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Comments on David G. Anderson: Dwellings, Storage and Summer Site Structure among Siberian Orochen Evenkis: Hunter-Gatherer Vernacular Architecture under Post-Socialist Conditions. *Norwegian Archaeological Review 39*, 1–26

SEARCHING FOR MODELS?

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We have with interest studied David Anderson's article on Orochen Evenki summer camps from the point of view of an ethnoarchaeologist. As an archaeologist it is always inspiring to learn about living societies. The study of present or historical reindear herders and hunter-gatherer-fishers holds a huge and often under-explored potential for archaeologists to develop dynamic models for how the former living societies created static patterns of the archaeological campsites. Unfortunately, from our point of view, Anderson does not provide a fully developed tool, because his arguments are too diffuse and the current presentation of empiric data too fragmented. In order to help Anderson's future work we will point out a few of the numerous possible adjustments and neglected discussions, which hopefully can inspire Anderson to develop his models.

According to Anderson, one hundred years of published work on traditional tent dwelling has dictated certain ideals of how designs and behaviour should be exhibited in a pure form by discarding hybrid examples. In the ideal Evenki dwelling, the women would take up their places to the right when they enter, while the 'master' would sit at the very back, at the place called 'malu'. Guests and children would occupy the left and there was a prohibition against 'circling' the house or walking through the 'corridor' from the entrance.

Anderson's own observations at Evenki camps all over central Siberia since 1989 contrast strongly with these observations of traditional folk life. Anderson has experienced a relatively unstructured nature of gender- and status-related behaviour within canvas tents. These observations bring Anderson to the conclusion that 'The use of evocative, unitary models has its purpose for articulating ethnic difference and in supporting contemporary cultural revival … and represents an evaluative, moralist way of thinking which was common to social evolutionary thought in the 19th century'.

Indeed much archaeology suffers from broad culture historical sweeps being based on data from just a few archaeological sites. Similarly archaeologists all too often rely on just a few ethnographic analogies when interpreting the static patterns of the archaeological record. Both of these factors have an unhappy tendency to maintain the status quo

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in our understanding of past and present societies.

In the case of understanding camp layout and architecture of hunter-gatherers the well documented and meticulously described organisation of space among Cree of Labrador (Tanner 1979), Saami of northern Scandinavia (Leem 1767) and Evenki (Levin & Potapov 1964) may have gained iconographic status as examples of the cosmological principles structuring the organisation of dwelling interior and camp layout, and thus permeating all aspects of life among the dwellers. The heavy reference by the latter authors working in other areas to such examples may well result in a 'scholarly overkill' where too much alien cosmological matter is read into vague or inconclusive patterns in other settings.

However this does not in any way make the original descriptions wrong, and to our minds ignoring them would be more unjust than actively attempting to apply such well-known principles when modelling the structuring principles of past campsites. Obviously we must try to avoid oversimplifications, but there is no reason to avoid any structuring principle in the analysis of social space, when we know for fact that cosmology, social and functional factors are entangled in the structuring of the living space of most humans.

We would argue that it is absolutely legitimate to search for a cosmological or symbolic 'code' when analysing architecture. In the case of the traditional house of Evenki, they – like many other people of Siberia and northern Scandinavia (Anisimov 1963a, Tugolukov 1978) – saw the hearth as a symbol of the middle world, the world of the living, and an opening to other worlds (Odgaard 2001, 2003, 2006). Through this opening, offerings could be given to the dead in the lower world and to the gods in the upper world. In the other direction, reincarnating souls were delivered through the hearth and into a woman's womb to be born again (Anisimov 1963b). The 'corridor' from the door, via the hearth, and to the back of the tent, symbolised the cosmology of the Evenks – the three worlds of (1) the gods and reincarnating souls (at the entrance); (2) the middle world of the living (the hearth); and (3) the lower world of the dead souls (behind the hearth, at the back of the dwelling) (Anisimov 1963a).

