

# Besprechungen

## Vorgeschichte

Oliver Rück, *Neue Aspekte und Modelle in der Siedlungsforschung zur Bandkeramik. Die Siedlung Weisweiler 111 auf der Aldenhovener Platte, Kr[eis] Düren*. Publisher Marie Leidorf, Rahden 2007. 318 pages, 158 figures, 82 tables, 1 list, 17 plates.

In the descriptive part of the book where the finds and features of the Weisweiler 111 Bandkeramik settlement are discussed, emphases are on the deviations from normal expectations regarding the Bandkeramik (Linearbandkeramik, Linear Pottery culture), and not too covertly so. Thus, hardly any of the eighteen recognizable houses (probably dating from almost the full Bandkeramik span) conforms to standards: several show bulging walls, others front or back parts which do not align to the central axis in some cases, once an annex is suggested by a set of small postholes, and more. It is not only in the realm of house construction, but also in the sphere of ceramics (and probably that of flint working, too; having no expertise there I shall pass by the latter) that Weisweiler 111 is, according to Rück, rather exceptional among Bandkeramik inventories. I suggest that its excavation is quite exceptional, too, as the Bandkeramik data were collected as by-products of the investigation of a Metal Age site on the very same location. I infer that the author did not take part in the excavation, and, thus, he is not to blame for the relatively tiny data base. So eighty-seven, or less than twelve percent, of the Bandkeramik features visible on the plans have been cut, resulting in forty-nine cross sections only, and less than half of those (thirty-five) yielding sufficient sherds for statistical and chronological evaluation, leaving most houses without such indicators.

In such circumstances one is tempted to expand on the data that are at hand, and Rück has valiantly (and rightly, I would add) accepted that challenge. He brings in evidence from houses in other, larger and better excavated contemporary settlements. This provides an occasion for him to try out novel and sometimes wild ideas, the most salient of which merit further discussion. These include the improbability of the farm yard pat-

tern or ›Hofplatzmodell‹, the numbers of occupants of the houses, and, by implication, the total of inhabitants in the settlements, the construction of Bandkeramik houses on piles rather than on ground-level, the line-like plan of such villages, and, finally, contacts between the Aldenhoven Region and the Paris Basin as indicated by corresponding house plans and details of ceramic decoration. Wild ideas, welcome!

The so-called farm yard pattern (Hofplatzmodell) has found ample acceptance among Bandkeramik students soon after it had been developed in the wake of the Aldenhovener Platte excavations. Briefly, the area of a settlement can be divided into a small number of yards (Hofplätze) on each of which farm houses were built to replace one another successively. Considering the starting and ending years of several settlements, the average replacement interval was calculated at some twenty to twenty-five years, and this space of time was dubbed ›house generation‹. Fifteen such house generations can be defined for the Bandkeramik period, and, based on this definition, a sharper resolution of the data could be established, much better than previous periodizations had allowed. Rück rejects the presumption of a relatively rapid replacement of the houses, as in several instances repairs can be noted in the house plans, or even extensions. Additionally, he argues that construction was expensive in terms of man power. Therefore, Bandkeramik houses may have stood for about a century, considering the durability of oak timber and recent reconstructions of such houses in archaeological parks. However, even as a technical argument this does not stand up to the facts: in the Oerlinghausen reconstruction (H. Luley in: *Experimentelle Archäologie. Arch. Mitt. Nordwestdeutschl., Beih. 4* [Oldenburg 1990] 31–44, also referred to by Rück) it is the roof that severely suffers from rot and moss growth damaging the girders and ridge poles, while the walls are threatened by humidity percolating from the subsoil. Of course, repairs could do much to alleviate these problems, but when the houses had stood for one hundred years indeed, the number of villagers would have trebled or

quadrupled, and where would they procure their food (cp. C. C. Bakels, *Four Linearbandkeramik settlements and their environment. A palaeo-ecological study of Sittard, Stein, Elsloo and Hienheim. Analecta Praehist. Leidensia* 11, 1978; J. Lüning, *Steinzeitliche Bauern in Deutschland. Die Landwirtschaft im Neolithikum [Bonn 2000]*)?

More serious, though, is Rück's silent by-passing of social imperatives as possible causes for abandonment of dwellings earlier than technically necessary. Succession, or rather social succession on the yard may have been signalled by the construction of a new house for the new *pater familias*, leaving the old in their old house. A replacement rate of twenty to twenty-five years accords rather well with the duration of generations in neolithic circumstances, allowing for a Bandkeramian life span of about forty years. If the old people lived beyond these forty years they had to continue repairing and upkeeping their old house; this complies with Rück's and others' observations of repairs which would fit into the Hofplatzmodell. As far as I am aware, nobody has ever claimed that succession or replacement implies momentaneous destruction of the existing house, with one exception: the type 1a houses. The Hofplatz scenario would not wildly inflate the population size and so seriously threaten sustainability.

