As the title suggests, this is an ambitious book, which many well-established authorities have avoided tackling due to the complexities and difficulties of interpreting the record. The last serious work was the landmark volume by Roebroeks and van Kolfschoten in 1995 with a wide range of contributions by the experts of the day. Since then the debates have moved forward, dating improved, the number of sites increased and as a result the questions have become ever more complex. It is certainly a brave person who ventures alone into this twilight world and expects to emerge unscathed.

The opening chapters discuss the four main aims of the volume, which are to assess: 1. The long v. short chronologies; 2. in situ evolution v. dispersal; 3. continuity v. discontinuity in occupation; and 4. the broader technological repertoires as represented by Mode 1 and Mode 2 assemblages. These chapters are well researched with clearly framed questions and they provide a solid theoretical background from which to proceed, presenting the current state of knowledge.

Chapter 6 introduces the database. The initial fields comprise the standard categories of location, dating, lithic technology, fauna and hominin remains, but to these are added a wide range of additional data (manuports; symbolic representation; use of bone, fire and wood; spatial organisation; shelters; hafting and artificial pavements). The list is comprehensive, but even at this stage, one worries about the quality of this evidence. The following chapter introduces the sites with an initial list of 352. The list is produced from available publications, which in the case of England is heavily biased towards the Thames valley as Wymer (1968) is the primary source, rather than the broader coverage provided by The English Rivers Palaeolithic Survey (TERPS; see Wymer 1998). The original database is whittled down to a more manageable 108, with the reduction largely made by omitting sites with insecure dating or in many cases a lack of publication in English. I empathise with the difficulties of reading foreign languages, but surely they can’t be ignored when discussing the whole of Europe and inevitably introduces the danger of having a geographic bias to the selection.

Some of the sites that are omitted are hard to understand; where for example is Mesvin IV in Belgium, St Acheul, St Pierre les Elbeuf and La Celle in France, or Highlands Farm, Hitchin and Elveden in England? There are also some curious sites included. For example Wivenhoe in Essex, consists of two ‘undiagnostic flakes’ from the undated, but possibly MIS 13 Wivenhoe Gravel. Elsewhere Purfleet bed 1 is included, although consisting of a few, generally heavily rolled, flakes. Quality control is also lacking for the continental sites. La Belle-Roche in Belgium, Karlich Levels Ba and A in Germany, Vallonet in France and Prézletice in the Czech Republic are included, although their artefactual character has been questioned (Roebroeks & van Kolfschoten 1995). The dating is also sometimes awry, so Hoxne for example is given as MIS 9, rather than MIS 11 (Ashton et al. 2008)

The main bulk of chapter 7 introduces an interesting way in which this type of evidence can be assessed to reflect behavioural complexity. Each category is graded according to the various levels of planning depth represented and given scores of 0–10. For example, the use of wood could be graded 1–5, with grade 1 simply being use-wear from wood on stone tools to grade 5 being wooden tools designed to a specific shape with evidence of other complex technology. The spears from Schöningen would fall into this category where there is a replicated design and projectile technology is also suggested. A different example is the use of fire, where grade 1 would be presence of fire, but most parsimoniously explained as of natural origins, whereas grade 5 would be structured hearths as...
suggested at Ménez-Drégan in Brittany or Beeches Pit in Suffolk (both scored 9.5). This methodology certainly provides a novel way to assess complexity and the chapter also provides useful summaries of the various categories of evidence from some of the sites.

There are, however, further questions of quality control. One example is the evidence of hafting. Whether there is evidence for this at all is debatable, although there are serious claims from Schöningen. However, the two notches noted by Reid Moir on a handaxe from the MIS 13 site of Warren Hill as evidence for hafting must surely be treated with extreme suspicion. This evidence, though, is scored as 5.5, compared to the zero for virtually all other sites. Equally, the ‘naturally pointed sticks’ (page 133) at Stoke Newington were also scored as 5.5, while the evidence of ‘shelters’ at Hoxne was given 9.5. The accumulations of pebbles and bones are suggested to be the support for posts. However, they are almost certainly a natural lag, where in slow-flowing water a large pebble can sink into the substrate, creating a slight hollow, which acts as a capture point for other clasts. A similar process can be seen on sandy beaches today (see Schick 1986).

