



Book Reviews

NW EUROPE IN TRANSITION: THE EARLY NEOLITHIC IN BRITAIN AND SOUTH SWEDEN EDITED BY MATS LARSSON AND JOLENE DEBERT

Archaeopress, British Archaeological Reports International Series 2475, Oxford 2013. 88 pp, 22 illus incl 1 col and 5 B/W plates, 1 table, ISBN 978-1-4073-1087-9, pb, £23

This volume contains a dozen papers examining aspects of the Neolithic of Britain and southern Scandinavia. An immediately noticeable point is that nine of the contributors come from just two teams: Manchester and Kalmar. The Manchester squad comprises Ellen McInnes (historical overview), Irene Garcia Rovira (rethinking theory), Hannah Cobb (northern Irish Sea), Sara Bishop (animals), and Jolene Debert (microwear and buildings). Opposite them, Sweden's Kalmar line-up consists of Mats Larsson (southern Scandinavia), Anna-Karin Andersson (Southwest Swedish Neolithic), Ludvig Pappmehl-Dufay (Öland megaliths) and Kenneth Alexandersson (Southeast Swedish Mesolithic/Neolithic). On their reserve bench are three people from Copenhagen: Lasse Sørensen (South Scandinavian transition), Rune Iversen (Danish later Neolithic) and Ditlev Mahler (Shetland Islands).

The volume has not been very closely proof-read, and a few scandinavianisms creep in here and there. They do not usually compromise understanding, though a particularly felicitous sentence in Mahler's paper deserves highlighting: "a pioneer society consisting of a 100 persons may well be economical successful, but if 98 of them are men and only 2 women the demographic prospective is prosperous" (p. 44). Prosperous for everyone, one wonders, or just the women? – Or did the spell checker convert "prosperous" from "preposterous"?

One might expect that the two teams would play in different formations, Manchester attacking with theory, Kalmar placing a defensive reliance on data. However, some of the Kalmar papers also deploy theory quite liberally, meeting Manchester in mid-field in this respect. Both teams do a certain amount of deferential forelock-tugging in the general direction of particular continental philosophers, but this does not prevent most papers presenting archaeological material as well. A particularly good point about the book is that a good deal of the Scandinavian material is new (at least in English). Arguably the book's major importance will be that it makes this otherwise largely inaccessible material available to the anglophone readership.

Sørensen's paper is the most impressive in the book. It presents a lot of new material, much of it the work of the author himself. Pointed butted axes date from the earliest Neolithic, and Sørensen presents an updated map of their distribution: a fair number are found in eastern Jutland and the Danish islands, but the major concentrations are in Scania, and further north in the area where the Falbygden megalithic concentration was later to emerge. This axe type occurs in the Michelsberg culture of the Low Countries and northern France, and Sørensen argues that there was at least some migration of Michelsberg people into Scandinavia at the start of the Neolithic. He argues for 'cultural dualism' in the Early Neolithic, hunting/fishing continuing on the coasts though being absorbed into farming. This differs from the view put forward by Jørgen Skaarup (1973), who argued that the Neolithic coastal sites were seasonal camps used by the

farmers. In the volume under review, both Larsson and Iversen follow Skaarup, so here is a clear issue for future discussion.

Sørensen presents a large number of new C14 dates, many of them on domestic animal bones and cereal grains. The plot is remarkably consistent: domestic animals and cultivated cereals appear pretty abruptly just after 4000 cal BC. Various claimed 'Mesolithic domestic cattle' are included in the dating project, such as those from Smakkerup Huse and Åkonge, and all turn out to be Neolithic. The exception is the tooth from Lollikhuse on Zealand, an island that had no native aurochs: mistaken identity being thus ruled out, the tooth is likely to be an imported pendant. Sørensen also mentions the Mesolithic 'domestic cattle' from Rosenhof in northern Germany, and he points out that recent work has re-identified these as wild aurochs. Larsson however still mentions them as domestic, citing the arguments of the Kiel research group, but it is worth noting that these researchers now too concur that the Rosenhof animals were wild (Terberger, Hartz and Kabaciński 2009, 268).

Bishop also considers animals, specifically ritual depositions at British Neolithic mortuary sites. On the basis of 33 published instances, she concludes that aurochs and particularly red deer are quite common. Some of these identifications would merit reanalysis to modern standards – her cited identification of aurochs at Thickthorn Down, Dorset, dates from 1936. Recent work is suggesting that wild animals were remarkably rare in the British Neolithic as a whole (Serjeantson 2011). The high red deer counts at some of the sites Bishop considers are at least partly due to the abandonment of antler picks rather than the deliberate placement of wild animal parts. This is clearly an area where there is work to be done: Serjeantson (op. cit., appendix 6) identifies some 75 sites of all kinds (not just mortuary-related) with ritual animal deposition in southern England alone.

