Hulthén (1991), asbestos pottery is defined as ceramics of which the temper is composed of 50-60 % asbestos fibres, and asbestos ware as ceramics of which the temper may be composed of as much as 90 % asbestos fibres (Hulthén 1991, 13, 32). Hulthén argues that this distinction is of chronological significance. Other archaeologists have held that the amount of asbestos temper in the Sär2-/Kjelmøy pottery usually lies between 20 and 50 % (e.g. Sundquist 1998, 19). Although the amount of asbestos temper seems debatable, it is important to take decoration and stylistic elements of the ceramics into account when interpreting its social and contextual significance in the ancient world.

The term asbestos pottery refers here to both undecorated and decorated pottery. The decorated pottery is usually equipped with incised lines, comb-stamped ornamentation or textile impressions. To the latter category one can also add textile pottery which in addition to asbestos fibres can also be tempered with hair. It is also worth mentioning that a large part of the asbestos pottery is fragmented and lacks visible ornamental details. The asbestos-tempered pottery in northern Sweden shows a varied spectrum of decorative patterns (Hulthén 1991, 41-47; Gustafsson 1996). Approximately 10 % of the potsherds in Hulthén's study have varied forms of textile impressions. The predominant dec-

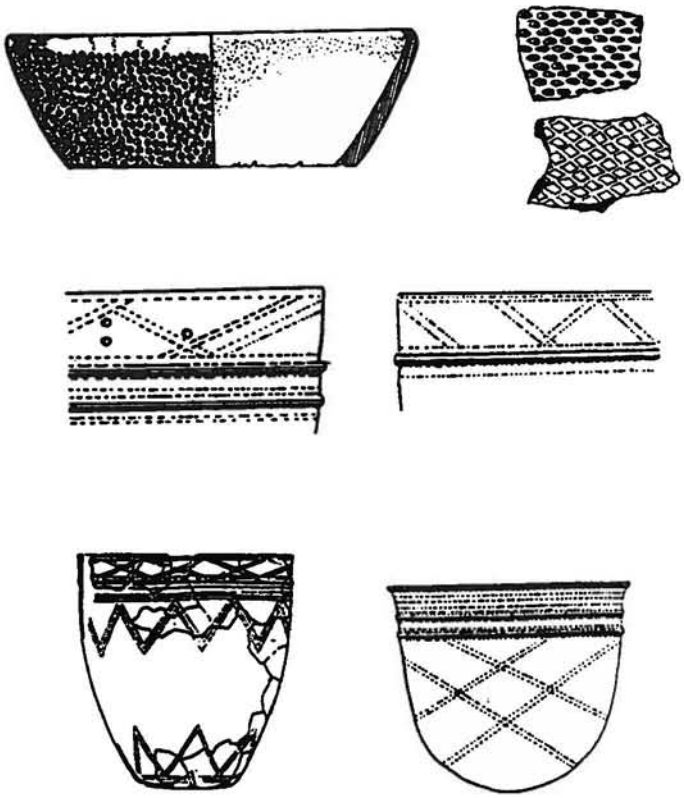

Fig. 6. Asbestos-tempered pottery decorated with textile impressions (on top) and pottery decorated with comb-stamped impressions and incised lines. The reconstructed vessels at the bottom are from Kultsjön (left) and from Laisan (after Hulthén 1991).

orative elements among the potsherds consist of different comb impressions and incised lines mainly concentrated to the upper part of the vessel (Hulthén 1991, 13, 41).

Pottery decorated with textile impressions begins to appear during the Early Bronze Age but seems to disappear during the transition to the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1500-900 BC). Asbestos pottery with comb-impressed ornamentation or incised lines seems also to appear during the Early Bronze Age, but it increases in frequency during the last millennium BC (Hulthén 1991, 28f; Jørgensen & Olsen 1987, 26f; Linder 1966, 145f). Accordingly there seems to be a chronological difference between pottery with textile ornamentation and pottery with comb impressions and incised lines. The stratigraphy from excavated sites, such as Hälla in Lapland and Råinget in Ångermanland, further supports this chronological sequence in which textile pottery is found in the lower and older layers and comb-impressed pottery dominates in the upper layers (Baudou 1977, 31; Hulthén 1991, 55).

Table 4 shows a list of 13 radiocarbon-dated sherds of asbestos pottery. Two of the potsherds that have been dated by Astrid Linder (1966) can be placed in the Early Roman Iron Age, seven in the pre-Roman Period, and four in the Bronze Age. As can be seen in Table 4 there is a slight overlap in the chronology between the different styles of decorative patterns. Although the material evidence is limited, the comb-impressed potsherds seem to predominate during the last millennium BC. The radiocarbon dating is based on organic remains taken from the inside of the vessels.

It is now time to outline some of the conclusions from the presentation of the asbestos pottery. As already mentioned, the asbestos pottery which appears in northern Sweden during the Early Bronze Age is decorated with various forms of textile impressions, but during the mid-Bronze Age there is a notable change in the decorative pattern of the asbestos pottery. The change is expressed in a new type of pattern, now with different variations of comb impressions and incised lines. This sequence has also been observed in the material from northern Norway (Jørgensen & Olsen 1987, 25-30), and it indicates that a similar change occurs more or less simultaneously all over northern Fennoscandia.

Figure 7 shows the distribution of asbestos pottery in the middle of northern Sweden. One can mention that there is hardly any difference between the distribution

Sample no./ site / object	Parish/ Site no./ Province	Decoration	^{14}C-age BP
St-1356 The "Laisan-vessel"	Tärna, raä 89, La	comb impression	3170±160 BP
St-1808 The "Laisan-vessel"	Tärna, raä 89, La	comb impression	3025±80 BP
St-1352 Lappvallen	Vilhelmina, raä 239, La	textile impression	2685±110 BP
St-1355 Kultsjön	Vilhelmina, raä 117, La	no decoration	2375±115 BP
St-1354 The "Kultsjö-vessel"	Vilhelmina, raä 117, La	comb impression	2300±110 BP
St-1140 Vallviksudden	Vilhelmina, raä 234, La	comb impression	2110±105 BP
St-1351 Vallviksudden	Vilhelmina, raä 234, La	comb impression	2100±90 BP
St-1141 Vallviksudden	Vilhelmina, raä 234, La	comb impression	2090±110 BP
St-1142 Lappvallen	Vilhelmina, raä 239, La	horizontal lines	2060±120 BP
St-1357 Ånnsjön	Åre, raä 4, Jä	no decoration	2020±110 BP
St-1350 Vallviksudden	Vilhelmina, raä 234, La	comb impression	1995±100 BP
St-1143 Lappvallen	Vilhelmina, raä 239, La	comb impression	1895±105 BP
St-1353 Lappvallen	Vilhelmina, raä 239, La	comb impression	1875±70 BP

Table 4. List of radiocarbon dated potsherds of asbestos pottery from Jämtland and Lapland. The list is based on data from Jørgensen & Olsen 1987, 25 and Linder 1966.

