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Soapstone in the North
Quarries, Products and People
7000 BC – AD 1700

Gitte Hansen and Per Storemyr (eds)

UNIVERSITETET I BERGEN

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Bergen University Museum and
Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural Studies and Religion
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Editors of this book
Gitte Hansen
Per Storemyr

Editors of the series UBAS
Nils Anfinset
Randi Barndon
Knut Andreas Bergsvik
Søren Diinhoff
Lars L. Forsberg

Layout
Beate Helle, Bergen University Museum
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Preface

This book has been a long time in the making. It is an outcome of the five Norwegian University Museums' joint research programme Forskning i Felleskap (FIF, 2010–2015), supported by the Research Council of Norway. FIF kindly facilitated a number of workshops and meetings between archaeologists, geologists and craftspeople, all with a common interest in premodern soapstone quarrying and use. The result is the chapters of this book, which are based on studies carried out over the last two decades and, for the most part, are published scientifically for the first time. We very much thank the authors for participating in this venture. We also thank several colleagues – archaeologists, geoscientists and craftspeople – that assisted the editors in peer-reviewing the chapters: Irene Baug, Birgitta Berglund, Laura Bunse, Poul Baltzer Heide, Richard Jones, Tor Grenne, Torbjørn Løland, Therese Nesset, Astrid J. Nyland, Lars Pilø, Kevin Smith, Lars F. Stenvik, Frans Arne Stylegard and Stephen Wickler; we are very grateful for the job you have done. Not least, thanks go to Tromsø University Museum, NTNU University Museum (Trondheim) and the University Museum of Bergen for their economic support in publishing the book.

Bergen/Hyllestad, Spring 2017
Gitte Hansen
Per Storemyr

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Laura Bunse

Multi-ethnic Involvement? Production and Use of Soapstone in Northern Norway

The northern Norwegian soapstone quarries display small, mainly rectangular extractions possibly for the production of smaller types of artifact or a kind of blank or rough out for various objects. In addition, some soapstone deposits might have been more than simply a source of raw material and can have functioned as landmarks or sieidi, a sacred place worshipped in traditional Sámi religion as a possible gateway to the spirit world. The quarries are located in areas with primarily Sámi or mixed Sámi and Norse settlements in the late Iron Age and early Medieval period, indicating a multi-ethnic influence. This raises questions relating both to the chronological framework and to the economic and sociocultural background of soapstone utilization in northern Norway.

Introduction

Many soapstone quarries in Norway are related to the large-scale production of cooking vessels and ashlar and decorative stone for church buildings in the late Iron Age and Medieval period. Recent studies of northern Norwegian quarries, conducted as part of the author's ongoing Ph.D. project, have documented a type of production that till now has attracted little attention in soapstone research. The quarries display small, mainly rectangular extractions possibly for the production of certain smaller types of artifact or a kind of blank or rough out for various objects. The quarries are located in areas with primarily Sámi or mixed Sámi and Norse settlements in the late Iron Age and early Medieval period. The quarries' geographic location and traces of their use indicate a multi-ethnic influence that is also observed in other archaeological finds from northern Norway. This raises questions relating both to the chronological framework and to the economic and socio-cultural background of soapstone utilization in northern Norway. To date, little attention has been paid to ethnicity and possible variations in soapstone utilization arising from a multi-cultural influence. However, ethnicity and different cultural influences may be matters of relevance, both in northern and in more southern parts of Norway. The article starts with an outline of the socio-cultural and economic situation in northern Norway in the late Iron Age and early Medieval period, followed by a presentation of the investigated quarries and indications on their use. Finally, perspectives for further research are outlined.

Resource utilization and production in Northern Norway – Economic specialization and socio-ethnic differentiation

Resource utilization and re-distribution in northern Norway in the late Iron Age and early Medieval period are the result of major social changes that were observable from the late Stone and the early Metal period or Bronze Age, which also may have a wider relevance for the supply of soapstone. These changes gradually led to an increasing socio-economic differentiation that may explain the development of different socio-cultural identities and eventually the emergence of Norse and Sámi ethnicities (Hansen & Olsen 2007, 2014). While the population at the outermost coast of Nordland and up to the northern part of Troms adopted a sedentary lifestyle and introduced agriculture with similarities and connections to south Scandinavian agricultural settlements, the populations in Finnmark and the inner fjords and inland areas of Nordland and Troms maintained an economy based on hunting and fishing. The hunting populations also established contact networks to metal working groups in eastern Russia, Finland and northern Sweden (Johansen 1990; Andreassen 2002; Hansen & Olsen 2007, 2014; Valen 2007). Among the hunting populations, the Sámi ethnicity seems to have emerged to accentuate cultural identity and socio-economic differences with the Norse agricultural settlement and vice versa.