In these examples the layout and architecture of the dwellings was guided by belief systems that (no wonder) are probably not reproduced in contemporary Evenki societies. The variation of traditional life, the sum of lived actions in any given dwelling and thus the resulting depositional patterns of artefacts and debitage may on the other hand show much more blurred patterns, primarily resulting from sweeping and general traffic patterns in and out of the dwelling (Jensen 1996, 1998). Who knows what the children were doing when the master was out hunting, and the woman was gone to fetch firewood? Indeed the cosmological order in – whether seen from the inside or outside – is an ideal rather than real.

Anderson describes the interior of the tents as being used in a 'disappointingly unstructured manner – a far cry from the stereotypes prescribed in literature'. One wonders if Anderson was disappointed to meet this modern mess rather than the glossy pictures of popular ethnographies? In any case it would have been nice to see acute registrations of the dwellings, similar to the sketches produced by Elgström 90 years ago (Elgström 1922). Such sketches would have enabled an ethno-archaeologist to use Anderson's observations for comparative studies, which is rather difficult, not to say impossible, in the form they are presented in NAR. In so doing Anderson could have refrained from reproducing the idealist pictures that we know so well from numerous existing publications, by instead adding new images and his own angle to the literature.

Anderson identifies a number of reoccurring features structuring the space on Evenki

taabor sites: tethered dogs, hearths, cooking fires for dogs, bread ovens, canvas tents, storage structures and reindeer marshalling areas. From the point of view of a field archaeologist the site maps (Figs. 4 and 7) presented by Anderson underline the interesting fact that most space at any given camp is actually empty space; distance is thus one of the most important means to structure the campsite. As a frustrating note one can also point to the fact that most archaeological excavations cover no more than 100 square metres, which only would be a fraction of the central part of the camp sites mapped by Anderson. Distant features such as the ovens would only be registered by change, and to the archaeologist the most interesting areas to excavate might well be the discard areas situated in the perimeter of the actual campsite. All of these trivial facts can remind the archaeologist about the limitations of archaeological enquiry. However it does not necessarily take an anthropologist in Siberia to do these observations; anyone could have done these observations on any boy scout camp.

Anderson states that: 'it is the anthropologist's task to speak about culture in motion, and in the present' (p. 4). However he does not give much information about meaning behind the model. The way things are related and the causes for the behaviour that is observed, is not revealed – maybe it is saved for the work Anderson has in press.

We would encourage Anderson to underpin his ideas, for example in relation to social patterns: Has it in fact been verified that in earlier summer camps people stayed in one communal tent – and if they did, is it really (as suggested by Anderson) because of the easier access to plastic and canvas that people now separate into more tents? Or is the present use of several dwellings a sign of modern individualism, and breakdown of the enforced communal economy of the soviet period? Anderson leaves such alternative explanations untested and there are no data that could qualify the reader to test such questions for herself.

During the last few years, one of us (Odgaard) has conducted extensive fieldwork on caribou hunters' summer camps of the Thule culture in West Greenland. During this work it has become clear that a 'camp of two generations' pattern was a strong principle structuring the summer camps and the territorial exploitation of the hunting grounds. The inspiration for this model derives from our own ethnoarchaeological studies in a camp of modern caribou hunters in 2003. The two-generation camp system, mirrored in the two principal dwellings of the camp, was one of the models – or keys – to enable interpretation of former organisation of the prehistoric summer camps and the whole landscape with more than 300 prehistoric and historic sites (Odgaard *et al.* in prep.). We wonder if Anderson unconsciously experienced the same system. His 'ideal typical model' (Fig. 4) shows two dwellings and he describes the heart of the work unit in the camp he visited as 'one elderly matron, Ol'ga, and her two sons, Nikolai and Yurii, with a rotating contingent of other kinsmen at various times of the year'. And further: 'One son camped with his mother; the other had his own tent (which he sometimes shared with temporary helpers)'.