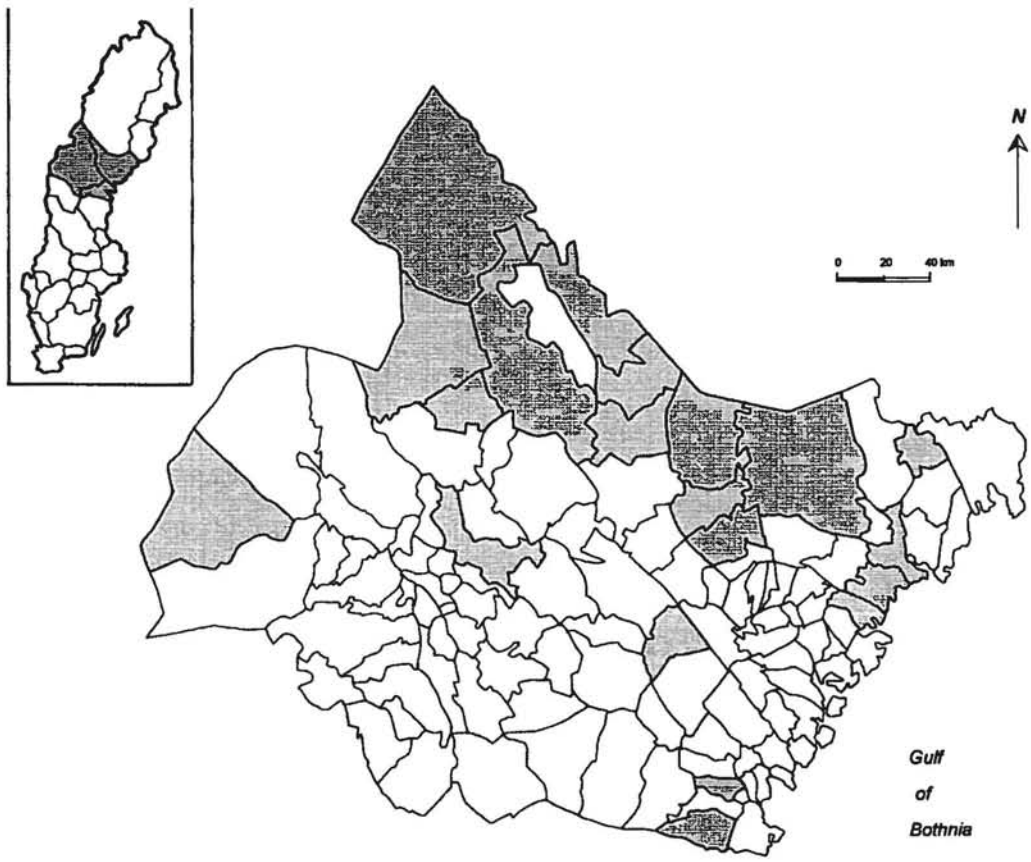

Fig. 7. The distribution of asbestos-tempered pottery in Ångermanland, Jämtland and Medelpad. The distribution is based on data from Baudou 1977, Hemmendorff 1989, Hulthén 1991, Lindquist 1994, ATA and SHM.

of textile pottery and pottery with comb impressions. It is also interesting to note that asbestos pottery from the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age frequently occurs in the coastal area. According to Ramqvist (1992) and Lindqvist (1994), the predecessors of the sedentary settlements along the coast of central Norrland during the pre-Roman Iron Age to a large extent used several types of asbestos-tempered ceramics (Ramqvist 1992, 186f; Lindqvist 1994, 41). Asbestos pottery decorated with criss-cross patterns has for instance been recovered on sites in Attmar parish (Raä 3) in Medelpad (Broadbent 1985, 390) and at Gene (Raä 59) in Ångermanland (Lindqvist 1994, 114-120). These finds of asbestos pottery clearly indicate that the coastal area can not be seen as culturally separated from the interior. One may add that asbestos pottery also occurs both north and further south of the investigation area.

Hulthén has defined the asbestos pottery in different categories according to decoration type (Hulthén 1991, 41-47). An interesting aspect concerning the decoration on the pottery is that similar patterns sometimes occur in different areas. These similar decorative details, consisting of incised lines and rhombic or angular patterns, seem to have originated from a fundamental pattern. How are these similar patterns to be explained? The knowledge of potting very often passes from the older to the younger generation, and the apprenticeship is usually regulated and controlled according to specific rules (Barley 1994, 76f). Several potsherds that have been found on sites at Lake Hornavan in Lapland show that comb-impressed decorations were made on both the outside and the inside of the vessel (Hedman 1993, 162ff). The potsherds with inner decoration clearly show that new pots were sometimes moulded over old pots in a direct re-embodiment of the ceramic tradition in northern Sweden. This transmission of cultural knowledge, which is seen in the distribution of similar decorative patterns, can be connected with different kinds of interaction, such as marriage relations between different groups (Bolin 1996, 7-19).

A possible explanation to the change in the pottery ornamentation during the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age is the increasing number of bronzes that were exchanged between different groups. The activities connected with the domestic casting of bronze on several sites (Baudou 1992, 109; Hulthén 1991, 24-28; Spång 1997, chapter 4) were probably also of great importance to this change. As discussed above, the significance of bronze is considered to have been intimately associated with various magical and ritual activities during the Late Bronze Age. The possession of bronze and the knowledge of bronze casting became a powerful instrument in the practice of the religious ritual, which in turn influenced the social relations between different groups. This may also have triggered competitive strategies between individuals and groups. The change in decoration, from textile impressions to comb-stamped impressions, can, according to this view, be explained as a strategy for dealing with a new contextual situation in society. Jørgensen and Olsen have held that the differentiated decorative pattern that appears on the asbestos pottery can be seen as a result of a need to legitimate the social categories and group relations in northern Scandinavia (Jørgensen & Olsen 1987, 33ff). The textile-decorated pottery became successively outdated when the distribution and exchange of bronze as well as bronze casting increased.

The change in decoration should not necessarily be regarded as a fundamental change in the kinship structure, but rather as an attempt to visualise and more clearly emphasise already established kinship relations. The new decorative pattern on the pottery was therefore one way of expressing and maintaining the already established order of social relations in times of change. In a more overarching perspective on the significance and meaning of the asbestos-tempered pottery, it is interesting to note that both the coastal areas and the inland parts of the investigated area were affected in a similar way by these changes.

If we compare the distribution of bronzes and moulds (Fig. 5) with the distribution of asbestos pottery (Fig. 7), there is no general one-to-one connection between the two. As mentioned earlier, a certain connection between asbestos pottery and bronze casting exists, but we must be careful when generalising this kind of functional explanation. It has been suggested that asbestos-tempered pottery was primarily designed to keep embers glowing because of its good insulating capacity, and thus had an important function in connection with metalworking (Hulthén 1991, 34). Other archaeologists have held that the asbestos-tempered pottery also could have been used as containers for different purposes. Astrid Linder (1966) has, for example, argued that the organic remains found on the inside of a potsherd very likely can have been blood (Linder 1966, 141ff). It is therefore not possible to make generalisations when discussing the various functional and contextual domains that the pottery may have passed through.

