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Becoming Neanderthals: the earlier British Middle Palaeolithic

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"Becoming Neanderthals" stems from the long-awaited Ph.D. thesis of a rising star – one of the few females to have successfully established herself in the harsh male-dominated field of the British Palaeolithic. I would like to boast that Beccy Scott is a close colleague, but my only "claim to fame" is that she and I were both students of Mark White at Durham University (although at different times). Indeed, White's influence is felt throughout the book, not only in the numerous citations of his work but also as Scott engages with many of his ideas. Often it is to disagree, which is a sign of a healthy relationship between student and thesis advisor. It also proves the maturity of her research.

Although based on a Ph.D. thesis, the book clearly is not just a thesis reprint. Scott has made real efforts to transform it into a reader-friendly structure, for example by putting details of the methodology into the Appendix. The book is divided into 8 chapters which can be considered as 6 sections. Chapters 3 and 4 both contain site data, and Chapter 8 is basically a "long abstract" summarising the entire book.

Chapter 1 sets out the aims and objectives of the research: to apply continental approaches to "re-animate through technological analysis" the lithic assemblages of southern Britain, in order to find out how Neanderthals lived on the edge of their range during the Middle Palaeolithic. The very first opening paragraph of Chapter 1 is immediately captivating by its colourful and evocative writing style peppered with subtle humour. It could easily attract general public readers. It provides a nice fly-by overview of the field which gently sets the scene for the study.

Chapter 2 is a second introductory section, which goes into more detail about the rationale for the study. Using the "expanded definition" of the British Middle Palaeolithic – from late MIS 9 to MIS 3 – Scott views Levallois as the first manifestation of a set of behavioural innovations which characterise the hominins that are in the process of "becoming Neanderthals" during the early Middle Palaeolithic. There is a long consideration of Levallois, with a good digest of Boëda's work and of the debates in both French and English over the definition of Levallois, which is excellent for English readers. This chapter is an excellent cross-Channel integration. It shows that Scott is as well-versed in the French literature as she is in the British. The introduction to Breuil and Bordes will be known to continentals but is welcome for UK readers. The introduction to key work in Britain is welcome for readers of both sides, as it contains a detailed history of UK chronostratigraphy. However, some key references are lacking: despite telling Breuil's story, she does not include any of his work; it would be nice to see references for Simondon rather than secondary citations; her discussion of "technique" and "method" on page 10 omits to mention the classic book by Inizan et al. (1999), which is in her bibliography. I will return to this last point later.

Chapter 2 lacks the light writing style that was so refreshing in chapter 1. Pages 5 to 7 are full of typos. All of Scott's sentences are far too long; despite an excellent use of punctuation, that lack of which I often reproach my undergraduate students for, Scott does not vary her sentence length, instead making each one several clauses long, as this one illustrates. Many of her well-meaning semicolons could be replaced with full stops to improve readability. By page 6 I began writing full stops into the book!

A French influence on Scott's work is evident in the bottom-up approach of this research, starting with observations to produce theories, which contrasts with the Anglo-Saxon preference for top-down work, starting from hypotheses to produce data (Pelegrin 2001-02). This might annoy English readers because by the end of chapter 2 it is still not clear what Scott is seeking. Her aim to "relate landscape exploitation to wider patterning in industrial variability" (page 9) is rather vague for a hypothesis-driven audience. Furthermore, to relocate Britain "at the centre of key debates in European Middle Palaeolithic research" (page 15) it would be good to know exactly what are some of the key debates, in a more specific way.

Chapters 3 and 4 are data-heavy. MIS 10, 9, and 8 are the focus of the first; the second is on assemblages dated to MIS 8, 7, and 6. Each site studied is described in its own section, with the same text structure for each: introduction to the site, history of excavations, geology, brief summary of location, climate, and dating, followed by description of assemblages, condition of the material, technological analysis with numerous charts and graphs showing summary data, and a final section summarising the findings and Scott's interpretations of site function. The brief summaries and behaviour discussions in each site's section are excellent for readers who just want to find the information in a clear and concise manner.