It is of great relevance for hunter-gatherer archaeology as such to take inspiration from ethnoarchaeological models. But generally the often purely observing and particularistic approach of anthropologists' work without comparative analysis and historical dimension makes it difficult to apply their work as analogue models. What we need is knowledge about the underlying structuring principles and we hope to have encouraged Anderson and other ethnographers to describe qualitatively as well as quantitatively the relationships between material culture, economy, social structure and cosmology in living societies.

COMMENTS ON DWELLINGS, STORAGE AND SUMMER SITE STRUCTURE

Ole Grøn

The theme of the paper is highly interesting and relevant for archaeological settlement studies. Unfortunately, the sketchy and unsystematic way the observations, their background and context are presented make some of them difficult to conceive precisely and thus to apply to archaeological data. This is a pity, because the paper presents some puzzling deviations from consistent and uniform patterns I have registered for the Evenk in northern Sacha (Yakutia), northern Chita Oblast, and the northern Irkutsk Oblast, Siberia.

MALU IN EVENK TENT

As a serious example of the sketchy and imprecise character of the paper, Anderson in relation to the spatial organisation of the tents states that the 'master would sit at the very back at the place called *malu*' referring to Shirokogoroff (1929:255–256). In the mentioned reference, however, Shirokogoroff states: 'the place malu usually remains unoccupied by the family members, except for single and honoured old men' and 'the right b'e [the area between the entrance and the malu in the left side of the tent when seen from the inside], as a rule, being occupied by the chief of the unit'. What Shirokogoroff says is that the 'chief of the unit' does not normally sit in *malu* but in the right b'e. Since Anderson's statement is thus not covered by the reference to Shirokogoroff, it would be interesting to know if this pattern he describes is a local variant (Grøn 2003, Grøn *et al.* 2003).

According to a large amount of data I have collected since 1997, the day-position of the leading male of a household in a traditional circular tent as well as in modern rectangular canvas tents is consistently opposite the leading female of the household, each on their side of the entrance. The woman is normally to the right when seen from the inside, the man to the left. *Malu* in the back of the tent is normally used as a sitting and sleeping place for the children. I have recorded that an honoured male guest or a visiting male shaman can have his sitting and sleeping place in *malu* (in which case the children will have to find somewhere else to sleep!), but even clan leaders (male or female) maintain in their own tents the ordinary positions for the leading male or female of their households. There seems to be some local variation with regard to whether other honoured male guests than shamans are allowed to take up *malu*. According to the reactions of the Evenk with whom I have discussed this, it is an important question of etiquette that can cause fierce discussion.

The only significant discrepancy between Shirokogoroff's statement (1929:255–256) and my observations concerning the organisation of the tent is that the children, according to him, do not sleep in *malu*. I know from informants who were children around the time when Shirokogoroff carried out his studies in Siberia that the Evenk children at that time slept in *malu* as well as in the other parts of the tent where there was room. Possible explanations are that he because of the questions he asked has attracted shamans or other old honoured males who would force the children to leave *malu* in the tent where he stayed, that he was led to households with shamans or old honoured males who could answer his questions (and took up *malu*) or that he himself was regarded as a such an honoured and exotic guest that he was given *malu* wherever he arrived.

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With log cabins the spatial organisation can be different. In areas with a strong Yakut influence, Evenk households that maintain a traditional Evenk spatial organisation of their tents employ a pattern in their log cabins with the leader/leading couple taking up the platform or bed in the back of the dwelling. This might well reflect Yakut influence (Jochelson 1933:135–138). In a more central Evenk area (northern Irkutstk Oblast) I have observed groups that consistently use the Evenk tent pattern in their log cabins as well.

