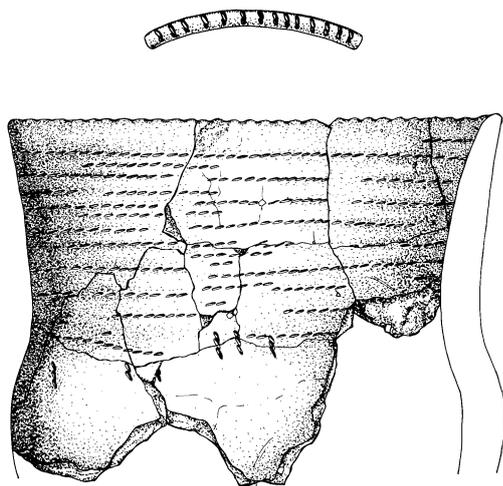


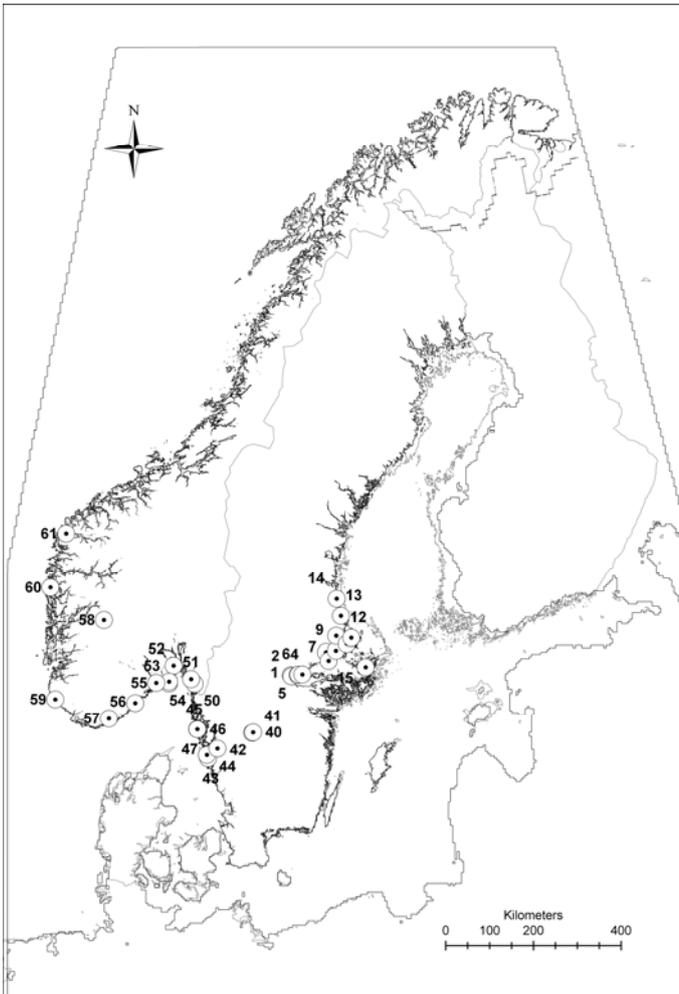
**Postdoctoral Fellow Fredrik Hallgren**  
**Department of Archaeology and Ancient History,**  
**University of Uppsala, Sweden**  
**fredrik.hallgren@arkeologi.uu.se**  
**CAS Fellow 2008/2009**

## A short note about Stone Age farmers who did not adopt elk hunting, and elk hunters who did not adopt farming

The first phase of the younger Stone Age of Scandinavia is known as the Early Neolithic (4000 – 3300 BC<sup>1</sup>), a period that in Denmark, southern Sweden and southern Norway is defined by the introduction of agriculture, but also by a characteristic archaeological assemblage that include artefacts like ceramic vessels (funnel-beakers, collared flasks, clay discs), polished working axes and polygonal battle-axes. This archaeological complex is termed the “Funnel Beaker Culture” (abbreviated TRB<sup>2</sup>), so named after the ceramic pots (figure 1) with a funnel-shaped neck (Jazdzewski 1932, Midgley 1992). The archaeological remains of the Funnel-beaker culture have a rather distinct northern limit in their distribution (figure 2), north of which there lived hunter-gatherers who did not adopt farming during the Early Neolithic, nor did they produce the pottery or polygonal battle-axes so characteristic of the early farmers. A prominent feature in the archaeological remains from these latter groups are tools of slate, thus this find-complex has been discussed in terms of the “Slate Culture” (Brøgger 1909, Almgren 1912).



