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# Tracing hide craft as human-animal relations in Stone Age Norway

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## Abstract

In hunter-gatherer anthropological research, animals are typically seen as food or alternatively serving as ‘food for thought’ for humans. When it comes to direct human-animal relational situations, the spotlight is put on the act of killing. The recent ‘animal turn’ in humanities and social sciences, and earlier ethnoecology and traditional knowledge accounts, however, suggest that ‘hunting’ construed as ‘killing for food’ provides a very limited view-angle into past hunter-gatherer realities. The growing debate in European Stone Age research as to how hunter-gatherer groups interacted and socially engaged with their environment provides an alternative, non-anthropocentric interpretation framework, suggesting that other-than-human beings should be seen as social actors with their own individuality, intentionality and consciousness. Understanding the potential of this turn to Mesolithic studies cannot be achieved without a broad understanding of ‘hunter-gatherers’, as socially and technologically diverse communities is necessary, depending among other things on a variety of products provided by wild animals, and engaging in them through a variety of actions other than killing.

In contrast to meat as food, which at least for shorter or longer periods could be replaced by other types of edible resources, northern hemisphere Stone Age hunter-gatherer societies did not have much alternatives to hide for clothes, sheltering and containing purposes. On the other hand, hide products are not very durable, and items and parts would have had to be replaced regularly. The broad use-spectrum, the lack of alternative materials and the constantly returning need for renewal places the material in a special position in northern prehistoric hunter-gatherer societies. In addition to these anthropocentric-based practical characteristics, one of the special properties inherent in hide and fur, more than for any other part of an animal, is how they provide to the experiences observer direct information about the animal from which the hide or fur has been obtained, sometimes down to an individual level. This paper uses archaeological data from Stone Age Norway to explore the potential of bringing hide and fur practices as expression of human-animal relations into broader narratives of Stone Age hunter-gatherer societies.

**Keywords:** hide processing, human, animal relations, north europe, coastal hunter gatherers, Norway

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