Although asbestos-tempered pottery is sometimes found on sites that have been used for bronze casting, we cannot exclude that it had other significant mean-

ings and was also used in different kinds of practices (e.g. Jørgensen & Olsen 1987, 30f). It is also reasonable to expect that its social significance might have changed over time, especially during the Late Bronze Age. Ethnography has shown how pottery in a wide variety of ways is used in cultural thought and that it reflects important conceptions about human bodies and powers. It is a broad generalisation to say that either just men or women make pots, although in many small-scale societies female potting is widely paired with male smithing, smelting and bronze casting (Barley 1994, 63). Female potting and male smithing/casting are activities separated from other daily activities, and the separateness of potters/smiths and other groups is expressed in many aspects of life. It might seem obvious that the more ornate the pots are, the greater will be their "ritual" load. However, according to Barley, pots often pass from everyday to "ritual" contexts and back again, and there is no clear division between the use of decorated and undecorated pots (Barley 1994, 116).

I will also stress the significance of exchange during the last millennium BC when different groups started to compete for access to bronze and control over exotic goods. This background scenario provides one explanation for the shifting configuration of the stylistic pattern on the pottery. The change in decorative pattern, from textile pottery to comb-stamped pottery, was perhaps a way to "activate" the kinship structure and put more emphasis on certain social relations among the hunter- gatherer groups. There are a lot of contexts in which social relations and exchange could be maintained and where the asbestos pottery may have functioned as an important medium in the social discourse. The so-called fire-cracked stone mound (Sw. *skärvstenshögar/skärvstensvallar*) is one example of such a meeting-place context where contacts between different groups were made.

FIRE-CRACKED STONE MOUNDS AS MEETING PLACES

Another find-context where asbestos-tempered pottery has been recovered is in mounds and embankments of fire-cracked stone. The fire-cracked stone mounds in northern Sweden vary in both size and form. They can be characterised as a large shallow pit surrounded by a mound or a midden of fire-cracked stones containing bones, artefacts, debris and other "refuse material". According to Åsa Lundberg's study (1997), there are approximately 80 fire-cracked stone mounds in the middle of northern Sweden (smaller structures of fire-cracked stone of various forms are not included). The size differs from around 10 m up to more than 20 m in diameter including the surrounding mound (for a more detailed outline of this feature see Lundberg 1997, 13; Spång 1997, 88; Löthman 1986, 40). Radiocarbon datings and artefacts such as asbestos-tempered pottery, grooved clubs and bifacial points of quartzite from some of the fire-cracked stone mounds show that they were in use not only during the Neolithic but also during the Bronze Age and the pre-Roman Iron Age. At Tjikkiträsk 17, Stensele parish in southern Lapland, sherds of asbestos pottery have been found under the embankment in the northern part of the fire-cracked stone mound (Meschke 1967, 46), which dates this part of the structure to the Bronze Age/pre-Roman Iron Age. Five of ten radiocarbon datings from Lesjön 26, Bodum parish in Ångermanland have furthermore rendered datings between 2830Å70 and 2245Å85 BP, which is the Bronze Age/pre-Roman Iron Age (Lundberg 1997, 189). The functional use of the fire-cracked stone mounds has mainly been discussed in terms of winter settlements (Baudou 1977; Lundberg 1997; Spång 1997), but different alternatives concerning their specific function have also been presented (Janson & Hvarfner 1960).

The fire-cracked stone mounds are predominantly located in the inland basin areas of the big rivers close to lakes and along watercourses. The more sturdily built mounds occur in areas with a high frequency of prehistoric settlements, such as the Hoting area in Tåsjö parish and Lesjön in Bodum parish, Ångermanland (Baudou 1977, 88-101; Lundberg 1997, 24-37). Lars Göran Spång (1997) has discussed the significance of central places among the prehistoric hunter-gatherers in northern Sweden. Spång argues that in sparsely populated areas it is important to have established places for meeting in an attempt to maintain social contacts with other groups. These sites are, according to Spång, found in areas where both geographical factors and means of communication as well as resources for economical subsistence coincide with each other (Spång 1997, chapter 5). The fire-cracked stone mounds are, according to this line of argument, most likely to be interpreted as meeting places where both "ritual" and "profane" activities occurred. Large amounts of bone, mostly from elk and beaver, have been recovered on these sites, which indicates that these mounds were used as sites where big game in large scale was regularly butchered for cooking and feasting (Janson & Hvarfner 1960). The proportion of non-local raw materials, such as red slate,

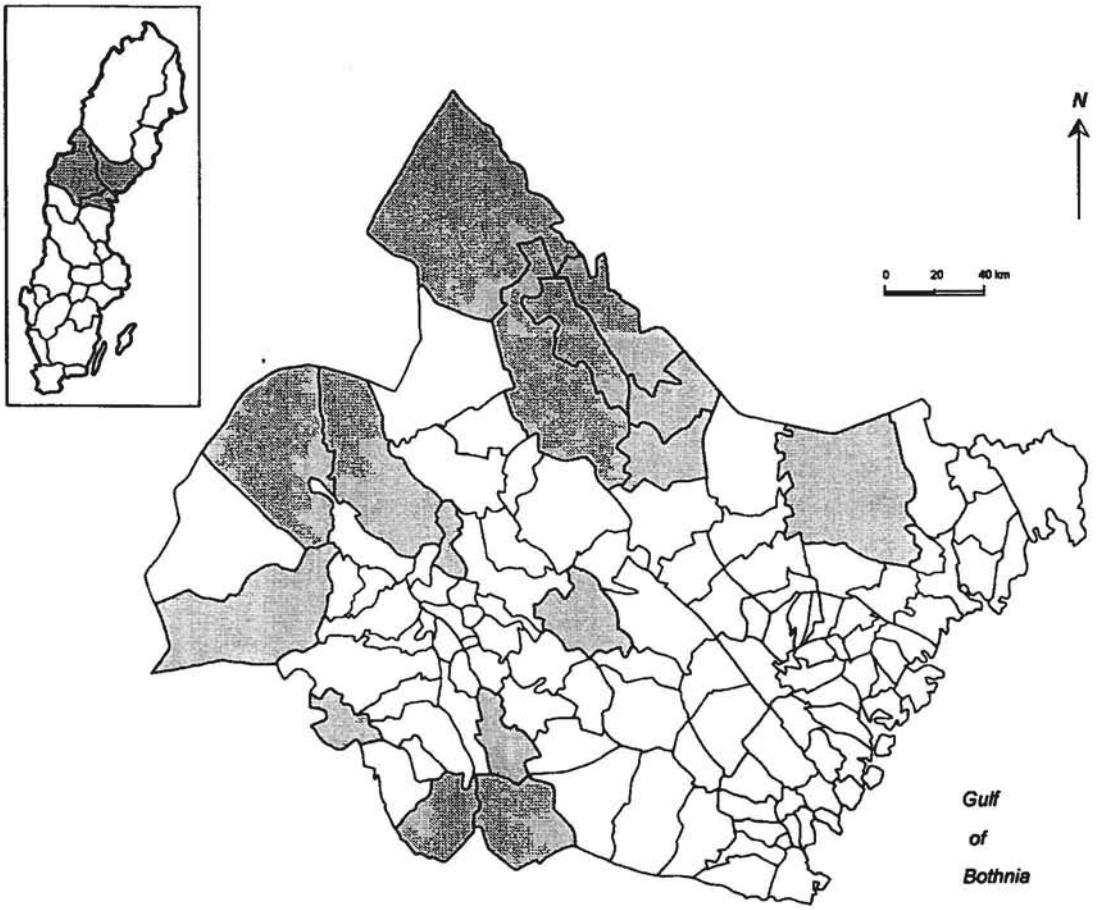

Fig. 8. The distribution of fire-cracked stone mounds in Ångermanland, Jämtland and Medelpad. The distribution is based on data from Lundberg 1997.

asbestos and flint, deposited in the mounds (Lundberg 1997) is further support the significance of these sites as places for meetings between groups.

