

# Buried Refuse?

## Interpreting Early Neolithic Pits

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### Abstract

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Among archaeologists in Scania it has long been recognized that the Early Neolithic in the region is largely reflected in the archaeological record through the presence of pits. The pits occur in various environments and they often contain large amounts of artefacts. As yet there have been few systematic investigations of the possible functions of the pits. These facts were the point of departure for the present investigation which deals with the analysis and interpretation of the content and morphology of thirteen Early Neolithic pits from various sites in south-west Scania. A common trait among the pits is their large content of artefacts, particularly pottery and flint. The pits are interpreted as functionally different. The emphasis is set on the in-filling, which is interpreted as refuse. A dualistic relation to the refuse is further discussed with the main focus on profane behaviour and sacral ideas.

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## Introduction – Pits in Scanian Archaeology

Early Neolithic pits containing large amounts of artefacts are a well-known type of feature in Scanian archaeology. In most cases, the artefacts consist mainly of flint and pottery. Some pits contain great quantities of flake scrapers and cores. Other common finds are lumps of burnt clay and stones. Occasionally animal bone and soot layers are also present. These types of pits are known to be prevalent in different topographical contexts in south-west Scania and they seem to occur almost everywhere that Early Neolithic activities can be ascertained. Although there have been a few investigations as to the possible functions of these pits (Nielsen 1988; Knarrström 1995 & 2000; Rosberg & Sarnäs

1995; Svensson 1998; Lagergren-Olsson & Linderöth 2000; Rudebeck & Ödman 2000), as yet there has not been any systematic analysis. This article is aimed at a more general understanding of this phenomenon.

Pits are a varied type of feature, occurring at most archaeological excavations in the fully-cultivated landscape in Scania. A previous investigation concerning the frequency of pits, based on evidence from investigations conducted by the Department of Antiquities in Malmö and the National Heritage Board Excavations Department in Lund during 1977–78, revealed a varied result concerning the presence of pits from different prehistoric periods (Widholm 1980, p. 40). Pits were considered to be absent in Mesolithic contexts in Scania, while there was an obvious increase of pits in Early Neolithic contexts. There appeared to be a declining

frequency of pits in Middle Neolithic and Late Neolithic contexts, whereas data concerning the presence/absence of pits in Early Bronze Age contexts were lacking. The investigation also showed an extreme increase in pits in Late Bronze Age contexts and a slight decrease in Early and Late Iron Age contexts.

According to Björhem and Säfvestad (1993), the volume of the burrow pits from the Late Bronze Age at the Fosie IV site, outside of the city of Malmö, corresponded to the volume of clay used for the wattle-and-daub walls of the adjacent houses. This brief account showed that pits can be used as indicators of changing behaviours in prehistoric societies.

The following investigation of Early Neolithic pits containing large amounts of artefacts was originally part of an M.A. thesis, in which attempts were made to structure and analyse these features with the purpose of understanding their function. Pit morphology and the finds of pottery and flint were the basic empirical materials in the investigation. This article summarizes some of the results of the thesis.

What, then, is meant by large amounts of artefacts? An estimate during the initial phase of the present investigation concerning the amount of pottery and flint was that about 0.5–1.0 kilos per pit could be considered as “a large amount”. However, no exact measures could be stated concerning the other find categories, i.e., burnt clay, stone and bone. Nor could the frequency or volume of soot layers in the pits be quantified more precisely.

Apart from the artefacts, different aspects of the pits and their spatial context were analysed from a theoretical point of view. Possible pit-related functions were calculated and applied in the analysis. Comparisons between pits and occupation deposits concerning the amount of utilized flint and find densities have also been accomplished and evaluated. In this article, the emphasis is on the analysis of the pottery and flint from the pits. Although the analysis of pit morphology was also an important method in

this work, it is not discussed further, but merely mentioned as a method for tracing primary functions.

