ANALECTA PRAEHISTORICA LEIDENSIA 29

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PUBLICATION OF THE FACULTY OF ARCHAEOLOGY
LEIDEN UNIVERSITY

LEIDEN UNIVERSITY 1997

Redaction committee: L.P. Louwe Kooijmans / C.C. Bakels

Redaction of this volume: C.C. Bakels / A.L. van Gijn

Graphic design: H.A. de Lorm

ISSN 0169-7447

ISBN 90-73368-11-1

Subscriptions to the series Analecta Praehistorica Leidensia
and single volumes can be ordered exclusively at:

Faculty of Archaeology
P.O. Box 9515
2300 RA Leiden
The Netherlands.

contents

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Taskscape, technology and tradition

1. Introduction

Few would deny that the Mesolithic/Neolithic transition in Britain has been difficult to capture. Despite a long established status as a watershed in prehistory, one of the few things upon which most agree is that there remains no firm consensus regarding its' character and significance. Most would also probably agree that this situation is as much a product of conceptual problems as it is of difficulties with material evidence. Beyond a relative lack of secure radiocarbon dates and apparent lacunae in our data, argument and confusion still surround questions of definition, scale and procedure.

To some extent at least, this situation has persisted because of academic divisions of labour. For the most part, the two periods have been studied within different traditions of enquiry, and this has created rigid boundaries. Criticising this state of affairs over a decade ago, Richard Bradley talked of a discipline which saw Neolithic communities engaging in social relationships while their Mesolithic forbears bonded with hazelnuts (Bradley 1984). And in much the same way, Julian Thomas argued that our understanding was constrained by the opposition of two models of humanity – one predicated on the importance of ecological relations, the other on concepts of social reproduction (Thomas 1988). Further problems have arisen because our definitions of the two periods have been far from constant. Some accounts have used the terms to talk of definitive traits such as hunting and gathering, pottery production or farming, that are independent of time and space. Others use them to denote phases in a specific historical process, and it is not uncommon for people to shift back and forth between the two. Originally labels attached (at different times) to stages in general evolutionary schemes, the terms came to denote cultural phenomena marked by distinctive repertoires of artefacts. Many of these repertoires had continental parallels and this laid the foundation for models of colonisation and migration across the channel. Talk of cultures, in its turn, gave way to discussions of economic change and social evolution, either as an inevitable – if sometimes protracted – tendency, or as the outcome of material contradictions and conflicts of interest between communities (Bender 1978; Pluciennik in press; Zvelebil in press). More recently still, attention has turned to the idea that the transition was something that happened in the minds of people rather than in the ploughsoil per se. Concepts of a unitary economic 'package' have been pulled back in favour of a view of the Neolithic as a pool of ideas and resources, drawn upon in varied ways by largely indigenous communities (Bradley 1993; Hodder 1990; Thomas 1996).

These recent studies have done much to question some of the familiar landmarks of thought on the transition. Yet it remains to be seen whether we have moved very far beyond the idea that it was a specific juncture at which one rigid archetype gave way to another. Over the course of this paper, I want to suggest that our difficulties in coming to terms with social reproduction in the fifth and fourth millennia stem from a variety of sources. We still tend to treat the break between the two periods as a substantive and unitary entity, rather than as an artefact of research. We have reified what should at best be regarded as a heuristic device. At the same time, we have often paid no more than lip service to the complexity of material traditions across the later fifth and early fourth millennia BC (see Kinnes 1988 for similar criticisms). In both Mesolithic and Neolithic research, we rarely talk in detail about the structure of the 'taskscapes' that people inhabited (Ingold 1993). This has meant that detailed and imaginative studies of sites such as shell middens, stone sources, tombs or enclosures can seem abstracted from their broader material context. It can be difficult to trace the paths of people once they stray beyond these particular times and places and this limits our understanding of the significance that they held. It has also meant that we often say little about the ways in which the character and rhythm of different routine practices may themselves have been keyed into social life and social change. One way of addressing this problem would be to explore the specific genealogies of these more basic material traditions, emphasising both continuity and change in patterns of routine activity across the landscape. In what follows, I want to try to take this path by tracing the outlines of traditions of settlement practice and stoneworking in Southern Britain.

2. Taskscapes in transition

In a recent study of tombs in the Black Mountains of Wales, Chris Tilley argued that our treatment of the transition as a

rigid divide went against the grain of at least some of our data (Tilley 1994). Using the evidence of Mesolithic and Neolithic surface scatters, he suggested that the first tombs in the area were not inscribed on a blank canvas. Rather, their foundation involved a reworking of the histories and values that certain places had accrued over many generations. Echoing observations made elsewhere, Tilley argued that early tombs were sometimes orientated towards prominent landscape features and/or Mesolithic scatters. On occasion, they even sealed traces of earlier activity: Mesolithic flintwork and subsurface features; Neolithic settlement; grassland, or earth that had been broken during hand cultivation (Barrett 1988; Edmonds 1995). Crucial to Tilley's argument was the idea that it was difficult to follow the biographies of certain places across the transition, so long as it marked a meeting point between two opposed archetypes. For him, the evidence suggested both continuity and change in the topography of the cultural landscape.

