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DEBATING SUSILUOLA

Susiluola ('Wolf Cave') in southern Ostrobothnia has been a subject to much debate in Finnish archaeology since the later 1990s, when stone artefacts or artefact-like stones were recovered in the fill of the cave. Archaeological excavations at the site commenced in 1997 and have continued for several years. What makes Susiluola so exciting, and so controversial, is that it was tentatively interpreted as a Middle Palaeolithic site, which was supposedly inhabited prior to the last Ice Age, ca. 120,000 BP, by the Neanderthals.

The seeds for a separate section on the research of Susiluola were sown in 2005, when Paul Pettitt and Markku Niskanen offered for publication an assessment of the site and some of its finds, which were originally reported in the initial publication of the excavations at Susiluola (Schulz et al. 2002). Unfortunately, tight production schedule did not allow us to ask other scholars to contribute on the pages of *Fennoscandia archaeologica* on the debate concerning Susiluola.

We were delighted, however, when Professor emeritus Joakim Donner approached us with another contribution on the subject in early 2007 and thereby revived our original idea of putting together a separate debate/discussion section on Susiluola. Our purpose was two-fold. First, we hoped to promote scientific discussion of the site. The debate surrounding Susiluola took off already in the late 1990s, but a good deal of the discussion has been conducted in Finnish and is, therefore, inaccessible to most foreign scholars who might be interested in the issue. Rather more problematically, the exchange of views has taken place in more or less non-archaeological and informal forums, for instance, in newspapers and journals, such as *Tieteessä Tapahtuu* ('Science Now'), published by the Delegate of Finnish Scientific Societies. Secondly, we wished to encourage exploring such aspects of Susiluola that may so far have gained less attention than they perhaps deserve.

Against this background, a request for contribution was sent to some 20 scholars who had been involved in the excavations at the site, had written about the site in other forums, and/or could potentially be interested in offering their insights into some aspect of Susiluola research or the debate surrounding it. The following themes were suggested, although not imposed: 1) conjunctions and discrepancies in the archaeology and geology of the Susiluola cave, 2) the nature, coherency/reliability and interpretation of scientific data, 3) the significance of Susiluola debate in relation to the state of Finnish archaeology, 4) the presentation of Susiluola to the general public in media, especially on the Internet, 5) too little emphasized or entirely neglected aspects in the study and interpretation of the finds, 6) the mutual weight of contradictory evidence, 7) problems related to the study of stone artefacts/artefact-like stones, and 8) the debate concerning Susiluola Cave in relation to other 'problematic' Paleolithic sites in Europe or the rest of the world.

We recognized that, given the nature and amount of evidence from the Susiluola excavations, it could be very difficult to develop completely new insights into the material available. We thought, however, that any attempt to depart from the sometimes confusing previous debate, and/or to look at the issue with the new eyes, would be fruitful. The following contributions focus largely on the question of artefacts vs. geofacts, which, of course, is paramount to the interpretation of the Susiluola site, but other aspects – from the geology of the cave to the Neanderthal diet – are also touched upon. Critical tones dominate most contributions, but we wish to underline that the aim of this section is not to 'solve' the problem of Susiluola.