Primitive

tider

21

arkeologisk
tidsskrift

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tider

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ISSN 1501-0430

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Ombrekk: Hege S. Gjerde

Trykk: Reprosentralen ved Universitetet i Oslo

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Forsideillustrasjon: Handelsrelaterte gjenstander fra Vikingtid. Foto: Åge Hojem, NTNU Vitenskapsmuseet. Fra artikkelen Metallsøkerfunn som grunnlag for kunnskap og vern. En case-studie fra Sunndal – et knutepunkt i jernalder og middelalder av Dahle *et al.* s.81-99.

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This is a wonderfully written, richly illustrated monograph, which nominally presents the Bronze Age archaeology of a number of coastal settlements in Rogaland (southwestern Norway), but which in fact is a manifesto for a new type of mindful archaeology which includes human-animal relations at its heart. The author is one of the most passionate advocates for human-animals studies within archaeology, who has taken the time to organize special panels at multiple conferences, sponsor and academic networks, and publish articles that lay out her vision. This volume is a thickly referenced and passionately argued case for a rethinking of how space and architecture should always be associated with human-animal ensembles. Although the headline species are sheep, the volume also touches on the archaeology and ethology of dogs (especially sheepdogs) and makes passing reference to a number of other commensal species who once and still inhabit crofts in this part of the world.

Although one might be led to think that this volume is a theoretical treatise on post-human archaeology, the volume bases itself around the settlement archaeology of “three-aisled” Bronze Age houses in Rogaland (Chapter 4). Here the author provides an exhaustive discussion of typologies of long-houses, putting her weight behind the argument that widening of the structures should be associated with a

qualitative change in how people and animals related to each other – representing a movement of animals indoors into the domestic space previously thought to be the exclusive space of humans. The chapter does more than this. It has some of the most attractive coloured illustrations of settlement plans I have seen, and it is accompanied again with coloured prints of 3D reconstructions of the dwellings. Although I am far from an expert, or even an amateur reader, on the Bronze Age of Rogaland, the chapter must be comprehensive summarizing site reports on at least 11 named sites. Aside from architecture, the author references osteological distributions, macrofossils, the distribution of artefacts – but oddly enough not geoarchaeological phosphate or lipid evidence, which presumably would settle the debate. This central chapter is the springboard for her argument that animals at this point became part of human households – and therefore the frame for the wider theoretical arguments for recovering this intimacy of co-residence in contemporary debates.

I have to admit that I don’t necessarily find sheep and humans cheek-by-jowl under one roof as evidence for commensalism. The argument to my view carries to an extreme what Judith Okely (1983) once called the “house dweller ideology”, that domestic architecture defines domesticity. In my own work I have identified relationships of care and attention between humans and animals

in windswept valleys and heaths. The domestic architecture of Bronze Age Rogaland is indeed intriguing. It would have been nice to reach out to compare similar settings (such as Pomor multi-level human-animal architecture – or similar structures in Germany). Although we can accept the argument of intense co-residence, one wonders if both the people and animals defined themselves as such back then. Likely it was an ubiquitous style of life much like many contemporary cities express the habit of The Car People. However, it is clear that the purpose of the author is not to represent the Rogalander humans but to make a general point about how co-residence flows into other more philosophical matters of intention and sentience that reach beyond human bounds. Chapters 2 and 3 present wide-ranging and well-expressed debates on sentience, neurobiology, linguistics, and poetry to argue for the complexity of animal subject-hood. These are some of the best written paragraphs on this topic, and these chapters could easily stand on their own in reading lists in a range of disciplines.

After a comprehensive grounding of this debate in the trenches of Rogaland (Chapter 4) the book returns to “the herding dynamic” in Chapter 5. Here the author shows how sheep, people, and dogs form a triad of interaction. This chapter is framed with an evocative pictograph illustrating this ancient relationship. This chapter also can stand on its own as an engaging description of how human and animal relationships can be constructively entangled. The link to the earlier discussion here is that, in the author’s view, the early socialization of sheep and dogs within a built setting is crucial for building this sense of trust. The author, however, is quick to qualify her discussion of architecture with the view that modern factory farms are not the right type of setting and instead breed alienation and mistrust. I would use this as an argument instead to show that attention and care can be framed within a variety of settings, and that it cannot be read out of the blueprints for a settlement.

Chapter 6 – a lengthy and thoughtful conclusion – puts forward the title of the book – how the intense co-residence of Rogalanders with sheep characterized all parts of their society. The author evokes the smells of a sheep-human society, refers to the psychology of perception of sheep and humans, and presents artefacts and dress of Bronze Age “individuals” to illustrate her claim. Here, wool textiles are used to connect Rogaland to Jutland and make a wider regional setting for the argument. The chapter concludes with a decentring of the argument that domestication is necessarily dominating. Reaching out into economic theory, Oma makes a case for a co-operative domestic economy.

The book has one appendix presenting the major datapoints of each of the houses analysed in Chapter 4. It has a comprehensive and wonderful bibliography and index.

This is a passionate and carefully crafted book. English readers might struggle with the idea of Rogaland as microcosm of the universe and therefore find a mismatch between the settlement archaeology and the manifesto quality of the book. As a co-traveller interested in human-animal interaction I find this a rich and welcome volume, which likely can be read a number of different ways and deserves a wider audience than that of archaeology.

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