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FINDS OF EAST SWEDISH PITTED WARE FROM THE RÄVÅSEN SITE IN KRISTIINANKAUPUNKI, OSTROBOTHNIA

Abstract

This article briefly presents the finds and investigations of the Rävåsen site. Salvage excavations in 1994–1998 produced a large corpus of dwelling-site finds. This material includes some 30 potsherds belonging to a singly markedly profiled vessel decorated with herringbone designs. The ceramic material is regarded to be East Swedish Pitted Ware, the Rävåsen find being the third of its kind on the Finnish mainland. In the Åland Islands, Pitted Ware appears to have been common during the Late Stone Age. The predominant types of pottery at Rävåsen are Late Comb Ware (Style III) and Pyheensilta Ware. The composition of the finds is briefly discussed.¹

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The Rävåsen site was discovered by local amateur archaeologists in the summer of 1993. It was situated at the edge of a recent gravel and sandpit. The site is situated on the northern and eastern slopes of a moraine ridge located approximately 18 km east of the town of Kristiinankaupunki, in the eastern parts of the former commune of Lappväärtti (Fig. 1). Presently at an elevation of 49–55 metres above sea level, the site was at a wide river mouth and bay in the Late Stone Age. In addition to Comb Ware period dwelling-site finds, over 10 battle-axes have been recovered in the river valley. Numerous finds and sites at lower elevations (38–45 metres a.s.l.) can be dated to the Kiukainen Culture. Several burial cairns along the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age shorelines (25–45 metres a.s.l.) point to more or less continuous settlement in the Storå River valley from the Mesolithic to the Early Iron Age.

The National Board of Antiquities carried out excavations at Rävåsen in 1994–1998 in a future gravel pit area of almost 2 hectares. A total of over 1,000 square metres of the site was investigated, which, however, is less than 5% of the area stripped for sand and gravel excavation and an even smaller proportion of the whole area of finds. Approximately 30 round or oval depressions were discovered in the southern parts of Rävåsen



1. RÄVÅSEN 2. HIITTENHARJU 3. KIRJUNAJU

Fig. 1. Finds of East Swedish Pitted Ware on the Finnish mainland. 1) Rävåsen, 2) Hiittenharju, 3) Kirjuna.

and on its eastern slopes. In shape and dimension, these depressions resemble Stone Age hut floors of the Madeneva type. Four of them were investigated and two were relatively undamaged. They were surrounded by a small yet distinct bank of earth, but there were no signs of hearths or fireplaces. The earth bank or wall of the best-preserved depression revealed a red-ochre grave containing an amber pendant, a slate pendant and a porphyry scraper. There were traces of a skeleton, as is common on the acidic soils of Finland with their low calcareous content. The grave type is characteristic of Comb Ware sites.

It is possible that the former location of the Rävåsen site on a low sandy shore contributed to the mixing of the cultural layer, as no distinct stratigraphy could be observed. The cultural layer was discoloured only in places, but finds were recovered even from locations of seemingly untouched sand.

The nature and composition of the cultural layer, the hut-floors and the distribution of the finds do not markedly differ from other, contemporaneous Stone Age sites in Ostrobothnia. Also the topography of Rävåsen in a coastal milieu is typical of Ostrobothnian coastal sites of the Late Stone Age (Miettinen & Vuorela 1982; Miettinen 1991).

Of the finds from Rävåsen, the ceramics were of most interest. The other finds are common to Late Comb Ware period sites in Ostrobothnia. The only artifacts to be mentioned here are a few sinkers and several slate arrowheads of the late Neolithic Pyheensilta Phase.

The recovered osteological material hitherto analysed consists of burnt and mostly very small bone fragments. Over 70% of the identified fragments were of seal. This was to be expected, as Rävåsen was clearly a shore site. In addition to animal bones, two small human skull fragments were found. They were in the cultural layer among other finds and cannot be associated with graves. Their interpretation remains an open question.

Potsherds constitute almost half of the finds. Poorly preserved pottery in small fragments is a common occurrence at Ostrobothnian sites. Particularly in the Late Stone Age and during the Pyheensilta Phase, ceramic paste was generally tempered with organic material, making the fired pottery very brittle. Most of the ceramics at Rävåsen were found at a depth of 10-30 cm, often in clusters, although the finds in general are spread all over the area.