Thus it seems that the position in the back of a dwelling in some areas can be held by the leading member of the occupying household if it is a log cabin, but that this at the same time is very unlikely to happen in a tent. This interestingly enough seems to indicate that some Evenk relate different spatial organisational patterns to these two dwelling types. The question is if Anderson's statement about the 'master' sitting at malu refers to log cabins. This is impossible to see from the text.

A detailed study of Anderson's Fig. 2 from the work of Zoia Pikunova (1999), which immediately might give the reader the impression that it shows a man (the 'master'?) sitting in the back of a tent (*malu*), shows that this is not a correct representation of the spatial organisation of an Evenk tent and therefore unfortunate as an illustration with no further explanation. The text says the figure shows the 'structured distribution of space within a standing dwelling portrayed as a solemn cultural ideal'. The heap of firewood would normally be located between the hearth and the entrance. *Tjungal*, the kitchen areas of the tent, should be directly beside the entrance, and the leading female of the household would sit beside it to the right of the entrance seen from the inside. In Anderson's Fig. 2 firewood on the one hand and woman and *tjungal* on the other are shown in the lower left and respectively lower right corners indicating that there should be an entrance in both of these. The horizontal poles shown (several different constructions are used by the Evenk) will normally run from the back of the tent in the direction of its entrance. The type of construction shown indicates that the entrance is behind the woman in the right lower corner which fits the location of the *tjungal* beside the entrance but not the position of the firewood. That the kettle hangs from the horizontal poles behind the lower right woman over a hearth which is in front of the same woman demonstrates the spatial inconsistency of the illustration.

In the back part of the illustration are a man and a woman shown with *malu* marked between them. He sits in front of his gear and hunting weapon and she appears to be preparing food at a second *tjungal*. This element becomes understandable if it is conceived as a separate and compressed element showing the man and the woman each sitting at their side of *malu* during the day – even though their positions are switched in relation to what is the most normal.

The illustration, accordingly, seems to contain three spatially independent and uncoordinated elements: (1) the heap of firewood and the hearth; (2) the woman (lower right) at her *tjungal* and the horizontal poles; and (3) the couple (in the back) in their tent at each side of *malu*. To state that such an illustration shows 'the structured distribution of space within a standing dwelling portrayed as a solemn cultural ideal' seems either misleading or to represent a misunderstanding of the way the Evenk understand their dwelling-space. At least the illustration does not provide support for the point that the 'master would sit at the very back at the place called *malu*' (that must be the 'master of the household' and not of the tent because the household's leading female was and can in some cases still be found to be the veritable 'owner' of the tent as a physical structure).

So altogether it would be interesting to have Anderson's possible source for

information about the 'master' sitting in *malu* and its context revealed with some further detail concerning, for instance, its day and night aspects (e.g. Grøn & Kuznetsov 2003). Is the 'master' who sits in *malu* during the day identical with the male of the 'owning couple' (the 'owners' according to Anderson) who during the night would sleep to the left (apparently seen from the entrance)?

SETTLEMENT MODEL

It is encouraging that Anderson now works along the lines of settlement modelling that I have been involved in developing for sites of the Siberian Evenk, from 1997 in collaboration with Oleg V. Kuznetsov, later on in an early phase of the Baikal Archaeological Project with Michail G. Turov, and now continue in a collaboration between the Institute of Archaeology, University College London, and Michail G. Turov from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Irkutsk State University. This work is an ambitious attempt to understand the Evenk spatial, ideological and resource-strategic basis for settlement location and settlement organisation in a dynamic perspective with focus on small-scale variation (Grøn & Turov in press a, b, Grøn *et al.* in press a, b). I have always thought we attempt to understand how the Evenk conceive and interact with their environment and therefore find it interesting that Anderson is not of the same opinion (p. 3).