The aim of this investigation is that we may gain new knowledge of social life during the Early Neolithic by tracing the functions of these pits. In particular, the following questions were considered: Are Early Neolithic pits, containing large amount of artefacts, a uniform phenomenon? Do they represent different types of activities? What do the contents mean?

## The selected pits

The area chosen for the investigation was south-west Scania (Fig. 1). This is a highly exploited landscape, and many rescue excavations during several decades have yielded abundant evidence of prehistoric occupation, thus offering good opportunities for finding suitable material from a limited geographical area. The chosen materials were retrieved during rescue excavations performed between the 1960s and the 1980s by the Department of Antiquities in Malmö and by the Historical Museum, University of Lund. Initially a total of 140 pits were listed and evaluated for further selection (Eriksson *et al.* 2000, pp. 145 f.). In the final selection, thirteen pits were chosen; ten pits and one pit system consisting of three pits.

Because the aim was to investigate pits from various environments, the selection of pits was guided by considerations of the geographical location of the sites (Table 1). Four pits were located close to the Neolithic coastline. Five pits were located at inland sites, one located in the plain and two from sites at the transition between the plain and the hummocky landscape. Two pits were located in the hummocky landscape in south-west Scania, i.e., the most easterly part of the investigated area. Two pits were situated in a flint-mining area and two were located at a site near the lake of Björkesåkra.

The selected features were investigated in connection with rescue excavations between 1963 and 1989 and according to aims and

Table 1. The thirteen selected pits, according to parish, site, year of investigation, acquisition number, archive number, feature number and geographical context (cf. Fig. 1).

No.	Parish & site name	Year of inv.	Acquisition no.	Archive no.	Feature	Geographical context
1	Burlöv, Stora Bernstorp	1987–88	MHM 7135	S01:116	A90a-c, A98a	Coastal
2	Böringe, Björkesåkra 6:1	1969–70	MHM 2796/17	–	A21	Lake
			MHM 2796/21	–	A26	Lake
3	Fosie, Kv. Hålsjön	1971–72	MHM 5216	S03:044	A28	Plain
4	Oxie, Käglingevägen	1972	MHM 3271	S08:007	A1	Hummocky landscape
5	Oxie, Oxievång II	1978	MHM 6299	S08:027	A6	Hummocky landscape
6	Skabersjö, Svenstorp 2:1	1963	MHM 5219	S19:005	Ö51, Ö90	Hummocky landscape
7	Södra Sallerup, Ångdala	1989	MHM 6902	S09:035	A972, A1649	Flint-mining area

methods that were current during each period. This being the case, it was considered necessary to record and analyse the material according to the particular questions of this investigation (Eriksson *et al.* 2000, pp. 5 ff.).

A total of 39 kilos of pottery and 158 kilos of flint, 8,328 pieces, was recorded. As the stratification of the artefacts was not originally documented in detail, there were some problems concerning the interpretation of the process of in-filling. This process could only be interpreted by means of the documented sections and the described layers. The analysis was sometimes limited by the lack of information concerning the general archaeological context of some of the features. Therefore, comparative materials from

other excavations were included in the investigation.

### Pottery

The analysis of the pottery focused on a chronological and cultural division of the material. The analysis also focused on vessel types and the degree of fragmentation. This was accomplished by studying decoration, vessel morphology and by identifying fragmented parts. The thickness and weight of the sherds were also registered to investigate possible differences concerning fragmentation.

