

Buchbesprechungen

H. MÜLLER-KARPE: *Zur Periodisierung der Vorgeschichte*. 19 pp., Wiesbaden 1980.

Chronological ordering of data pertaining to past human societies is the backbone of archaeological studies. Ever since the formulation of the Three-Age system towards the middle of the last century by C. J. Thomsen, the founder of modern archaeology, this topic has been the focus of attention among many workers. Müller-Karpe's essay under review is one of the latest in the series. It constitutes the unaltered text of a lecture which he delivered in 1980 under the auspices of the Scientific Society of the University of Frankfurt.

Before getting on to the main task, Müller-Karpe makes certain general observations about which there could be little or no disagreement, viz., a) that the scope of prehistory covers all regions and extends up to the 1st millennium B.C. – he therefore calls it universal history; b) that this discipline should be called a historical science since it is backed up by authentic evidence which can be subjected to critical judgement and interpretation; c) that individual events are important only inasmuch as they are components of a structural historical canvas; d) that the method of hypothesis can lay bare the underlying causes of this canvas; and e) that particularizing and generalizing approaches are complementary in prehistoric research. Echoing the ideas of cultural evolution current in North America, Müller-Karpe further says that the archaeological record reveals both stage-wise progress and complexity of cultural forms – two features forming the very basis of periodization. A tribute is in order to Müller-Karpe when he, unlike many who view periodization as an end in itself, asserts that it ought to provide a glimpse into the concrete expressions of Early Man's historical consciousness and their interconnections.

Müller-Karpe divides the archaeological record into two main phases – Palaeolithic of the Pleistocene period and post-glacial prehistory stretching from 9 000 – 8 000 B.C. to the 1st millennium B.C. The latter phase is structurally different in that it witnessed specialized developments in economic, social, artistic and spiritual/ideological spheres. Müller-Karpe rightly points out that the Early, Middle and Upper Palaeolithic are not merely technological stages but manifest increasing historical consciousness. Upper Palaeolithic is the most distinctive of all, on account of features like the cave and home art, innovation in burial practices, new hunting methods, etc. The coming into vogue of the Neolithic and urban ways of life (the latter characterized by statehood, writing, anthropomorphic figures of deities, burial cults, etc.) is the most significant aspect of post-glacial prehistory.

Müller-Karpe then goes on to say that just as efforts must be made to define culture sequences in individual areas, attempts must be made simultaneously to seek general, pan-regional sequences of cultural forms. These two ideas, respectively, recall the concepts of specific and general evolution developed by Marshall Sahlins (1973). The Copper, Bronze and Iron Ages (these terms have been in currency for over a century) are examples of the latter process. Notwithstanding their regional peculiarities, these ages constitute developmental stages in the same sense as the Lower, Middle and Upper Palaeolithic are. Müller-Karpe abstains, and rightly so, from discussion of issues like the ultimate meaning of history, cyclical nature of historical developments, etc. which were a common feature of the speculative philosophy of history during the 18th and 19th centuries.

From what has been said above, it is clear that Müller-Karpe's essay, while it is no doubt useful to both students and research workers, does not contain anything new; it is basically a summary restatement of the ideas and views already in vogue in the discipline. The reviewer would have liked to see elaborate discussion of some of the general aspects pertaining to culture change. The following two points are of particular interest.

While referring to the conditions of culture change, Müller-Karpe refers to environmental changes, change and proliferation of needs, application of diverse discoveries and inventions, etc. as the potential factors. It is well to bear in mind that the event-centered view of cultural development and linear view of causation, to which he implicitly subscribes, have now given way to a conception in which change is viewed as a process ascribable to the interplay of a multiplicity of factors (e.g. see Hill 1977; various essays in Renfrew 1973). As examples, Müller-Karpe could have taken up the rise of food-producing and urban cultures in key areas like the Near East and reviewed the various explanatory frameworks such as the demographic pressure, conflict theories, cybernetic approach, etc. put forward thus far.