On the basis of our careful registration of settlements of all types and from all seasons, in combination with detailed interviews with individuals who inhabited the settlements, I find several features that apparently deviate from those I am used to. These therefore represent potentially interesting features in the plans published by David Anderson, which unfortunately are so sketchy and provide so little detail that they are of little help. Should, for instance, the 'reindeer marshalling area' with smudge fires ('smudges') shown in Fig. 4 just be conceived as a graphical signature for a reindeer marshalling area, or does it actually represent a feature that deviates from their normal round/oval shape? In the latter case, why? Another possibility would be that it represents several generations of marshalling areas in the same place. It would not have taken more of the restricted publication space to make the figure clearer on this point.

A very loose application of 'floor-area' calculations (calculation of the covered area per person in this case) for the settlements of an expedition that contained several non-Evenk members is used to reject the value of that approach. Such 'area per inhabitant' calculations have caused concern on several earlier occasions (e.g. Casteel 1979; LeBlanc 1971) and are therefore uncommon in today's archaeology. Why does Anderson enter such an exercise at all if the intention is not to carry through a detailed and well-documented analysis and check of a hypothesis?

CONCLUSION

The first central question which the paper raises through its numerous loose statements and considerations, of which quite a number are undoubtedly sound, is what the character is of its result, which in its early part is postulated to be 'a model illustrating the way lived action generates certain regular patterns' (p. 6). The paper's conclusion formulates an apparently quite different aim: 'The main purpose of this article was to present a catalogue of Orochen Evenki summerstructures and the activity areas associated with them' (p. 23). And how is that related to a bombastic statement such as 'As an anthropologist, I have framed these observations by the way that Orochen Evenki would perceive their own lifeworld' (p. 2)? It seems very confusing.

If there was no time to 'do exact measurements of any of the sites' (p. 6) and thus

through proper fieldwork to create a documentation of a reasonable quality, the second question arises which is: why have these results been disseminated prematurely? They need the clarification only years of continued detailed field observation and documentation can provide.

Reply to Comments on 'Dwellings, Storage, and Summer Site Structure Among Siberian Orochen Evenkis'

David Anderson

I would like to thank the two reviewers for their detailed comments as well as several other archaeologists who have contacted me directly by post. I am very excited about the possibility of building a strong dialogue between Siberianist field anthropologists and archaeologists through this journal, as in other projects. I am also very happy that Siberian material is once again generating such interest in the archaeological community.

In my reply I wish to focus on theoretical and methodological matters. Although both reviewers welcome the ethnographic study of space and vernacular architecture, I am worried that in both cases the main theoretical contributions of the article have been misunderstood. Indeed, this lack of agreement about the value of ethnographic research I think generates many of the specific requests for detail that take up the majority of the space of both reviews.

I have to apologise both to the reviewers and to readers for the fact that my intention was *not* to 'register' behaviour or extract precisely measured analogue models in the manner which may be standard to excavation-oriented archaeologists. The article presents a series of way-posts to how Orochen hunters would recognize a summer camp in the taiga. I had hoped to demonstrate two things. First, that much important activity happens outside the walls of a central dwelling anchored by a single hearth. Specifically, the article emphasized the important role of intermediary and not-quite-finished types of temporary shelter, storage, and the varied use of fire that could be scattered over a large territory. Second, I tried to show that under conditions of severe social and environmental change, residential patterns and architectural forms can also change. However, in what I had hoped was a helpful gesture to structuralists, I indicated where activities divided by age, gender and status could still be discernable under a wider surface area of coverings, and over a wider territory, than had been the case in more stable times.

The article presents certain general tendencies; each clearly stated, such as the placement of summer camps near key resources, the importance of a hearth-region instead of a single compact fireplace, and the importance of temporary and long-term storage structures to provision a region. What the article does not provide is a formal, static model that can be taken out of this context and dropped on top of excavations in other parts of the world. To that end, the sketch maps of camps show general relationships between features, and are not

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engineer's diagrams designed to recreate the Poperechnaia river site as if it were a movie set. This choice, to represent structural *tendencies* in Orochen summer camps gives what an anthropologist would recognize as a true rendering of agency. Orochens do not carry about in their minds a blueprint and surveyor's instruments when they create a camp. Camps are built in relation to a given terrain and given constraints of time. Thus reindeer marshalling areas can be round, oval, square, rectangular, or diamond shaped depending on the surface on which they are built – but they are always a good distance away from the residential area and always close to water and wood. Measuring these sites in millimetres would be a misrepresentation of way that human intuition was applied to them (but would entertain our Orochen hosts to no end!). There is a type of human truth in this type of ethnographic representation of space, but it is not the type of timeless, positivistic truth that the reviewers were searching for.