The ceramic finds that initially merited attention are 30 sherds of a vessel of markedly angular profile. The whole exterior surface is decorated with herringbone

designs executed in short lines. There were no base sherds. On the inside, almost 2 cm from the rim, is a horizontal line of small, shallow and roundish depressions (Fig. 2.). These sherds are only a small proportion of the total ceramic assemblage from the site. The sherds described above are from the same vessel and were found within an area of a few dozen square metres. The closest parallels to this material are in the Jetböle finds from the Åland islands (Cederhvarf 1912; Ailio 1909; Meinander 1957, 1962).

The predominant type of ceramics at Rävåsen is Late Comb Ware (styles III:1-2) and Pyheensilta Ware. There are also a few sherds asbestos-tempered pottery, most probably of the Kierikki group. A few sherds of solid, light-brown ware with a slightly outwardly curved rim part and line designs can be probably be attributed to the Corded Ware culture. Some of the finds are of extremely coarse ware with scratched surfaces and possibly related to the pottery of the Kiukainen culture, which was found in field surveys at lower elevations (35-45 metres a.s.l.) in the Lappväärtti River valley and the Kärjenkoski river valley. Asbestos-tempered ceramics, Corded Ware and Pitted Ware are nevertheless highly marginal components of the material, in which Comb Ware predominates. The oldest stages of human occupation at Rävåsen are represented by survey and trial excavation finds roughly 70 metres NW of the excavated area on a higher terrace formation situated 59-60 metres a.s.l. These finds include, among other elements, Typical Comb Ware and are in a limited area, originally on the lee side of a small island at the mouth of a bay. The Pitted Ware from Rävåsen also displays similarities with the decoration of Pyheensilta Ware. The herringbone motif, executed either with a comb stamp or lines, occurs in both Pyheensilta and Pitted Ware. But the former lacks pits, which are common in Pitted Ware. On the other hand, the distinctly angular profile of the vessel and the light-coloured and solid paste clearly differ from the other ceramic finds of the Pyheensilta type from Rävåsen.

At present there have been two other discoveries of Pitted Ware from the Finnish mainland in addition to Rävåsen (see Fig. 1). In Southwest Finland, finds from the Late Comb Ware site of Kirjunpaju site in Nousiainen included a few sherds of a vessel regarded as representing East Swedish Pitted Ware (Luoto & Terho 1988). The vessel is of angular profile, albeit not as distinct as in the Rävåsen find, and its herringbone decoration is similar to both Pyheensilta and Pitted Ware. The pits of the Kirjunpaju vessel were impressed onto the herringbone pattern, thus differing from Py-