It has long been assumed that the respective settlement areas for the agricultural and hunting populations were determined by natural conditions for agriculture (Sjøvold 1974:302; Johansen 1990:33–34; Hansen & Olsen 2007:78, 2014). Nevertheless, the borders of the settlements also seem to have been influenced by social factors and perceptions of cultural identity. Habitation and subsistence probably were important markers of identity and transgressing settlement borders could challenge social and cultural affiliation (Schanche 1986, 1989; Johansen 1990:34; Hansen & Olsen 2007:78–80, 2014). Accentuation of ethnicity and cultural identity seem to have been particularly important in border areas and during encounters with other groups, probably as a kind of social strategy (Odner 1983; Henriksen 1995; Spangen 2005; Hansen & Olsen 2007:31–34, 75–77, 82–87, 2014). However, as demonstrated by numerous examples of hybridization and exchange, these cultural meetings were not bound to certain geographical areas, and cooperation and different cultural influences are observable across the main areas of Norse and Sámi settlements, indicating that borders were less impermeable than previously assumed (Bruun 2007; Hansen & Olsen 2007:87–90, 2014).

Researchers mostly agree that within the social and economic system in the late Iron Age and early Medieval period, resource utilization and distribution in northern Norway were predominantly administered by Norse chieftains who were the political, economic and religious leaders of society (Johansen 1990:54; Solberg 2003:87; Hansen & Olsen 2007:56). In order to justify and maintain their power, they were dependent on access to and control of resources, as well as on alliances with leaders of equivalent societies, which were ensured by gift exchange and marriage. Resources were collected and shared within a redistributive system controlled by the chieftains, who claimed a part for themselves and divided and redistributed the surplus to the other members of the system (Hansen 1990; Solberg 2003:87–88; Hansen & Olsen 2007:65–66, 2014). Through the exchange of gifts and goods, the chieftains acquired luxury items and prestige goods like weapons, jewelry, glass and precious metal, in addition to other supply goods. This system required that the chieftains themselves had access to products that were in high demand in exchange for these luxury and high status items. In the case of the north Norwegian chieftains, these included items such as ivory from walrus tusk, fur, down, ropes made of walrus skin and train oil produced from marine mammals, i.e. products mainly supplied by Sámi hunting groups. Cooperation and trade with the Sámi thus were of major importance for the Norse chieftains in order to enhance and maintain their status. As experts and

