

Both papers are very well presented with the objectives and study methods clearly detailed.

In 'Flint work distributions: the excavation record', Garton makes a plea for greater levels detailed recording within contexts of flint artefacts on Neolithic and Bronze Age excavations as is common on Mesolithic sites. He argues that this would allow more attempts at assemblage interpretation than at present.

Guirr et al. present an analysis of flint artefacts from a series of excavated sites in 'Flint work from Neolithic structures and contexts at Dragonby, south Humberside'.

Myers' paper, 'Lithics, risk and change in the Mesolithic, suggests that alterations in Mesolithic technology and changing settlement patterns might be responses to changes in the climate of subsistence risk in two periods centred on or around 6700 BC and 5000 BC. In a stimulating and well argued paper he uses flint assemblages from a number of Pennine sites to illustrate the hypothesis.

The last paper is by Young - 'Mesolithic-Neolithic transition in north-east England and mixed lithic scatters: a speculation. This must have generated much discussion at the conference when it was presented. Mixed assemblages containing Mesolithic material with small numbers of later arrowheads are common in the study area and the support for various explanations was canvassed. The author's conclusion was that co-existent groups of farmers and hunter gatherers might explain the assemblages.

Frances Healy's concluding paper entitled 'Afterthoughts' provides a valuable perspective in discussion of each paper. She cites comparative studies and material from both within and without the study area, so placing each contribution in the wider context of lithic studies in Britain as a whole.

The volume is a welcome addition to published sources of information on Lithic studies and will hopefully provoke wider discussion and stimulate further research both in the north-east Midlands and elsewhere.

Margaret Maher

Gräslund, B., Knutsson, K., Knutsson, H., Taffinder, J. & Stina, E. (eds). *The Interpretative Possibilities of Microwear Studies*. Uppsala: Societas Archaeologica Upsaliensis, 1990. 184 pp. £14

The eighteen papers published here represent the product of the 7th international conference of lithic use-wear analysis held in Uppsala in February 1989. I applaud the organisers' adoption of a particular theme to be addressed and the authors for complying rather than simply presenting accounts of recent research.

The book is not intended as an introduction to this particular field. Nor do the papers deal extensively with current methodologies or the controversies surrounding them (see however, Millán, Sievert and Borrás), something many will be pleased to hear.

Roger Grace neatly, in readable prose, cuts through the rather old and simplistic argument of 'high-power' (laborious and limiting) versus 'low-power' (not thorough enough) microscopy, by stepping back and redefining the questions to be asked. The concept of the greater the input, the greater the derived inference, does not have to be the case. He presents a study of sixteen

lithic artefacts, including a fine flint dagger, deposited in a British E.B.A. burial. The context, quality of material and possible implications of a microwear study justified, or rather dictated, intensive analysis, replicative and experimental work. Comparative study of two larger assemblages, for example at intra or inter site level, would be dealt with by a lower level of analysis in his three-tiered system (edge, edge-wear and microwear analysis).

This excellent first paper emphasises the need for the design of a relevant approach to each research project and refutes the use of a general methodology. Compare this to the verbose drudgery of Knutsson's 'archspeak', which only reduces the impact of an otherwise fine paper emphasising the contextual applications of microwear.

Van Gijn similarly presents a case where microwear can be used to understand archaeological problems alongside structural, floral and faunal evidence, rather than as a supplement within an interpretative process. She predicts that the question of (im)permanence of settlement at a Dutch Late Neolithic site can be approached through microwear. A model is established whereby potentially recognisable use-wear traces would be seasonally indicative e.g. the exploitation of furbearing animals (butchery, bone/hide processing) is best suited to winter.

Beyond any predictive flaws (such as storage and utilisation of resources in different seasonal activities), I find Van Gijn's lack of self confidence disappointing when her results present two interesting anomalies. The data is interpreted in the context of (read 'submissive to') the other avenues of evidence. Lack of sickle gloss is accepted as valid in the light of the palaeobotanical study. The absence of use wear evidence for fish processing is discounted due to the discovery of a fish trap rather than suggesting new interpretation, i.e. intrasite functional differentiation.