**Fig.1.** Example of Early Neolithic funnel-beaker from the site Skogsmossen, Västmanland, Eastern Central Sweden. After Hallgren (2008 figure 8.28).

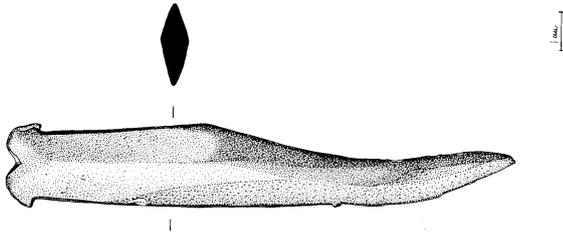


**Fig. 2.** The northernmost <sup>14</sup>C-dated sites of the Early Neolithic "Funnel Beaker Culture" in Scandinavia. The site Skogsmossen discussed in the article is marked as number 6 in this map. After Hallgren (2008 figure 10.3).

### **A permeable border**

While on one level there really is a sharp divide in the archaeological material across central Scandinavia, there are also traces of contacts across this border, in the form of imported exotic objects. I encountered examples of this at the excavation of the Funnel Beaker Culture settlement Skogsmossen, in Central Sweden, where several non-local slate artefacts were found (Hallgren and others 1997, Hallgren 2008). Among these were a knife of banded red and green slate, a raw material originally quarried at outcrops along the eastern edge of the Caledonian Mountains in Central and Northern Scandinavia (figure 3). While the sources of banded red and green slate have a limited distribution, both the raw materials and the finished tools were circulated in a large area of Northern Scandinavia. Thus, for example on the coast of Trøndelag in Central Norway were grey, grey-green and white slate occur locally, a majority of the slate knives were made of red or banded red and green slate (Søborg 1986 p.282). The raw material was fetched – directly or through middlemen – from

quarries in Jämtland in Northern Sweden, that is, from the other side of the Caledonian Mountain range (Søborg 1986, Alsaker 2007).



**Fig. 3.** A knife of banded red and green slate, found at the offering-fen at Skogsmossen. After Hallgren (2008 figure 9.31).