On the number of people per house. Usually, the number of inhabitants of a house is either estimated from its surface area (ethnographically set at about ten square metres per person), or from assumptions about the type of household once inhabiting the house (ethnographically and ethnologically an extended family of four to seven adults). For Bandkeramik houses the first approach comes up with the problem which surface area is to be referred to: the whole house, or the central part only. If the second approach is taken, its result coincides nicely with an estimate based on the Bandkeramik houses' central part (forty to seventy square meters). Rück, instead, brings in longhouses in other cultures as possible parallels to the Bandkeramik buildings, and puts the figure of inhabitants per house to thirty or more (pp. 146; 247). Such longhouses, though, tend to have a separate room for each family; see, for example, G. Buschan, *Illustrierte Völkerkunde I (Stuttgart 1922)* 106, on the Irokese referred to, but not referenced by Rück. The excavated Bandkeramik houses at Weisweiler III and elsewhere do only occasionally show a subdivision apart from the front, central, and rear parts commonly distinguished.

Another, indirect approach to the problem of the number of a house's inhabitants is by way of surveying the pottery next to the houses. Most likely, the pots that end up as sherds in the long pits next to the houses were used by their inhabitants. The number of features with pottery finds is very low at Weisweiler III: thirty-eight pits representing twenty Bandkeramik houses, with one or more sherds of 356 pots. One should compare this with the Dutch Geleen-Janskamperveld village, where 334 features, sixty full house equivalents, and sherds

from 3552 pots have been unearthed; see P. van de Velde (ed.), *Excavations at Geleen-Janskamperveld 1990/1991. Analecta Praehist. Leidensia* 39, 2007. At Weisweiler III there were excavated nearly two pits per house, at Janskamperveld nearly six pits. This implies that the number of pots at Weisweiler III must have been substantially larger than the present figure seems to indicate. Additionally there are indicators that the amount of Bandkeramik pottery at Janskamperveld is somewhat smaller than at the nearby Langweiler 8 (see below), for instance, which could imply another increase of the Weisweiler III number of pots. On the twenty years' replacement interval for the houses at Janskamperveld it was estimated that a Bandkeramik household had some ten vessels in use, three for service, four in kitchen use, and another three for storage purposes, suggestive of three adults per house on average. If, on Rück's suggestion, thirty or more people occupied every house, then at Weisweiler III perhaps one single pot would have been available to any individual only, if it is assumed that Aldenhoven Bandkeramians had thrice as many pots as those in Janskamperveld (which they did not). Had the Weisweiler III houses been occupied for a century by thirty persons each, as Rück suggests, then only very few people could have benefited from the pottery. Certainly, wooden, bone, and skin vessels might have filled the difference, but this becomes a little too wild to defend seriously, in my opinion. Here again, the only way out is a return to archaeology's tradition: one small extended family living in a house for no longer than one or one-and-a-half generation.

On Bandkeramik houses as pile-dwellings, Rück rightly observes that most villages of that time were built on slopes although I would rather say on uneven surface. In two out of fourteen Bandkeramik villages selected by Rück (Table 7, p. 134) the slope gradient is five percent or more, which allows height differences between front and rear gables of one metre or more (with a house length of over twenty metres, which applies to about one quarter of the Bandkeramik houses). Even if height differences are less than a metre in most cases, the awkward fact of disleveling remains. Since our species seems to prefer level living floors, pile dwellings offer a solution. A row of posts is found paralleling to the long side of some houses, while others have some posts and spaces in front, both suggestive of terraces or floors on poles there. The idea is illustrated by a house in India where the slope it is built on can be estimated at much more than five percent on the evidence of the photograph (p. 141 fig. 105). Some more images of Batak houses in Indonesia illustrate the idea of pile dwellings (figs. 98; 99), but there no slopes seem to be related to the phenomenon, at least not on the illustrations. The Vietnam Montagnards' house on piles depicted in fig. 106 seems to have been constructed on perfect level ground (p. 142). In none of the cases any construction drawing is presented.

In most south-eastern parts of the Bandkeramik houses double post settings occur, lengthwise approxi-

mately in line with the posts in the central parts. As is generally accepted one post of each pair (generally a little thinner) is assumed to have supported a floor, while the other supported the roof. This is also extensively discussed by Rück (p. 141 with figs. 100 and 102, pp. 136; 137). In the north-western parts of the houses no such twin posts have been observed, in this part therefore the floor would have been the earth's surface. In the central parts, however, post holes similar to those of the platform supports of the twin posts in the south-eastern part are relatively often found, but not in close association with regular posts; it eludes me why these in-house posts if they supported a floor indeed have not been twinned with thicker posts, as in the south-eastern part. According to Rück they are indicative of a low platform or floor in that part, together with the posts outside the walls. Yet, there are at best four or five such outside postholes along the whole length of the house, and they are considerably wider apart than the posts within it. This would imply an unimaginably wild construction with horizontal beams hanging from the roof or the wall posts since the posts rarely configure a straight line. To my mind, the extra posts in the central part of the house (which can also be found in the north-western and south-eastern parts) have been more convincingly argued to be auxiliary supports to the girders of the roof; see D. von Brandt, *Die linearbandkeramischen Häuser des Siedlungsplatzes Langweiler 8* (Diss. Aachen 1980); id. in U. Boelicke et al., *Der bandkeramische Siedlungsplatz Langweiler 8, Gemeinde Aldenhoven, Kreis Düren. Rheinische Ausgr. 28* (Cologne 1988) 36–289. Similarly, Buttler's duly quoted (p. 101) inferences regarding the poles outside the houses, as being either fences or hay racks seem preferable. In conclusion, a pile-based construction for the central part of the house is probably a slight over-interpretation.

