

BOOK AND CONFERENCE REVIEWS

FROOM, R. 2012. *THE MESOLITHIC OF THE KENNET VALLEY*.

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This book is the second of Froom's publications reporting the results of his excavations of Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic sites in the Kennet Valley. The first of these, *Late Glacial Long Blade Sites in the Kennet Valley*, was published in 2005, this volume, the larger of the two, focuses on the Mesolithic. This book is the result of five decades of work on the early prehistory of the Kennet Valley, during which some 50 Mesolithic sites have been identified: Froom's archaeological career spans work with Douglas Connah, with John Wymer and the Newbury Museum Research group at Thatcham, through excavations on a series of sites in the Kennet, focusing on the Wawcott and Kintbury areas, with students from St Bartholomew's Grammar School, where he worked as a chemistry teacher. This tells: the volume shines through with the detailed knowledge of an area and its archaeology that only several decades of meticulous research can produce.

Froom's Mesolithic work displays the same features as his Long Blade analyses, a highly rigorous approach to lithic analysis which can serve as a model for analysis of sites of this date. To be able to pursue this approach across so many sites, several of which have yielded very large assemblages, is truly remarkable. To add to this Froom has undertaken a considerable amount of refitting, and he has also examined the numerous important, but unpublished (or minimally published) collections from the Kennet, such as Marsh Benham, the Mud Hole and Victoria Park, excavated by others, making this an extremely valuable resource for all scholars of the Mesolithic.

The book focuses in the main on the analysis on some of the more extensively excavated sites: the early Mesolithic Wawcott XXX and the late Mesolithic Wawcott XXIII, Wawcott I and Avington VI with a reprise of the earlier published site of Wawcott III (Froom 1976). These are set within the context of smaller excavations undertaken by Froom himself, and

previous work undertaken by other individuals. The former focuses in two main areas: the Wawcott/Kintbury area (Wawcott I–XXX) and to the west, the Avington area. To these are added some discussions of the cluster of sites on the edge of Newbury itself (Greenham Diary Farm/Faraday Road and Victoria Park), and of the Thatcham complex to the east (Thatcham I–V, Sewage Works, Mud Hole, etc.) allowing for a detailed picture of the occupation of different zones of the Kennet Valley to appear.

Wawcott XXX, Froom's main early Mesolithic excavation, is an important site for the region, as it is one of the first where a modern analysis, including refitting, has been possible. These analyses have permitted a detailed glimpse into the lives of the inhabitants and the tasks they undertook there. The site is composed of several lithic scatters, all focused on different activities. Froom's analysis gives a sense of tasks associated with each scatter: Concentration 3 for example was focused on the manufacture and discard of microliths; concentration 4 on the production of axes and the use of and repair of burins (the blanks of some of which were made at concentration 3). With this exception, refits between scatters are rare or absent, probably indicating repeated occupation of the same place, a common feature in the Kennet Valley.

Wawcott XXX is unusual in the Upper Kennet Valley in having reasonable quantities of faunal remains preserved. It is also unusual in the wide range of species represented, which is more analogous to sites such as Star Carr than those in the Kennet. This may have a chronological component: Froom suggests on the basis of blade length that Wawcott XXX is one of the earlier sites in the region. Further dating of this site would be intriguing as the current dates of $10,960 \pm 100$ BP and 6130 ± 100 BP do not seem to match the microlithic component. Further dating also might throw light on an interesting pattern noted by Froom, the presence of a small cluster of unpatinated

microliths at the site that may post-date the main assemblage.

Froom points out a broader pattern arising from his analysis of the early Mesolithic of the region: the homogeneity of the early Mesolithic microlith assemblages in the Kennet. With the exception of the patinated series at Thatcham, these are all classic Deepcar types (Radley & Mellars 1964), with slender obliquely blunted and part-edged points, some with retouch on the leading edge, and the occasional bitruncated piece and large triangle. From perusing his excellent illustrations, some assemblages seem more homogenous than others (Wawcott XXXIII and Sheridan's collection from Marsh Benham) others less so (Greenham Dairy Farm, for example). Given the fact that these sites are all likely to be palimpsests of some form, these very minor differences possibly have some chronological component that is currently difficult to elucidate. However the broader point of homogeneity holds. This returns us I think to a point originally made by Jacobi (1978) in the context of the Mesolithic of Sussex: that we seem to find clusters of Mesolithic sites within particular regions with very similar microlithic components. Froom's point perhaps tells us something about the nature of early Mesolithic landscape occupation, with 'persistent places' (Barton *et al.* 1995) revisited for several generations before being finally abandoned.

