

# Arrowheads as indicators of interpersonal violence and group identity among the Neolithic Pitted Ware hunters of southwestern Scandinavia



Rune Iversen

Saxo Institute, Dept. of Archaeology, University of Copenhagen, Karen Blixens Vej 4, DK-2300 Copenhagen S, Denmark

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## ABSTRACT

The three main types of tanged flint arrowheads (A, B, and C) characteristic of the Neolithic Pitted Ware hunter, fisher and gatherers of southwestern Scandinavia are traditionally viewed as chronologically conditioned. However, recent studies have shown their simultaneity during the early 3rd millennium BC. Based on a study of more than 1500 arrowheads from Denmark and western Sweden, this paper explains the stylistic variation of the Pitted Ware arrowheads as functional determined representing two main categories: relatively short and wide hunting arrowheads (type A) and long and slender war arrowheads (type C). Type B represents a multifunctional group of arrowheads that mixes features from type A and C. Furthermore, diverging production schemes (*schema opératoire*) used for the shaping of hunting arrowheads has helped to identify social groupings within the larger southwestern Scandinavian Pitted Ware complex and contact across the Kattegat during the Middle Neolithic.

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## 1. Introduction

Tanged flint arrowheads stand as the most widespread and iconic features of the Neolithic Pitted Ware complex in southwestern Scandinavia. In spite of that, the social and stylistic functions of these arrowheads have never been dealt with as the stylistic variation among the Pitted Ware arrowheads has been seen as chronologically rather than socially determined (Becker, 1951, 1955, 1982). However, new recordings and evidence from a series of radiocarbon dated settlement layers and sealed grave finds have shown that the different arrowhead types were used simultaneously within the Pitted Ware area (Iversen, 2010). This has left us with the very important and not previously posed question on how to understand the stylistic variation of these significant arrowheads from a functional and social perspective.

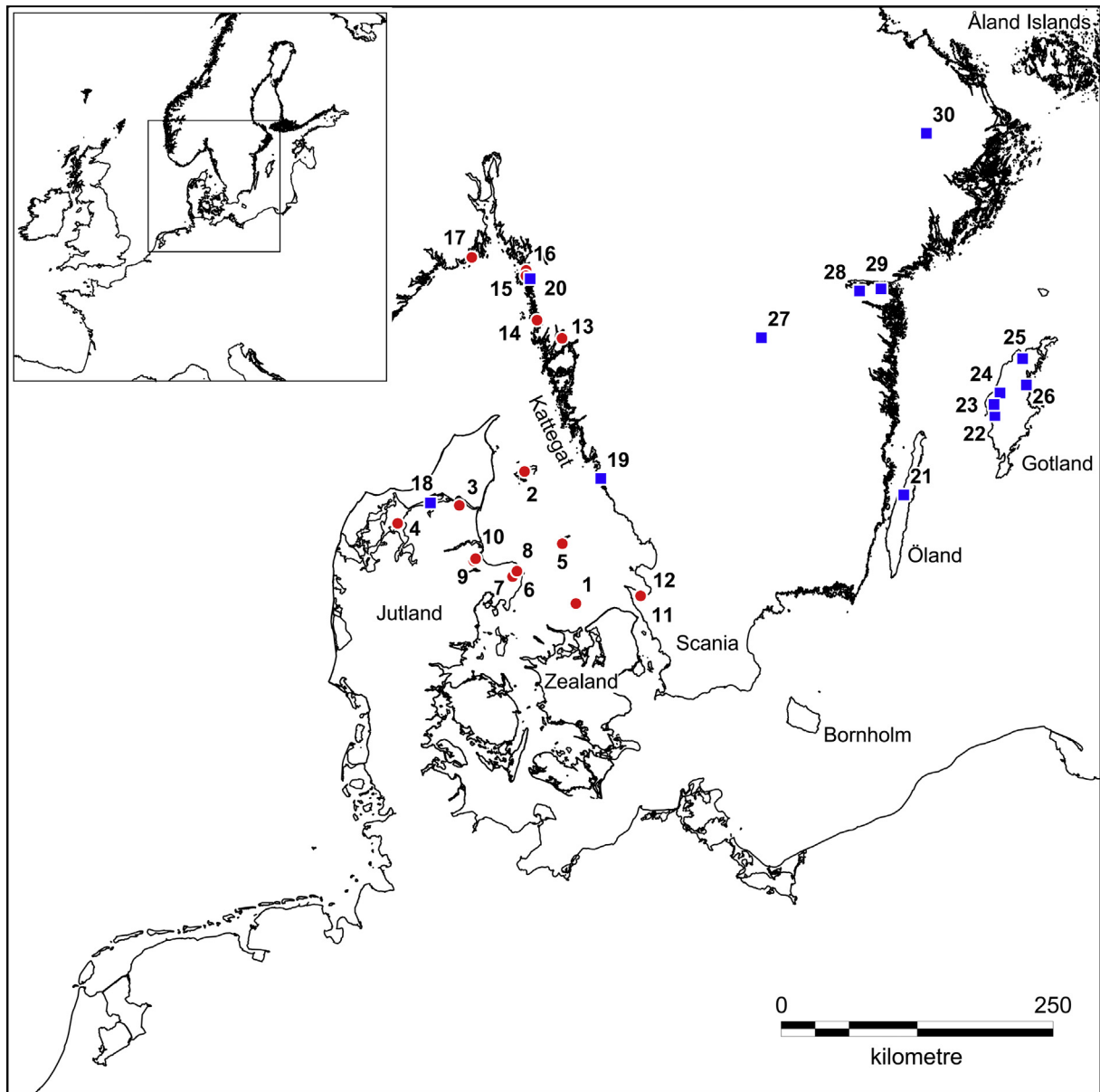
Based on analyses of the flint arrowhead inventory of the southwest Scandinavian Pitted Ware complex, this paper addresses the question of stylistic variation by considering the different arrowhead types as the outcome of task specialisation, such as hunting and warfare, and production processes in which different group identities were integrated components.

