
Reviewed by Andreas Zimmermann

De Grooth's papers, collected for her doctoral thesis, deal with flint artefacts from six different Neolithic sites. Raw materials from sources at different distances from the sites are used and consequently artefacts from varying stages of production appear. These relationships are used to discuss procurement of raw materials and production of artefacts. Besides the statistical evaluation of these observations, the results of refitting of artefacts and reconstruction of production techniques are used as arguments.

The exhibition "*Op goede Gronden*" was a stimulating reconstruction of many aspects of life in the Bandkeramik period (de Grooth and Verwers 1984). Concepts worked out for this purpose form the background for her work.

Her questions focus on social and economic conditions during the Neolithic. Archaeological observations are suited to recognise some aspects of a division of labour and of communication patterns. Some of the materials de Grooth is dealing with are from southern Germany where chert (*Hornstein*) from Malm deposits predominates (Hielenheim and Meindling). Others are from western Europe (Beek, Elsloo, Langweiler 8 and Rijckholt) where flint from this region was preferred. Patterns common to these regions are assumed to have some general significance. Another aspect is that she is dealing in western Europe with materials from the Early Neolithic (second half of the 6th millennium) as well as with materials from the Michelsberg period (several hundred years around 4000 BC). This contrast enables us to recognise differences of possible historical significance.

The following results may be summarised:

1) Procurement of flint was organised in the second half of the 6th millennium and the first half of the 5th millennium in a way which was not oriented to gain as much profit as possible. However, in some fields indications for the beginnings of part-time specialisation may be recognised (de Grooth 1987, 1988, 1994). A reconstruction of a moderate specialisation is in remarkable contrast to the conclusions of Engelhardt and Bisteiner (1988). De Grooth's arguments are based on calculations of working time and observations of the technology used in building the shafts of Abensburg-Arnhofen. However, in order to be certain, quantitative analysis of the sites classified by Engelhardt and Bisteiner as "production-sites" is still needed.

2) In the 3rd and 4th millennium arguments exist for restricted access to the flint exploitation area of Rijckholt (NL). This corresponds with a production of flint artefacts far in excess of local demand and results in hoards of large blades at distances of some hundred kilometers from Rijckholt (de Grooth 1991).

In de Grooth's papers distribution maps of archaeological finds are related to theoretical models and ethnographic analogies. Her work may lead to a better understanding of many aspects of the complex system of Stone Age exchange.

REFERENCES


Richard Bradley and Mark Edmonds, Interpreting the axe trade: production and exchange in Neolithic Britain. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993, pp. xiv + 236, 24 pls, 64 figs.

Reviewed by Alan Saville

Interpreting the axe trade is divided into three main sections: 1. Neolithic Britain and the study of exchange systems (pp. 3–58); 2. Axe production in the Cumbrian mountains (pp. 61–133); and 3. Exchange systems and the study of Neolithic Britain (pp. 137–206); with the rest of the volume comprised of tables (pp. 207–17), bibliography (pp. 218–232), and index.

Undoubtedly the core of the book is Section 2, an account of an ambitious fieldwork and research project to study the Great Langdale complex of rock extraction sites, high in the mountains of the Lake District, north-west England. The epidotized tuff of Great Langdale, known to British archaeologists and petrologists as Group VI rock, was used during the Neolithic to manufacture axeheads, which have been found widely dispersed in England, and occur also in Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man, and Northern Ireland. Although, in a general sense, Great Langdale was already one of the best known of all the axehead-producing locations, and its products probably the most numerous among the stone axeheads of Britain, relatively little work had been undertaken on the production site itself.

The authors accordingly embarked on a bold, innovative, and in many ways highly successful programme at Great Langdale from 1985 to 1987, involving field survey, sub-surface survey, pollen analysis, test-pitting, excavation, and experimental work. Two patterns of extraction were revealed: one of open-cast quarry pits, with blocks of tuff prised up, roughly shaped, then taken to working floors for processing into more regular roughouts; the other of rock-face removal, both by direct flaking and possibly by fire setting, with regular roughouts made on the spot. A third element, subsequent exploitation of previously abandoned debitage, is suggested for one of the quarry sites. Radiocarbon dates on charcoal suggest this activity was taking place between 3800 and 3100 in calibrated years BC.

It is the account of this work and its results which is presented, in a form more narrative than scientific, in Section 2. Section 1 presents a wide-ranging background to the project, including a summary review of exchange systems, which seems to favour Marcel "The Gift" Mauss as flavour-of-the-month anthropological guru. (Guru fashion changes very rapidly; in a subsequent review of the same topic, Edmonds 1993, Mauss is not cited). Precisely how Mauss’s ideas relate to Section 3 of the book is less clear, since this comprises a classic Bradleysque dance through the British Neolithic evidence of a kind now increasingly familiar since his first tour de force of 1978. As ever, the distillation (or concoction) of abstruse data and interpretation is dazzling; one feels the authors must have seen a film of which this is the book. As usual, as reader one either goes with the flow, enjoying this latest version of the screenplay for what it is worth as a possible picture of prehistory, or one resists in annoyance at the selectivity and papering over of cracks.

It is interesting that one reviewer of this book did not bother with Section 2 — the boring data bit — but was stimulated by the rest to write his own mini-novel of what was going on in the Neolithic (Sherratt 1994). My own approach is instead to focus on this section, picking up from the quote the authors include as the last line of the book: "books are not made to be believed, but to be subjected to enquiry" (p. 206).