Although the conditions which gave rise to the foundation of tombs are not explored in full, Tilley's stimulating study nonetheless highlights a fundamental problem. For the most part, settlement and subsistence models for the two periods have remained archetypal; dealt with separately and conceived at large, abstracted scales. On the one hand, we find 'groups' of seasonally mobile gatherers and hunters who moved from coast to inland or from lowland to upland in step with rhythms of resource availability. Other imperatives for movement are seldom discussed, and more often than not, the constitution of these groups is held as a constant at all places and times. Only in the case of so-called 'special purpose' or 'task specific' camps do we allow for a different roll call (Darvill 1987). On the other hand, we often find a view of the Neolithic as the point in time at which it becomes possible to identify ourselves; to trace in the evidence the signature of attitudes that seem timeless and familiar. Despite arguments to the contrary (Bradley 1993; Thomas 1990), it is still a commonplace to see the onset of the Neolithic portrayed as a time when people became sedentary, switching their allegiance from hunting and gathering to farming. Settling down is often emphasised, as is the role of food production, and the period marks the point in time where reconstructions evoke a familiar impression of 'community' and fixed settlement, cornfield and mixed agriculture. Beyond discussions of labour involved in monument construction (Renfrew 1973), the pattern, tempo and roll-call of routine experience often remains under-explored (Holgate 1988).

Neither of these portraits is entirely wrong. But in both cases, what often seems lost in our translations is a sense of past landscapes as inhabited times and places. We play down the variability of our patterns and say little about the ways in which people moved and acted or 'thought through' the landscapes that they occupied. In the Later Mesolithic, for example, our evidence suggests a varied landscape inhabited by communities bearing many of the characteristics of Brian Hayden's 'accumulators' (Hayden 1989). Details are difficult to establish, but these were people whose lives were probably structured by concepts of close kinship and perhaps clan membership. Many 'horizontal' distinctions would have also been recognised – concepts of age and gender, and perhaps ties of affiliation that cross-cut the boundaries defined by kinship and descent. While they may have lacked the forms of institutionalised hierarchy emphasised in many social evolutionary models, these social formations would have been far from undifferentiated. Despite ideologies of sharing that often emphasise a sense of commonality amongst gatherers and hunters, complex social distinctions may nonetheless exist. Concern with the definition of kin and non-kin and with lines of descent; of women and men; of the elders and their subordinates, and of tenure and personal renown: these are common themes that animate social life and it is around these themes that tensions often arise. Rooted in myth and origin stories, and inculcated in various forms of formal ritual, these themes may also be woven into the fabric of routine experience.

It is with these ideas in mind that we can consider some of the characteristics of later Mesolithic taskscapes. Environmental data from a number of areas suggest that people were exploiting a wide variety of resources and modifying the land through limited woodland clearance during the fifth millennium, much as they had done for generations. The period also saw a significant emphasis upon routine, perhaps seasonal, movement, by some, if not by all. Moving between coasts, river valleys, fens and varied uplands, the annual round carried people along well-worn paths that linked one place and one season to another. Distinctions between 'balanced' and 'unbalanced' assemblages also point to variations in the scale, duration and character of the activities conducted at these different times and places (Myers 1989). Some scatters or excavated assemblages comprise no more than a handful of microliths and/or a few blades or cores. Others are rather more substantial, containing the debris associated with a wide range and large volume of stoneworking tasks. Palimpsests or large concentrations of tools and waste suggest that some of these places may have been returned to over many generations (a.o. Tilley 1994). Variations in the character and distribution of microliths may also reflect the emergence of a measure of regionality in the Later Mesolithic. For example, contrasts can be drawn between areas such as the Weald, East Anglia, the Pennines, the Midlands and the South West, each defined in terms of an emphasis upon particular microlith forms (Jacobi 1976; 1979). Whether these regional traditions were recognized as such remains open to question.

But their existence does suggest a recurrent relationship between generations of particular communities and broad areas. Equally deep-rooted links between people and landscape may also account for patterns in areas such as the North Yorkshire Moors, where lithic scatters in adjacent zones appear to reflect the consistent use of different raw materials.

Under these broad conditions, people may have thought about the landscape and themselves in ways rather different to those we take for granted today. To begin with, relatively mobile communities often tend to think in terms of the tenure that they have over particular places and pathways, rather than ownership of discrete and demarcated territories (Casimir 1992; Ingold 1982; 1986). Social boundaries within and beyond extensive kinship systems are often recognised, just as certain resources can be thought of as the effective preserve of clans or sub-clans. At times they may be actively contested. But there is often a flexibility in connections between people and place that is manifest across the seasonal round and at the timescale of generations. Traditional patterns of movement and activity involve a continual, often cyclical, process of renewing and reworking those connections. At the same time, taskscape traditions are often bound up in the reproduction of more specific discourses. Cut through with myth and with stories of the ancestral past, familiar places and pathways can have varied biographical associations with kin and non-kin, with women and men and with adults and children (Gell 1985; Morphy 1995; Tacon 1991). Particular resources or prominent landmarks can be accorded a totemic significance, and it is not uncommon for people to draw metaphors and mnemonics from features and rhythms of the natural world. Forests may hold the eyes of the dead and the configuration of the taskscape may be explained by reference to the acts of earlier generations or ancestral forces (Basso 1984). These understandings do not, and could not, persist as rigid and abstracted codes. Like the biographies of people, they are carried forward via oral tradition and through a practical, often bodily, engagment with the world and with others.