## 2. The Pitted Ware culture – Neolithic hunters, fishers, and gatherers

The Pitted Ware culture is a widespread and rather heterogeneous cultural phenomenon occupying the later Scandinavian Neolithic. It was distributed from the Åland Islands and eastern Sweden to the north and east and to southwestern Norway to the west. To the south, Pitted Ware sites are found in northeastern Denmark and in Scania, southern Sweden (Fig. 1). In central and southern Scandinavia, the Neolithic started around 4000 BCE by the occurrence of the first agricultural societies, the Funnel Beaker culture, with its northern limits reaching central Sweden and southern Norway.

The Pitted Ware culture in eastern central Sweden must be dated to the period c. 3400–2400 BCE, corresponding to the final Early Neolithic and Middle Neolithic in southern Scandinavia (Hallgren, 2011; Segerberg, 1999: 127–129, fig. 89). Whereas, more than 200 Pitted Ware settlement sites have been recorded in eastern central Sweden of which some has displayed extensive culture layers and hut structures, relatively few Pitted Ware burials are known except from the east Swedish islands of Gotland and Öland. Isotopic data from eastern central Sweden, Gotland, Öland and the Åland Islands show that people buried in Pitted Ware contexts had a distinct diet based on seals and other marine protein sources

E-mail address: [runeiversen@hum.ku.dk](mailto:runeiversen@hum.ku.dk)



**Fig. 1.** Map showing Pitted Ware sites. Dots indicate sites analysed in this paper, squares indicate other important Pitted Ware sites mentioned in the text. 1 Hesselø, 2 Læsø, 3 Smedegaarde, 4 Livø, 5 Anholt, 6 Kirial Bro, 7 Kainsbakke, 8 Musefælden, 9 Aagaard I, 10 Højvang 1, 11 Jonstorp sites H, M, M2-3, 12 Jonstorp RÅ, 13 Fiskevik, 14 Rörvik, 15 Dafter, 16 Änneröd, 17 Auve, 18 Selbjerg, 19 Olas, 20 Sandhem, 21 Köpingsvik, 22 Ajvide, 23 Fridtorp, 24 Visby, 25 Ire, 26 Västerbjers, 27 Alvastra, 28 Fagervik, 29 Säter, 30 Aloppe.

(Eriksson, 2004; Fornander et al., 2008; Lidén and Eriksson, 2007). This marked predominance of seals in the diet has even given the Pitted Ware people of Gotland the nickname ‘Inuit of the Baltic’ (Eriksson, 2004: 154).

In southern Scandinavia we face a rather different situation. Except from some larger settlements located in northeastern Jutland, sites are mostly recognised by collections of cylindrical blade cores and tanged flint arrowheads and reflect a mobile lifestyle with seasonal or short-lived camps closely related to the coastal zones, fjords, and watercourses. Sites are almost exclusively distributed in the northern and northeastern parts of Denmark and only in eastern Jutland have larger sites been recorded with traces of all-year occupation including culture layers. Pottery is mainly related to such occupation layers and pits on larger settlements. No clearly distinguishable or unambiguous Pitted Ware house structures are known as are any proper graves. Arrowheads are

on the other hand found in large numbers in megalithic tombs indicating a preferred reuse practice of these graves, in particular in eastern Denmark. From radiocarbon dated sites and a limited number of contact finds relating the Pitted Ware culture to other cultural groups, the Pitted Ware horizon in southern Scandinavia has been dated to c. 3000–2450 BCE (Iversen, 2010, 2013).

Only a few sites such as Kainsbakke and Kirial Bro on Djursland, eastern Jutland, have revealed preserved fauna remains showing a broad-spectrum economy consisting of husbandry, hunting, fishing, and gathering with a certain importance attached to marine resources (including seal, fish, and shellfish), which have been extensively exploited. In all, wild species constitute a larger quantum than the domesticated among which cattle dominate. However, dog, pig, and sheep are also present. The wild species include a range of aquatic birds, otter, beaver, fox, roe deer, red deer, wild boar, horse, aurochs, and the youngest specimens of

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