It is important to mention that fire-cracked stone mounds do not seem to occur in all areas where we usually have other indications of Bronze Age activities. As can be seen in figure 8, fire-cracked stone mounds appear predominantly in the inland parts of the landscape. I have in another paper argued that the interpretation of the fire-cracked stone mounds as some kind of winter settlement (e.g. Baudou 1977; Lundberg 1997; Spång 1997) is not convincing (Bolin in press). We can instead regard these fire-cracked stone mounds as important nodes that served a variety of functions, for instance to preserve the social communication within the community and to maintain the interactional network between different neighbouring groups. The establishment of these meeting places has to be viewed in a long-term perspective. The significance of the more sturdily built fire-cracked stone mounds falls back on a very long tradition that began perhaps in the Early Neolithic, namely the marking out of routes and points in a vast landscape. Some mounds of fire-cracked stones became successively more and more important as orientation points among a multitude of tracks following different watercourses. It is interesting to note that there are no fire-cracked stone mounds, similar to those found in the interior, in the coastal area. One explanation to this relationship may be connected with the significance of the landscape in the coast and interior, respectively (Fig. 8 and 9). Topographic features, such as the many watercourses and streams criss-crossing the landscape in the river-basin area, shows a more differentiated structure than they do further downstream to-

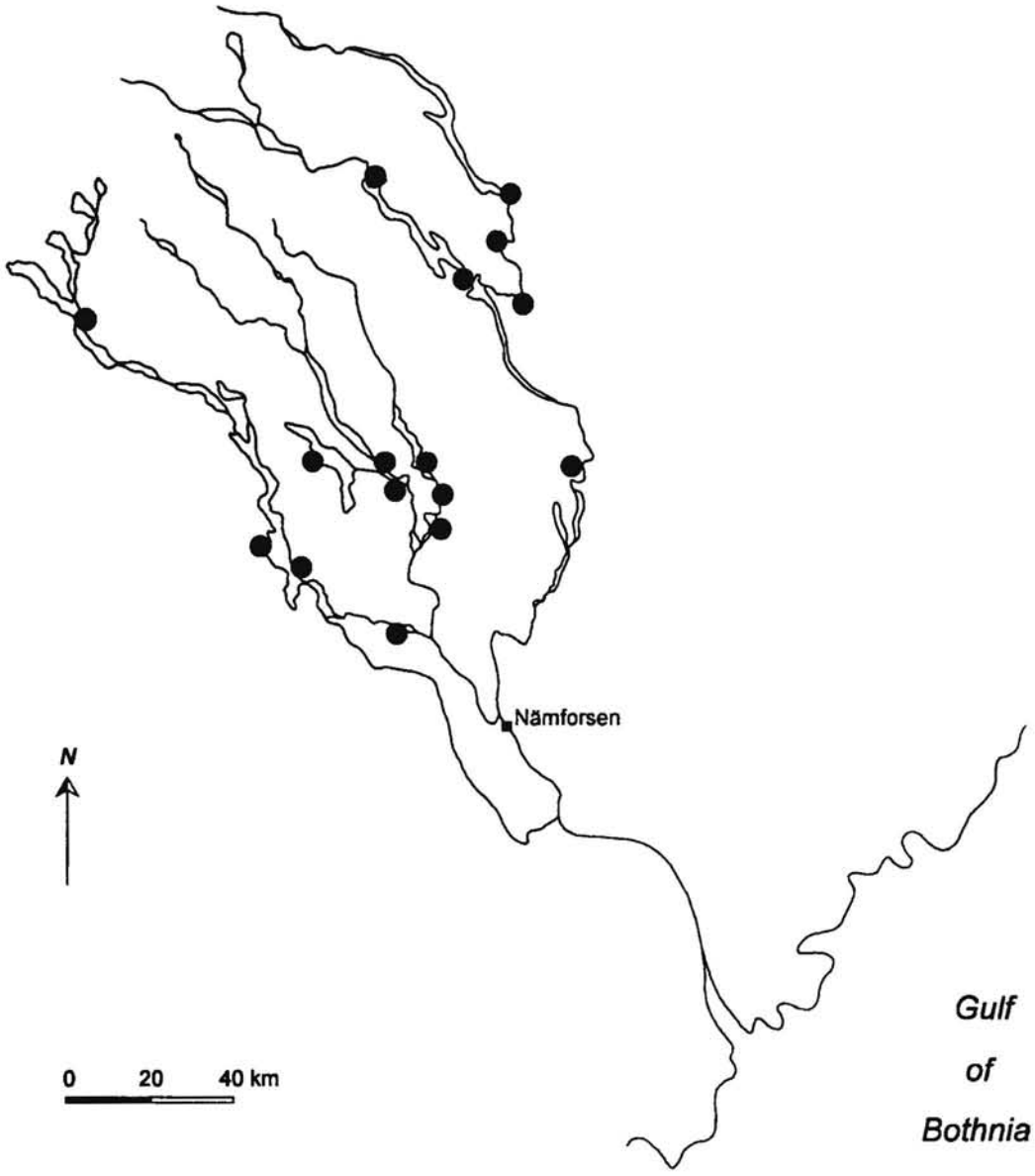

Fig. 9. The distribution of fire-cracked stone mounds in the Ångerman river-basin area in the interior of Jämtland, Ångermanland and southern Lapland. The black circular markings represent sites with one or several fire-cracked stone mounds of various size and form. The distribution is based on data from Lundberg 1997 and Löthman 1986.

wards the coastal landscape zone and the Gulf of Bothnia.

The fire-cracked stone mounds are almost all located less than 20 meters from lakeshores and watercourses. Most mounds are located on points of land by lakes or on the shores of rivers and waterways (Lundberg 1997, 101f). The establishment of fire-cracked stone mounds along watercourses and lakes in the river basin could also be seen as an attempt to get access to and hence control over the interior parts. The landscape was probably criss-crossed by a multitude of routes and paths following the main rivers and streams and extend-

ing in a variety of directions from one site to the next. In figure 9 one can note that the fire-cracked stone mounds which are established along the many watercourses, lakes and streams in the Ångerman river-basin area, in an intricate way seem to bind the landscape together. The main watercourses were presumably very important as guidelines when moving between places in this fluvial landscape. The landscape constituted a referent for orientation as well as acted as a sign system for mythological events, especially at sites where the topographical features were symbolically and economically significant (Tilley 1994). Emotional ties to the land are obviously related to economic dependencies, to the exigencies of gathering and hunting; but according to Tilley, they are just as significantly related to mythic beings and ancestors, who create and sustain the fertility of the land and stimulate the natural increase of species (Tilley 1994, 40). The fire-cracked stone mounds may here be seen as important places incorporated in such an ideological reference system. I will return to the phenomenological aspect of the monuments' localisation in the landscape later on in this article.