How were these and other themes woven into the taskscapes of the Later Mesolithic? Variability in the scale, composition and location of many surface scatters suggests not just a diversity of camps and tasks, but also a flexibility in the roll call of certain places and times. Communities divided and combined at different times of the year, and there would have been junctures at which members of more than one broad kin group came into routine contact with each other. Connections between people and place were also reworked across generations. Some settlements or camps were returned to again and again, persisting as dominant locales in much the same way as the coastal shell middens that survive further to the north. In a varied, but often heavily wooded landscape, other places were set apart, seeing only sporadic use by relatively small numbers of people. Stretched across time as much as space, these patterns of routine activity provided frames across which various themes and values could be mapped. For example, routine separation from the community may have been keyed into concepts of rites of passage, and into the negotiation of the thresholds that separated the young from the old. At other times, a particular task or resource brought people together in larger and more varied combinations. Anticipated as part of an annual cycle, these events created potentials for the realisation of social relations that stretched beyond the boundaries of immediate or close kinship.

Traditional cycles of activity also brought people into routine contact with evidence for the past that lay behind their actions and, at times, for the presence of others. For example, browsing conditions created by firing would have left a tangible trace to be seen by others. Here was a place that had been shaped by others. Who were they? What had they done? How long had they stayed? Such conditions also needed to be maintained. Cleared land can regenerate in a handful of years and even an annual round would bring changes in the physical appearance of a particular place. Like other forms of woodland management, the routine, cyclical process of 'tending to land' would have reiterated the ties that bound people and place (Cronon 1983; Head 1994). The return to a camp of the previous year involved the clearance of low cover and an acquaintance with the traces of past activity. Even long vacated clearings would have been recognisable as places with a history, even if that history had become blurred and suffused with myth. Often rooted in oral tradition, the significance that people attached to particular areas would have been shaped by their encounter with these traces. This 'archaeological' evidence provided cues for narratives that linked past to present and people to each other.

We can follow these ideas in the evidence of stone tool assemblages and can begin with the stone itself. In raw material terms, Later Mesolithic assemblages often reflect the consistent selection of good quality stone. This is particularly evident in areas such as the Peak District, where a range of materials were available. Here, good quality flint and fine grained dark cherts dominate assemblages to the virtual exclusion of poorer stone. We often explain this tendency by suggesting that mobile groups need good stone because movement involves a stress on time and resources (Torrence 1989). On occasion, we also use raw material characterisation to talk in terms of the scale and direction of mobility in different areas. What can also be said is that these patterns of procurement reflect a consistent use of particular sources or source areas over generations. In the course of their lives, people built up knowledge of where the good stone lay, and

of how to read a river bank, cliff or tree-throw in the search for more material. At the same time, they learnt of the ancestral past that lay behind particular sources, and of the conventions that determined who could visit and work and who could not. And in this way they also learnt about themselves, and about their place in world. The use of a familiar source renewed the genealogical and mythic connections that bound people to particular parts of the landscape and to their kin. Here was a place that had always been there, shaped, perhaps, by ancestors. Generations before had come to this place, and the marks of their presence were all around – old hearths, scatters of stone and regenerated trees. As much a part of nature as a product of history, these sources endured. On occasion, seasonal visits to sources, and the hearing of stories, might have been undertaken only when a person had reached a certain age. It is also likely that some source areas – pockets of clay-with-flints or fine grained chert outcrops – were visited by both kin and relative strangers. Under these circumstances, the negotiation of access and other, more chance, encounters created a medium through which relations between communities were renewed and reworked over time.

It may have been under conditions such as these that the distinctive chert of the Isle of Portland was carried into Central and Western England (Bradley 1984; Darvill 1987). Visits to these long known outcrops may have been signal events where many met, and where the broader outlines of the social landscape were brought into sharper relief. However, the archaeological distribution of this material may also reflect the passage of stone between people. Just as many tranchet axes were distributed away from the chalk where they were made, so cores and even raw materials may have moved between, as well as with, communities (Care 1979; 1982). Such transactions may have often had a pragmatic aspect. But persistent trading partnerships created lasting bonds between groups. Other exchanges were crucial for the reproduction of ties of kinship, affiliation and even obligation. Where exchange was also means of inflicting debt, the practice of 'keeping while giving' (Weiner 1992) played an important role in reproducing relations between kin groups and between elders and their subordinates.

Further details of Later Mesolithic assemblages offer clues as to the ways in which the practical and the social were interwoven. Almost by definition, assemblages display a consistent emphasis upon the controlled working of small blade cores and the creation and use of small, 'geometric', microliths (Jacobi 1976; Pitts/Jacobi 1979). These were often the products of accustomed hands. While the retouching of a microlith is simple in itself, it is a task that comes at the end of a complex and potentially varied chain of operations that begins with the selection of stone. Platforms need to be prepared and maintained, and flaking often requires precision, anticipation and a sympathy between hand and stone. Homogenous raw materials lend themselves to this way of working, and this is one reason why we see considered patterns of selection and procurement.

Here again, we have tended to explain these characteristics as a function of mobility. In circumstances where people move on a routine basis, traditions of working which favour portability appear to confer certain advantages. By the same logic, microliths are taken to reflect an efficient way of using stone, and, because of high component redundancy, a low risk strategy in 'gearing up' for hunting trips. As Nyree Finlay has noted, this sort of explanation betrays something of a 'boys and arrows' bias, playing down the use of microliths in a much wider range of tasks (Finlay pers comm). What it also plays down is the idea that these particular ways of working and using stone were meshed into other concerns. These traditions endured for many generations and archaeologically, they stretch across large parts of the country. They reflect the persistence of specific forms of knowledge and technique – particular ways of working amongst many alternatives. This suggests that the act of working was itself an object of discourse – a medium through which ideas about identity and community were addressed.

