

CYRILLE BILLARD, FRANÇOISE BOSTYN, CAROLINE HAMON & KATIA MEUNIER. *L'habitat du néolithique ancien de Colombelles 'Le Lazzaro' (Calvados)*. 2014. (Mémoires de la Société Préhistorique Française 58). 408 pages, numerous colour and b&w illustrations. Paris: Société Préhistorique Française; 978-2913745575 paperback €40.



This volume presents the results from the excavations at Colombelles 'Le Lazzaro', a *Linearbandkeramik* (LBK) site north of Caen, France, very close to the shores of the Channel. This anomalous location, far to the west of the main distribution of that culture, has ensured that this publication has been eagerly awaited. It is to the credit of the French system of rescue excavation (by INRAP and local archaeological services) that the site was not only investigated to the highest standard

(including systematic sieving), but that post-excavation was extremely thorough and that the publication explicitly aims to answer ambitious research questions that follow from the site's notable geographical location. How well does Colombelles fit into the cultural norms of the Paris Basin LBK (the RRB)? Is there a persistence of traditions, or an adaptation to local conditions, fusion with Mesolithic populations and ultimately dissolution of the LBK cultural canon? How was the site organised and the environment exploited? Did people make use of the nearby sea? What were contact networks like, both with possible indigenous peoples and with other Neolithic communities? Did Colombelles' inhabitants make use of the many diverse stone and mineral resources of the area? And finally, how do funerary practices develop here, where collective burial was later to become the norm?

As the site has badly suffered from erosion and decalcification processes, it was not always possible to address all these questions directly (for example, bone was not sufficiently preserved for isotopic approaches to dietary reconstruction). The authors of the individual chapters, however, make the most of the material at their disposal, devoting particular attention to the *chaînes opératoires* of tool production and use for which the French research tradition is rightly famed. Houses and burials are introduced first, and the complex issue of dating the burials (many of which have returned Bronze Age radiocarbon dates) is well handled. Habitation units had to be reconstructed through artefact refits, as virtually no postholes survived. The presentation of the different artefact groups takes up the bulk of the volume. Pottery was not preserved sufficiently to reconstruct production processes in detail or to develop a seriation (although few will miss the arcane discussions on motif structure that would otherwise inevitably have followed at this point). Despite some local peculiarities, however, the decoration fits well into the RRB canon and supports a smooth development to the following Villeneuve-Saint-Germain (VSG) culture, rather than a coexistence of the two, as others have controversially claimed.

Petrographic analyses were also carried out. Flint provisioning is strictly regional and interestingly ignores the plentiful sources of the Paris Basin. A nuanced discussion of the complexities of identifying 'Mesolithic' and 'Neolithic' knapping techniques and products is also offered. The use of both flint and other stone tools is extensively discussed, and it is instructive to see the variety of functions that close attention to rubbing and grinding tools can reveal. Interesting points here are the local production of colourants and the fact that raw materials for stone bracelets and beads had been imported from distant sources in southern France or Spain, prefiguring patterns that would become current in the VSG. Cereals and charcoal are also investigated, and a micromorphological assessment of selected pit fills reveals their complex taphonomic history—a point still all too often neglected in the wider literature.

The following interpretive section begins with spatial patterns. It identifies a possible pioneer phase in the centre of the site, with later houses to the north and south. Limited task differences between households are also possible. This is followed by the overall synthesis: although Colombelles is in

many ways still a 'classic' RRB settlement, contacts with the Paris Basin may have been ruptured and the Mediterranean connection rose in importance. This prefigures developments to come, but while they were obviously present, indigenous Mesolithic populations are not accorded the leading role in this process. Indeed, the discussion on Mesolithic-Neolithic interactions is particularly well balanced, and the authors succeed in showing the importance of Colombelles for addressing the interaction of the RRB with other cultural traditions in this area. One must query the idea—based on radiocarbon dates—that despite the fuzziness introduced by the calibration plateau, the settlement of Colombelles may have begun particularly early, especially since no formal statistical models are offered (a date list is included, however).

The one slightly disappointing aspect is that in spite of the ambitious questions set, wider debates outside France are hardly referenced at all. For example, the idea of a 'crisis' at the end of the LBK is not limited to French archaeologists, but the international controversy is not referenced, nor are the much broader debates that surround diversity and uniformity (particularly evident in the discussion of burial rites at Colombelles) or the recent resurgence of 'migrationist' models on the basis of genetic evidence, to name but the most obvious examples. This is also reflected in the literature cited, which includes very few references to material in languages other than French and/or on LBK regions beyond France and Belgium. Non-French speakers will also find the German and English summaries a little short.

Of course, it is not the primary purpose of an excavation monograph to tackle all the major current research issues—it is simply that the high goals the authors have set themselves could have been pushed a little further by looking beyond the region. In all other respects, this is a hugely satisfying volume. The authors have clearly made the most of their material and the site is very well contextualised in the archaeology of the area and the regional developmental sequence. The book is lavishly illustrated and there are appendices with additional detail, especially on the lithics and the animal bone. Most significantly, it provides much-needed food (and data) for thought on the complexities of the Mesolithic-Neolithic and LBK-post-LBK transitions. For all that, the price tag is highly affordable, and the book is warmly recommended.

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HANS-ÅKE NORDSTRÖM. *The West Bank Survey from Faras to Gemai I: sites of Early Nubian, Middle Nubian and Pharaonic Age* (British Archaeological Reports International series 2650; Sudan Archaeological Research Society 21). xviii+178 pages, 262 b&w illustrations. 2014. Oxford: Archaeopress; 978-1-4073-1289-7 paperback £36.



The UNESCO-sponsored International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia was launched

in 1960 to document as much as possible of the archaeological landscape of Lower Nubia (partly in modern Sudan, partly in Egypt) before the lake rising behind the Aswan High Dam obliterated all traces of the past. Publication of the data produced by the many teams that undertook work as part of the campaign has been ongoing since the 1960s. The volume under review is the last of three documenting the sites surveyed from 1960–1964 under agreement between the Sudan Antiquities Service and UNESCO on the west bank of the Nile along the 40km stretch between Faras and Gemai, northern Sudan. The two previously published volumes present sites of the Meroitic and Ballaṅa Age (Adams 2004) and the Christian Age (Adams 2005); this final volume deals with earlier sites of Nubian and Pharaonic date. The fieldwork was directed by William Adams; Nordström, the author of the present volume, was a principal member of the team.

The volume is divided into seven chapters: an introduction; a description of terminology and classifications of ceramic fabrics and vessel forms (with references to fuller descriptions in previous publications); catalogues of Early Nubian, Middle Nubian and Pharaonic New Kingdom sites; a catalogue of miscellaneous (essentially undated) sites; and a very brief discussion of wider context. There are also appendices listing catalogued objects, organised by date, and an extensive although not comprehensive set of black and white plates. An Arabic abstract is also provided. The meat of this book is the presentation of the data, arranged by site, in the three period-based

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