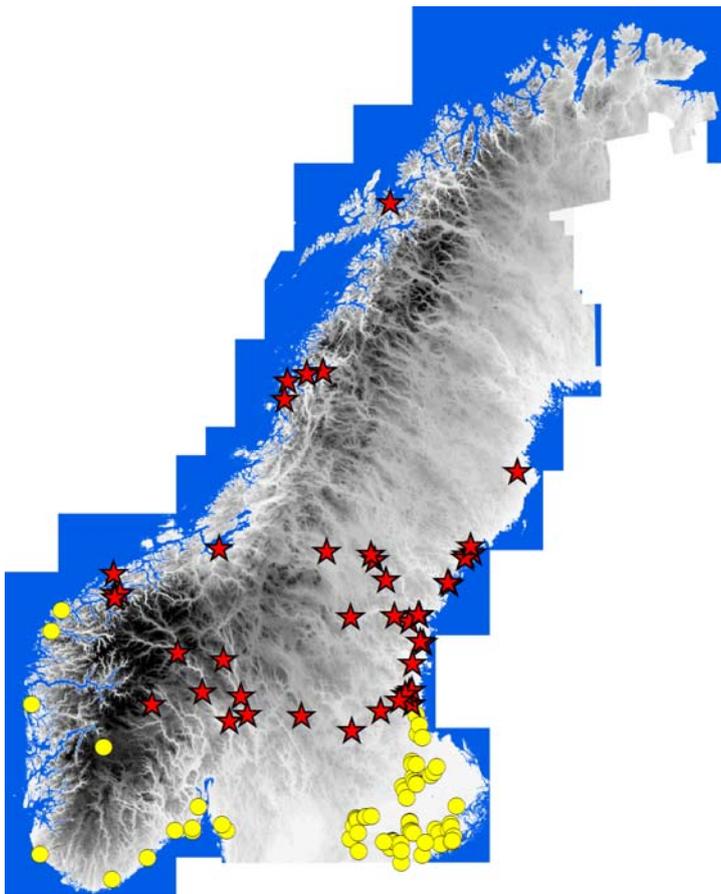
The local production and use of slate knives are one of the common denominators for all regions included under the umbrella of the term “Slate Culture”. This does not mean that the craft traditions were uniform, just as with the Funnel Beaker Culture several local and regional traits can be observed. One such regional tradition, originally identified by Brøgger 1909, is a design of slate knives where the border between blade and handle was marked by small protrusions, a detail that according to Brøgger was typical for Trøndelag (Brøgger 1909 p.62, cf. Søborg 1986 p.306). As the banded red and green slate knife from Skogsmossen display this specific trait (figure 3), it *may* thus be an exotic artefact produced by slate quarried out of the bedrock in Jämtland, the chunk of slate was then possibly transported to Trøndelag, where the slab was worked into a knife by a stone-smith adhering to the local craft traditions practised on the coast of Central Norway. After a long use (the blade of the knife has been resharpened repeatedly) in the hand of one or several wielders, the artefact was handled in a context where hunters from the north met farmers from the south.

The site Skogsmossen where the knife was eventually found, belongs to the northernmost group of Funnel Beaker Culture sites in eastern Central Sweden (figure 2). While the places of origin in Jämtland and Trøndelag lay at a fair distance (500 km as the crow flies), the closest settlement sites with archaeological remains that can be classified as “Slate Culture” is only a couple of days of travel by foot to the north of Skogsmossen. It is likely that the farmers met hunters quite regularly while herding forest-grazing cattle, or on hunting expeditions (the “farmers” also hunted, but small game and seal rather than the elk preferred by their neighbours to the north). Skogsmossen is a settlement interpreted as being used by subsequent generations of one or a few families, who repeatedly relocated and rebuilt their house(s) within different parts of the site. Apart from the settlement remains the site also includes a small fen used as the locus for offering depositions that were placed in the water. The find material from the fen includes some 155 fragmentary ceramic vessels (funnel-beakers, collared flasks, clay disks), 35 axes of greenstone and flint, 25 hand querns, charred cereal grains (perhaps the

content of some of the funnel-beakers?), but also the above mentioned knife of red and green slate.

After being handled in the cultural context of *contacts across* the border between hunters and farmers – contacts that may they have been both peaceful and warlike – this foreign, exotic knife was thus subsequently included in the ritual of the local farmstead(s) at Skogsmossen, laid to rest among the funnel-beakers, axes and quern stones offered to the gods or ancestors of the farmers. As such the banded knife has a complex biography that encompasses both the roles this artefact played in the original cultural context(s), as well as the new associations and meanings that were ascribed to it by placing it as an offering at the ritual site of the local group of farmers, what could be described as a layering of different meanings.

Many Funnel Beaker Culture settlements in eastern Central Sweden have examples of exotic, imported slate knives and points, and there are also single slate artefacts found at TRB sites as far south as Skåne (Nilsson 1969, Taffinder 1998, Hallgren 2008). Likewise there is a comparable northward spread of TRB axes (figure 4). These northern finds of polygonal battle axes and polished working axes of greenstone and flint, is the subject of the case study I conduct presently at CAS (Hallgren *forthcoming*).