Many of the fire-cracked stone mounds seem to have been built up during a long-term practice in which cooking and feasting on special occasions was a central activity. The activities that took place at these sites were probably associated with different kinds of rituals aimed at maintaining the established order in the community. As some of the fire-cracked stone mounds successively grew larger in size, it is reasonable to suggest that they also became more important as places for meetings, visits and feasting, where different religious ceremonies and rituals were conducted and expressed in public form. Some of the larger fire-cracked stone mounds have datings from the Early Neolithic to the Early Iron Age, which indicates their long-term traditional importance. The occurrence of slate objects with incised patterns, animal sculptures and smashed asbestos pottery in the fire-cracked stone mounds may very likely be the result of different ritual activities that took place on these sites. The sites 16, 26 in Bodum parish and 101 in Tåsjö parish in the province of Ångermanland, can be mentioned here. At these sites several asbestos-tempered potsherds have been found scattered in the fire-cracked stone mound (Lundberg 1997). The ethnographic descriptions of the variety of ways that pots are used show that the life-spans of vessels often end in contexts that would be puzzling to archaeologists. What is otherwise a cooking pot can, for example, be used to contain the placenta of a dead baby when the latter is buried (Sterner 1989; Barley 1994, 76). Large amounts of asbestos pottery have also been found on a site with a fire-cracked stone mound (Raä 234) at Vallviksudden near the lake Varris in Vilhelmina parish in southern Lapland (Linder 1966; Spång 1997, 166f). Following this line of interpretation, the organic remains that have been found on the inside of the potsherds, which according to Linder can be interpreted as blood (Linder 1966, 142f), might for instance have been connected with the ritual handling of internal organs from an animal or a human. Cooking pots, water jars and other domestic pots can be used to trap decease spirits and so end up hidden in rocks or buried. Vessels may also move back from the sacred domain to the profane (Barley 1994, 76).

There is a multitude of practices and associations which are closely connected with death, marriage and ritual feasting. The asbestos pottery probably had different significant meanings depending on its contextual setting and on the social status of its owner or user. In many traditional societies throughout the world, marriage sometimes involves the making of new pots and funerals the smashing of old (Barley 1994, 92). The smashed asbestos pottery found in the fire-cracked stone mounds is one example of how the life-span of a pot sometimes ended as part of the ritual, but as mentioned earlier, the asbestos pottery was probably also involved in the bronze casting that took place on other sites. As a contrasting picture to the distribution of the fire-cracked stone mounds I will now turn to another find category, which in a geographic sense has an opposite distribution, namely the coastal cairns in the middle of northern Sweden. In the next section I will also discuss the rhombic and right-angle shafthole axes from the Bronze Age (Sw. *rombiska skafthålsyxor och rätvinkelyxor*).

CAIRNS AND AXES

Cairns and cairn-like stone-settings in northern Sweden occur entirely in the coastal area, and similar variations in form and construction exist within the different cairn-areas (Baudou 1968; Selinge 1979; Thålin 1969). Finds of chronologically significant artefacts in the cairns are very unusual, but according to dating from shore-level displacement it is possible to argue that the cairns and the stone-settings appear during the Early Bronze Age and continue into the Iron Age (Baudou 1992, 100; Selinge 1979, 395f). A more comprehensive overview of the cairns in northern Sweden can be found in Bau-

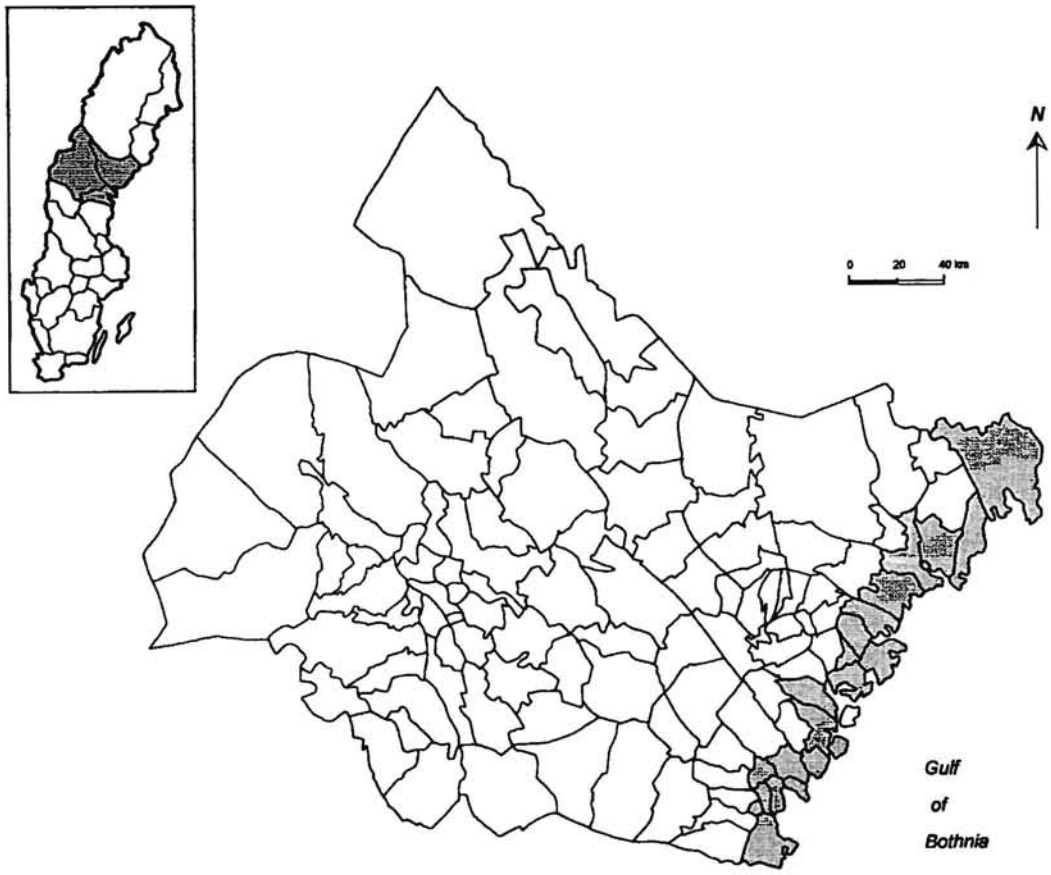

Fig. 10. The distribution of cairns and cairn-like stone-settings in Ångermanland and Medelpad. The map is based on data from Baudou 1968, 1977 and Selinge 1979.

dou (1968).

Figure 10 shows the general distribution of cairns and cairn-like stone-settings in the coastal areas of Ångermanland and Medelpad. The strict distribution of cairns and stone-settings along the coast has motivated many archaeologists to see the cairn-phenomenon as a primary representation of an autonomous and separate society, in contrast to the social setting in the cairn-less interior (Baudou 1989; Bakka 1976; Kristiansen 1987). In the following I will discuss some of the interpretations of the cairns that have been used in the archaeological approach to the cultural relationship between the coast and the interior.

