

VAN GIJN, A. 2010. *FLINT IN FOCUS: LITHIC BIOGRAPHIES IN THE NEOLITHIC AND BRONZE AGE*. SIDESTONE PRESS, LEIDEN.

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In *Flint in Focus*, Annelou Van Gijn creates an alternate narrative for understanding Dutch prehistory, develops a clear methodological approach to lithic analysis that incorporates interpretative tools from social theory alongside more traditional approaches to use-wear studies and provides a guide for the future of Dutch use-wear research and for flint studies in the larger region.

Chapters 1–3 provide an overview of the project, Van Gijn's methodology and the material analysed. Van Gijn situates her research within the usually separate spheres of materiality theory and microscopic use-wear analysis with the intent of providing an alternate avenue for understanding Dutch later prehistory. She notes a particular focus on understanding both the role of flint and flint tools in the Neolithisation process and the process by which flint 'declined' in the metal ages. She makes her biographical approach explicit in her methodology by focusing on three stages in the life of flint tools: conception (collection of raw material), birth (manufacture technique and typology) and life (functional analysis). Her methodology is characterised by a careful integration of social theory and technological analysis. She also provides an excellent, succinct and clearly useful guide to use-wear analysis, emphasising the importance of experimentation and the difficulty of overcoming preconceived ideas of how prehistoric tools were used. The two databases of flint tools which Van Gijn studied comprise, first, a record of ca. 45,000 flints from prehistoric sites (largely settlements) dating from the Mesolithic through the Middle Bronze Age and, second, a collection of flints from museum collections deriving from 'special' find contexts, such as hoards and burials.

In chapters 4–7, Van Gijn delves into the various uses of flint tools in later prehistory based on the find context, macro- and microscopic use-wear traces and extensive experimentation as well as research into materiality. The focus of Chapter 4 is subsistence activities, primarily the process of

Neolithisation and the role of lithic industries and specific raw materials in this process, as demonstrated by the apparent specialness of arrowheads and sickles in many periods. However, Van Gijn also makes sure to point out that flint tools played only a small role in subsistence activities and large aspects of food processing, in particular fish processing, are nearly invisible when study is limited to the flint assemblage. In Chapter 5, Van Gijn discusses the roles of flint tools in craft activities such as hide and fibre processing, woodworking and the production of bone and antler objects, and notes regional differences between crafting activities in upland and wetland areas as well as temporal shifts in contacts from central and western Europe to Scandinavia. While most of the crafts are discussed at some length, lithic working is addressed in two paragraphs and concerns only the rejuvenation of querns, rather than the stone shafthole axes characteristic of the later Neolithic. Chapter 6 comprises an extensive discussion of the ways in which flint tools are both reflect and participate in identity creation at different periods in Dutch later prehistory. Consequently, it provides a categorical discussion of flint working from each major culture group and period from the Mesolithic to the Iron Age with a level of detail that might have been more useful to the reader if positioned before the discussion of subsistence and craft activities rather than after. She suggests that a number of flint tools — e.g. axes, sickles and arrowheads — were invested with greater stylistic and social information because they were primarily used outside the immediate community sphere at the interfaces of different social groups. In Chapter 7, Van Gijn discusses the use of flint in ritual activities, such as the frequent inclusion of harvesting and hunting tools in votive depositions and burial assemblages and the use of fire to destroy or alter flint objects prior to deposition. To discuss changes and continuities in practice from the Middle Neolithic to the Bronze Age, she looks in great detail at Scandinavian flint axes and French and Scandinavian flint daggers. She

demonstrates a shift from depositing unused axes to depositing both used and unused ones in the earlier third millennium; and she notes parallel use-wear on earlier and later third millennium daggers which she believes went unused except as display objects. Both axes and daggers were rendered significant in part because of their foreign origin and in part because of their superb craftsmanship.

Chapter 8 addresses the decline of flint as a quotidian and symbolic raw material for tools from the beginning of the second millennium to the middle of the first. Van Gijn argues that while most flint objects lost their ability to communicate outside the community, ad hoc flint tools remained in use throughout the Bronze Age and specific flint objects, often originating elsewhere (i.e. earlier Bronze Age flint daggers and later Bronze Age 'sickles' actually used to cut turfs), retained an ability to signal affiliation and prestige between social groups.

Flint in Focus is a well produced book with few errors in the text, and the occasional idiosyncratic word serves to remind the reader how fluent and clear Van Gijn's English is throughout. However, if there is a weakness in the book it rests in the illustrations. While most are clear, i.e. the black-and-white photographs of use traces, the colour photographs are of variable quality, some so dark that whole axes are obscured, others so washed out that the

edges of flint daggers are invisible. A handful of drawings are so sketchy and poorly reproduced that they clearly should have been redrawn prior to publication. Further, one or two reconstruction drawings are so impressionistic that the flint tools being used could not be clearly distinguished. Finally, while the title claims the book will present "lithic biographies in the Neolithic and Bronze Age", the words 'in the Netherlands' ought to have been appended. Although Van Gijn makes notable efforts to link developments in the Dutch area to developments elsewhere in Europe (e.g. regarding the function of French flint 'daggers'), in many cases, such as with much of the evidence for the LBK, the sheer amount of Dutch data to discuss precludes attempts to contrast flint usage within the Netherlands to practises elsewhere. Despite these few flaws, *Flint in Focus* is an extremely rich and carefully documented discussion of three millennia of Dutch flint tools, their practical uses and social meanings. Moreover, it is peppered with asides, footnotes and short sections in which Van Gijn notes the limits of her own knowledge and suggests specific projects and more general avenues for future research; in this way it is not just a summary of 20 years research, but a roadmap for the next 20.

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