**Fig. 4.** The distribution of Early Neolithic TRB axes (red stars) found to the north of the northernmost known settlements of the Funnel Beaker Culture in Scandinavia (yellow dots, cf. figure 2). After Hallgren (*forthcoming*).

## **Hunters turning farmers, farmers becoming hunters**

As already hinted at, the “farmers” of the Funnel Beaker Culture were also hunters and collectors of wild vegetables. The proportion of wild and domestic products is debatable, and surely differed substantially between different TRB regions. The contrast in regards to the absence or presence of elk hunting mentioned above, is possibly specific for eastern Central Sweden (Hallgren 2008 p.123-125), as elk bones occur on one of the few Norwegian TRB sites with preserved animal bones (Jaksland & Tørhaug 2004). While acknowledging that regional differences in subsistence are present within the TRB, the presence (to larger or smaller degree) of some elements of cultural practices connected to the handling of domesticated plants and/or animals, remain a common feature (Glørstad 2005 p.45-46, Hallgren 2008).

According to most interpretations of the Early Neolithic archaeological materials of south Scandinavia, the first farmers were also the last hunters (Price & Gebauer 1995), that is, local hunter-gatherers acquired the knowledge and know-how of agriculture and transformed their way of life into what we know as the Funnel Beaker Culture (Price 2000, Fischer 2002, Glørstad 2005, Hallgren 2008). The contrast between the (part-time) farmers of South Scandinavia and the hunter-gatherers of North Scandinavia was from this perspective a new phenomena, since the inhabitants of both regions were hunter-gatherers during the preceding Late Mesolithic.

During the following period – the “Middle Neolithic A” (3300-2800 BC) – the border zone between hunters and farmers across Scandinavia was redefined (Larsson 2009). Shortly after 3300 BC the first small scale traces of cultivation and/or husbandry appeared north of the limit of the Early Neolithic TRB Culture (Østmo 1999, George 2007, *forthcoming*). More or less at the same time, ceramic technology was adopted by the hunter-gatherers living in Dalarna and along the coast of Northern Sweden (<sup>3</sup>), where as the manufacture of slate tools *spread south* to Central Sweden (Nyberg 1987, Taffinder 1998). The arguably most profound changes took place within the local Funnel Beaker Culture communities of eastern Central Sweden. Here, all known farming settlements in the interior, like the above mentioned site Skogsmossen, were abandoned. Instead settlements seem to have been relocated to the coast and the islands of the archipelago. Some small-scale agriculture may still have been practiced close to the coastal sites (Roger Edenmo *forthcoming*), but the overwhelming impression of the osteological assemblages (Storå 2001, Olson 2008) as well as data from diet studies on human bones (Fornander and others 2008) is that hunting and fishing dominated the subsistence economy.

Significantly, the elk bones so conspicuously absent at most Early Neolithic sites in eastern Central Sweden, are common at early Middle Neolithic sites (Almgren 1906, Segerberg 1999 p.179-183). Thus, it seems that the farmers that for 700 years had rejected the elk hunting practices of their

northern neighbours, finally found it culturally acceptable to hunt elk, at the same moment in time when some of the hunter-gatherers condescended to try out husbandry and cultivation. The spread of technology and subsistence practices across the former border zone between farmers and hunters hint at the creation of new alliances, as well as re-negotiations of local and regional identities. It is likely that the contacts across the border zone during the preceding period lay the foundations for these processes.

## Notes

Note 1. Datings are listed as <sup>14</sup>C-years BC (before Christ) calibrated to calendar years, following the procedure of Reimer and others (2004).

Note 2: The term Funnel Beaker Culture was originally coined during a time when the German language dominated the archaeological discourse (Jazdzewski 1932), and the German abbreviation TRB (Trichter Becher Kultur) is still in use in the international literature.

Note 3. Pottery craft was already introduced during the late Mesolithic in Finland and adjacent regions of north-easternmost Sweden and Norway, but not further west and south in Norrland and northern Norway (Halén 1994, Skandfer 2005, Hallgren 2004).

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