

SOUNDS LIKE THEORY

XII NORDIC THEORETICAL ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP MEETING IN OULU 25.–28.4.2012



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MONOGRAPHS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF FINLAND 2



Published by the Archaeological Society of Finland

www.sarks.fi

www.sarks.fi/julkaisut.html

Editorial assistant: Ville Hakamäki

The design of this book is based on MASF 1, adapted by Janne Ikäheimo

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ISBN 978-952-67594-7-0 (PDF)

ISBN 978-952-67594-6-3 (hardback)

Monographs of the Archaeological Society of Finland

ISSN-L 1799-8611

ISSN 1799-8611 (online) ISSN 1799-862X (print)

Printed in Finland at Saarijärven Offset Oy, Saarijärvi 2014



The conference and the printing of this volume have been made possible through a grant from the Finnish Cultural Fund.

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Foreword

Anna-Kaisa Salmi, Tiina Äikäs & Janne Ikäheimo

The XII Nordic Theoretical Archaeology Group conference (NTAG) was held in Oulu, Finland, from 25 to 28 April, 2012. The NTAG conferences have been organised since 1985. Their goal has always been to present and discuss new and exciting theoretical aspects in Nordic archaeology, and the XII NTAG in Oulu was no exception. We had a very exciting four days with 13 sessions and approximately 90 papers and 130 participants. Although the individual sessions were very interesting in their own right, and some of them are published as separate journal or book volumes (for example, *Folklore* 2013 Vol. 55; *Arctic Anthropology* 2014), we wanted to emphasise themes that were common in more than one session and thus reflect the issues that are important in Nordic archaeology in general right now. Therefore we have edited this peer-reviewed volume in which contributors from all sessions could participate. We asked the contributors to emphasise northern issues and/or fresh theoretical approaches in their papers, and we ended up with an exciting combination of papers that touch upon several important current theoretical viewpoints.

The 13 papers cover a wide range of themes and cultural contexts. Many of the papers focus on northern archaeological sites and materials, and sites from Northern Europe as well as from North America are discussed. There are also papers by archaeologists from the Nordic Countries and from northern universities that deal with sites in Southern Europe and South America. Especially the range of papers on classical archaeology is impressive (Lipkin, Rajala & Mills and Viitanen & Ynnilä), reflecting the fact that classical archaeology is a central part of archaeological stud-

Figure. Experiencing ancient soundscape – Odysseus and the Sirens. 3rd century AD Roman mosaic from Dougga (Tunisia). Bardo Museum, Tunis.



ies at many Nordic universities, as well as the fact that classical archaeology actively participates in the theoretical debates of current Nordic archaeology.

A variety of fresh theoretical approaches were presented at the conference and in the papers that were selected for this volume. Although individual papers were multi-faceted and often multi-disciplinary in their approaches, we identified three overarching themes that were at the core of the papers selected for this volume. There were several papers tackling with the lived-in worlds of the past – experiencing things, carrying out practical tasks, engaging with material objects – and attempting to understand them archaeologically. There were also a number of papers dealing with archaeoacoustics, especially with sound and musical instruments. Although this theme is somewhat related to the lived-in worlds of the past – after all, soundscapes were a part of the experience of the world – we decided that this relatively unexplored and exciting field in archaeology was worth a thematic section of its own. There were also several papers that dealt with spheres and networks of interaction; the roles of material culture in encounters between people were addressed, as well as the ways archaeologists deal with these issues.

The lived-in worlds of the past have received increasing attention from archaeologists lately. The Heideggerian/Ingoldian dwelling perspective – how people's lives are structured by doing and experiencing things – has increasingly been the basis of archaeological interpretations. In this collection of papers, several authors focused on how people constructed, experienced, and sensed the world around them. Many authors also address the way making things, wearing

things, and interacting with things shapes human experiences and identities. Marila's paper focuses on the theoretical premises of understanding meanings of things in archaeology. He states that meaning is not an inherent quality of things or a social construction, but is equal to habits of action – for instance, the ways things were used and their physical qualities. He thus suggests that archaeologists should begin to look at objects by concentrating on those habits, many of which have remained relatively unchanged throughout millennia, and only after that proceed to discuss the more complex aspects of human society.

