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Book Reviews



NEANDERTHALS AMONG MAMMOTHS. EXCAVATIONS AT LYNFORD QUARRY, NORFOLK. Edited by William A Boismier, Clive Gamble and Fiona Coward. Pp. xx and 529, Illus 160. English Heritage, 2012. Price: £ 80.00. ISBN 978 1 848020 63 4.

This is an edited monograph of significant importance in illuminating the murky depths of not only the nature of the Neanderthal re-occupation of Britain, from late Marine Isotope Stage 4 (MIS) – early MIS 3, but also the complex and changing environments in which these hominins interacted. For the non-expert, MIS reflect changing glacial (even numbers) and interglacial (odd numbers) climatic conditions. As is eloquently highlighted, the Late Middle Palaeolithic of Britain (c. sixty to thirty thousand years ago; MIS 3) is a period that is not well known. Evidence is limited to a small number of rock / cave shelters and open-air sites, largely demarcated by the *bout coupé* handaxe. Therefore, the presence of a near *in situ* open air site from this era, such as Lynford, is not only of national, but international importance, illuminating the socio-ecological behaviours of a human species living at the edge of their known world.

The monograph certainly does justice to the site, offering plenty of detail in terms of illustrations and data tables accompanied by well-written and accessible text. Chapter 1 outlines the context of discovery, excavation methodology and recording, research background and objectives. Chapter 2 gives a comprehensive account on the complex stratigraphy and dating of the site, describing the formation of the oxbow lake in the Ice Age course of the River Wissey, and the subsequent bank collapse which led to the slumping of the faunal and archaeological remains into the still waters of the isolated channel. The following chapter details the environmental evidence where the excellent preservation of Lynford allowed for the analysis of insects, pollen, mollusca, plant macrofossils and large faunal remains dominated by woolly mammoth. The faunal evidence paints a vivid picture of Neanderthals sharing the cold-steppe landscapes with large mega-fauna, and associated predators, which were presumably attracted to the plain due to the availability of aquatic and waterside vegetation. Chapter 4 details the nature of the assemblage formation and deposits with the results of a quantitative spatial analysis, highlighting that the vertebrate and artefactual materials do not represent residues of *in situ* behaviour, but secondary accumulations of materials which formed over multiple occupations and which were then derived from the surrounding banks and deposited through erosional processes.

Chapter 5 focuses on the archaeological assemblages both faunal and lithics. The results depict a versatile hominin capable of successfully adapting to their environment, utilizing the landscape to their advantage — a planner and opportunist. Chapter 6 is an interesting

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and thought-provoking conclusion: the Lynford Neanderthals are brought to life in a way that pulls together the strands of evidence and interpretation offered previously, facilitating a data-rich behavioural interpretation that highlights the true complexities of Neanderthal lifeways and subsistence strategies. The monograph also contains five appendices that detail the conservation of the faunal remains, thin section descriptions, booking sheets, tables of data relating to the vertebrate assemblage, and a full context list.

This monograph takes a multidisciplinary approach to processing and understanding the Neanderthal environment toward the end of MIS 4 / beginning of MIS 3. The data is clearly presented and the arguments are well structured, however one must be cautious of inferring species-wide behaviour from the evidence present at one site, however fine-grained and detailed. That being said, although an expensive purchase, *Neanderthals Among Mammoths* certainly earns a place on the bookshelves of any student of the Palaeolithic and sets a high benchmark against which publications of this nature will be measured for some time to come.

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