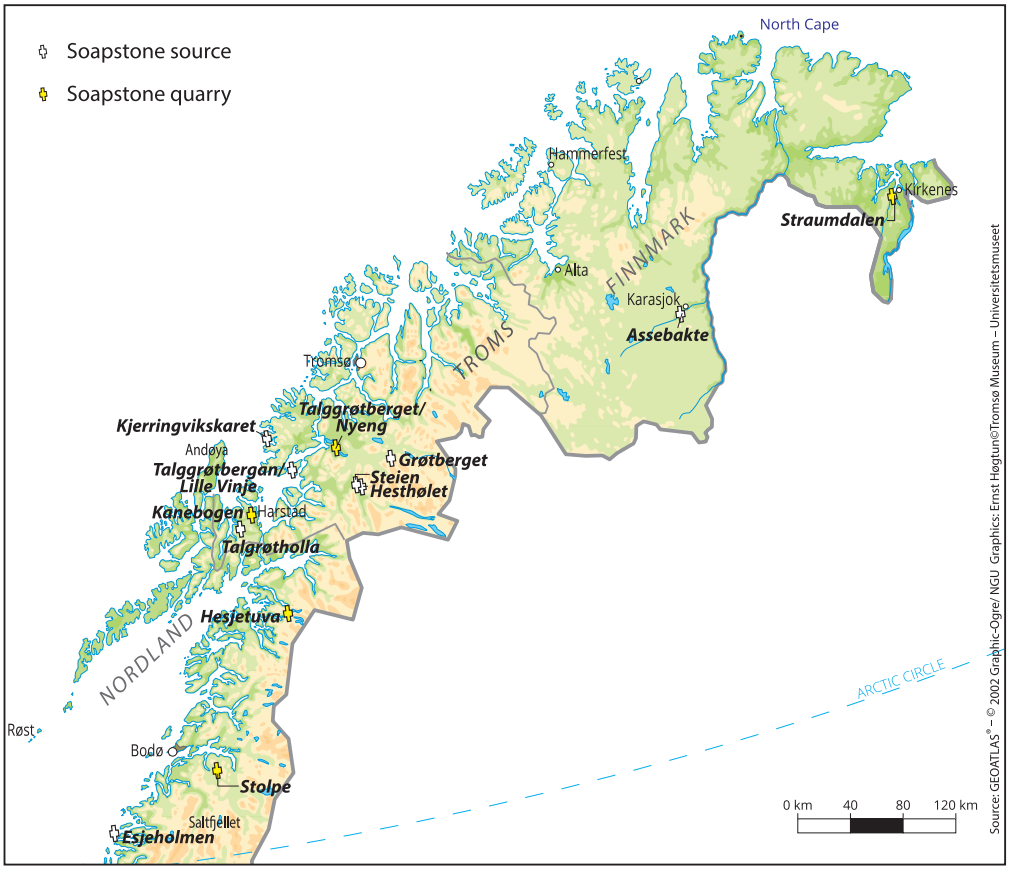

Figure 1. *Map of soapstone deposits investigated in 2013 and 2014. (Illustration: E. Høgtun, Tromsø University Museum.)*

large-scale suppliers of outland resources, the Sámi, on the other hand, also gained increased power as trading partners and were ensured access to important supply goods (Hansen 1990; Storli 2006:90–94; Hansen & Olsen 2007:65–66, 2014).

Due to the quarries' geographic location, a Sámi cultural influence may also be considered for soapstone utilization and supply. The area of study is confined to the administrative district of Tromsø University Museum, which includes Nordland County north of Saltfjellet, as well as the northernmost counties of Troms and Finnmark (Figure 1). Within this area, the majority of quarries are situated in the inner fjord systems and inland areas with primarily Sámi or mixed ethnic settlements, exhibiting both Norse and Sámi cultural features in the late Iron Age and early Medieval period. Hunting, fishing and wild reindeer trapping, which in some areas were combined with stock breeding, agriculture and handicraft production, continued to be an important part of Sámi subsistence throughout the high and late Medieval periods (Hansen & Olsen 2007:175–177, 197–200, 2014). Thus a multi-ethnic context of soapstone production should also be considered for these periods.

The quarries

The Geological Survey of Norway (NGU) (Lindahl & Nilsson 2002; Lindahl 2012) have registered the majority of known soapstone deposits in northern Norway, and collaborative geological and archaeological field surveys were recently conducted as part of the Outfield Research Network directed by the Norwegian university museums (see also Wickler 2015, Wickler et al. this vol.). The actual number of exploited soapstone deposits within the area of study is difficult to estimate and requires further interdisciplinary field surveys (Bunse 2016). According to the Mineral Stone Database (NGU) and the National Database for Cultural Heritage (*Askeladden*), the number of deposits with possible traces of early production or other historic use can widely be defined as 10–15 sites (Figure 1). In connection with the Ph.D. project, 11 deposits were investigated in 2013 and extraction was documented at five of these (Figure 2): *Stolpe* and *Hesjetuva* in Nordland County, *Kanebogen* and *Talggrøtberget* in Troms County and *Straumdalen* in Finnmark County (Bunse 2013a–e). In 2014, minor excavations were conducted in the spoil heaps at Stolpe, Talggrøtberget and Straumdalen (Bunse 2014a–b, 2015). In addition, stone samples for geochemical analyses and studies of provenance were collected at Stolpe, Hesjetuva, *Talggrøtbergan*, Talggrøtberget and Straumdalen. Analysis results and a detailed presentation of the quarries will be given in the author's Ph.D. thesis. An overview of the quarries' most distinct features and traces of use is given here.

Small extractions

The five quarries with traces of previous production are characterized by small, mainly rectangular, extractions. At Stolpe and Hesjetuva, there are some variations in size and shape, whilst at Kanebogen,