But skipping the details would mean missing some noteworthy information, such as the intriguing discussion on page 53 about the function of Levallois points, or the tantalising suggestion on page 154 that the knapping of Sequence 5 at Crayford was a display or teaching demonstration. It is a shame that the photographs of the Crayford refitting sequences on pages 140-151 are not in colour, especially as the book's front cover shows a beautiful example of one.

Chapter 5 examines the origins and spread of Levallois. Scott rejects an African origin, although she accepts that the concept was present in Europe and Israel first. Scott interprets Levallois as a multi-tool allowing the transport of raw material with the option to make it into cores or flakes. Levallois emerged patchily in north-west Europe, with people immediately adapting it to their local conditions. Scott's argument rests on literature reviews, and I would have been more reassured if she had studied some of the continental assemblages herself. A key point Scott makes in the book is that hominins travelled along river corridors during interglacials. These would have been kept clear of forests by large grazing animals and also provided herds of prey for easy hunting.

The biggest problem I found with this chapter was Scott's dreadful confusion of Technique and Method, where she continually refers to Levallois as a technique. It is clear from her misuse of the terms that Scott has not understood the terminology that she herself reviewed in chapter 2. According to the very clear definitions given by Inizan et al. (1999: 13), Technique is "The physical modality according to which raw material is transformed. The practical manner of accomplishing a task, i.e. one of the procedures of the knapping craft (e.g. direct percussion, anvil percussion, use of hard or soft hammer or a punch, pressure-flaking, aspects of body position, etc.)" and Method is "An orderly set of rational procedures devised for the purpose of achieving an end. The method followed to create a prehistoric tool is thus an orderly sequence of actions carried out according to one or more techniques, and guided by a rational plan." Levallois is a method and no continental archaeologist would dare call it a technique. Unfortunately for Scott, this crucial mistake could potentially give French readers a reason to shun her book.

Chapter 6 summarises Scott's findings in the British assemblages and considers how Neanderthals were using the different sites. Most of the eight sites she studied are "Extraction and Production" sites for large flake blanks. Exceptions are Crayford, where Levallois cores were also taken, and Creffield Road, where exhausted cores were discarded (presumably upon returning from a journey where no flint was available). Creffield Road was a reprovisioning site for making and modifying Levallois points and cores, and for maintaining tools and prepared cores. A key point is that most of the sites are known by archaeologists because they are located at raw material sources, which is where hominins were knapping repeatedly, thus building up enough material to ensure preservation. Scott reminds us it is rare to find places of tool use, giving an excellent review listing a few examples of sites far from raw material sources with only 1 to 5 artefacts.

Although chapter 6 has a good discussion of Levallois, one of Scott's arguments seems contradictory. She writes that hominins were not able to innovate because their reduction methods were flexible (page 180). But I would argue that too much rigidity in reduction sequences was not possible when the raw materials varied so widely in shape, size, and quality. Scott hints that Levallois does not impose a method and states hominins "acted as technological automata" and did not make "innovative leaps between available options" (page 181). This seems to contradict her statement that trajectories were never imposed. It would have been helpful to give some specific examples here.

Some interesting insights are given in chapter 6. Scott suggests Levallois was quickly adopted in favour of handaxes because it offered an easier way to make a lightweight handaxe-shaped object without the risks of breakage from thinning a biface. This is a thought-provoking perspective because most literature considers Levallois to be more difficult to make than handaxes. There is a mention of sites where flint nodules were deliberately "scratched" to test their quality (page 182); readers might have appreciated a reference to this fascinating occurrence. Scott supports the function of Levallois points as hafted to foreshafts on spears, so that for one spear hominins could carry several hafted foreshafts in case of point breakage. These hafted foreshafts could double as knives, which are known from the ethnographic record and attested by microwear on Levallois points. Finally, Scott's discussion of landscape use in south-east Britain does not consider distances between the sites. At Boxgrove the different sites were frequented by the same groups of people (Pope & Roberts 2005). Hunter-gatherer range sizes are known from the ethnographic literature, and it is possible that Neanderthal groups travelled much greater distances than today.