In conducting and writing up this research we deliberately chose to use a broad scale and the tools of typology rather than those of design to represent summer activity in this valley. The article was also composed in a self-deprecating style of 'disappointment' to politely indicate the fact that all of us felt the vast majority of published literature on Siberian and boreal hunter gatherers asserts a rather more static and structured picture of human activity than is the case. The beautiful – and accurate – description of Evenki cosmology à la Anisimov in Odgaard & Jensen's comment, and the seductively crisp diagram accompanying Grøn's comment (not published here), are cases in point. None of us were raised on romantic or glossy ethnographies. With the exception of the students, we all have worked in the region for decades and have had to suffer watching a proud stable community fundamentally overturn the way they organized their lives in response to the brutal development of monopoly capitalism in the region. The article presents a representation of a workable but shifting adaptation to difficult circumstances – one which if reduced to a blueprint would work an injustice to the creativity and intuition behind it.

The main question, which should be of concern both to readers and editors of this journal, is whether true ethnographic work is useful to archaeologists. The two reviewers state quite clearly that a highly contextualized description of activity areas and dwellings in a particular place is too 'fragmented' or 'sketchy' to be useful in the interpretation of excavations. I am very open to a constructive engagement on questions of methods. Indeed I am very curious about Odgaard & Jensen's 'camp of two-generations' and am working very intensely on the representation of kinship and architecture over long periods of time in this region using oral history, and census records from 1897 and 1926. However I am somewhat saddened by the implication of both reviewers that if ethnographic work (so-called 'registrations') cannot be easily applied to the dense regions of settlement made visible by excavation, that it should not be published at all. Surely even archaeologists need to incorporate the element of creativity and intuition in the interpretation of their sites.

I would like to answer, briefly, two specific points in each review.

In response to Odgaard & Jensen I would like to clarify that the pattern observed in this site (and in many other sites in post-Soviet Siberia) of a 'suburbanisation' of dwelling patterns is a new post-socialist phenomena. In my view, it is not best explained by the development of possessive individualism nor the destruction of communal mores. As many ethnographers have demonstrated in detail, the Soviet period encouraged a false residential communalism for ideological reasons and for reasons stemming from the so-called 'economy of shortage'. Evenki residential patterns have always been seasonal. One would find more than one generation living together only in

summer and midwinter (and then not always). Traditional forms of architecture, such as the moose or caribou skin lodge, made up of five overlapping panels, could very easily be divided to make several smaller dwellings to shelter small groups. They then could be reassembled to create a larger lodge. This well-documented modular quality to both social organisation and vernacular architecture underlies my suggestion that this very old pattern has simply been adapted to the plethora of new materials in the post-Soviet period. It certainly does not point to the wholesale assimilation and destruction of traditional society.

In response to Grøn, Fig. 2 in my article is clearly referenced as coming from a recently printed pictorial Evenki dictionary printed for elementary schools across Siberia. It is most likely that the artist had never seen an Evenki tent, and almost certainly has never lived in one. Moreover, I suspect the printer reversed the diagram when the dictionary was printed. The illustration does not represent any real pattern of human behaviour. It represents the cultural ideal of the tent – divorced from everyday life – that I was criticizing. Here, the readers now have Grøn's corrections to the unrealistic model which in many ways provide a perfect example of how over-simplified stereotypes can strangle any sincere discussion.

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