

Commentary: Maritime Mode of Production: Raiding and Trading in Seafaring Chiefdoms

The article is fresh and valuable input to discussions of the societal make-up of the Nordic Bronze Age (NBA). It rethinks Marxist concepts and historicities while the Viking Age provides data to model a Maritime Mode of Production (MMP) based on water-borne trading and raiding. With its footing in Ricardo's Comparative Advantage (1817), Mann's power sources (1986), and the ethnography of political economy, this hybridizing contribution will appeal to NBA scholarship and beyond. Strong points are slaves as key commodity, the resolution of the conventional war-peace divide, the anthropological underpinning of the argument, the dynamism between landed and maritime production/property and the effort made to show that hierarchies can arise among low-density populations. The following remarks stem from my own research.

From Bell Beaker hubs c. 2500-2100 BCE to West Scandinavian NBA confederacies c. 1500-750 BCE. The article describes this long span in terms of a continuum between two maritime-led expansions both of which inhabited metallurgical knowledge. What is however truly remarkable is the wide time gap between them with *de facto* little metal. This hiatus left the triangle of NW Jutland-Rogaland-Bohuslän outside the emerging NBA with little evidence of engagement in the metal venture as it evolved in central-eastern Denmark and Scania with thresholds c. 2100 BCE and again 1600 BCE (in alignment with much of the Bronze Age hyper region in Afro-Eurasia). Thy and the central Limfjord region with their modest-sized sunken-floor houses contrast with the east where metal axes were in great demand due to the timber-demanding BIG houses (Vandkilde 2017b). Metallurgy apparently fell out of use in the west after the Bell Beakers and was not reintroduced until c. 1500 BCE with concrete evidence in the Kluborg sunken-floor house (Simonsen 2017) and in the suddenly numerous metal-rich mound burials.

The NBA history of the west then took a path different from the leading east of the earliest NBA. This invites questions of the underlying logic and reasons for such differences as well as their longer term consequences. An ethnically heterogeneous landscape rooted in Scandinavia's complex later Middle Neolithic, hence different varieties of tribal formations, may form part of the answer.

Can the MMP template contain, and throw new light on, historical change and social-structural variation in Scandinavia? At stake is its wider applicability when confronted with archaeological data from the remarkable NBA containing several thresholds of change and regional variations. The article generalizes long time spans into one single model, but could have explained the degree to which socio-cultural change impacted the MMP in the focus region of Thy-Rogaland-Bohuslän. The Urnfield-inspired Late NBA commenced toward the end of the 13th century BCE as a major watershed (Kristiansen 1998): did this push the MMP in the direction of more or less hierarchy?

Across a wider geography, one may ask whether different production modes coexisted while networking with each other through trade, alliance and raiding. South of the MMP in Thy, Western Jutland may exemplify a persistent pastoral mode of production from the Corded Ware into the NBA. *Segmentary tribes* ought here to be addressed as a social solution *also* perfected to the extreme decentralisation of low-density dispersed populations. Seminally, Sahlins (1961: 326) explained this form of society in terms of 'predatory expansion' because of the innate warfare expediting strong confederacies akin to Clastres' warrior societies (1994), the military democracy earlier coined by Morgan and Engels (1972), and also bearing resemblance to the article's MMP. This makes me intervene that it is perhaps not necessary to subscribe rigidly to the chiefdom model when interpreting

the societies of the Corded Ware, Bell Beakers or the Bronze Age. Temporary elevation of tribal segments to form a political superstructure is known to occur in times of stress and crisis (Sahlins 1968: 51). The article's expression 'chiefdom-like' would align with a more volatile order. The MMP nonetheless maintains that hierarchy was consistently present in the low-density populated NBA building on landed/maritime property and the comparative advantages obtained through bronze and linked goods. These advantages must at times have been subject to intense competition and thence difficult to maintain. Clearly different social groups existed, more or less privileged and with slaves at the bottom rung as the authors contends, but why not with room for social climbing, or descent when success failed? As far as I can judge, the data do not contradict a measure of social mobility through self-made enterprises.

Warfare was an arena where individual ambition could contest fraternity order and potentially threaten hierarchies at home. At sea, fame, prestige and companionship evolved around the leader as captain and provider of booty (Van de Noort 2012: 233-235). If the war chief proved unpopular or unable to deliver he was degraded or even killed: this basic principle of 'military democracy' or 'first among equals' existed in many contexts from Homer's epic about the Trojan war and Tacitus' accounts of the Germanic tribes to early Danish kingship. In the Viking Age with its lords and retainers, the warrior fraternity at sea demonstrated loyalty to the group as much as to the war chief, i.e. social boundaries were traversed to bind the group (Raffield et al. 2016: 42). In the Aegean final Bronze Age and Iron Age, as furthermore Homer sustains, fragile hierarchies existed with a pregnant, though rather unofficial, economy and sociality of raiding. Mediterranean early histories unfolded in a seascape offering good analogues to the NBA (cf. Broodbank 2013; Bevan 2010). Hence, I am inclined to understand NBA social hierarchies as usually unstable with dynastic exceptions primarily in the 9-8th centuries BCE.

How similar was the Bronze Age to the Viking Age? A final remark regards the comparative potential of the Viking Age to improve understanding of the NBA. I find the endeavour undertaken fruitful and inspiring. However, the NBA formed part of a huge realm glued by bronze as a crucial resource well outside the controlling grip of ancient hubs and civilisations (Vandkilde 2016, 2017a); indeed an 'economic revolution as transformational as the Neolithic revolution'. The historical uniqueness of the Bronze Age may hint at substantial differences between the two epochs, which need more research.

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