This idea is not entirely original. For some, regional differences in microlith typologies have been taken as evidence that these items were drawn upon to signal group identity to others. Carried and used in seasonal routines, these tool components provided a physical expression of distinctions between people at a relatively broad social scale. This argument has its attractions. But it may be that we have missed both the themes that these items addressed and the particular manner in which this process operated. To begin with, these regional traditions are more than a little blurred. We could explain this away as a product of time depth. But this blurring may actually indicate that the boundaries of different social traditions were far from static. They may have shifted back and forth through patterns of exogamous marriage, through the negotiation of varied social relationships, and as a result of changes in the fortunes of different generations of kin. In addition, it is unlikely that differences in the trimming of tiny bladelets provided a medium for explicit expressions of group identity, particularly since they were mounted, and more or less hidden, in composite tools. Instead, 'regional' microlith traditions may reflect a more tacit consensus, sustained over time, regarding the customary manner in which such artefacts were to be made. Much the same might be said of the structured routines of flaking bound up in the creation and working of blade cores themselves.

What themes were sustained by these traditions? Broad similarities in ways of working may have offered quiet

confirmation of the ties that stretched between different groups. But knowledge of particular routines would have been acquired through observation and practice at a relatively local scale. Learning would have required instruction, and from that process would have come a localised sense of position and, perhaps, of progression across the thresholds that defined different stages in the life of a person. In other words, the acquisition of technical know-how may have been keyed into the reproduction of quite basic social categories, from close kinship to distinctions of age and gender. During the Later Mesolithic, the working of cores and the production and use of microliths may have been important media through which these facets of a person's identity were given expression.

These observations may not take us very far. However, they do suggest that the landscape was already inscribed with social and historical significance prior to what we call the Neolithic. The land and its resources had taken on complex associations with particular groups of people, and networks of contact and communication cut back and forth across regions. As relations within and between kin groups shifted over time, so those associations and networks were themselves reworked. At the same time, particular traditions of procuring and working stone seem to have been shaped as much by concepts of identity and community as by practical demand. Ties of obligation and affiliation were reworked through the exchange of tranchet axes and perhaps other materials. Customary patterns of source use helped sustain close kinship and an affinity with particular places. And core working itself contributed to the reproduction of basic social categories. It is against this varied background that we can turn to the taskscapes of the Earlier Neolithic, and to the idea that the transition involved both continuity and change in the character of routine experience.

We can begin with the evidence of continuities in the broad pattern of people's daily and seasonal lives. So far as we can tell, much of Southern Britain saw only limited woodland clearance at this time, with many sites established in clearings or on the margins of woodland. Across valleys and uplands, the land took the form of a varied and shifting patchwork. Rather than a tradition of mixed agriculture with all that this entails, communities followed routines of a different character, their pattern sometimes varying from one region to another. Where practiced, cultivation generally took the form of 'garden plot' horticulture, and this was often an adjunct to the husbandry of animals and the hunting and collecting of wild resources by small groups. More often than not, those groups probably comprised close kin. As in the Later Mesolithic, all that often remains of the settlements and camps of the early fourth millenium are surface scatters that vary in their scale, location and internal characteristics. Where excavated, few produce features indicative of substantial structures, and it is common to find sites defined by the presence of a few bowl-shaped pits. Many of these pits show signs of purposive filling, involving the careful deposition of pottery, tools, midden material and, on occasion, fragments of people (Thomas 1990). No doubt other sites remain to be discovered, in the bottom of river valleys or beneath peat or hillwash. We must also allow that stake holes and other shallow features have been lost in many cases. Nevertheless, many of our scatters fit uneasily within a model of mixed agriculture and stable residence. They vary considerably and it is this variability that we need to acknowledge.

Some scatters are small indeed. Identified through fieldwalking, they can be no more than twenty or thirty metres in diameter, comprising cores and waste, endscrapers, blades and narrow flakes. An Earlier Neolithic presence can even be marked by no more than one or two tools – often the leaf-shaped arrowheads that appear at this time. Distributions such as these reflect the limited and sporadic use of particular locations: small camps established for a season, or places through which people passed. Other scatters display different characteristics. Some take the form of more extensive spreads, their distribution being all that survives of settlements comprising one or two structures that persisted for perhaps a generation. In settings such as these, the range of artefacts can also be extended. Cores and waste occur with burnt flint, scrapers, serrated flakes and other retouched pieces – a range that suggests a wide array of tasks and a sense of duration (Ford 1987; Gardiner 1984; Holgate 1988; Richards 1990; Woodward 1990). Sometimes the waste itself will indicate specific acts; the thinning, shaping and maintenance of axes or adzes, the working of cores, or the fashioning of arrowheads and laurel leaves.

Other scatters are larger still. At places like Broome Heath in Norfolk or Tattershall Thorpe in Lincolnshire, excavation has revealed evidence for more extensive clusters of pits, stakes holes and other features, and a correspondingly larger volume of worked stone (Bradley *et al.* 1993; Wainwright/Longworth 1972). Similarly, along the Snail Valley in Cambridgeshire, survey has identified an extensive yet discontinuous spread of Earlier Neolithic tools and waste. Echoing patterns seen elsewhere, the spreads of material along this valley seem to follow the path of a now relict river channel, hidden until recently by a blanket of eroding peat. These larger scatters can be interpreted in a number of ways. On the one hand, the scale of a 'site' may reflect the existence of a settlement that comprised a handful of extended families. Alternatively, the distribution of features and artefacts may be a product of time depth: These may have been places to which people returned, each phase of occupation adding to the sense of attachment that it held for an extended family.