The only absolute dating in the material was from the Svenstorp site, while the other sites were dated according to the local pottery chronology. A general relative dating for the south-west Scanian material has been established by Madsen (1990) and Liversage (1992), with the Early Neolithic chronologically divided into two phases, EN I and EN II. The dating of the Early Neolithic can be estimated to 3950–3300 BC with the division approximately set to 3500 BC (Madsen 1990; Liversage 1992; Larsson & Olsson 1997, p. 8; Koch 1998). In the present study, the pottery is also grouped according to the local groups discerned by Larsson (1984, pp. 156 ff.), i.e., the Oxie, Svenstorp and Bellevuegård groups. The first two groups should be regarded as contemporary during EN I, while the Bellevuegård group is equivalent to EN II in the geographical area of the study (cf. Larsson 1984, pp. 156 ff.; Madsen & Petersen 1984;

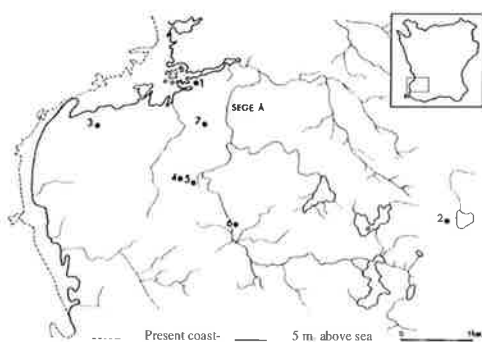


Fig. 1. Map of the Malmö-area with the selected sites and their geographical positions. 1: St. Bernstorp, 2: Björkesåkra 6:1, 3: Kv. Hålsjön, 4: Käglingevägen, 5: Oxievång II, 6: Svenstorp 2:1, 7: Ångdala. (Larsson, M. 1984, p. 14, modified)

Table 2. The chronological and typological setting of the various pits, based on sherd morphology and decoration.

EN I	EN I	EN II
The Oxie group	The Svenstorp group	The Bellevuegård group
Björkesåkra A21	Oxievång II A6	Kv. Hålsjön A28
Björkesåkra A26	Stora Bernstorp A90a-c	Ängdala A972
Käglingevägen A1	Stora Bernstorp A98a	Ängdala A1649
	Svenstorp Ö51	
	Svenstorp Ö90	

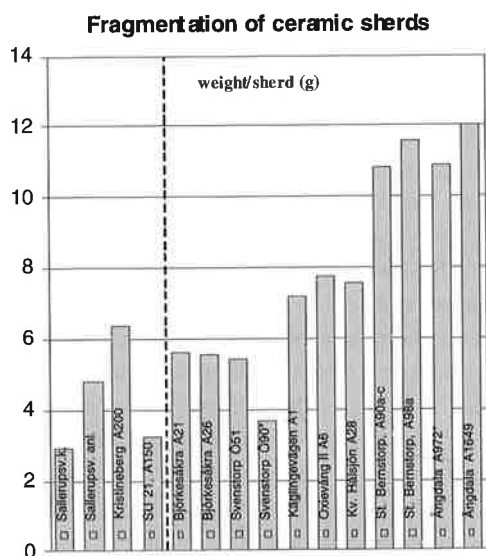
Koch 1998; Petersson 1998). The pottery analysis yielded the following chronology among the selected pits (Table 2):

The result shows a rather uniform division between the different chronological groups (Eriksson *et al.* 2000, pp. 83 f.). Hence, the initial result of the investigation revealed that the pits with a large amount of artefacts existed during the entire Early Neolithic period. This indicates that pits, as a cultural phenomenon, were shared by all Early Neolithic societies.

In order to distinguish refuse material from profane activities or ritual deposits, an analysis

of pottery fragmentation was conducted (Eriksson *et al.* 2000, pp. 84 ff.). In order to understand the various degrees of fragmentation, a comparison with three additional contemporary occupation deposits was included. The analysis resulted in three groups, where the most fragmented pottery was interpreted as refuse, based on similarity between occupation deposits and pits concerning fragmentation (Table 3). The least fragmented pottery was interpreted as representing activities, sacred or profane, that involved the deposition of whole or only slightly fragmented vessels. The interpretation of the intermediate group is problematic.

Table 3. Fragmentation of pottery from the selected pits, expressed as weight/sherd (g). For comparison, evidence from various occupation deposits in south-west Scania have been added. \*Incomplete materials.