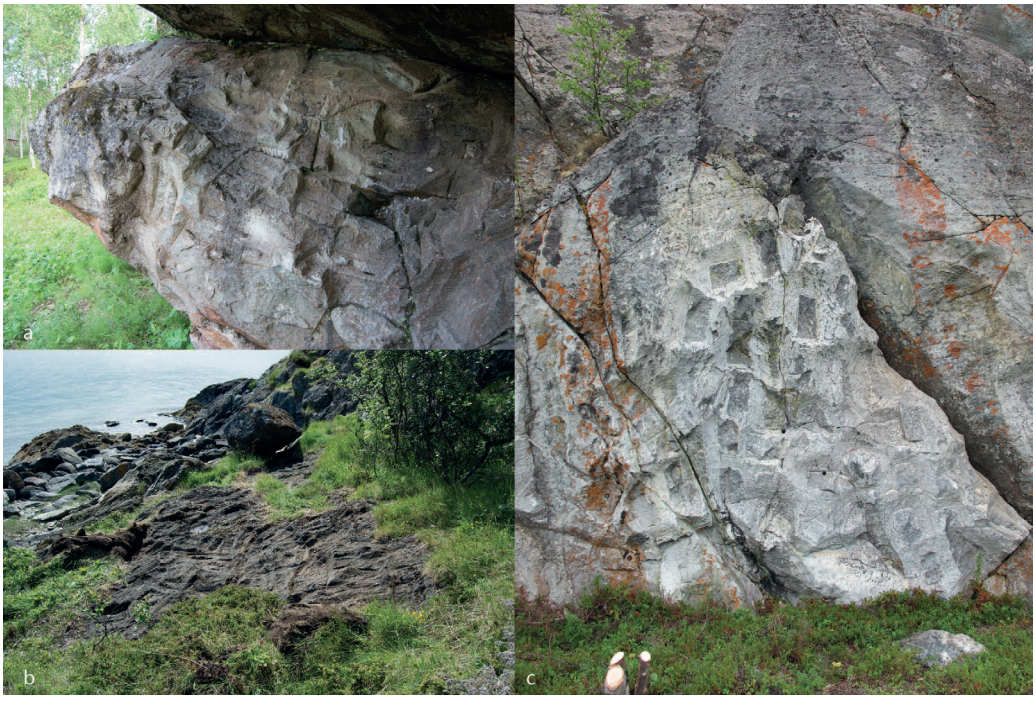

Figure 2. *The quarries at a) Talggrøtberget, b) Kanebogen and c) Straumdalen. (Photo: L. Bunse).*

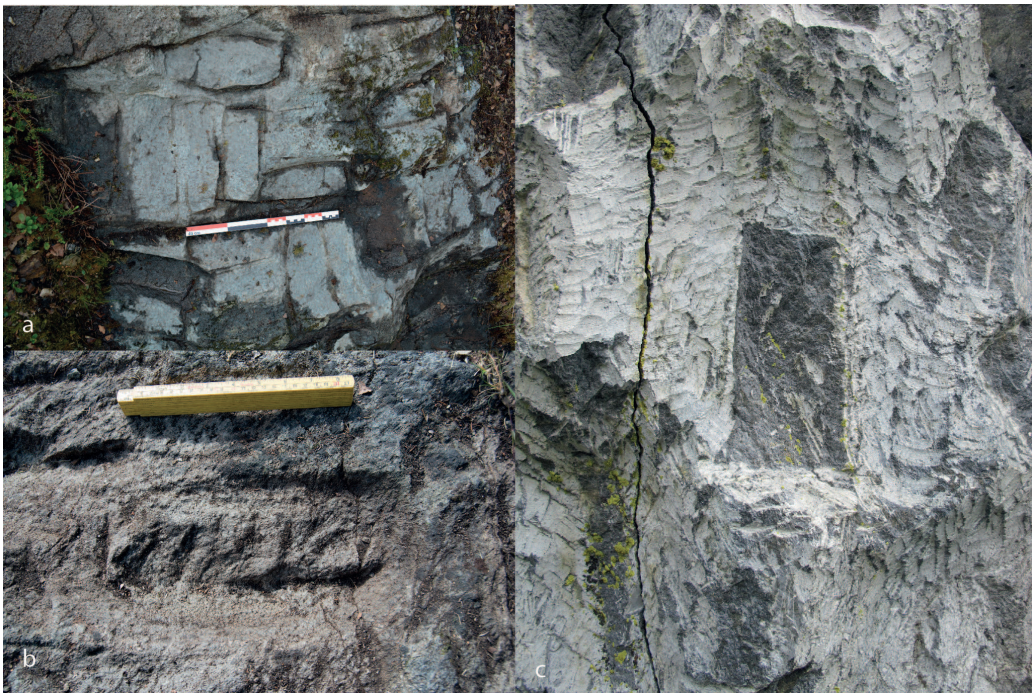

Figure 3. *Small extractions at a) Talggrøtberget, b) Kanebogen and c) Straumdalen. (Photo: L. Bunse).*

Talggrøtberget and Straumdalen, extractions are quite uniform (Figure 3). The quarried items seem to have been about 5–20 cm wide and 15–30 cm long according to the fracture surfaces, whereas the whole area of extraction for each item measured up to 20 cm width and 40 cm length, including the area of removed rock around the quarried objects. Some of the extractions at Straumdalen had rounded corners and an oval shape. At Straumdalen and Stolpe, a few circular extractions were observed, measuring about 15 cm in diameter, whilst the quarry at Hesjetuva displayed several up to 5 cm deep 'disc'- or 'plate'-shaped extractions with a diameter of c. 20 cm.

