

Reviews

THE NEOLITHIC AND BRONZE AGE CULTURES OF THE MIDDLE AND UPPER TRENT BASIN by *Philip M. Vine*. British Archaeological Reports No.105, 1982, 410pp. Price £16.

This work is based on an M.Phil. thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham in 1981. The area of the survey covers some 8120 square kilometres (3135 square miles) encompassing the counties of Leicestershire and Staffordshire, south Derbyshire and portions of the counties of West Midland and Warwickshire lying within the watershed of the river Trent. Small parts of Leicestershire lie outside the watershed but fortunately these have also been included so that the whole county is covered. Portions of the region have been studied before but this is the first overall survey of the Middle and Upper Trent regions as a geographical entity and as such is to be welcomed.

Following a brief geographical introduction which considers the solid geology and modern land use but not the prehistoric environment, the first four chapters deal with stone objects, pottery, metalwork and miscellaneous small finds. A consideration of sites however is restricted to a short chapter of fifteen pages. Finally the sites and finds are discussed in their geographical and distributional context. The remainder of the work consists of a descriptive catalogue of small finds but *not* field monuments unless they have produced artefacts. The majority of these are illustrated by simple but clear line drawings whose quality of reproduction is on the whole good.

Almost 90% of the area falls within the Lowland Zone in Fox's terminology the southern part of the Pennines comprising the only major area of uplands in the region. The inclusion of the latter does however allow the author to make comparisons between settlement pattern, land use and density of small finds distribution in the two natural zones which appear to change with time over the period studied. The author suggests an emphasis on the Lowland Zone in the Early Neolithic and a shift to the Highland Zone in the Later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age. How real is this change? In terms of monuments, the higher survival rate, but not necessarily the original density pattern, in the small area of the Highland Zone must reflect as much that these are by and large stone built structures on marginal land which has not been subjected to cultivation or other development since the Bronze Age. The Pennines too is an area which has been the focus of antiquarian activity since the nineteenth century whereas the Lowland Zone, at least for the period covered by this study, has only attracted the attention of prehistorians in recent years.

Another problem is that only a small selection of the numerous flint artefacts have been included in the gazeteer, either as representative examples of the total assemblage or because the author considers them to be of special interest or have important associations. This selectivity raises serious doubts in the reviewer's mind regarding the meaningfulness of the distribution patterns and therefore some of the conclusions which have been drawn from them. Extensive field walking by numerous groups in the area, including Leicestershire, has located numerous surface scatters of flints of Neolithic/Early Bronze Age character. In most cases such potential settlement or working sites are only represented by Lithic material but the frequency of their occurrence indicates that occupation in the Lowland Zone may be much more intensive than other evidence, or lack of it, might suggest. What is clearly needed now is a comprehensive survey of such sites detailing their artefactual components to supplement the material catalogued in the present work.

In spite of these limitations however the author has made an invaluable contribution to Neolithic and Bronze Age studies in the region and the volume will provide a mine of information for other students of the period. That the area is worthy of further and more intensive study is amply demonstrated by the wealth of material assembled here which belies the long held belief that this area of the East Midlands was largely shunned by man during the earlier prehistoric period.

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