The occurrence of cairns in the coastal area and the absence of cairns in the interior has often been connected with the occurrence of two different populations and economies. According to Baudou, the mobile life-style seems to have continued unchanged in the interior during the transition to the Bronze Age, while the appearance of cairns can be seen as a change in the settlement structure, with an increasing number of permanent settlements established (Baudou 1977, 129f). Kristian Kristiansen (1987) argues that the distribution of the cairns can partly be interpreted as a ritual expression of a more hierarchic and differentiated social organisation, which in terms of both economy and cultural orientation was separated from the interior. According to Kristiansen, the northern hunter-fishermen belonged to the Russian Arctic Bronze Age tradition in opposition to the coastal farmers (Kristiansen 1987, 74-85). This approach is also quite similar to the one held by Bakka (1976, 45ff).

Klas-Göran Selinge (1979) presents a quite different approach to this issue. Selinge argues that the distribution of the cairns is primarily the result of the hunter-gatherers' seasonal utilisation of the coastal area. In

this perspective the cairns can be seen as an indirect result of temporary settlements in a mobile economic system. Selinge argues that it is not possible to view the relationship between coast and interior in terms of two independent cultural systems. "The difficulties are completely dependent upon the differences in the two systems' archaeological sources with ideal remains – cairns – in the coastal environment and predominantly functional remains in the inland" (Selinge 1979, 100). The division between "ideal" and "functional" remains is, however, not a satisfactory description, and Selinge does not further explain why we only find "ideal" remains such as cairns in the coastal area and not in the interior.

I have elsewhere discussed the significance and meaning of the cairns according to their localisation and construction (Bolin 1998, 7-16; Bolin in press). Earlier studies of the cairns have also shown that they had been ritually used on several occasions, when they also may have been subjected to fundamental rebuilding (e.g. Baudou 1968). Very few traces of settlement activities have been found in *direct* location to the cairns (e.g. Hermodsson 1992, 50), which in my opinion supports the suggestion that the cairn ritual was mainly separated from the "regular" settlement areas. Archaeological and paleoecological investigations have shown that there is no general spatial connection between the sedentary farming settlement areas and the cairn monuments in Ångermanland and Medelpad during the last two millennia BC (Engelmark 1997, 50). It is true that there are sporadic indications of agricultural activities during the last millennium BC along the coastal area (e.g. Wallin 1996; Engelmark 1997), but these indications do not seem to appear in the phase with the earliest cairn constructions. It is therefore important to emphasise that the relationship between sedentary settlements, agricultural activities and cairns is far from clear, at least during the Bronze Age. The picture seems to differ from one coastal area to another, and the question about the significance of farming during the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age is still waiting for good answers. It is worth noting that there is no agricultural evidence at all from the Höga Kusten area in Ångermanland during the Bronze Age (Engelmark 1997, 45), although cairns are widely distributed there.

Thus, instead of focusing upon the spatial relationship between cairns and settlements, I will argue that the localisation of the cairns shows a significant and meaningful relationship between the cairn ritual and beliefs about the Bothnian saltwater. Different types of water in a fluvial landscape have always had a strong influence and effect on people's conceptions and mythologies about life and death (Schama 1996, chapter 5). The localisation of cairns in the transition zone between saltwater and freshwater can here be interpreted as an expression of such a conception. The cairn-building practices in northern Sweden, and perhaps also in other areas, are here viewed as the result of ritual strategies of groups in a mobile community. This interpretation is partly in line with the one held by Selinge (1979).

Many of the find categories discussed so far in this article support the view that the coastal area should not be considered as culturally isolated from the inland areas during the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. The hypothesis that different environments in the landscape were utilised for different purposes is instead a more attractive point of departure when discussing the cultural setting in this context (e.g. Selinge 1979). An important objection to Selinge's systems approach is, however, that too much attention is paid to economic subsistence and ecological adoption as a primary explanation for the mobility among the groups. Selinge's approach departs from a human ecological perspective in which "the cultural development must be seen as strongly conditioned by the ecological prerequisites" (Selinge 1979, 125). Needless to say, it is important to stress other, social as well as ideological aspects when discussing movement in the landscape and the motives that lay behind different kinds of activities. The term "mobility" implies a wide range of fundamental needs which, in addition to different subsistence strategies, also involve other kinds of movements and strategies aimed at maintaining social relations. Movements between areas are sometimes done for ideological and religious reasons, for example "pilgrimages" to sanctuaries and ritual sites. Mobility may also be caused by temporary conflicts or power-competition over certain sites and resources. As I have argued above, it is not reasonable to expect that the north Swedish hunter-gatherers lived within clearly defined territories. Some coastal cairns have contained bones from reindeer and bifacial points of quartzite (Baudou 1968; Olsson 1914), which shows that features that normally occur in the interior have been used in the cairn-ritual. These finds may indicate that the cairns can have functioned as sanctuary monuments for "pilgrimages" made by groups living in a mobile community (Bolin in press).

Having completed this brief discussion of the coastal cairns and their significance for to the coast/interior issue, I will now introduce another find category, namely the shafthole axes of stone from the Bronze Age.