She further claims that meat, fish and plant traces may have been masked by patination and post-depositional soil movement. If this is the case one wonders why she bothered at all with her analysis; if not she is in effect destroying her assertion that microwear has an interpretive role alongside palaeobotany etc..

The establishment of a cogent theoretical framework is continued with Aldenderfer's use of Middle Range Theory, and Hayden's personal version of 'Tool Formation Processes'. The former author, working in Lowland Maya Society, berates previous lithic studies' concentration on techno-socio-economic and symbolic implications at the expense of function. His aim is to investigate possible specialised uses of tools which are already recognised as products of specialised manufacture. Yerkes also discusses this problem but gets negative results from his case study.

Aldenderfer's use of iconographic and ethnohistorical data is comparable to Hayden's extensive ethnographic research to develop his T.F.P. The effects upon chipped stone assemblages and use-wear traces associated with the production of prestige skin clothing in modern hunter-gatherer societies are applied to the European Middle and Upper Palaeolithic. The prospect of being able to deduce the social and economic importance of materials not usually preserved in the archaeological record is tantalising. Unfortunately whatever results this project gleans (and one has a feeling that via his theoretical

approach he is going to get the ones he wants) are based on far too many assumptions to have a solid basis.

To an 'outsider', some articles will smack of the 'well so what?' syndrome. Nuzhnyu's study of Ukrainian Upper Palaeolithic microliths, re: representation of different projectile forms, merely confirms what had been securely established by typology and the recovery of entirely preserved samples! Similarly Sylvie Beyries' stunning paper on four Ethiopian Acheulian implements expounds the knowledge that at various sites, in various regions, to varying degrees wood was being worked during the Lower and Middle Palaeolithic.

Annoyingly her reference to site formation processes potentially altering or destroying microwear traces, though valid, is far too vague, especially given that she quotes the extensive work undertaken by the late Irene Levi-Sala in her bibliography but does not reference it in the text.

The closest to a review is provided by Odell. One could be forgiven for not understanding all the implications and innuendos as it is presented through the fable of Brer Rabbit! (Pity the Swedes present that day - the story is totally unknown in Scandinavia). With a welcome dose of humour Odell argues the pros and cons of present methodologies in microscopic analysis (which Grace, [above] clarifies best of all). Underlying this however Odell defends his low power approach - scorned by many, not just Brer Fox - by stating its major benefit - " 'Why, we kin look at great gobs of tools, '" says Brer Rabbit (130).

This book provides a thought-provoking insight to a relatively new, rapidly developing, open and honest field imposing upon itself the need for a theoretical approach. It avoids bandwagonism, covers a wide range of projects and it is these aspects, I feel, that will attract non-participants to read the book. It is a positive, though not flawless step; my sole concern is that one is left to assume that any original post-paper discussions/criticisms have been incorporated by the authors rather than presented to the reader.

Tristan Carter

## SEMINARS

### ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA POSTGRADUATE STUDENT SEMINARS

On 27 October 1990 approximately thirty people attended a day-long series of postgraduate seminars devoted to Ancient Mesopotamia at the Institute of Archaeology (University College London). Abstracts of the five seminar topics are given below. The event, accompanied by coffee and lunch, was organised by Renuka Maden and Clemens Reichel, both Institute students. A follow-up session of similar seminars is intended to be held in Oxford in March 1991 as part of what is hoped to be a continuing series of *Ancient Mesopotamia Postgraduate Student Seminars*. These are intended to be an informal forum for the presentation and discussion of current postgraduate student research on the archaeology, languages and history of ancient Mesopotamia, up to and including the Islamic period. It is hoped that the venue of these events can rotate according to those University departments where there is sufficient interest in this subject and postgraduates who are