

Many important sites mentioned in the text are not shown on the map; not one of the Hongshan culture sites is marked.

Most readers will first of all look for the key sites of Banpo, Hemudu and Zengpiyan. They will not find them, as the convention of using archaeological site names is seldom observed on this map (for comparison, see the historical map of China issued by National Geographic in the July 1991 issue).

Since the discoveries of recent years it is now obvious that pottery was made at Neolithic sites scattered throughout China, most of them far beyond the area of the first dynasties. Since much earlier it has been equally obvious that there is a sharp contrast to be drawn between potters serving the widely dispersed farming communities, and those who came later and were held as specialists just outside the walls of China's first cities. As there is also a profound difference in the pottery, surely the Neolithic deserves its own map?

Eddie Field

Chris Knight. *Blood Relations: Menstruation and the Origins of Culture.* Yale University Press, 1991. 581pp. £40.00.

With the collapse of stalinism, palaeolithic archaeology and anthropology are the only disciplines where one is likely to hear the concept of a 'human revolution' being unabashedly entertained. The emerging consensus appears to be that we did not become 'behaviourally modern' until long after our presumed speciation in Africa between 200,000-130,000. Social anthropology, which one would have expected to have a significant input into such a debate, has been notable for its silence, preferring an entrenched isolationism.

Chris Knight has broken this silence with a model of cultural origins which is itself revolutionary. It is a Marxist model in the tradition of Engels' pamphlet *The origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, but drawing upon the methodological advances provided by sociobiology, structuralism and feminism.

It is a model already creating quite a stir making it to the front page of the *Independent* and Radio 4's 'Woman's Hour', and receiving favourable comments from a wide range of academics including Clive Gamble, Alexander Marshack, Robin Dunbar, Mary Douglas and Marilyn Strahern.

Knight argues that to understand the roots of culture, we have to start with the selfish-gene driven mating systems of the primates and the sociobiological orthodoxy that in the process of hominisation, females became an increasingly reproductively burdened sex.

Evolving Pleistocene females required support from males in provisioning their increasingly large-brained offspring. They minimised male philandering and maximised male parental investment by (a) concealing ovulation, (b) extending receptivity throughout the cycle and (c) synchronising their ovulatory cycles within local groups. Concealed ovulation forced males to stick around throughout the cycle as a condition of making a female pregnant; continuous receptivity rewarded males for staying around; synchrony prevented any dominant males from monopolising fertile consortships. If

females needed to synchronise with each other to frustrate the philandering of dominant males, they needed some external cue - a shared 'clock'. The only available one would have been the moon. Those females best able to synchronise in this way would have maximised the number of males in the mating system and the amount of parenting energy. This reasoning successfully explains women's reproductive physiology - the lack of ovulatory signals, the tendency to synchronise cycles and the average cycle length of 29.5 days. Still to be explained is women's unusually heavy and prolonged menstrual bleeding. Here, Knight gives a new twist to the above sociobiological model.

The continuous 'yes' strategy - which kept males in the vicinity of females - would have worked so long as there was adequate food in the immediate vicinity. But, if conditions became colder and drier, the provisioning of females and offspring with fat would require logistical hunting, with implied periods of sexual abstinence. Late Pleistocene females had to abandon their 'yes' strategy - but they no longer possessed the physiological 'no' signals, the anoestrus periods of their primate ancestors.

Women solved this problem by establishing menstrual bleeding as an artificial, conscious 'no' signal. Effectively, this meant that women went on a periodic lunar-scheduled sex-strike. Acting in solidarity, they would have synchronised their cycles over a wide area. With a genuine collectivity now established, 'moral' judgements were possible for the first time.

The most suitable time for women's strike would have been dark-moon. This is because the evening light supply, needed by hunters tracking game, is maximal in the period leading up to full-moon. This logic generates a binary division of time, dark-moon solidarity and full-moon honeymoon. By extending the taboo implied by menstruation to the blood of game animals when killed, women would have achieved a unitary code ensuring the distribution of sexual partners and game.

Knight's model is a return to the classic concerns of social anthropology - classificatory kinship, unilineal descent, moieties and clans, incest and exogamy rules, totemism and associated rules divorcing a hunter from his own kill. He claims that all these are best understood in terms of a unitary, universal, 'initial situation' for human culture. This 'initial situation' of 'primitive communism' was based on material abundance - the abundance of collective big-game hunting during the Upper Palaeolithic. Take away that abundance, the basis of women's solidarity, and men could begin to retain women as permanent sexual and economic partners - as 'wives'. But, the legitimisation of this 'counter-revolution' has to operate within the existing ritual/symbolic syntax, reversing meanings in accordance with new political realities. He assembles an impressive array of ethnographic material testifying to the resilience of this syntax.

Probably the least satisfying parts of the book are the chapters concerned with the archaeology of this hypothesised 'human revolution' which Knight places ca. 45,000BP. However, this weakness has as much to do with the uncertainties within the field concerning the behaviour of Neanderthals, early and late anatomically moderns, as with Knight's reading of Middle/Upper Palaeolithic transition.

Strauss' 'exchanges of women' theory, has social anthropology come forward with a theory of cultural origins. What makes Knight's materialist model particularly significant is that it is unique in directly addressing the symbolic domain.

The comment of Robin Dunbar, reader in biological anthropology at UCL, seems an appropriate evaluation: 'Revolutions in science seldom appear ready made . . . but I suspect that the basis of a new synthesis between anthropology and biology may well lie within the pages of this book'.

Ian Watts

Collins, D. and Lorimer, D. (eds). *Excavation at the Mesolithic site on West Heath, Hampstead 1976-1981*. Oxford. British Archaeological Reports 217. 1989, (Printed 1991). 138pp. £13.00.

West Heath was first discovered in 1973 when a member of the Hendon and District Archaeological Society (HEDAS) collected a number of flint blades from a sandstone bluff near the Leg of Mutton pond on Hampstead Heath. Continued collection revealed a potentially important Mesolithic site which was undergoing erosion prompting excavation by HEDAS in 1976. This monograph presents the results of the first years of ongoing work at the site.

The work centres on two complementary sites - the 'main' site and the spring (spa) site. The 'main' site yielded a large assemblage of flint tools and debitage, some non-flint material and possible surface features of early Mesolithic date. The acid nature of the sandy soil here prevented the preservation of organic remains other than charcoal and, for this reason, the spa site was opened up in a waterlogged area 300 metres to the south-east with the aim of recovering palaeoenvironmental data. The spa site yielded important sequences of insects, pollen and macroscopic plant remains, albeit with virtually no artifactual material.

HEDAS have to be congratulated for undertaking methodical and controlled excavation, with three-dimensional recording of both finds and surface features. Post-excavation work was very much a team effort, but the report does not suffer from presentational problems often encountered with multiple authors.

Collins notes that the main purpose of the report is to 'record the salient features. . . of the flint artifacts'. In this sense the report succeeds; the assemblage is well described and illustrated with extensive use of distribution diagrams and tables. Lithic specialists may be disappointed with the short coverage of the flints, although one certainly grasps the salient features. References are often made to fuller data in the site archives and one hopes that such will eventually be published.

The assemblage resembles a 'classic' Maglemosian typology, e.g. obliquely blunted points outnumber geometrics by at least 10:1. Microliths dominate the entire assemblage, although enough scrapers, microburins, cores and waste flakes exist to justify calling the site functionally 'balanced' in Mellars' sense. Distributional diagrams indicate no convincing clustering of artifact types. Rejoined material indicated horizontal movement of 3-10 metres and some vertical sorting. This, and the lack of stratigraphy, leaves the