



Quarrying in the Stone Age and Bronze Age in southern Norway studied as a socially situated phenomenon

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June 26, 2017 · volume 7, issue 1 (2017), ?????? / Papers

Astrid Johanne Nyland¹

¹ Museum of Archaeology, University of Stavanger

Nyland AJ. Quarrying in the Stone Age and Bronze Age in southern Norway studied as a socially situated phenomenon:

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Bulgarian e-Journal of Archaeology. 2017 Jun 26 [last modified: 2017 Jun 28]. Edition 1.

Abstract

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In this paper, a chaîne opératoire analysis of lithic extraction sites and direct lithic procurement form the point of departure. This study was originally part of a PhD project comprising a detailed examination and contextualization of 21 extraction sites located in southern Norway. The 21 sites are in different topographical settings and landscapes, in different geographical regions, and they provided people in the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age with different types of rock. I build on the results from the original study of all the sites, but I will here emphasize only a few of them. To transcend the sites' physical differences and acquire information about procurement practices, I operate with an extended notion of what constitutes a quarry. Whereas estimates of the scale of quarrying and the duration of exploitation are important, tracing the occurrence of the extracted rock away from the quarries in different dated archaeological contexts is equally necessary in order to understand the character and value of the exploitation of the procurement sites.

Investigating lithic procurement from various angles, attempting to chart and visualize spatial and temporal variation in practices, different methods have been applied. An important aspect has been to establish an index of the intensity of exploitation. This enables a demonstration of a 'norm' and an 'extraordinary' manner of exploitation of quarries and other lithic procurement practices. Furthermore, lithic procurement studied as a chain of operations embeds a theoretical perspective where all practices are perceived as influenced and guided consciously or subconsciously by peoples' cultural choices, traditions and social habitus. Together with the dated and contextualized sites and procurement practices, this offers a frame for interpreting the results of my study; some practices are common cross-regionally, while others defined regions and/or time-periods. Quarry studies therefore have the potential to provide insights into developing social relations and social-political strategies. Indeed, interpreted in a wider cultural context, it seems that how, and from whom or where you obtained your rock mattered more than the type or the quality of the rock itself.

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