The small extractions were, in most cases, made in one layer on the outer face of the deposits and there were no signs of other production prior to the small extractions. They thus seem to represent the only type of production in the quarries, except traces from modern black powder blasting at Stolpe, Hesjetuva, Talggrøtberget and Straumdalen. The quarry at Stolpe is the only site that also displays traces from the production of c. 20 vessels in a separate area of the quarry, indicating that the know-how for the quarrying of larger items was also present in northern Norway. The vessel extractions measured up to 80 cm in diameter, while vessel rough-outs that were left on the rock face indicate that the final products were about 50 cm in diameter. The vessels were extracted using hewing channels with pickaxes or pointed tools around the vessel rough-outs in order to more easily remove them from the quarry face. This is a common technique used for quarrying vessels (cf. Skjølsvold 1961) and is one of the basic principles for quarrying soapstone (cf. Stavsøien 2012) and other soft rocks across the globe from the Stone Age until the early modern era (e.g. Abu-Jaber et al. 2009). This technique was also used to quarry most of the small items.

Figure 4. *Small fishing jigs from Noatun (Ts.5208-dd and -ee). The left one is made of slate; the right one is made of soapstone. (Photo: M. Karlstad, Tromsø University Museum).*

Indications of products and chronology

The production of small objects represented in the northern Norwegian quarries has not been studied in detail elsewhere in Norway, and there are only a few parallels to draw upon. Although there are examples of domestic and professional production of small soapstone objects from settlement sites, farmsteads and medieval towns, these items were made primarily from offcuts from vessels or building stones or were reworked from shards of broken vessels. It has also been suggested that raw soapstone could have been transported to the towns for further manufacture (Skjølsvold 1961:32; Johansen et al. 2003; Olsen 2004:35–36; Hansen 2005:194–196, 203–204; Baug 2011). Occasionally, small objects were made as by-products in quarries with production of vessels and building stones (Lundberg 2007; Storemyr et al. 2010; Berglund 2015). Several historic sources also mention the production of net sinkers in recent times, not only at Hesjetuva (Egenes Lund 1963) and Straumdalen (Vigerust 1968) in northern Norway, but also in other parts of the country, in the quarries at Tolgesteinsbrota in Rogaland County (Tuastad 1949) and at Øvre Bjørnå in the southern part of Nordland County (Smedseng 1994). At Tolgesteinsbrota and Øvre Bjørnå, net sinkers were not extracted directly from the rock, however, but were made of waste from previous production of vessels and building stones.

To date, the only known site in Norway with similar small extractions is the early Iron Age quarry at Kvikne/Sandbekkdalen (referred to as Bubakk in earlier literature) in central Norway. In addition to traces from the quarrying of bucket-shaped soapstone vessels in the pre-Roman Iron Age (Skjøldsvold 1969), a quarry face with several hundred small rectangular items has recently been excavated in a separate area of the quarry (Østerås 2004). Because of their size and shape, the extractions were interpreted as casting molds for bronze artifacts, but radiocarbon dating the site to the pre-Roman Iron Age may partly reverse this. The extractions at Kvikne/Sandbekkdalen were made with an adze-like tool (Grenne et al. this vol.) and the tool marks are quite similar to those observed at Straumdalen. Compared to Kvikne/Sandbekkdalen, however, soapstone use in the vicinity of the northern Norwegian quarries and other proxy data give different indications about the range of products and the time span covered.

Straumdalen is possibly an example of quite early use of soapstone. In close proximity to the quarry, ceramics tempered with crushed soapstone and small soapstone flakes with cutting marks and polished surfaces, as well as a small fishing jig (Norwegian: *fiskepilk*) (Figure 4) were found at the late Stone Age site of Noatun in the Pasvik Valley and the early Metal period sites of Makkholla and Mestersanden on Kjelmøy Island. From Jarfjord, c. 20 km from the Straumdalen quarry, there are stray finds of two casting molds and an oval line sinker, also called a deep-sea sinker (Norwegian: *jarstein*). The two molds from Jarfjord are made for casting blades, perhaps daggers of an eastern Seima-Turbino type (Chernykh 1992:Fig. 7), which could potentially date from before 1700 BC (Engedal 2010:67; see also Bakka 1976; Rønne 2008). A possible fragment from a similar casting mold has also been found at Mestersanden on Kjelmøy (Solberg 1909; Bakka 1976; Olsen 1984). The oval line sinker indicates another date of production. Line sinkers of this type were primarily used from AD 1000–1600, but were also possibly used within a shorter period, from AD 400–600 (Helberg 1993).

Their use over such a long period can only give a rough indication of the date of production in the quarries.

The vessel extractions at Stolpe indicate production in the Iron Age and Medieval period, and soapstone finds from settlement sites near the quarry seem to confirm this. The excavations of the late Iron Age and early Medieval period sites of Vestvatn, Eiterjord, and Arstad resulted in a number of soapstone finds, including vessel shards, small net sinkers for river and lake fishing, and soapstone scoops with decorated handles (Munch Stamsø 1967, 1973).