Then, Rück's arguments on this topic depart from a slope in south-eastern direction with the north-western part laying on the ground, the floor of the central part being a low platform, with a full podium in the south-eastern part. Such a slope may have existed in some cases, but certainly not in all Bandkeramik houses (and Weisweiler III is a case in point here, as its slope is in the opposite direction, to the north-west; p. 5 fig. 4), which is not discussed by Rück, though. Another possibility is not considered either: the filling up below the lower lying end of the house (the longpits have sufficient volume), and perhaps sometimes also digging in the higher end would solve much of the problematic forty to eighty centimetres of dislevel, applicable in all situations regardless of the slope, which is certainly a less wild idea.

On the line-like plan of Bandkeramik villages: »common to most Bandkeramik villages are groups or rows of parallel houses ranged on the same line (Giebelständigkeit)« (p. 117). The space between the parallel houses tends to one or two houses width. Examples are Straubing-Lerchenhaid, Cuiry-lès-Chaudardes, and Weisweiler III. Such rows perhaps represent the initial,

planned settlement structure, and although diluted by later abandonments and additional constructions they can be reconstructed most of the times. The houses in such lines are not necessarily synchronous (p. 121). One of the examples adduced is Janskamperveld (on p. 127), where I myself have played with this very idea, but was unable to substantiate it (op. cit. chapter 15). Another example offered by Rück (p. 125), Elsloo, in which I have also been involved, with so many houses that if the requirement is dropped that the buildings in a settlement row be more or less synchronic, then any number of rows can be discerned. Something similar can be noted for Weisweiler III itself (p. 245): the three earliest constructions on that site form a triangle with none of its edges in line with any of the house fronts (p. 243 fig. 158); however, disregarding synchronicity several alignments of gables (Giebelständigkeiten) can be seen. The settlement row is presented as an alternative to the Hofplatzmodell; perhaps in some instances the first houses in a settlement were laid out in a line, but not generally Bandkeramik-wide.

On contacts between the Rhineland and the Paris Basin, Rheinhesen, Palatinate, and Rheingau in Bandkeramik times: Rück's inferences on contacts between Weisweiler III and the regions farther away are based on the occurrence of rectilinear pottery decoration (about one third of the decorated pots) and some similarities in the houseplans. True enough, rectilinearity is rare in Flomborn period pottery, but soon after almost half of the decoration on the pots was executed in that style right to the end of the Bandkeramik: in the Königshoven settlements (close to Weisweiler III) the proportion rises from twenty-five to even seventy percent, see E. Claßen, *Die bandkeramische Siedlungsgruppe bei Königshoven* (Diss. Cologne 2006) 243 (Rheinische Ausgr. 64, forthcoming). Moreover, pottery decoration has some more dimensions, and if there really were foreign influences, other dimensions would have been affected, too. Therefore, if anything, local liking (lokale Vorliebe, p. 211) is to be preferred to »influences from other regions«, and why not from the Königshoven neighbours?

Then the houseplans 3 and 4 (dating to house generation 6, resp. 5), being »curved plans« resemble houses elsewhere. House 4 (pp. 30f.), »slightly trapezoid, together with bulging walls shows changes in architectural tradition«; its Y-type central post configuration puts it firmly in the Flomborn period. Nevertheless, similarities to Villeneuve-Saint-Germain houses (the very Youngest Bandkeramik) in the Paris Basin are noted. I must confess that apart from the very slight trapezoid outline, I cannot find anything special in the plan of House 4; probably Bandkeramians did not see such either, for no change in the house building tradition becomes apparent afterwards, unless it is manifest in House 3 in the next house generation, which at best can be described as a relatively awkward construction with its tapering north-western part and obliquely-aligned south-eastern part; according to Rück this

house should relate to the post-Bandkeramik Großgartach houses (p. 26). Wild things did apparently occur at Weisweiler III, especially regarding chronological connections.

There are still more things in this book that are questionable or wild. I want to close with a more positive note, though. There are also many things in this book that are main stream (not necessarily a recommendation), emphasising or substantiating smaller or larger concurrences with established insights. I do not think it necessary to spell these out, as that would be a tame reaffirmation of current ideas; instead, I chose to discuss disagreements since it is in that methodical realm that the book is lacking. The book is well-illustrated, well-tabled, and well-written, the author is nowhere hiding his dissenting opinions.

Leiden

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