The diversity of the pottery as to morphology and decoration indicates that the materials contained the remains of different activities (Eriksson *et al.* 2000, pp. 91 ff.). In order to distinguish profane activities from sacred activities, everyday life from ritual life, and in order to discern the ritual in everyday life, an identification of vessel types was attempted. This attempt included only the least fragmented material. The examination indicated that the pottery included funnel-beakers, lugged beakers, bowls and bowls with a more than semi-spherical profile, storage-vessels, cylinder-necked beakers, collared flasks and clay discs. This roughly reflects all the vessel types of the period in the investigated region.

Funnel-beakers and lugged beakers were probably used for cooking, while small funnel-beakers were probably used for drinking (Koch-Nielsen 1987, p. 115). Bowls, which represent an open type of vessel, may have been used for preparing food or serving food and also in

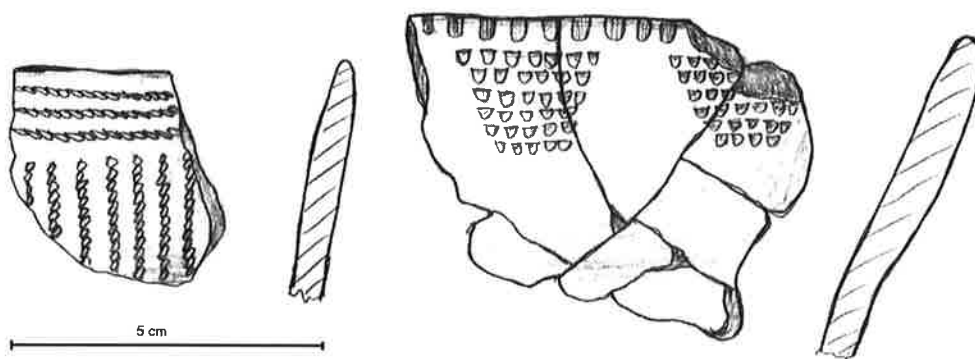


Fig. 2. Potsherds with elaborate ornamentation from the feature A6 at Oxievång II. Illustrations by T. Wennberg.

offerings (Koch 1998, p. 115). The storage vessels, characterized by their large size, were probably used for storing grain, or possibly water. The cylinder-necked beakers were probably used in the same varying manner as the funnel beakers. The collared flask is often found in burial and ritual contexts (Larsson 1980; Ebbesen 1994, p. 68), while the function of the clay discs is unclear.

On the basis of the pottery, the pits Käglingevägen A1, Oxievång II A6, Stora Bernstorp A90a-c and Kvarteret Hålsjön A28 were interpreted as indicating ritual activities (Eriksson *et al.* 2000, pp. 93 ff.). These deposits included one or more presumably intact vessels, collared flasks, pottery with elaborate decoration (Fig. 2) and deposits of a variety of vessels that may be the remains of a ritual meal (Nielsen 1988, pp. 76 f.) or offering. The pottery in the remaining pits indicated profane activities of daily life. However, interpretations according to the sacred and profane dichotomy, should not only be related to the specific type of vessel, degree of fragmentation, type of decoration and the amount of vessels deposited. Interpretations also have to include the way the pottery was deposited, the possible presence of food offerings, the general context and a variety of other indications.

#### Flint

The flint analysis were accomplished by registration of weight and cortex, where the presence/absence of cortex was a criterion for dividing the flint into different categories (Eriksson *et al.* 2000, pp. 98 ff.). This division was based on a general knowledge of the flint-knapping process, where cortex is present at the initial phase and present to a lesser degree, or absent, in the final phases. The method was used in combination with information on the weight of the flakes, with lesser weight being seen as an indication of a later stage in the flint-knapping process. Flakes with retouches and use-wear were registered, as well as flakes affected by fire. An identification of flakes originating from the production of square axes was also made. Splinters were excluded from the study because they were rare and because information concerning sieving of the soil was often missing in the archaeological reports.