Found in a variety of settings, from river valleys, fens and coasts to modern downs and moors, patterns within and between Earlier Neolithic scatters invite several interpretations. On the one hand, they prompt the suggestion that many communities retained a measure of mobility. Rather than being permanently fixed to a specific location, people followed routines which often took them between uplands and lowlands and between different places (Barnatt 1996). Many practiced what was in essence, a long fallow system alongside the herding of stock, and this meant that occupation could shift on a seasonal basis and at the time scale of generations. Differences in the scale and composition of scatters also point to variations in the roll call of different places: short term camps for a handful of people; settlements occupied by an extended family, and places where families gathered, perhaps for a season, perhaps for a generation or more. Beyond these places lie the palimpsests of material created at some of the field monuments that emerged during the Earlier Neolithic – tombs, prominent stone sources and ceremonial enclosures that were visited periodically.

We shall return to these places later on, but first we should acknowledge that many of these characteristics recall the broad patterns identified across Later Mesolithic landscapes. Here too, it seems that the structure of daily and seasonal experience brought people to different places and into different combinations. This created the potential for the reproduction of relations within and between communities of close kin. And again, we must allow that the varied patchwork of woodlands, cleared ground and paths provided evidence for the past and present order of the social landscape (Gow 1995; Kahn 1990; Kuchler 1993). These parallels gain greater depth when we recognise that routines of movement and action brought people to places that had a long ancestry. Scatters containing both Later Mesolithic and Earlier Neolithic material have been identified in many areas. In some cases, the overlap is marked by no more than a handful of tools. In others, it is evidenced by the placing of a tomb on a camp established long before (Kinnes 1992; Saville 1990). Patterns of raw material selection in a number of regions also remained relatively unchanged. Communities followed long-standing traditions of selection that brought them back again and again to particular sources – to beach cliffs, rivers, outcrops and pockets of good flint.

These apparent continuities find echoes in traditions of stoneworking themselves. Microliths appear to have fallen out of use by the end of the fifth millennium BC, but patterns of core working in the Earlier Neolithic display a persistent concern with the production of blades and narrow flakes. This too has been taken as evidence for the continued importance of routine patterns of mobility amongst Earlier Neolithic communities (Bradley 1987; Edmonds 1987). I do not wish to challenge this argument here. Similarities in raw material selection and in core working traditions between the two periods do suggest broad continuities in the pattern of people's lives. However, close inspection suggests that we cannot always compare like with like. Together with the disappearance of microliths, traditions of core working do display some changes and these are no less important. For example, the inventories of stoneworking waste in Earlier Neolithic assemblages can be quite varied. Sometimes this reflects the production of different classes of artefact, such as those that required patterns of bifacial working (Burton 1980). In other cases, there is a greater degree of variability within the products and by-products of core working itself. Many single and opposed platform cores were carefully worked to produce narrow flakes and blades. But size ranges are wider than before, and flake morphology a little more irregular (Pitts/Jacobi 1979). Despite similarities in the end product, the knapping routines that produced many flakes and blades in the Earlier Neolithic were not as tightly structured as they had been in the Later Mesolithic. These rather subtle changes in core technology are difficult to understand. However, they may reflect a gradual shift of emphasis away from core working, and perhaps the creation and use of microliths, as media through which basic concepts of social identity were carried forward.

What conditions gave rise to these changes? One response would be to take developments in stoneworking, like the first appearance of pottery, polished tools and monuments, as by-products of a dramatic economic transformation. Yet many features of the taskscape seem to have remained relatively stable across the transition. As an alternative, we might follow the argument that these changes represent the introduction of new ways of thinking about the self and about society (Hodder 1990; Thomas 1988). This has its attractions. But we actually say very little so long as we play down two issues. First, ideas about 'being Neolithic' did not simply float in the ether. They were grounded in material traditions, some of which had a long and complex ancestry. Second, the Neolithic was not a tightly drawn or unitary ideological package any more than it was a simple economic transformation. In other words, it may be unwise to talk in terms of a single way of thinking or a new, singular, definition of culture and nature. These are overly simple rationalisations of a far more complex process that varied from one place and time to another. Rather than follow that line, we should allow that the Neolithic consisted of a series of elements, drawn upon in different ways under different historical and material conditions. It was not the same thing from one place or time to another (see Barrett this volume; Pluccienik in press; Thomas 1996; Whittle 1996; Zvelebil in press). In the face of tensions within and between communities, questions of access, tenure, standing or renown

were addressed with reference to new ideas and new resources. The creation of ancestral houses, the herding of cattle, the production and consumption of pottery and polished stone tools: Each provided new potentials for the reproduction of concepts of identity, community and authority.

Resolving itself over several centuries and in different ways from one region to another, this process brought with it consequences for the taskscape that were no less profound for being unforseen. Cattle, for example, had an impact that went far beyond their value as a source of protein. Having herds created new media for the expression of identity and the negotiation of standing. Cattle could be owned and exchanged in novel ways, and this introduced a new dynamic into relations that stretched between communities. They also provided a rich new source of metaphors; the constitution of herds offering cues for people's understandings of their place in the social landscape. Inclusion of cattle bones in certain tombs also suggests that they may have sometimes had the capacity to stand for particular qualities of people. At the same time, the rhythms of herding brought with them new patterns of movement and new practices through which to draw distinctions such as those that separated the young and the old. The seasonal round carried people to and from the land of their birth, their feet in step with the hooves of their small herds. No doubt these journeys were often made by all, but there would have been junctures at which trips to pastures were made by only a few.