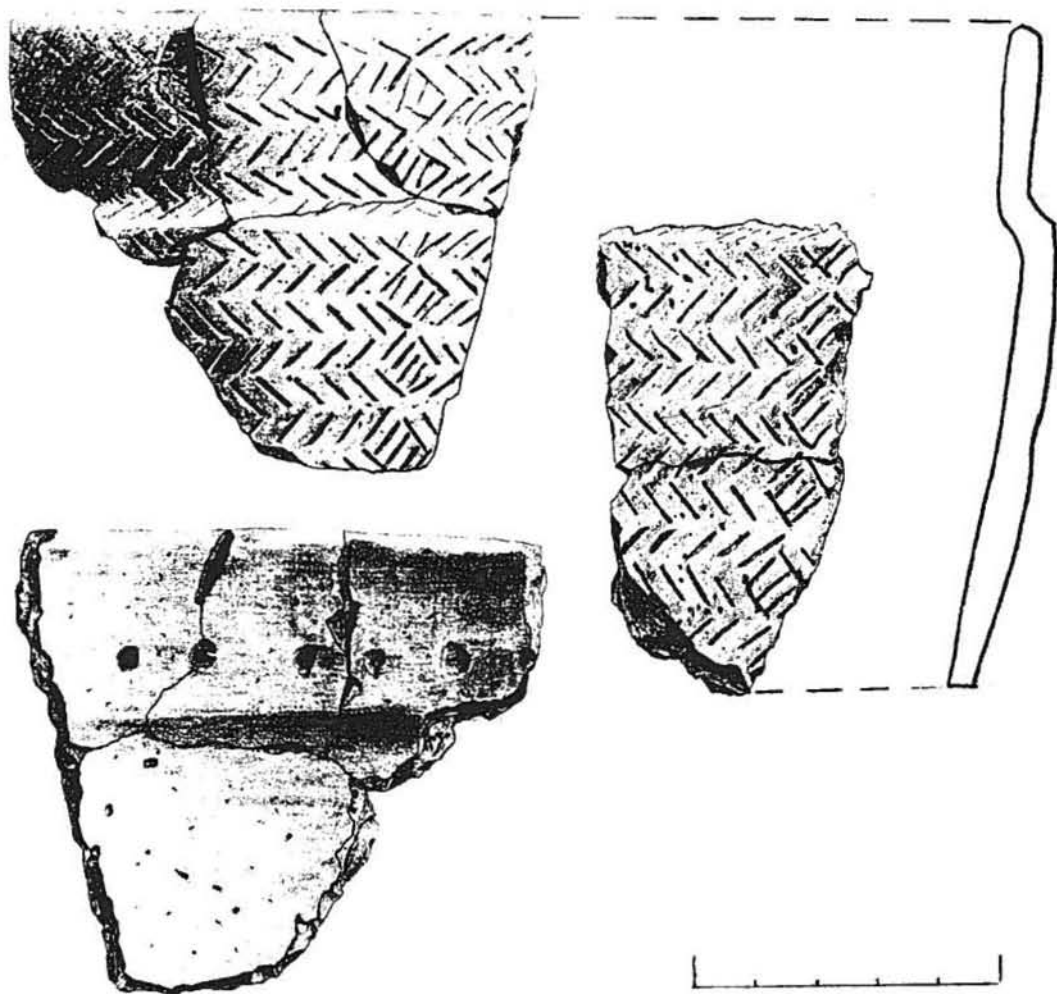


Fig. 2. Pitted Ware sherds from Rävåsen (National Museum of Finland 28695:498). Exterior with herringbone motif, mouth profile and the inside of a large trim sherd. Drawing / National Board of Antiquities.

heensilta Ware, which completely lacks pits. The porous paste and the firing of the vessel correspond to the other ceramic finds from the site. According to Anne Vikkula (1987) there are a few Pitted Ware sherds among the material from the Pyheensilta Phase site of Hiittenharju in Harjavalta, near Pori.

In the Åland Islands, Pitted Ware appears to be an integral component of the Stone Age material. The Pitted Ware from Rävåsen and the Finnish mainland will be analysed in further detail in a forthcoming article.² Following a closer study of the whole material, further comment may be available on the new finds from Rävåsen. On the other hand, it is not at all unusual for

apparently foreign elements to occur at large coastal sites, such as Rävåsen. Comb Ware is generally regarded as having constituted the cultural basis also for the Ostrobothnian coastal sites of the Stone Age. But the Comb Ware culture was not a closed phenomenon culturally, socially or in terms of material culture. The Comb Ware material contains both local and chronological groups, and the Comb Ware sites often include foreign elements of various kinds. A few examples can be mentioned with regard to Ostrobothnia: small amounts of asbestos-tempered pottery, eastern flint (from the Valdai region in Russia), Corded Ware and other finds of the Corded Ware culture, amber (from the

southern Baltic regions), and individual slate artefacts (e.g. slate knives from Norrland in Sweden). It is possible that the hunter-gatherer populations on both sides of the Gulf of Bothnia had not only random but also regular contacts across the sea. So far, no new material shedding light on these contacts has been compiled or studied in further detail in Finland. Previously, such contacts have been traced in the material of the Late Neolithic Kiukainen Culture and particularly in the Bronze Age context.

It is, however, obvious that these western elements in the areas east of the Gulf of Bothnia are based on older contacts that had been maintained for a long while. The Pitted Ware vessel from Rävåsen can be equally attributed to barter as to contacts via fishing and seal hunting, or to individual immigrants. There is, however, nothing else in the remainder of the Rävåsen material that could be associated with the Pitted Ware culture. The arrowheads, adzes and axes are of types common in the Late Comb Ware and Pyheensilta environment. According to currently held views, the SW Finnish Pyheensilta Culture, an affluent hunter-gatherer culture, had active contacts with the Pitted Ware Culture in the west. The geographical distribution of the Pyheensilta Culture encompasses the southwestern and southern coastal areas of Finland. The Ostrobothnian finds are at the northernmost margin of this area. A thorough study of other Pyheensilta material may provide further information on the nature and extent of the Pitted Ware element.

NOTES

- ¹ The present article is based on unpublished excavation reports (1995-1998) in the archives of the Section for Prehistory of the National Board of Antiquities and on a paper delivered at the Umeå Archaeological Congress in 1998.
- ² The finds from Rävåsen are being studied by a team of researchers of the National Board of Antiquities, consisting of Vesa Laulumaa (excavation director at Rävåsen), Mirja Miettinen, Tuula Heikkurinen-Montell, Leena Ruonavaara and Pirjo Uino.

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