For the late Mesolithic Froom presents three sites in detail: Wawcott XXIII, Wawcott I and Avington VI, with a reprise of the previously published Wawcott III. These sites immediately show a contrast with the early Mesolithic in this region. Here we have places that appear to have been repeatedly reoccupied and that have generated large, high-density lithic assemblages. Over 100,000 lithic were recovered from Wawcott III with average lithic densities of 3000 pieces per square yard; this is in contrast to the early Mesolithic sites where Froom suggests densities are more usually in the region of 30 per square yard. In addition, these sites have evidence, in the form of different microlith types, for revisits over millennia. The wide variety of microlith types encountered at both Wawcott III and Wawcott XXIII, spanning basally modified forms to scalene triangles with three retouched sides and small crescents (the latter two forms

probably represented by the single radiocarbon dates from each site of 6120 ± 134 and 6079 ± 113 respectively) is likely to represent repeated occupation over around three millennia. In the late Mesolithic (or to be more precise from the end of the early Mesolithic, given the presence of Horsham material) the nature of landscape occupation appears to have changed, from shifting occupation within a small area in the early Mesolithic to repeated occupation of the same place in the late.

The Mesolithic of southern England is in general poorly understood, with little written on the region since Roger Jacobi's synthetic articles of the late 1970s and early 1980s. This has begun to change with knowledge of the Mesolithic of the Thames tributaries in particular increasing in the last two decades, mainly through developer-funded work. Of these tributaries, the Kennet is now by far the best known, initially through the work of John Wymer and the Newbury Museum group, and more recently through developer-funded excavations (Healy *et al.* 1990; Ellis *et al.* 2003) and doctoral projects (Chisham 2004; Overton 2014). With the addition of Froom's work the Kennet Valley can reclaim its rightful place as a rival to the Vale of Pickering, both in the quantity of the work done there and the richness of its archaeology.

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MUNNERY, TOM. 2014. LATE UPPER PALAEOLITHIC/EARLY MESOLITHIC, ROMAN AND SAXON DISCOVERIES AT FETCHAM NEAR LEATHERHEAD. SPOILHEAP OCCASIONAL PAPER 4.

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This monograph edited by Tom Munnery from the Surrey County Archaeological Unit presents the results of excavation at Cobham Road, Fetcham, an interesting site in Surrey exhibiting several occupations spanning from the Terminal Palaeolithic to the Anglo-Saxon period. This review uniquely focuses on Chapter 1 of the book that is dedicated to the prehistoric occupations of the site and especially the Upper Palaeolithic/Early Mesolithic occupation(s). This study is particularly interesting because of the scarcity of the Terminal Palaeolithic sites in the UK and indeed the general rarity of these sites in western Europe.

The Cobham Road assemblage is particularly unusual because of the presence in the same lithic assemblage of both a blade industry with Terminal Palaeolithic characteristics associated with microliths made by the microburin technique, usually found only in Early Mesolithic assemblages. It is not always clear how the author considers this issue. Most of the time he seems to consider this assemblage to be transitional. Sometimes he seems to consider these two periods, very different in many ways, as a whole. In the conclusion he however suggests the eventuality of a palimpsest. Even if the last hypothesis appears to me to be the more probable regarding the context of the site, this debate is particularly interesting in the perspective of the understanding of the Palaeolithic/Mesolithic transition in northwestern Europe.

In the first sections of the chapter the author presents the history of research, the geological and archaeological background of this part of Surrey, the methodology of the excavation, the stratigraphy of the site and describes the various archaeological components and features identified. As well as the Anglo-Saxon cemetery studied in Chapter 2 of the book and the Upper Palaeolithic/Early Mesolithic occupation(s) of the gridded area, the excavation highlighted Late Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman testimonies. It is regrettable that the stratigraphy section is not more developed. This is a very important point, especially in the key question of determining if the “Upper Palaeolithic/Early Mesolithic” assemblage is the result of a transitional site or a palimpsest mixing several late Pleistocene/early Holocene occupations. The stratigraphy seems to be highly perturbed by biological and frost action. If, as suggested by the author, these taphonomic processes did not affect too much the spatial organisation of the site, these processes could have very much perturbed the vertical distribution of artefacts belonging to different prehistoric occupations, especially those that are very close chronologically such as with Terminal Palaeolithic and Early Mesolithic occupations. It is thus essential to evaluate these perturbations in order to discuss the homogeneity of the lithic assemblage. The development of micromorphology studies, fabric studies, simple x/z projections and even just refittings, essential on any Palaeolithic