Two papers consider Mesolithic/Neolithic flint scatters, Cobb in the northern Irish Sea, Alexandersson in coastal SE Sweden. Cobb points out that fewer than 3% of her sites are stratified middens, though a higher proportion of the surface scatters appear to contain some Neolithic artefacts. Long-distance movement of stone raw materials is documented, but no chronological patterning emerges. Alexandersson in contrast is able to see a clear change between Middle and Late Mesolithic: in the earlier period, sites were small and evenly scattered across the landscape, while in the Late Mesolithic large sites appear on river estuaries. This would be worth discussing in the context of the rising Litorina Sea and the increase in availability of marine resources. At Hagbytorp, the Early Neolithic pattern is similar to the Late Mesolithic. Because of the long history of Swedish research, Alexandersson can be sure that he is dealing with farmers in his Neolithic. Whether the same is necessarily true in the northern Irish Sea remains to be conclusively proved: Garrow and Sturt (2011) argue that the appearance of farming in this area may have been patchy, both geographically and chronologically. Could northwestern Britain turn out to be similar to southwestern Norway, where a hunter-gatherer economy extended well into the artefactual Neolithic? Mahler's consideration of pioneer colonists in Shetland could be extrapolated to all pioneer situations, whether forager or farmer. Various ultimately failed colonisations of Greenland (not just the Norse, but also the first Palaeoeskimo in the northeast) suggest that colonisation was fraught with demographic dangers.

Several papers consider the Neolithic of particular areas. Here the Scandinavian papers, while containing theoretical discussions, are data-heavy in a way the British ones are not. Andersson discusses recent work around the town of Malmö, where the results can only be described as spectacular. The Kristineberg site contains two Early Neolithic long mounds; Almhov has four or perhaps five, and 130 pits. What British town could boast this? The mounds and pits are contemporary (within the capacity of radiocarbon to distinguish them) but a few of the pits are stratified below the mounds so Andersson suggests that a phase of feasting preceded a phase of

monument construction. Pappmehl-Dufay considers the group of four megaliths at Resmo on Öland, using an entertaining discussion on the zebra crossing in Abbey Road (London) to argue that places too have biographies – and no-one who owns a copy of the Beatles' penultimate LP would disagree. He argues that the groups of megaliths, built around 3400 cal BC, were not just dropped onto any random portion of the landscape. The recent discovery of a large Early Neolithic site a few hundred metres away, dating from 3900-3400 cal BC, "clearly shows that this place was not neutral prior to megalith construction" (p. 67). Iversen discusses what he terms de-neolithisation: what happened *after* the incredible spate of megalith building in Denmark, when an estimated 25,000 were constructed in a 400 year period. The end of the Funnel Beaker culture is a complex phenomenon: it disappears rather abruptly in Jutland around 2800 cal BC, replaced by the Corded Ware, but continues in the islands and Scania until 2650 cal BC, gradually incorporating Single Grave/Corded Ware and Pitted Ware elements.

There are no corresponding period/area considerations from the British team, who prefer to work thematically. Bishop's paper on animals has been mentioned. Debert, a "lithicist" (sic), starts by considering stone tool microwear. This methodology has fallen into abeyance in recent years, and Debert clearly highlights the problems: from four major British sites, she was able to identify and diagnose the microwear on a total of just *fourteen* stone tools. And several have many possible uses: one tool from White Horse Stone, Kent, is identified as used on "fresh wood, dry hide, dried or frozen meat and fibrous plants" (p. 84). Paradoxically, Debert argues that "the future of lithic and microwear studies does not lie with the next technical innovation but with theoretical integration and interpretation" (p. 86); but it appears to this reviewer that *unless* major technical innovations are made, there will not be much to integrate. Debert's main interest is however the symbolic aspects of Early Neolithic timber structures, and here the discussion is more wide ranging. Timber structures are indeed manufactured of timber, thatch, wattle, daub, but some may question the author's statement that "the collection of these resources would have brought people together over vast areas" (p. 85): would not the very act of making a small clearing in Britain's Early Neolithic forests make most of the necessary materials available right on the spot?

So which team is ahead after 90 pages? Several of the Scandinavian papers present useful overviews of ongoing research in particular areas, while fewer of the British papers do. This reviewer therefore inclines to the opinion that Kalmar has scored an away win, although the result would have been closer without the Copenhagen players. Southern Scandinavia retains its status as the Neolithic capital of Europe, and until half a dozen Early Neolithic long barrows are excavated within the city limits of (say) Watford (in the UK), this is likely to remain the case. If this volume highlights one thing, it is that workers in any particular area can benefit hugely from finding out what is happening elsewhere; we need more like this.

References

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