

Milton Núñez SUSILUOLA – THE PROBLEM PERSISTS

I was disappointed by Schulz's fresh reply (in this issue) to the comments regarding the 2002 article (Schulz et al. 2002). One gets the impression that he is evading the raised points. In my case he plays much attention to trivial matters like the time of my visit to Susiluola Cave. He clarifies that it was not in 1998 and, though he does not mention when, he is right nevertheless. I have checked and it was actually in 1999. My examination of the tools in Helsinki took place, as Schulz rightly states, in 1998. In all fairness, I should say that Schulz kindly showed me around the cave and that I was quite satisfied with the visit. It was the students excavating there who later commented that the finds had been hastily taken to the bank prior to my arrival.

But whatever the reason, this matter is rather irrelevant and, more important issues addressed by me, are entirely dismissed by Schulz. I am referring, for example, to the problems with the interpretation of the finds as artefacts and the alleged magnetic anomaly of the sediments surrounding "burnt" stones, which according to him are not in situ. The closest possible references to the latter are, perhaps, the mention that 'important new data about the stratigraphy and chronology' gathered during 2003–6 'will be published in other papers' and that the answer to my critical comments on the lithics interpretation had already been provided in his 2007 article (Schulz 2007). I am afraid that the said article was very much MOTS (more of the same) and does little to restore my confidence or placate my concerns. Admittedly, the new drawings of alleged artefacts look fine on paper. However, based on the drawings of the artefacts examined by me, I fear that they will too deflate to geofacts upon close examination.

In contrast they respond lengthily to my suggestion that the researchers may not have had the necessary experience in Middle Palaeolithic lithics and cave deposits and, for this reason, it was irresponsible to go into full-fledged excavations without engaging the expertise of a team of scholars in an international project. First of all, I was aware that Schulz had worked several years in Palaeolithic cave sites. He had told me so. My judgement was based on his interpretations of the Susiluola finds. As to the researchers of the Geological Survey of Finland, I never questioned their experience/expertise in glacial geology. My main concern was the complex nature of cave deposits, which are extremely rare in Finland.

Furthermore, one is amazed by the claim that although an international research project would have been the best solution, Finnish research budget did not allow it. The possibility of finding Middle Palaeolithic habitation in Fennoscandia would have certainly served to both lock European researchers' interest and release EU funds for an international research project. As it stands now, some foreign experts have inspected the material and may have given some sort of positive opinion of the finds via Schulz/National Board of Antiquities, but they have not participated in any joint publication asserting their views about the artefact nature of the finds. This has placed the Susiluola finds in a kind of to-be/not-to-be limbo and, unfortunately, this must be blamed on the manner in which the investigations were/are organized and carried out. This is what was meant by irresponsibility.

Schulz's only serious response had to do with my comment that the alleged tools may have been somewhat small for Neanderthaler fingers. He is right in pointing to the small size of Middle/Lower

Palaeolithic assemblages found at certain Central European (Kulna and Tata caves) and Near Eastern sites, where, despite the availability of larger pebbles, there seems to be a clear preference for smaller ones (Valoch 1967; 1984; Collins 1969; Moncel & Neruda 2000; Moncel 2001a–c, 2003; Marder et al. 2006). However, at least the Kulna and Tata assemblages appear to be connected with specialized butchering activities and are thought to have been hafted (e.g., Moncel 2001b), which is not so far-fetched considering the recent evidence for Middle Palaeolithic resin use (Grunberg 2002). Although Schulz does not explicitly mention hafting, it is certainly a possibility. The main problem with the Susiluola material is not the size, however. It is the lack of credible and unquestionable signs of human modification. I would gladly change sides if such were found but, to this day, the site has not produced any piece that could not be explained as the result of natural processes.

With the above words I withdraw from this debate, at least until there is more concrete evidence about human activity at Susiluola. I will conclude by saying that I fully agree with Schulz in this: Susiluola is a unique case of a cave in Precambrian bedrock of which researchers lack previous experience. In point of fact, nobody knows what the combination of glacial, glaciofluvial and beach processes could do to hard, compact silt/sandstone and quartz pebbles within the confinement of a low-roofed rock cave.

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Editors' note: Hans-Peter Schulz and Tapani Rostedt declined the possibility reserved for them to comment on the counter-arguments put forward by Donner and Núñez.