Further analysis made it necessary to distinguish between utilized and non-utilized flint. For this reason, utilized flint was defined as flint with retouches and use-wear, cores, tools and fragmented tools. Non-utilized flint included preforms and all flints that were not categorized as utilized. For a relevant evaluation of the possible functions, it was considered necessary

to investigate probable differences concerning utilized and non-utilized flint in pits versus occupation deposits (Eriksson *et al.* 2000, pp. 110 ff.). Since there was no adequate documentation of artefacts from occupation deposits in the immediate vicinity of the selected pits, artefact material from the following occupation deposits was included for comparisons:

- 1 Kristineberg, 1977, A200 (MHM 6021). Oxie parish (Rudebeck & Ödman 2000, pp. 56 ff.).
- 2 Sallerupsvägen east of Särslövsvägen, 1995. An Early Neolithic occupation deposit (MHM 7832). Södra Sallerup parish (Rosberg & Sarnäs 1995).
- 3 Väst kustbanan SU 21 – Occupation deposit A150, 1998 (LUHM 30981). Dagstorp parish (Svensson 1998; Lagergren-Olsson & Linderöth 2000).

The hypothesis was that the amount of utilized flint from occupation deposits would differ in relation to the amount of utilized flint from pits. Pits were likely to contain more specific and intentionally deposited material while occupation deposits would probably be characterized by unintentionally deposited refuse.

However, the comparison revealed something else. The amount of utilized flint in the occupation deposits was between 4 and 21%, where the calculated figures represent a percentage of all flint fragments in the respective features. The pits showed a similar result, an interval between 4 and 23%. What do these figures mean, and what do they say about human activities during the Early Neolithic? They may represent areas with different activities or differently utilized areas, such as seasonal sites, permanent settlements, permanently established activities, flint production or varying access to flint.

Based on the various relations between utilized and non-utilized flints, the features were divided into three groups. A low share of utilized

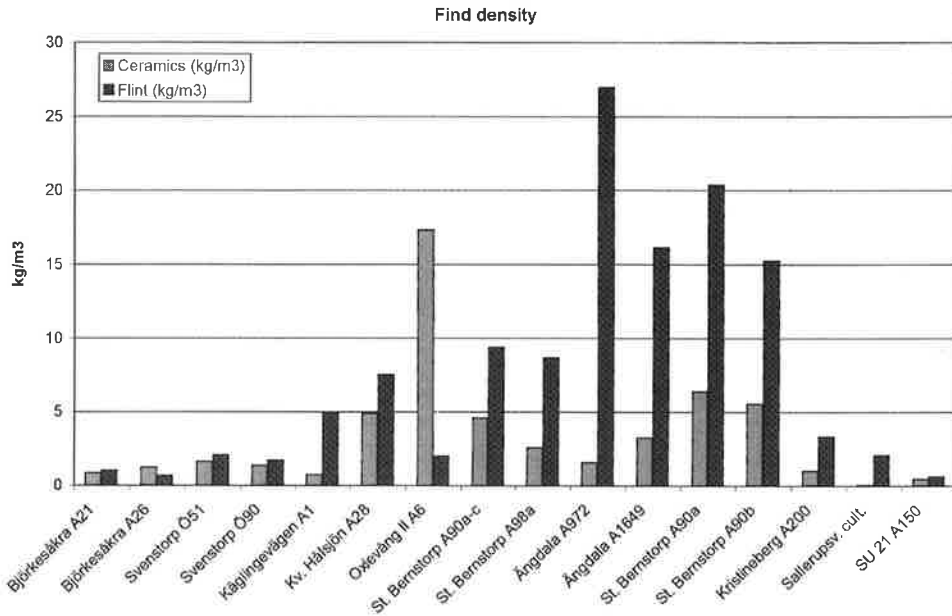
flint may indicate a curated technology, lack of flint, seasonal activities or work attached to the flint-mining industry, i.e. that the flint was distributed to other areas. A high share of utilized flint may indicate an expedient technology, presumably, but not necessarily, with good access to flint. It may also represent depositions from a permanent settlement, i.e., the remains of an ordinary everyday life. The group with a medium share of utilized flint was the most difficult to interpret and for further evaluation it requires more comparative material from other occupation deposits. Most of the selected pits had a medium share of utilized flint. To sum up, the similarity between occupation deposits and pits concerning utilized flint indicates that the flint material should be partly regarded as refuse (cf. Rosberg & Sarnäs 1995, pp. 39 f.). It is probable that most of the pits had undergone a phase as refuse pits during the in-filling.