There is the further question of whether some of the categories actually reflect complexity of behaviour. For example, one of the categories is the range of lithic raw materials that were used. Sites such as Boxgrove, despite having other evidence of complex behaviour, would score low on this count due to the abundance of good quality flint on the doorstep. Sites without such luxuries, where there might be reliance on a variety of materials in local stream beds, such as at Miesenheim I, would score much higher. This does not reflect complexity of behaviour.

Despite some of the issues with the database, does it provide a means of interrogating the four questions posed at the start of the volume? With the question of the long versus short chronology, there are some obvious problems by the inclusion of sites that had been dismissed by Roebroeks and Kolfshoten in 1995 (see above). Without any direct reassessment of the contentious sites, the discussion here remains a reflection of the current and past literature, rather than providing a new insight on the debate. Most workers now accept a sporadic Early Pleistocene occupation of southern and occasionally north-west Europe, with a much more sustained occupation from MIS 13 (see for example Dennell 2003; Roebroeks 2006; Ashton & Lewis 2012). Ling in fact argues for a more complex interpretation, with five phases of occupation, three of these being prior to MIS 13. However, the paucity of the evidence and the inclusion of contentious sites make such a deduction highly questionable.

This interpretation of five phases relates to the similar second and third questions about whether there was in situ evolution or a series of dispersals and whether there was biological continuity. These are addressed through evidence of continuity from the various identified technologies and behaviours (e.g. use of wood, bone, fire, shelters and lithic transport distances) and whether their increase in complexity can be related to biological species. Using this data the earlier phases (prior to MIS 13) are argued to show discontinuity, whereas Ling suggests evidence for continuity between MIS 13 to MIS 10. Again the evidence is slim and relies on one or two sites that may date to MIS 12 and 10 in northern Europe. The most convincing of these is Cagny la Garenne which does seem to be associated with a cool, interstadial-type climate, in MIS 12. However, this does not show continuity in the occupation of northern Europe. Although the data shows an increase in behavioural complexity from MIS 13, Ling is reluctant to relate this to the arrival of Homo heidelbergensis, who she argues first made an appearance in Europe in MIS 15. She therefore, and perhaps quite rightly, argues for in situ development of new technologies as H. heidelbergensis adapted to Europe.

The final question relates to Mode 1 and Mode 2 technologies. One problem here is the attribution of sites, where assemblage size for example is not considered, or where raw materials may preclude the easy production of handaxes. The use of the simple Mode system also conceals the much greater complexity in the lithic record and therefore is unhelpful for discussing behavioural complexity or indeed cultural relationships and identities. However, as Ling clearly demonstrates, the consideration of other technologies and behaviours does
indicate few differences between sites associated with Mode 1 and Mode 2 technologies. This is a useful conclusion and should be borne in mind when discussing old debates such as the Clactonian v. Acheulian.

Overall, the author should be congratulated for drawing together an impressive range of data, although this has to be balanced against the inclusion of some dubious sites and occasional errors in information. The methods used are also interesting and with better quality control could form the basis for future analyses. The twilight world of Pleistocene Europe is not an easy place to walk, but this author has survived, albeit not unscathed.

Nick Ashton

REFERENCES


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This book is a report on the work of the Namibia Palaeolithic Field Research Project (NAMPAL often written as Nampal) from its inception in 2002 to 2010. Focusing on the Zebra River region of Namibia the project aimed to identify areas of surface material suitable for more detailed study. Hardakers goals are commendable, I feel sure the sheer quantity of stone tools now on the surface in Africa far outweighs that discovered in excavations the world over, and he is virtually unique in trying to establish methods for tapping this invaluable resource (although see Markofsky & Bevan 2011; Underhill 2012).

The report is divided into six sections, following the preliminaries, covering the landscape, archaeological overview, analytical methods, fieldwork studies, interpretation of the finds and conclusions; although in reading the report feels like it is in two different parts, background and methods, and data and interpretation. In fairness Hardaker does acknowledge this and points to the problem of ordering complementary narratives, something that is an issue in work that demands detailed background knowledge from the reader, and additionally develops new methodologies. However, the supply of this necessary background information is actually scattered throughout the work, often after it has already been invoked as justification for important conclusions, including the entire description of a clast movement experiment that is not detailed until page 141, half way through the interpretation section. More problematically Hardaker makes important but sweeping claims whilst not presenting any justification for several pages. The later division of data and interpretation seems ill advised, creating confusion and enhancing the appearance of circular arguments.