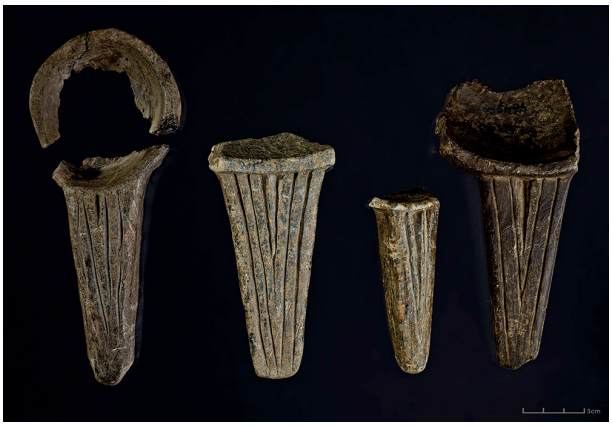

Figure 5. *Decorated handles from the Stolpe-area. From left to right: Ts.6251-bå from Vestvatn, Ts. 6504-h from Eiterjord, Ts.4647-b and -a from Brekke. (Photo: M. Karlstad, Tromsø University Museum).*

According to their size, which corresponds well to the extractions in the quarry, all of these items were possibly quarried at Stolpe. The scoops, which are about 15 cm long with a diameter of 5 cm at the bowl and a 10 cm long handle, are found at all three sites (Figure 5). In addition, there have been several stray finds of such scoops in the surrounding area of Stolpe (e.g., at Brekke, the farm closest to the quarry; see *Askeladden*).

At some sites, the production of small soapstone items seems to have taken place in historic or early modern times. The Kanebogen quarry is situated at the shoreline. Extractions are documented on several small quarry faces extending from the high tide level up to 5 m ASL. Due to isostatic uplift, production would first have been possible in the Medieval period or modern times. According to local tradition, net sinkers for fishing were quarried at Hesjetuva and Straumdalen, and the visible extractions at these sites possibly represent quite recent activity (Egenes Lund 1963; Vigerust 1968). This might also be the case at Talggrøtberget. According to the landowner, the locals quarried stone for fireplaces in the early 1900s, but the site was probably regularly used from the Stone Age onwards. An unauthorized excavation inside the rock shelter next to the quarry revealed remains of a Stone Age dwelling site, as well as several soapstone finds, presumably from the Medieval period. They consist of a handle for a scoop or oil lamp, a three-pointed item with a drilled hole in the middle, and two cone-shaped items (Sandmo 1997).

The soapstone material from northern Norway suggests that the quarries were in use at different periods and for different products. At Straumdalen, production possibly has large time depth. Soapstone finds from the vicinity of the quarry suggest that the site was used in the Stone Age and early Metal period, while historic sources mention the quarrying of net sinkers in recent times. Stolpe seems to have been utilized mainly in the late Iron Age and early Medieval period, while the small extractions at Kanebogen surely represent quite recent activity. Radiocarbon dating of samples collected during excavation, as well as studies of provenance conducted in cooperation with the NGU, will hopefully provide more specific information on the chronology of the quarries and the products that were made.

Figure 6. *The Assebakte soapstone deposit. (Photo: L. Bunse).*

Other forms of soapstone use

Some deposits might have been more than simply a source of raw material. The name of the *Assebakte* deposit in Finnmark is derived from the Sámi word, Ássebákti, which means '*soapstone* or *soft rock* that is easy to carve' (Nielsen & Nesheim 1962:5). The deposit is located on the plains of the river Karasjok and consists of a c. 15 m long and 4–5 m high knoll, which clearly stands out against the slightly undulating landscape (Figure 6). The name Ássebákti is also applied to the surrounding area, with several light-grey boulders; as is common in Sámi place names, Ássebákti seems to refer to prominent features in the landscape. Sámi place names give information about, for example, the topography of the area, travel routes, weather specific to the area or its reindeer pasture, and they often function as 'orientation guides' or 'terrain descriptions' (cf. Qvigstad 1935, 1938, 1944; Solbakk 2012; Solbakken 2014:33–34). At Assebakte, a track passing close to the deposit and several nearby fireplaces give the impression that the site was a natural place for a rest. The path and fireplaces seem to have been used recently for reindeer herding, but may also have been used further back in time. In the vicinity is also an investigated settlement site dated to the late Iron Age and early Medieval period, though without finds of any soapstone artifacts (Simonsen 1979).