#### *Find density*

An additional factor that was used in the interpretations of the selected pits was the find density of pottery and flint (Table 4). This was accomplished by dividing the weight of flint and the weight of pottery with the volume of the pit. A similar calculation was made for the occupation deposits. The calculations revealed that there was a great variation among the pits concerning find density.

The amount of pottery varied between less than 1 kilo and approximately 17 kilos per cubic metre, and the amount of flint varied between approximately 1 kilo and 27 kilos per cubic metre. The pits that had a low find density contained pottery and flint below 5 kilos per cubic metre. These pits were Björkesåkra A21 and A26, Svenstorp Ö51 and Ö90 and the occupation deposits. The features Ängdala A972 and A1649 and Stora Bernstorp A90a and A90b represent the highest density of flint, while Oxievång II A6 had a high density of pottery, approximately 17 kilos per cubic metre. These groups are only hypothetical, and Table 4 leaves room for several interpretations and further

Table 4. Find density concerning pottery and flint in the selected pits and in the additional occupation deposits.



discussions, not least concerning aspects of source criticism.

#### *Hypothetical functions*

To obtain as much information as possible from the selected material, various functions related to pits were analysed and evaluated, particularly concerning how these functions could be identified through the archaeological remains (Eriksson *et al.* 2000, pp. 8 ff.). The analysis does not include a complete list of all existing prehistoric pit-related activities. However, the suggested functions serve as “mind-openers” for a wider perspective in the final interpretations. The functions suggested were burrow pits, for the extraction of materials such as clay, stones, lime, flint, sand and gravel. Other aspects were functions related to refuse and also curated versus expedient assemblages. Tanning was discussed according to archaeological remains from skin dressing. Another possibility was the use of pits for the firing of pottery. Other thermic-

related functions are hearth pits and cooking pits. The study also included sacred and profane deposits as well as burials.

The analysis revealed that the artefacts from the pits did not exhibit obvious indications of what type of activities had taken place (Eriksson *et al.* 2000, pp. 30 f.). There are many explanations for this. The classical question: “Waste pits or offering pits?” asked by Becker (1961, p. 122), or the question “Waste or What?” (Stålbom 1997, p. 21) gives a hint of the problem. Studies have shown that refuse can be deposited in any available pit, regardless of their primary functions (Hayden & Cannon 1983). A common trait among excavated storage pits and burrow pits from the Late Bronze Age at the Fosie IV site, outside of the city of Malmö, is the in-filling of refuse (Björhem & Säfvestad 1993).

Refuse may be left where the activity took place or deposited in a place intended for that specific purpose. Does the in-filling reflect activities in or outside the pit? According to the

analysis, fragmentation of the pottery indicates at least two types of depositions. The most fragmented material is interpreted as equivalent to occupation deposits, i.e. not directly deposited, and thus exposed to further fragmentation. The least fragmented pottery reflects an environment where further fragmentation is limited, i.e. directly deposited. This may indicate an intended refuse pit or perhaps a reflection of a ritual behaviour. The question of whether original deposits were profane or sacred, or both, is complex and requires further indications from analysis of combinations of finds and contexts. Early Neolithic graves are often difficult to identify, due to extensive destruction and also because they rarely contain skeletal remains. However, the specific types of objects that were used as grave goods may be decisive for the resulting interpretations. This discussion also indicates the significance of interpretations of the morphology of the pits, something which ought to be a more decisive factor concerning the primary functions. In short, the combinations of all available criteria are crucial for relevant interpretations of probable functions.