With cattle also came the consolidation of pathways, the persistence of grasslands and new tensions between communities. Questions of access and tenure remained important. But the subtle reworking of the land that cattle entailed would have engendered claim, counter claim, and on occasion, perhaps even rustling. And cattle, like other domesticates, encouraged the redefinition of attitudes towards the natural world (Hodder 1990). It may have been the potentials offered by the ownership and herding of cattle that contributed to changes in stoneworking traditions.

Traditional attitudes and ways of working were further eroded by important changes in the inventories of Earlier Neolithic assemblages. Leaf shaped arrowheads and sickles suggest a concern with hunting, harvesting and perhaps fighting, however graded and ritualised the latter may have been (Edmonds/Thomas 1987). But like laurel leaves, they also betray an increased concern with the execution of careful patterns of bifacial working, pressure flaking and invasive retouch that often went far beyond the satisfaction of practical requirements. The production and the use of these tools may have emerged as new media for the definition of people.

Beyond these items, the Earlier Neolithic also saw the emergence of discrete and often prominent sources – flint mines and upland stone quarries that saw a distinct and sustained emphasis upon axe production. Often set apart from settlement, many were established in clearings or above the treeline, their exploitation taking the form of periodic visits by small groups. Sometimes these visits went in step with the movement of cattle. As with some earlier sources, these were places and times at which members of different kin groups might anticipate meeting. Physically marginal to familiar settlements, they may have also been socially liminal, their use helping to structure basic concepts of identity that had once been sustained in other ways. As Verna Care has pointed out, flaked axes were already being produced and perhaps circulated between people during the Later Mesolithic (Care 1979). This seems to suggest a measure of continuity in a specific area of social practice; further support provided by the fact that a few ground stone axes have been recovered in Later Mesolithic contexts (David 1989). However, we should not play down the change in practice occasioned by the development of major mines and quarries. These were monuments just as much as the first tombs and ceremonial enclosures. Those permitted to work at these sites at certain times dug not just for stone, but for tokens of their identity. Indeed, the very act of sinking a shaft or climbing to a precipitous cliff face was itself a medium through which these themes were carried forward. And as people worked and learned in varied combinations, they sat among the scars of old shafts and working faces – testaments to the genealogical and ancestral past that lay behind their actions (Edmonds 1996).

With time, visits to sources may have changed in their significance. Artefacts that could be drawn upon as tokens of identity were also circulated as tokens of value. Rich in biographical associations, the histories of these tools were embellished as they passed from hand to hand, and even from one generation to another. Carried, used and displayed, they served as reminders of the standing of certain people, and their place within networks of kinship and obligation. And as exchange was increasingly drawn upon in the negotiation of those networks, so the significance accorded to procurement and production within particular regions gradually changed (Bradley/Edmonds 1993). Access to sources became a more highly charged discourse – an arena in which relations between groups were actively negotiated. Prominent mountains or hillsides gained a patina of myth and even danger, and working may have taken on added qualities as an event which shaped the basic identity of a person. This may be why we find a change through time, at one upland source at least, towards more highly structured flaking routines and the use of precipitously located quarries (ibid).

In step with these changes came other shifts in attitude and practice. Here we can return to the pits that often lie beneath

scatters of broken stone. Pits and their contents often display an order which is difficult to explain as the random and gradual accumulation of rubbish, however we choose to define the term (Thomas 1990). Pottery sherds may show considered selection and placement, as can worked stone, and material from middens or episodes of consumption is not uncommon. What were the conditions under which these features were created? What purposes were served by the placing of these materials in the earth? We will never catch the full significance that these acts may have held for specific people. But given their context, these essentially local rites may have provided a medium through which communities renewed their sense of tenure with particular places. This may have been of great importance where seasonal and even generational cycles involved movement away from one setting to another. And it increased in importance as new forms of relationship, with land and with others, were engendered by changes in the character of routine practices. For those who were present, the gathering together of fired clay, worked stone, food remains, and sometimes fragments of the dead, drew attention to the practical and genealogical ties that bound communities to specific locales. These were the traces of particular acts, associated with particular people and events. Created as people left for a season, or perhaps for other reasons, the filling of pits, like the planting of crops, offered the hope of renewal and return. For those who returned and remembered, these features provided mnemonics for the past that lay behind an old clearing or camp.

The presence of fragments of the dead in pits and perhaps in middens also brings us back to contemporary tombs. Regional differences can be seen in the forms and histories of these sites and this reminds us that we are dealing with varied local traditions. These histories also reveal that the character and significance of specific sites did not go unchanged over time. Yet many tombs share common features and their use often suggests an acknowledgement of common principles. These were the houses of the ancestors. Often embellished over generations, tombs were frames which could hold the bones of the dead and harness those relics to particular places.