The paper of Vajanto does exactly that. The authors take the technological process, in this case, textile production, as their starting point, and then proceed to discuss the meaning of ancient textiles. Vajanto discusses the *nålbinding* technique used in textile fragments recovered from 11th–14th-century burials in Finland. Based on her analysis of the *nålbinding* technique and dyes used in the textile fragments, she reconsiders the traditional interpretation of the meaning of those textiles, and suggests that instead of mittens and socks, they may have been something else altogether – for instance, pouches containing perishable ritual objects.

The papers by Lipkin and Vilka & Salmi take a step further from the habits of action and try to understand how things were related to social identity, as well as how the physical experience of pain was understood in the past. Lipkin's paper focuses on belts and their relation to identity construction and manifestation in prehistoric central Italy. Her analysis reveals that belts were related to different aspects of identity,

such as gender and ethnicity, in different time periods, and she concludes that aspects of identity can be studied through things such as dress accessories. Vilkkama and Salmi's paper concentrates on the experiences and interpretation of pain caused by dental diseases. Through a case study of dental diseases of the deceased buried in the cemetery of Old Ii Harbour in Northern Finland during the 15th and 16th centuries, they explore how the experience of pain can be taken into account in palaeopathology.

A number of papers addressed the relatively new field of archaeoacoustics. Already in the 1990s, there was a demand to investigate not only visible past landscapes but also a multisensory experience of the lived-in worlds of the past. Methods adopted from visibility studies have nevertheless dominated the research. Hence the recent lively discussion around the use of archaeoacoustics is most welcome. The papers in this volume offer a variety of different approaches to archaeoacoustics, including the study of past soundscapes and musical instruments. The term soundscape, introduced by Murray Schafer (1977), has been the starting point for many studies concerning past sounds. Gjermund Kolltveit elaborates the classification of sounds further by dividing them into intentional and non-intentional sounds. He also distinguishes three subgroups in the intentional sounds, these being sound made for functional reasons, for ritual reasons, and for pleasure and pure expression. Riitta Rainio and Kristiina Mannermaa show how the groups of sounds related to functional and ritual reasons can be intertwined in their interpretation of tubular bird bone artefacts using use-wear and sound analysis and ethnographic analogy. They also demonstrate how the recognition of sound-producing instruments may require interdisciplinary methodologies. Iegor Reznikoff also explores the connection of ritual and sound in his study of echoes related to painted caves and rocks. Jeff Benjamin gives another example of the benefits of using interdisciplinary methodologies. He brings together composers and archaeoacousticians in order to reanimate sounds of the past. He moves away from the division of studies of soundscapes and sound instruments, and states that there is a need to accept sound as an artefact in and of itself.

There are also several papers that deal with spheres and networks of interaction. These papers address the way material culture was used in and shaped the encounters between people. Rajala & Mills and Viitanen & Ynnilä use different concepts of -scapes to explore social interactions. Rajala and Mills concentrate on 'ceramiscene', a taskscape that focuses specifically on the landscape created by the manufacture, use, and disposal of ceramics. They demonstrate that investigating such taskscapes can produce valuable information on the social interactions between towns, villas, and hinterlands in the Roman world. Viitanen and Ynnilä analyse the demonstration of social control in the context of the Pompeian cityscape. Hudson and Henderson, on the other hand, focus their paper on the relationships between the Maya and the Ulúa in Mesoamerica. They argue that archaeological evidence reveals that Ulúa societies were deeply entangled with but not subordinated by the Maya, and call for the recognition of multiple Maya, Ulúa, and other identities.

The ways in which archaeologists discuss cultural contact and write about their findings are also discussed. Ojala's paper concentrates on the complexities of doing and writing Sámi archaeology. He pinpoints several key issues in Sámi archaeology, such as the definition of Sáminess, the problems and possibilities of indigenous archaeology, and power relations manifesting themselves, for instance, in the discussions surrounding repatriation. He also suggests that the issues raised by Sámi archaeology provide an opportunity to challenge the ways in which cultures, identities, and boundaries are created in archaeological discourse. Oikarinen gives an example of how archaeological writing needs new spheres of interaction. She brings up some of the problems concerning grey reports and also introduces possible solutions in emerging technologies, such as Semantic Web.

All in all, based on the papers presented in XII Nordic TAG, there seems to be a great variety of theoretical frameworks used in archaeological interpretation. Papers no longer start with a long introduction of theoretical thinkers. Instead, theory is perceived more as a tool for new ways of thinking and interpreting archaeological material and even for new ways of thinking about the nature of archaeology itself.

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