The taphonomical influences on organic materials may contribute to a biased find material, e.g. making flint an over-represented category. Archaeological remains from the tanning process are very difficult to interpret since the remains would probably consist of only humic layers. The recycling of stones in cooking pits may result in empty pits that are difficult to identify as to function. Factors like these underline the importance of relevant documentation of surrounding contexts in order to make appropriate interpretations.

## Interpretations

According to the present investigation there were no clear indications of the more specific activities connected with the different pits. It seems that various functions contributed to the different stages of the in-filling process. The following is a brief summary of a discussion in which all previously discussed indications were

included (Eriksson *et al.* 2000, pp. 120 ff.) (Table 5). The functions of the pits were divided into primary and secondary functions. Clearly, it would be possible to divide these two basic categories into several more, but for the following discussion these two main categories are sufficient.

Primary functions could be indicated by pit morphology, surrounding soil, deliberately arranged artefacts or stones in the bottom layers or by constructions in connection with the pit. Secondary functions represent a continuing utilization where the filling and the surrounding contexts give further indications of possible interpretations.

### *Primary functions*

It seems clear that there was no correlation between particular primary functions and topographical and geographical context. Extraction and offering are the most prevalent primary functions. Most offerings are dated to EN I, which includes the Oxie and the Svenstorp groups. The pottery from Kv. Hålsjön A28, the Bellevuegård group EN II, also indicated ritual activity. In this case the morphology and the surrounding context also indicated clay extraction. Feature A1 at Käglingevägen was interpreted as primarily an offering pit because of evidence for the deposition of an intact pottery vessel, deliberately arranged flint blades and a relatively quick in-filling of the bottom layers. In addition, specific combinations of deliberately arranged stones and pottery may indicate ritual deposition.

The offerings may be interpreted as reflecting some of the changes that took place during the first phase of the Early Neolithic. These changes were evidenced by elaborate pottery, development of the flint technology and the initiation of agriculture, but also by traces of activities attached to the new way of life and the new way of subsistence. Perhaps these were libation and food offerings expressing wishes for good crops. Another interpretation is that the offerings reflect changes towards a socially more complex and stratified society.



Table 5. Primary and secondary functions of the pits.

Selected pits	Primary funktion	Secondary funktion	Dating	Context
<b>The Oxie group</b>				
Björkesåkra A21	work pit	refuse deposition	EN I	inland/lake
Björkesåkra A26	tree-fall	refuse deposition	EN I	inland/lake
Käglingevägen A1	offering	refuse deposition	EN I	hummocky landscape
<b>The Svenstorp group</b>				
Oxievång II A6	grave		EN I	hummocky landscape
St. Bernstorp A90a	offering	refuse deposition	EN I	coastal
St. Bernstorp A90b	offering	refuse deposition	EN I	coastal
St. Bernstorp A90c	offering	refuse deposition	EN I	coastal
St. Bernstorp A98a	hearth pit	refuse deposition	EN I	coastal
S. Svenstorp Ö51	gravel pit	refuse deposition	EN I	hummocky landscape
S. Svenstorp Ö90	no pit! refuse deposition		EN I	hummocky landscape
<b>The Bellevuegård group</b>				
Kv. Hålsjön A28	clay extraction/ offering	refuse deposition	EN II	inland/flat country
Ängdala A972	cooking pit/hearth pit	refuse dep./ oven/refuse d./ oven	EN II	flint-mining
Ängdala A1649	clay extraction/ storage	refuse deposition	EN II	flint-mining

The other primary functions during the EN I are interpreted in terms of work pits, hearth pits and gravel pits. These functions are most likely connected with ordinary day-to-day activities on a normal settlement. They may also be seen as indicators of permanent settlements and a more settled existence, something which favoured an increasingly complex social structure.