What significance did the living attach to the dead at these sites? In many cases, the bones of the dead arrived already stripped of their flesh. Exposed or actively defleshed elsewhere, human bones were often brought to tombs to rest amongst the remains of earlier generations. This privilege may not always have been open to all, and bones could be removed from tombs for deposition elsewhere or to circulate amongst the living. Within their bounds however, it was a commonplace that the broken remains of a person were incorporated with the jumbled remnants of those long dead. It is in this emphasis on the collective over the individual that we can trace a concern with ancestral forces. These communities of bones contained kin who were remembered and mourned. But the customary breaking and re-ordering of their bodies suggests a desire to see the dead pass on into the ancestral realm; a realm which bound the community of the living to earlier generations and to the time of myth. Few were singled out for special treatment within these sites, and for the most part, we find little evidence for the provision of durable goods with specific people. Shrouded in myth and perhaps watched over by spirits, these were places to which people returned on many occasions. Sometimes that return brought fragments of the newly deceased, but visits were often as much in step with seasonal and ancestral rites as they were with the demise of a specific person. Entire communities may have gathered in the shadow of their ancestors at certain times. At others, attendance and observance may have been the privilege of more select groups.

The meanings that people attached to these ancestral houses was probably as varied as the architecture that we try to capture in our plans and sections. These were places where personal loss could be acknowledged and where a sense of kinship and community could be grounded in an ancestral and cosmological order. They were places where relics were generated to circulate amongst the living, many offering no more than a temporary resting place for the bones of the dead. Associated with powerful forces, they were also places to which people came to ask for intervention and support, and as such, they were contexts where some might come to hold authority over others. Proximity to the ancestors may itself have been taken as an index of the standing of particular people. The right to officiate may have been the prerogative of family heads or of shamans, and there may have been times when access to the forecourts or interior of tombs was restricted to only a few. Out of these distinctions came a sense of the order of relations amongst the living, an order which seemed all the more inevitable where its roots could be traced into the ancestral past.

The communities of bones that lay within could play an immediate and important part in this process. Inclusion may have often been a privilege of kinship and position, and once inside, the placement and re-ordering of bone may have brought certain concepts and values into sharp relief. The confusion of disarticulated and decaying remains could be read as a metaphor for the collective bonds of kinship, and this has been a common theme in interpretation. At times, this sense of commonality may have been more fictive than real, the leveling in death concealing divisions amongst the living (Shanks/Tilley 1982). But until our grasp of genetic information improves, we can only suggest that these divisions followed lines defined by marriage and descent.

What is clear is that these frames could be used to idealize more basic distinctions. Sometimes the bones of the elders and of children were separated, drawing attention to the authority that set one generation apart from another. Women could also be distinguished from men. These distinctions were brought into focus as certain people handled and ordered skeletal remains; rites which probably involved the telling of stories about the ancestral past and the lives of earlier generations. Those narratives may have even taken cues from the architecture of the tombs themselves (Barrett 1994). The arrangement of chambers and deposits lent an order to the encounter that people had with these relics, and this allowed relations amongst the living to be manipulated and placed beyond question.

In a landscape composed of places and paths, what sort of encounter did people have with these sites? What issues were addressed through their foundation and elaboration over time? Rites conducted at these sites had important consequences for relations among those who participated, and those who could only stand and watch. But the significance of tombs went beyond the fragments of the dead that they contained, and this returns us to the taskscape. The settings of tombs are varied in the extreme, but many are found in prominent locations – at valley heads, on ridge tops and along likely paths of access. Some were founded in small clearings, on turf, or on earth that had been cultivated. A number even seal traces of later Mesolithic and Earlier Neolithic settlement, or align themselves on prominent landscape features that had long provided a focus for human activity (Barrett 1988; Tilley 1994). More often than not, they were founded in places that had a specific cultural past.

We could dismiss these patterns as coincidences, but a more common response is to cast these sites as territorial markers; as statements of property rights made by particular communities (Bradley 1984; Renfrew 1973). This idea seems to 'make sense' to us, but it actually says very little in itself. To begin with, it misses the dramatic reworking of the significance of a place that the foundation of a tomb established. An old camp or clearing, a patch of grazing, or an area that had seen visits by generations of hunters and herders now had ancestral occupants, forces to be respected and perhaps even feared. The purposes that were served by these foundations were probably as varied as they are difficult to specify. But it may be useful to think of the tensions that existed both within and between communities: arguments over the authority of the elders or competition for local dominance between different kin groups. No doubt there were times when these arguments revolved around questions of access; to grazing or to old settlement areas, or perhaps to particular sources of stone. This may be part of the reason why long barrows on Cranborne Chase lie close to pockets of clay with flints (Barrett *et al*. 1991; Edmonds 1996). Often however, it was the ancestors and their powers that were the focus of attention. Where proximity and the right to speak on their behalf could be an important expression of authority, these houses of the dead and their contents could become objects of discourse in their own right. Where those involved in the foundation of a tomb were bound by ties of kinship, the housing of the ancestors was a means by which they attached themselves to a place. What was important was that this attachment often grew out of a cyclical pattern of life that took people to and from these places. Visited at key junctures and seen or passed in the course of the seasonal round, the foundation and episodic use of tombs provided a powerful medium through which people renewed a sense of tenure with particular locales. Returning again and again, and adding to the fabric as well as the content of tombs, they grounded that attachment in the ancestral past and projected it into the future.

Over time, the statements made through simple mortuary structures were embellished through the addition of earth or stone; through the extension of mounds or the construction of forecourts and facades. These physical changes betoken shifts in the significance attached to these places and the manner in which they were drawn upon or appropriated by the living. As one generation gave way to another, those who returned added to the form and historical associations of these sites. In doing so, they renewed and redefined their bonds of kinship and their basic sense of community. These were houses that endured, but they were also resources that could be manipulated.