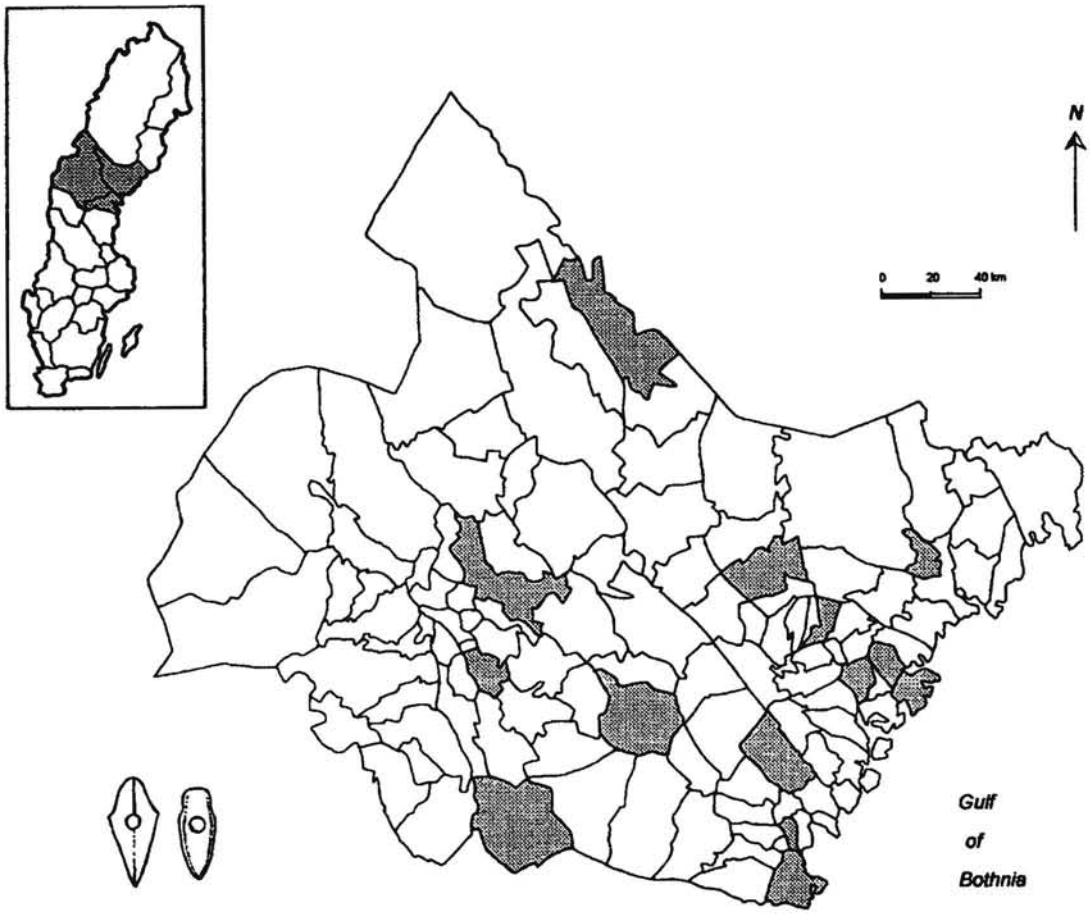

Fig. 11. The distribution of rhombic and right-angle shafthole axes from the Bronze Age in Ångermanland, Jämtland and Medelpad. The distribution is based on data from Baudou 1960 and SHM.

Rhombic and right-angle shafthole axes of stone occur on at least 14 sites within the investigation area (Fig. 11). According to the distribution of the shafthole axes, there is no significant difference between coast and interior. The shafthole axes of these types are most frequently distributed in the southern and middle parts of Sweden, where approximately 550 finds have been recovered (Baudou 1960). Very little is known about the find context of the north Swedish shafthole axes of stone from the Bronze Age, and a comparison will here be made with the deposition contexts of the simple shafthole axes, which in many respects resemble the rhombic and right-angle shafthole axes.

The social and cultural meaning of the simple shafthole stone axe is difficult to interpret because most of these axes (ca 98 %) are recovered and documented as stray finds (Segerberg 1978, 66). Studies made of shafthole axes in southern Sweden show that 65 % of the axes have been found in wetlands and watery locations, which can be interpreted to mean that they have been deposited for ritual purpose (Karsten 1994, 76f). The simple shafthole axes from Ångermanland have also been recovered in wetland-contexts, which indicates a similar deposition practice. One shafthole axe was found in a small stream (Bryngeån) in Ovansjö, Arnäs parish and another two have been recovered from shallow water in the lake Myckelgensjön in Anundsjö parish (Santesson's record of finds from Ångermanland, Department of Archaeology at Uppsala University). Another shafthole axe was reportedly found in a small stream in Lövsjö by (Raä 170), Själevad parish.

It is commonly held that the practical and symbolic

use of axes has drawn upon a wide range of implications and meanings in various archaeological contexts (e.g. Bradley & Edmonds 1993; Strassburg 1998). With reference to the depositions mentioned above as well as axes depicted in rock carvings (e.g. at Nämforsen), there is reason to believe that axes during the Bronze Age also had a strong symbolic significance in the middle of northern Sweden. There is no reason to suppose that all depositions of shafthole axes served the same purpose. Axes deposited in watery locations may have served as gifts to gods, establishing symbolic exchange relationships that would have important consequences for the distribution of power among the living (Bradley & Edmonds 1993, 204). Variations in the treatment and deposition of axes within particular areas also suggest that the conceptions associated with axes may have been drawn upon in different ways (Strassburg 1998). It is interesting to note that three of the axes found within the investigation area did not have a drilled shafthole, although they resemble ones with a shafthole in respect to both surface treatment and form. It is beyond the framework of this study to draw any detailed conclusions from this observation, but it is reasonable to suggest that the deposition of these "uncompleted" axes probably signifies something different from that of the broken axes or the fully "completed" ones which have a drilled shafthole.

According to the distribution in figure 11 above, rhombic axes as well as other types of axes were exchanged between groups in the middle of northern Sweden during the Bronze Age. Exchange in non-Western societies is really a form of diplomacy, and for this reason it cannot be understood in terms of "economy" (Bradley & Edmonds 1993, 13). Rather, it is concerned with creation, protection, and manipulation of social relationships such as marriage ties, kinship bonds and alliances. Turning to ethnography, the fundamental characteristic of marriage as a form of exchange is deeply implicated in the classification and circulation of people (Levi-Strauss 1969; Gregory 1982, 30). The exchange of specific objects such as axes has also a strategic role because every gift presupposes another in return, and lasting differences in social position may result when debtors are unable to discharge their obligations (Bradley & Edmunds 1993, 12). Although the significance of exchanged axes in the middle of northern Sweden during the Bronze Age may have altered as they passed between groups along the coast and in the interior, it is reasonable to argue that their distribution speaks for a similar cultural attitude towards axes.

CROSSROADS OF CULTURE

Throughout this article I have emphasised the study of the relationship between coast and interior by using different archaeological materials from the provinces of Ångermanland, Jämtland and Medelpad. It is now time to try to put the cultural pieces together and discuss the question raised in the beginning. In my opinion it does not seem relevant to talk about a dualism of cultures between coast and interior in the middle of northern Sweden during the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. The examples presented in this article show that the discussion about prehistoric cultures and cultural boundaries is complicated, and the issue needs to be approached from different perspectives.

It is important to stress that what may be delimiting in an archaeological sense does not necessarily imply limits between people in reality. The distribution of the different cultural/material expressions within the investigation area (Ångermanland, Jämtland and Medelpad) shows that the cultural/material boundaries seem to overlap each other in a fairly intricate manner. What can be regarded as a delimited cultural unit from one particular category of material evidence, may be more or less dissolved when bringing in another category of finds. We must also be aware of the fact that the "specific culture" within an area is often a combination of elements from a wide range of "cultures", and that different cultural activities have different boundaries (Goody 1994, 255f; Westerdahl 1994, 312). Perhaps the reason why it is hard to determine the type-identity of many of the bronze artefacts in northern Sweden, for instance, is that we do not expect to find a particular local stylistic tradition (which in turn may be a "bricolage" of transformed influences).

The quantitative region-division method has, according to scholars of geography, proved to be quite insufficient when it comes to interpreting cultural differences (Helmfrid 1994; Hägerstrand 1953). Culture refers here to a commonly shared worldview of knowledge and practice, mediated in different contexts and situations. The distribution of a particular phenomenon on a map may easily become an illusory static representation of reality. It is, for instance, not satisfactory to draw the conclusion that there is a cultural boundary between the coast and the interior of northern Sweden on the basis of the distribution of just one particular phenomenon, such as the cairns and cairn-like stone-settings. We also need to discuss other evidence of material culture within a framework of social theory.