A closer investigation revealed that two features interpreted as primary refuse pits were not man-made. Instead they were natural cavities in the subsoil. Two pits from EN II were interpreted as evidence of a primary function as clay extraction pits. This may indicate an increased need for materials used for house building during this period. With reference to Björhem and Säfstestad (1993), this is likely to be an indication of an increasing complexity of the social structure.

#### *Secondary functions*

Secondary functions are chronologically later than the primary functions. It is clear from the

pit sections that the in-filling was a process with a varying duration. The secondary functions seem to have been particularly connected with the handling of refuse. In addition to the various functions it seems that, during the end of the in-filling process, most of the pits were filled up with refuse material. This may be interpreted in different ways. It could be a cultural reflection of the organization of the settlement. The pits were a natural way of disposing of refuse. On the other hand, it is possible that refuse was part of a ritual, the practice of sealing something that was considered completed and done with. Another interpretation is that material extracted from the pits had to be replaced or repaid according to an idea of gift repayment. Perhaps the phenomenon reflects the concerns of a society that became increasingly dependent on yields from "Mother Earth"?

## Final remarks

Although it may be problematic to use contemporary behaviour to illustrate possible reasons for patterns in the prehistoric material record, the following example may serve as an illustration of the problem of distinguishing between refuse deposition and ritual deposition without closer knowledge of the cultural context.

A young woman in the centre of Lund recently demonstrated an example of contemporary refuse handling. She happened to drop a china vessel on the pavement. The vessel was fragmented into differently sized sherds, whereas half of the vessel remained intact. The woman collected all the pieces and used the remaining half vessel as a container for the smaller sherds. Then the fragmented vessel most probably ended up in a dustbin or a refuse container. This whole event lasted for about two minutes. According to our cultural norms, this is an example of correct handling of refuse, and probably, according to most people, an event without any ritual associations whatsoever. However, if archaeologists at an excavation had detected half a vessel, containing smaller sherds, deposited in a pit, the interpretation of this as a refuse deposition would not have been the only possibility.

According to the present investigation, ritual activities concerning primary functions were generally interpreted on the basis of the pottery. Caches including one or more presumably intact vessels, collared flasks, pottery with elaborate decoration and deposits of a variety of vessels that may be the remains of a ritual meal or offering are such examples. Other indications were deliberately arranged artefacts or stones in the bottom layers. An additional factor in interpreting primary functions, though briefly mentioned in the article, is the morphology of the pits. A decisive factor in the method of investigation is the comparison with occupation deposits, hence the flint material and the fragmentation of the pottery mainly indicated refuse depositions. These refuse depositions were

interpreted as secondary functions, thus illustrating the process of in-filling.

The analysis of find density shows that the relation to refuse was culturally established. The pits were generally denser than the occupational deposits, which may indicate a structural attitude to refuse, a way to keep the settlement free from debris. Why, then, refuse depositions in offering contexts? And why, then, these similar patterns of the in-filling phase? There are many possible interpretations of these matters. The following is just one way of looking at it. The debris, or the refuse, may reflect a society increasingly dependent on agricultural produce. The refuse may have been looked upon as part of "Mother Earth". It may symbolize a temporary loan, which was restored back to the ground after being used. The practice of depositing refuse was a way of maintaining the status quo of nature, sustaining a balance. This may represent a dualistic approach to the handling of refuse reflecting a ritual process based on both profane behaviour and sacral ideas.

A conclusion from this brief study is that Early Neolithic pits should not be considered as a functionally uniform type of feature. Many of the pits are rich in finds in comparison with occupation deposits, and most of the pits seem to have been "sealed" with refuse during their secondary or final phase. The archaeological problems of distinguishing refuse from offerings still remain. An extended discussion concerning refuse is necessary to approach the phenomenon of the pits, thus gaining a better insight into their functions in the Early Neolithic society.

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