

**DECORATION OF BONE AND ANTLER ARTEFACTS
AS AN INDICATION OF MESOLITHIC NETWORKS. FINDS
FROM A CENTRAL SWEDISH LATE MESOLITHIC SITE**

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Орнаментированные костяные и роговые артефакты эпохи мезолита в Скандинавии были известны в основном по находкам из Южной Скандинавии. Однако раскопки, проведенные в недавнее время на поздне-мезолитическом памятнике Страндваген в Мотале (Центральная Швеция), позволили обнаружить большое количество роговых и костяных орудий, некоторые с орнаментом. Символические знаки, обнаруженные на этих предметах, не были известны ранее на данной территории. Сравнение полученных находок с аналогичными артефактами из Южной Швеции, а также из Балтийского региона, позволяет понять структуру коммуникационных сетей, связанных как с югом, так и с востоком.

Our knowledge of Mesolithic decorated bone and antler tools from Scandinavia has mainly been based on finds from sites and single finds from Southern Scandinavia (Nash, 1998; Plonka, 2003). However, recent excavations at a Late Mesolithic site at Strandvågen in Motala, south-central Sweden, have changed the state of research and revealed a large number of bone and antler tools, some of them with decoration.

The site was excavated in different stages due to a change in the railway system. The site is located at the eastern shore of Lake Vättern, the second largest lake in the southern part of Sweden, at the only outlet of the lake to the Baltic Sea, located about 30 km to the east. A considerable part of the site has been excavated, including the refuse area below the present shoreline, the lower slope of a small ridge, with the settlement remains, and the top of the ridge, with a cemetery (Molin et al., 2014). The presence of such large parts of a site with the remains of different activity areas is exceptional within Scandinavia. The site has been used during several centuries, with a concentration of radiocarbon dates at 5500–5000 cal BC.

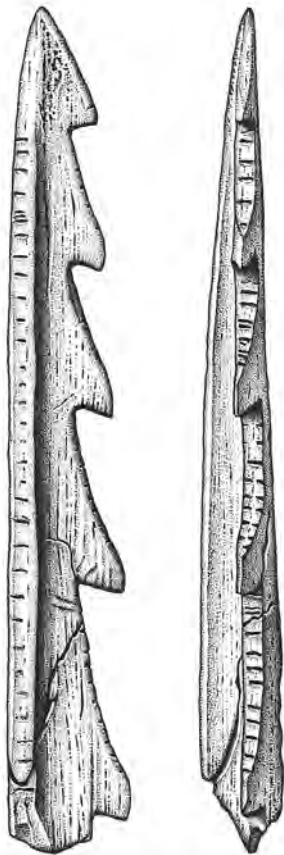


Fig. 1. Leister prong from Strandvägen
 Рис. 1. Острога из Страндвагена

Most of the bone and antler tools were found in the refuse area of the settlement. The present shoreline is the same as during the prehistoric situation, and by enclosing part of the area beyond the present shore and pumping away the water, a large number of organic finds were found on the bottom. The settlement at Strandvägen is the only site in this part of Scandinavia with a large number of finds of bone and antler, due to the absence of layers with suitable preservation in the region.

Leister prongs are the single largest group of tools, with a total of about 300 examples, all in a fragmentary state. A number of these are furnished with decoration, in the form of small notches on the barbs, more or less systematically arranged, as well as cross-hatched motifs. A small number of other tools, such as slotted daggers, slotted bone points and antler objects with shaft holes of uncertain shape and use, have been provided with decoration. A number of fragments of bone and antler also derive from decorated objects.

The decorative motifs are exclusively geometrical, some executed in a sketchy fashion, and a small number with high accuracy. So far, this Late Mesolithic site is the only one from which all decorated objects and fragments are available for study in detail.

The location of the site was exceptional, as it was easily accessible through links to the south and north as well as to the east and west

(Carlsson, 2008). This is well manifested in the find material, which includes flint from the south and west, and slate objects from the north.

This site provides a picture of symbolic markers in the form of decoration that has not been known from this part of Sweden, from other parts of Central Sweden or from southern Norway. The number of bone and antler objects in Northern Sweden is very small, and includes just one decorated piece, a slotted dagger, which has been dated and interpreted as an exotic object originating from Southern Scandinavia (Larsson, 2005).

Comparison with material from present-day southern Sweden and Denmark shows obvious similarities, both concerning the choice of motifs and the range of ways in which they were executed. The high representation of decorations as well as decorated objects in relation to the large sites of the Late Mesolithic in Southern Scandinavia is, however, exceptional.

The only other area in the Baltic region with numerous decorated objects is the East Baltic. However, the chronological relevance is uncertain. For example, leister prongs with some similarities to the finds at Strandvägen can be identified among the finds from Lake Lubāna in south-eastern Latvia. Most of these may be several centuries older (Vankina, 1999), as leister prongs of the Kunda type belong to the Early Mesolithic (Zagorska, 1992).

The question is, which of the motifs and the modes of execution constitute pan-Mesolithic phenomena within Northern Europe, and which can be regarded as specific regional characteristics. One example concerns the leister prongs, as they are so common at Strandvägen. Just a few leister prongs from Southern Scandinavia, all dated to the Early Mesolithic, are decorated (Plonka, 2003). Decoration on leisters and harpoons is much more common in the area to the east of the Baltic Sea.

At the time Strandvägen was settled, the rise of the bedrock had created a chain of islands linking Central Sweden with present-day Finland. That the Baltic island of Gotland was inhabited indicates that travel across the Baltic Sea might have been feasible.

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