The *Stabben* deposit in Troms appears to have had a similar function (Manker 1957:113, 292; Lindahl & Nilsson 2002:37–38). Owing to its prominent shape, it is known as a landmark and a *sieidi*, a sacred place worshipped in traditional Sámi religion as a possible gateway to the spirit world (Figure 7). Sieidis are often characterized by rock formations that could have an unusual appearance, a special shape with resemblance to humans or animals, an unusual color or raw material or a fissure in the rock that provides a natural 'portal' (Manker 1957; Mulk 1994; Bradley 2000:6). The Stabben deposit seems to combine several of these significant features into a monumental 20–25 m high rock pillar/knoll with a light brown color consisting of useful and in-demand raw material.

Figure 7. *The Stabben soapstone deposit. (Photo: Ø. Vorren, Tromsø University Museum).*

In this connection, it is interesting that these deposits were not exploited. According to Richard Bradley (2000:28–30), it is common that rocks significant to indigenous people often seem to resist aging and are seemingly invulnerable in their original appearance; a fact which adds to their significance to the people visiting them. Thus, a common feature of sacred natural places, such as rocks, caves or mountains, is that they are usually unaltered and left entirely unmodified.

A multi-ethnic involvement?

When discussing the ethnicity of the soapstone users, different kinds of data can be drawn on. One is the geographical location of the quarries. As elaborated on above, the quarries in the present study are situated in areas with a mixed Norse/Sámi or primarily Sámi settlement in the late Iron Age and early Medieval period (Hansen & Olsen 2007, 2014).

Besides the examples of Assebakte and Stabben, which suggest the use of soapstone deposits as Sámi landmarks and sieidis, a possible multi-ethnic involvement is indicated by soapstone finds from the surrounding areas of the quarries and their archaeological context. The soapstone-tempered ceramics from Makkholla in Finnmark are Kjelmøy-type ceramics, a ceramic group that, together with Risvik-ceramics, has been linked to the increasing cultural dualism that is observable in the archaeological record from the early Metal period and onwards. Risvik ceramics are usually found along the coast of Nordland and the southern parts of Troms in areas with primarily agricultural settlement, whilst Kjelmøy-ceramics are found in hunter-gatherer contexts in northern Troms and Finnmark. These two distinct ceramic traditions have been seen as a symbolic expression of this cultural development and the emergence of Norse and Sámi ethnicity during the Iron Age (Jørgensen & Olsen 1988; Andreassen 2002; Hansen & Olsen 2007:53–56, 2014).

Ethnicity has also been important in the interpretation and discussion of the archaeological material and the soapstone finds from the settlement sites at Vestvatn, Eiterjord and Arstad in the vicinity of Stolpe. The economy at these sites was based on a combination of agriculture, hunting, fishing and the exploitation of several outfield resources, like iron production (cf. Jørgensen 2010) and possibly the quarrying and working of slate and soapstone. Artifacts from these sites include both

items that are interpreted as Norse, such as combs made of reindeer antlers (which was the common raw material for combs in medieval Norway) or soapstone vessels, as well as artifacts usually associated with a Sámi cultural context (e.g. bone items with linear decoration). While Gerd Stamsø Munch (1967) interpreted the sites as Norse settlements with Sámi interaction, Knut Odner (1983:68) later argued for interpreting the sites as Sámi or a possible case of hybridization and especially regarded the soapstone artifacts as a Norse cultural feature. Yet, both Odner and Stamsø Munch highlighted the linear decoration on the soapstone scoops as an example of Sámi cultural influence since it is quite similar to the decoration on some of the bone items from these sites. This may be further supported by the confined geographical distribution of these scoops.

In addition to the close proximity of Stolpe, the scoops are also found in Arjeplog, northern Sweden, which is about 170 km from Stolpe. In historic times, a trading route across the mountains connected the Misvær area with Arjeplog (Fjellström 1986:305; Brekke 1989). Each year in the autumn, Sámi reindeer herders came from Arjeplog to Misvær to trade and sell their products (Brekke 1989). Further investigation is required to see if this trading route might have already existed during the late Iron Age or Medieval period and if the scoops were produced at Stolpe. Still, the production and distribution of these specific scoops suggests a Sámi interaction due to the linear decoration on the handles and the fact that they are found in the Misvær and Arjeplog areas, with Sámi cultural influences visible in the archaeological record from the Iron Age and onwards.