The second aspect concerns whether discussions about periodization could lead to law-like formulations about cultural evolution. Nobody would dispute Müller-Karpe's emphasis on the priority of building-up local culture-sequences. But it should not be forgotten that the place of archaeology ultimately depends on its ability to formulate generalizations (however imperfect they may be) about cultural developments across time and space. Formulations like the law of cultural dominance and the law of evolutionary potential are already known in anthropological theory.

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References

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A. LEROI-GOURHAN et M. BRÉZILLON: *Fouilles de Pincevent. Essai d'analyse ethnographique d'un habitat magdalénien*. Vol. I (text)-327 pages; Vol. II (plans). VII^e supplément à Gallia Préhistoire, Paris 1972.

Despite the fact that France has probably the richest number of Palaeolithic sites and that it is the birthplace of prehistory, prehistoric studies in this region are by and large one-sided in character. As this reviewer has pointed out elsewhere (Paddayya 1979, 678), French prehistory has hitherto adopted a vertical approach devoted to stratigraphy and delineation of cultural phases/periods and sub-phases within them. The long series of cave/rock shelter investigations are a witness to this research orientation. It is only during the last one or two decades that recognition has been accorded to the fact that only horizontal excavation of occupation sites, more particularly the open-air stations, could help us in reconstructing the Stone Age lifeways. Quite a few open-air sites have already been excavated with this end in view in different parts of the country. The work at the late Upper Palaeolithic site of Pincevent by a team led by A. Leroi-Gourhan, a well-known figure in European prehistory, is a fine example of this change in the research orientation of French prehistory. Both in respect of the patient and enormous nature of the job done and on account of the controlled use of imagination for reconstructing a segment of the Upper Palaeolithic life-world, this work at Pincevent must rank as a major contribution to prehistoric studies as a whole.

Pincevent is situated on the river Seine in northern France, and has been excavated for several seasons in the sixties. The late Magdalenian occupation, which constitutes the principal aspect of the site and forms the subject-matter of the present publication, took place on a gently sloping surface of sand deposits of fluvial origin. It is overlain by cultural remains ranging in age from Epipalaeolithic to the Roman times. The Magdalenian deposit has an overall thickness of two metres and has an areal extent of one and a half hectares. The four main cultural horizons distinguishable within this deposit are intercalated with thin, varve-like levels made up of fluvial silt. The excavators assure us that the fluvial activity could have caused little or no disturbance to the archaeological levels. In an earlier publication the authors (Leroi-Gourhan and Brézillon 1966) have given details about the site and results of excavation done in sectors 16 and 17, two of the grids (25 m × 25 m) into which the site had been divided.

The present publication (Volume I containing text and volume II containing ten plans of occupation surfaces) gives a full account of the results of excavation undertaken in Sector 36. Chapters I and II are introductory in nature, and respectively provide information about the procedures adopted for excavation and recording of objects, and the distribution of various categories of occupational evidence on the site. Chapter III is a detailed study of the flint industry comprising over 16 000 specimens. Of these, only a little over 1 700 are finished tools – end scrapers, burins, borers, backed blades, etc. Chapters IV, V and IX are devoted to a detailed study of the habitation units, fire-places, flint chipping areas and such other forms of occupational evidence, and thus constitute the most important part of the report. Chapter VI is a detailed account of the faunal material (including pieces shaped into arrow-straighteners and other artifact types) and its significance for reconstructing the food-economy of the Magdalenian inhabitants. Chapter VII is a brief statement about bone/antler objects bearing engravings, fossil shells, haematite pieces and such other items concerning prehistoric home art. In Chapter X entitled 'Synthesis and Hypothesis', Leroi-Gourhan weaves together in a lively way the various forms of evidence to arrive at a palaeoethnographic picture of the Magdalenian occupants of the Pincevent site. Following this chapter are four appendices, respectively dealing with flint waste products, fire places and related evidence, faunal material, and glossary of terms employed in the text.