The different categories discussed in this article do

not speak for a dualism of cultures between the coast and the inland area, as has been argued by several archaeologists during the years. The different kinds of finds and monuments instead show a rather dispersed distribution pattern, which may very well be interpreted as the intricate result of group mobility or as the result of social interaction between groups. The distribution may also be the result of conflicts and balance of power between groups within a segmentary social structure, while other remains could be the result of "pilgrimages" and visits to various places of ritual importance. The occurrence of bronze artefacts as well as the shafthole axes of stone and the asbestos-tempered pottery is material evidence that speaks for a similar cultural orientation in both the coast and the interior. The eastern and southern influences as well as the occurrence of more indistinct types of bronze artefacts and moulds both demonstrate the signification of external connections and the local importance of metalworking. Some types of rhombic shafthole axes in the area are also indicative of exchange relations and contacts with Trøndelagen in the west (Baudou 1960, 241). The distribution of the finds in the middle of northern Sweden shows that this "culture" was created and maintained by a flexible structure of crossroads, some of them having neither a beginning nor an end.

It is important to point out that the social relationships that developed during the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age can hardly be regarded as static and stable in a sense that life went on just the same irrespective of what caused the material changes. The external influences which can be observed in the archaeological record should be interpreted with caution, however. Lars Ersgård (1997) has pointed out the importance of paying attention to the transformative aspect of the process when discussing the significance of social change within a community (Ersgård 1997, 109-119). The reproduction of actions is not just a mechanical and unconscious maintenance of culturally determined practices and traditions; it also involves the transformation of already existing relations, which in turn may lead to a new direction in the social discourse. There are also structures of culture that do not change at the same pace, such as ritual institutions. The prehistoric cultural landscape can not be described as a sequence of separate wholes, placed on a chronological scale. Each whole or archaeologically defined period must instead be viewed as a continuous transformation of its own past (e.g. Ersgård 1997, 115).

The main difference between the two areas, according to the distribution of prehistoric remains, is the occurrence of cairns along the coast and the distribution of fire-cracked stone mounds in the interior. These two categories of monumental remains represent two important institutions where various sorts of rituals, feasting and power were reproduced and mediated. Both categories express the continuity of tradition-bound customs and practices, but they were also subjected to long-term transformation, rebuilding and change. These categories were actively used during the last two millennia BC, although the mounds of fire-cracked stone appeared more than two thousand years before the cairns. The original use of the fire-cracked stone mounds was very likely associated with another spectrum of ritual activities, probably significantly different from the later use when both cairns and the mounds had become more monumental in character. The continual practice of rebuilding, visiting and using these structures was also central to maintaining the social order within the segmentary community. The long-term use of the fire-cracked stone mounds can therefore be interpreted as an important institution which throughout times of change during the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age continued to structure the intricate network of social relations.

The pattern of social relations was transformed into new forms as the conditions for different activities constantly became subjected to various external influences and ideas. The increase in the exchange of bronze and metalworking had, for instance, an effect on the existing network of relations among the north Swedish hunter-gatherers in a fundamental way. The possession of bronze and the knowledge of casting bronze objects suddenly became a very important ritual medium, which further influenced the balance of power between different groups. The differentiated decorative pattern that appears on the asbestos pottery during the Late Bronze Age became hence a way of dealing with this new situation. It is not clear whether the change in decorative pattern is to be seen as an intentional strategy or if it should be regarded as a kind of silent unconscious response to this situation. Both views seem reasonable from different perspectives. Anyway, this new situation activated the interest in emphasising certain kinship relations, and the new decorative pattern with comb-stamped impressions and incised lines on the pottery became one of many ways of manifesting this. The asbestos pottery was also involved in several other contexts; above I discussed its connection with bronze casting, marriage, and the ritual activities performed at sites with fire-cracked stone mounds. The primary context of decorated asbestos pottery was not

to send ethnic messages to outsiders, but mainly to communicate with its users and other participants engaged in these rituals. As Edmund Leach reminds us, "We engage in rituals in order to transmit collective messages to ourselves" (Leach 1976, 45).

The occurrence of cairns and the occurrence of fire-cracked stone mounds should not be seen as the material representations of two different ethnic populations or two economic systems or cultures. The fire-cracked stone mounds in the river-basin area and the coastal cairns along the sea were used by mobile groups who, in many respects, had a similar cultural orientation. These groups used different parts of the landscape for different purposes and activities. It is reasonable to expect that the mobility pattern among the hunter-gatherers was equally subjected to economic strategies as to different social and ideological or religious ends. Some of these movements were made to sanctuaries located on the seashore, along the Gulf of Bothnia, where cairns were (re)built and ritually "activated". We have to accept a system of mobile groups if we want to explain the dispersed distribution and the overlap of artefacts in many areas in the middle of northern Sweden. We cannot use the terms "Arctic" or "Nordic Bronze Age" culture because these concepts presuppose that there is a kind of clear-cut boundary between them and that a culture is something internally coherent containing a fixed essence. This approach is of little relevance when discussing the material situation in the middle of northern Sweden. The term "culture" must here instead be regarded as a situational construction, which also has to account for variation, mobility and change.

The historian Simon Schama (1996) maintains that the landscape, with all its natural and cultural elements and features, has always been used as an important component in the conceptions of what is commonly held to be meaningful and significant. An important factor when trying to understand the relationship between the coast and the interior is the localisation of different kinds of monuments to freshwater and saltwater, respectively. The ancient metaphor that rivers were the arterial bloodstream of a people is illustrative since rivers and waters are thought to bind the landscape together (Schama 1996, 363). Conceptions and myths related to different waters were probably of great importance when situating the monuments in different watery locations. Mounds of fire-cracked stone, which occur exclusively near calm freshwater such as lakes and rivers, were localised there in accordance with certain ideas and beliefs about these waters. The exigencies of gathering and hunting were not only related to economic dependencies but were just as significantly linked to mythic beings and ancestors, who were thought to have created and sustained the fertility of the land but also stimulated the natural increase of species. It is here suggested that the fire-cracked stone mounds in the inland landscape acted as an important referent for much of this symbolism. Another important referent of this symbolism is the northern Swedish rock carvings at Nämforsen from the Neolithic and the Bronze Age, which undoubtedly seem to have had a certain meaningful relationship to rapid streams and swift waters. The constant flow of freshwater from the inland areas towards the coast and the seashore, where the freshwater turns into saltwater, was probably also of great significance for the localisation of the coastal cairns. The coastal area was probably perceived as the final boundary between the fluvial landscape of life and the mysterious waters of death. Conceptions and myths about the arcane and even dangerous saltwater at the Bothnian coast most likely played a very important role in the cairn-building "program" and in the ritual activities that took place at the cairns.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Mats Burström, Department of Archaeology, Stockholm University, and Kerstin Cassel, Department of Archaeology, Stockholm University, for comments on an earlier draft of this paper. English revised by Laura Wrang.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ATA: Antikvarisk-Topografiska Arkivet
JLM: Jämtlands Länsmuseum
NA: Nordarkeologi, site number
NM: Norrbottens Museum
RAÄ: Riksantikvarieämbetet, site number
SHM: Statens Historiska Museer, catalogue
Jä: Jämtland
La: Lapland
Md: Medelpad
Nb: Norrbotten
Vb: Västerbotten
Ån: Ångermanland