Given their taskscape contexts, the redolences of pits or tombs may have been best appreciated at a local scale by a relatively small number of communities. Yet like pottery and stone tools, these features were created with reference to traditions that stretched a considerable distance across the country and through time. Just as ground and polished axes can be found from northern Scotland to Cornwall, or similarities in core working traced between Yorkshire and Wiltshire, so conventions surrounding the treatment of pits or the veneration of ancestors are shared between regions. In other words, we can see common themes and concerns, even though these may have been drawn upon in different ways from one setting to another.

These patterns may be partly a product of our own preconceptions, and our desire to find an order that we can call national. But they highlight what at first glance appears to be a paradox. How do we reconcile similarities at these broader scales with the idea that the landscape was dispersed, fragmented and often seasonal in its roll call? We might make reference to routine mobility patterns played out and reworked over generations, and to concepts of exogamy and overlapping local traditions. These are, of course, crucial. But we must also allow that these broader webs of social

relations were hung upon specific points in time and space. Stone sources or areas seasonally rich in game had long served as contexts in which encounters with kin and relative strangers might be anticipated. Through these meetings, goods, people and ideas passed between communities. It may have been under these circumstances that the possibility of changes in practice were realized. With the Neolithic came the idea of more clearly demarcated arenas in which those encounters could be scheduled and undertaken. Arising out of the cooperative labor of a range of kin groups, causewayed enclosures served as liminal places – set apart from the world of day-to-day activity – where the more extensive qualities of the social landscape were pulled into sharper focus (Edmonds 1993).

Long established on the continent, the idea of enclosures was drawn upon in various ways from one part of North-Western Europe to another (Burgess *et al*. 1988). Some formed boundaries that were added to settlements whilst others had close ties with the dead or with particular resources (Bradley in press; Petrequin *et al*. In press; Whittle 1996). This idea was drawn upon in equally varied ways by groups of communities in southern Britain. Like some prominent stone sources, many were initially encountered on an episodic, perhaps seasonal basis, their use embedded in broader routines of cattle husbandry. In areas such as the South-West, a few were established as more or less permanent settlements, but these remain exceptions which confirm the strength of long standing regional traditions. Often passed or even used as camps in the company of animals and close kin, these places periodically witnessed the coming together of a larger number and a wider range of people. Herds were brought together in their environs, and people camped, cooked, and worked the land around them in close proximity to others. At a time when the common pattern of contact stressed close kin, these were signal events. A focus for rites of passage, and for production and exchange, these gatherings created a symbolically charged context in which many themes could be addressed: fertility and renewal; access and ancestry; kinship and obligation; even conflict and competition. Through ancestral rites, the giving of feasts and graded transactions, people worked and reworked their position in broad networks of kinship, obligation and authority. Understood differently by those who could participate and those restricted to the margins, these events also confirmed the standing of people amongst their close kin.

Enclosures may have often been regarded as socially liminal, even dangerous places. But like tombs, these arenas of value were not constructed and used in a vacuum. Some would have been encountered on a regular basis; passed as a family moved with their cattle, or during hunting, and seen as people tended crops and gathered other resources. Certain enclosures even lay on or close to outcrops of stone that had been in use long before the first ditch was dug. Distinctive tranchet flakes in surface scatters near Knap Hill in the Vale of Pewsey point to a connection between people and place that extended back into what we call the Mesolithic. Similar patterns can be seen in Sussex (Gardiner 1984) and at Maiden Castle in Dorset, local sources of stone were as important to Earlier Neolithic communities as they had been to their forbears. We should not play down the drama of 'altering the earth' bound up in the construction and elaboration of enclosures. But even here, we should recognize that the foundation of these sites often involved the reworking of long histories attached to particular clearings, hilltops and sources of stone. Once established, they too became resources with the potential to be drawn upon in the satisfaction of sectional interests.

3. Conclusion

This discussion has remained at a relatively general level, and this brings with it certain problems. However, I hope I have shown that a concern with the dull compulsion of people's lives, and with the changing configuration of the taskscapes that they occupied, can add much to our understanding. We create a better context in which to set our studies of particular monuments or monument complexes when we consider the conditions under which these particular times and places were occupied. And in tracing these taskscapes, we can also explore how the character and tempo of routine tasks was itself caught up in the reproduction of the social world. In other words, we allow that commitments to place and to others may be, quite literally, 'worked through' in different ways through different areas of practice.

These genealogies of settlement and stoneworking traditions cast a sharp light on some of the taken-for-granteds behind models of the transition. In particular, they stress the importance of treating this phase in prehistory as a situated historical process unfolding through the actions of people. If there is a general observation to be drawn from all of this, it is that this process involved both continuity and change in the character of routine experience. Although resources and ideas were drawn from communities across the water, the landscapes of Southern Britain were not a *tabula rasa* upon which Neolithic colonists could make their mark. By the same token, concern with the definition of kin and non kin; of women and men; of the elders and their subordinates, did not emerge with the first crop of corn. Nor did questions of tenure and renown. Woven into routine practice and explicit in varied rites, these and other themes had been important for many generations. What happened across what we recognise as the transition was a reworking of the practices through which people understood and addressed these issues.

Ancestral rites, the production and use of pottery and polished tools, procurement, exchange and the use of domesticates: all provided media through which concepts of identity, community and authority could be carried forward. Taken up in varied ways and at different times from one region to another, these practices, in their turn, changed the ways in which people thought about the landscape, their past, and their relationships with others. We do little justice to the complex qualities of this process when we reduce it to the succession of archetypes.

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