Altogether, the sources suggest that a multi-ethnic context and possible involvement should be considered for all investigated quarries. For some sites, the affinity to Sámi culture is more distinct and is sometimes the only indication of use, whilst in other cases, indications on the socio-cultural background of the users and producers of soapstone are mixed. However, when discussing ethnicity, one has to keep in mind that our modern classifications and interpretations do not necessarily capture past peoples' concepts and perceptions of identity. Several researchers have emphasized the problem of applying ethnic 'categories' that are too narrow, as well as a Norse/Sámi dichotomy, to the archaeological material from northern Norway. In recent years, there has been increased focus on the complex relationships between Norse and Sámi cultural features and social identities in northern Norway in the Iron Age and early Medieval period. Hybridization and a mix of cultural expressions did not only take place in border areas between the Norse and Sámi settlements, but also in places that previously were regarded as core regions for either the Norse or the Sámi culture. Like the adaptation of Norse or Sámi ethnicities, hybridization could also have been a conscious choice and a social strategy (Spangen 2005; Bruun 2007). The soapstone finds from the settlements at Vestvatn, Eiterjord and Arstad in the vicinity of Stolpe combine both 'Norse' and 'Sámi' cultural features and could possibly be regarded an example of hybridization.

However, a discussion of ethnicity may be a useful approach to gain increased and more nuanced insight into the socio-cultural background of soapstone production and use. In the same fashion as with the northern Norwegian quarries, hunter-gatherer groups could also have exploited Kvikne/Sandbekkdalen; four soapstone clubs found in the quarry possibly indicate this. Furthermore, nearby pitfall systems for reindeer and elk/moose hunting have been found (Skjølsvold 1969:233–234). On the other hand, such pitfall systems may date to other periods than the quarrying, and without any information about their chronology a possible relationship cannot yet be confirmed (see Grenne et al. this vol.). Still, a discussion of the socio-cultural background and ethnicity of soapstone utilization may also be an issue of relevance for areas further south in Norway (cf. Bergstøl 2008).

Perspectives for further research

The northern Norwegian quarries' geographic location and evidence of their use indicate a multi-ethnic use of the natural resources/places. An awareness and accentuation of this multi-ethnic situation raises questions on the chronological, socio-cultural and economic backgrounds of soapstone production and use that require further investigations:

- When did this kind of utilization and production take place? Was it contemporary to the large-scale production of vessels and building stones in the late Iron Age and Medieval period in the more southern parts of Norway?
- Which factors determined production and why were small soapstone items primarily made? Was it due to natural conditions (e.g. stone quality or accessibility of stone sources) or due to socio-cultural aspects?
- Can different types of soapstone production be linked to different ways of life? Can, for example, the quarrying and use of large and heavy soapstone items, such as vessels production/ large and heavy soapstone items be related to agricultural settlement and the making of small items such as net weights and scoops, be linked to a semi-sedentary lifestyle?
- Who had the right to use the soapstone sources? Who worked in the quarries?
- To which level was production organized; did the products satisfy household/local demands only or were they meant for further distribution and trade?

Some of these questions will be addressed further as part of the author's Ph.D. project and several articles are in progress. In the next step, geochemical analyses will be conducted in cooperation with geologist Gurli Meyer from the NGU, in order to investigate the distribution of locally quarried soapstone products. Samples from five quarries and a selected number of soapstone artifacts from secure archaeological contexts will be compared in order to try to match the products to their original raw material source. A particular concern is trying to match soapstone objects from Sámi cultural contexts to the quarries and to see whether the distribution of the products can be linked to Sámi trading and exchange networks. Another article by the author and stonemason Eva Stavsøien from the Nidaros Restoration Workshop seeks to explore the factors that might have been important in the production process by analyzing quarrying techniques, tool marks and the workability of the different soapstone raw material sources. In this connection, attempts are made to see how the use of certain tools, techniques and types of decoration on soapstone objects can be compared to certain handicraft traditions (e.g. Sámi handcraft tradition; *duodji*)(Bunse & Stavsøien 2016). The final article aims to draw lines between these discussions and the results from radiocarbon dating of the quarries and indications on their chronology.

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The National Natural Stone Database, Geological Survey of Norway (NGU): http://geo.ngu.no/kart/mineralressurser/

Soapstone in the North. Quarries, Products and People. 7000 BC – AD 1700

Soapstone is a remarkable rock. While it is soft and very workable, it is also durable and heat-resistant, and with a high heat-storage capacity. These properties have been recognised and valued around the world since prehistoric times, and soapstone has been used for a multitude of purposes, ranging from everyday household utensils to prestigious monuments and buildings. This book addresses soapstone use in Norway and the North Atlantic region, including Greenland. Although the majority of the papers deal with the Iron Age and Middle Ages, the book spans the Mesolithic to the early modern era. It deals with themes related to quarries, products and associated people and institutions in a broad context. Recent years have seen a revival of basic archaeological and geological research into the procurement and use of stone resources. With its authors drawn from the fields of archaeology, geosciences and traditional crafts, the anthology reflects cross-disciplinary work born of this revival.

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