

Hunters and their Prey Animals. Man Animal Relations in the Pitted Ware Culture of Neolithic Eastern Middle Sweden.

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The causes for variability in patterning in the faunal record have often been attributed to actions within the economic sphere of animal utilization. Hunting patterns, butchery practices and transport tactics are among the most widely discussed topics – often with reference to ethnographic data. The Pitted Ware culture dating to approximately 3300-1800 BC cal can be characterized as a hunter-gatherer complex appearing contemporary with both the Funnel-Beaker culture and the Battle Axe culture, which in this area represent "Neolithic" cultures.

Ethnographic records of hunter-gatherers indicate that the relationship between man and animals may be very complex and not only utilitarian. This aspect of man-animal relations has received little attention in zooarchaeological studies. In recent years more interpretative approaches have been adopted within zooarchaeology with less emphasis on the economic sphere of animal utilization. Instead, social dimensions of man-animal relations are emphasized, i.e. perspectives "beyond calories". There are indications that prey animals in the Pitted Ware culture were important not only from an economical point of view; animal bones have been recovered in burial contexts, tooth beads are common as pendants, clay figurines depicting several species. In some ways these features are similar to those, which have been observed among several modern hunter-gatherer groups.

When Pitted Ware Culture hunting patterns have been described and interpreted, the subsequent handling of killed prey has received little attention. It can be argued that "*the bringing home*" of prey animals or parts of them has been considered a rather uncomplicated activity. The handling of prey animals "on-site" and their effects on patterning in the faunal record has been given little attention. It can be argued that this is common in many zooarchaeological studies. A common feature in many hunter-gatherer cultures is the ritualized treatment of the remains of prey animals – including the honouring of the animal (or the soul of the animal) and the proper disposal of bones and bone discard may bear important symbolic meaning. Importantly these practices may be relevant to zooarchaeology. Body parts of the animals have sometimes received special handling - sometimes one can see that the remains receive some kind of "burial". Of significant importance is that this ritualistic handling of animals in no way stands in contrast to the "economic" utilization of the animals as resources. This is a problem but also a challenge to zooarchaeology, which opens up alternative perspectives for interpretations and it has significant zooarchaeological implications since the disposal of prey animals may affect patterning in the faunal record. It is important to realize that zooarchaeological analyses of refuse faunas need to consider all aspects of the relationship between man and animals

On the Åland Islands and Gotland one can see that the skulls of seals have received some kind of special treatment, which can be seen in depositional practices on some of the sites. This also concerns the dog and some skeletal elements of pig (Gotland only). Also, there are some interesting aspects concerning the species distribution" of tooth beads. These aspects of the Pitted Ware culture are very different from the other contemporary "neolithic" cultures in the same area. Obviously these latter cultures do not share the same relationship between humans and animals as within the Pitted Ware culture. This opens up an interpretative perspective on the neolithization of the area - which also is "beyond calories".

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