

Recent studies in the Final Palaeolithic of the European plain – an introduction

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The Final Palaeolithic of the Great European Plain is a recently established scientific commission within the U.I.S.P.P. (Union Internationale des Sciences Préhistoriques et Protohistoriques). The first general meeting of the commission was held in June 1998 in Kraków, Poland. The purpose of the commission is to stimulate and co-ordinate research on the Final Palaeolithic of the European plain. To pursue this aim, the editors of the current volume were entrusted with the organization of a symposium held in Stockholm, 14-17 October 1999.

The intention of the Stockholm symposium was to bring together scholars working in several different areas of Northwestern Europe, and to review and synthesise our present knowledge of *Behaviour and Landscape Use in the Final Palaeolithic of the European Plain*. Presentations were aimed at defining topics and areas in which further specific research is most needed, thereby setting a stage for future work. The symposium was highly successful in this respect, and initial versions of the chapters by Kolstrup, Eriksen, Åkerlund, Kindgren, Larsson *et al.*, Johansson, Eberhards & Zagorska, Fiedorczuk & Schild, Bratlund, Kabaciński *et al.*, Kobusiewicz, Pasda, Veil & Breest, De Bie *et al.*, Rensink and Nielsen were first presented at this symposium. Along with revised versions of the papers presented

in Stockholm, we are pleased to include an additional chapter by Crombé & Verbruggen in the current volume.

The European plain was largely devoid of human settlement during the last Pleniglacial. Large parts of the area were covered by extensive inland glaciers, and the remaining part was severely affected by accompanying periglacial phenomena. However, following the general global warming during the early Lateglacial, the large Fennoscandian ice-sheet retreated rapidly, and from approximately 15,000 BP the picture had already changed significantly. The open tundra of the European lowland, from the British Isles in the west to the Russian steppes in the east, had by then become the destination of many hunter-gatherer groups – immigrating from their Pleniglacial *refugia* in more temperate zones. The process of recolonisation increased markedly during the course of the Bølling chronozone, when the climatic amelioration had finally established itself. Eventually, by the onset of the Holocene at approximately 10,000 BP, hunter-gatherer groups had settled throughout all of the European Plain, now largely forested.

During the Lateglacial the frontier of human settlement moved north, a process continuing well into the early Holocene on the Scandinavian peninsula. According to present archaeological

evidence, this can hardly be described as a uniform northward-moving front across the continent. The growing knowledge of varied local environmental and geomorphological conditions in different regions would rather suggest that we are dealing with a manifestation of different responses to the general climatic amelioration. Also, in some areas, the temporary climatic deterioration of the Younger Dryas apparently did lead to a serious setback. A recurrent theme in the regional overviews presented here thus extends beyond the investigation of evidence of human presence, to consideration of whether a lack of finds may indicate an absence of human settlement, or rather a deficient archaeological database with respect to a specific area and chronozone. In all cases the geochronological and environmental frames of reference are of the utmost importance, and two chapters have been devoted to the discussion of the potentials and limitations of these areas of research.

The following chapters provide case studies and/or exhaustive reviews of currently-available data from Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and Switzerland. Given the extent of the region covered in this volume, regional diversity is understandably marked. On the other hand, it is also evident that although the contributions derive from several different research traditions, they share important analytical and methodological approaches. The contributions to this volume are thus characterised by a strong central focus on the envi-

ronmental preconditions for Final Palaeolithic settlement and subsistence patterns. Virtually all chapters address this issue more or less explicitly. Furthermore, in the presentations of past settlement patterns in the different areas, the influence of local geological preconditions for the recognition of sites as well as the amount of fieldwork invested in recent years is discussed critically.

It is our hope that this collection of papers will stimulate more inter-regional discussions of data and ideas, as well as of general interpretive problems regarding behaviour and landscape use in the Final Palaeolithic of the European plain.

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