This chapter – and indeed the whole book – leaves readers wondering about percussion techniques. Scott does not mention the availability of hammerstones anywhere at all. Hominins were carrying one or more cores with them for mammoth hunting episodes, but did they also carry one or two hammerstones? It is evident that carrying cores and blanks to be knapped on demand requires at least one hammerstone. Were these available in the vicinity of the hunting sites, or did they also have to be curated? The conclusion follows that some sort of bags or carrying containers were necessary, if not for hammerstones, then at least

for the multiple cores. This important element is lacking in Scott's argument about Levallois as the ideal portable toolkit.

Chapter 7 serves as a conclusion while focusing on Neanderthal behaviour and demographics. It is a nice digest of the settlement prehistory of Britain through the entire Middle Palaeolithic. Scott covers far-ranging topics such as why Britain was not re-colonised in MIS 6-5, the spread of the mammoth steppe, and the handaxe technology that came after the heyday of Levallois. Scott argues hominin populations reached their peak at MIS 8-7, then declined as the climate warmed, but did not crash. She suggests one reason might be that flint was easier to find during colder times. In interglacials there were fewer exposures, as exemplified by examples of sites that were abandoned when "raw material outcrops were masked by progressive sedimentation" (page 191). This is a logical remark. Considering hominins probably relied entirely on flint for sharp cutting tools, they would naturally have left the country when no more flint was available. Was Levallois a clever way to maximise dwindling flint resources?

Becoming Neanderthals is augmented by occasional nice extras, such as photos of John Allen Brown and Spurrell from the 1880s, stratigraphy charts, and exact dates of Brown's artefact collecting events. The summary table of results for all sites on pages 183-184 is excellent. One of the strengths of "Becoming Neanderthals" is the impressive archive work Scott has achieved on the written records of old British excavations.

There are few negative points to mention, except that it would be useful to subdivide the Table of Contents into site sub-sections. Since chapters 3 and 4 are more like data catalogues, they will most likely be used to find information, not read in sequence. The Appendix contains details of Scott's methodology and nice drawings, but no actual raw data. The Index is broad but does not cover the appendix as promised (at least, not for "tranchet"). A reference is frustratingly missing from the bibliography (White & Jacobi 2002). The site of Cotenin (or Contenin) is not shown in figure 5.1 as stated (page 194).

Occasionally Scott lets her scientific rigour lapse. She claims (page 18): "A large collection of material from Bapchild, Kent is clearly heavily reworked (personal observation)." If this is true then it should be published, as otherwise this is not a scientific way to exclude an assemblage. Furthermore, Scott does not follow her own criteria for site selection; for instance, she accepts "likely dating" (page 19) and sites with no environmental information in the deposits (pages 36 and 69) even though these go against her selection criteria (pages 17-18). In the display of data there is inappropriate use of line graphs to show numbers of pieces for each grouping of maximum dimensions (e.g. page 90).

Overall, "Becoming Neanderthals" is an impressive piece of work which will be useful to students and professionals. Scott gives enough information on context for readers to make up their own minds about site stratigraphy. For readers seeking detailed data on specific assemblages, these are provided. The book is dedicated to Roger Jacobi, and I believe it is a very worthy tribute to his life and work.

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Homo Symbolicus: The Dawn of Language, Imagination and Spirituality

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Interdisciplinary trends in evolutionary sciences are quickly reshaping the focal lens from which archaeologists peer into the past. Integration with disciplines including cognitive science, psychology, neuroscience and ethology has dramatically increased our ability to retrieve information about the evolution of *Homo sapiens*. While this trend has expanded the scientific horizons of archaeology, it has also highlighted enormous difficulties in constructing unified theories to interpret the fragmented remains of our past. There is perhaps no better example of this challenge in archaeological research than the contentious debate surrounding the role of "symbolism" in the rise of human modernity. Symbolism as a behavioral and cognitive manifestation has long been held as a hallmark of humanity, defining the uniqueness of our species, although recent archaeological and ethological research has challenged such claims. As a result, archaeologists have been hard pressed to discuss wider issues of symbolism and cognition outside the modern human arena. Nonetheless, *Homo Symbolicus* spearheads these problems in adjoining various interdisciplinary reflections upon the "symbolic conundrum", and in doing so develops a unique