

Acts of the XIVth UISPP Congress, University of Liège, Belgium, 2-8 September 2001. Section 3: Paleoecology. General Sessions and Posters

Congress Secretariat (ed.). Section 3 Organizers: Paul Haesaerts and Freddy Damblon.

British Archaeological Reports International Series 1271. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2004, 111 pp. (paperback), £29.00.

ISBN-10: 1-84171-624-3.

Reviewed by KRIS KOVAROVIC

Department of Anthropology, University College London, 14 Taviton Street, London WC1H 0BW, UNITED KINGDOM; k.kovarovic@ucl.ac.uk

ISABELLE DE GROOTE

Department of Anthropology, University College London, 14 Taviton Street, London WC1H 0BW, UNITED KINGDOM; i.degroote@ucl.ac.uk

This slim volume is a collection of papers derived from podium and poster presentations at the International Union for Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences (UISPP) Congress held at the University of Liège in 2001. Written in both French and English, the overarching theme of palaeoecology is more evident in some contributions than others. Previously in this journal, the review of a similar book pertaining to the Middle Palaeolithic sessions at the same meeting points out that the purpose of this congress—essentially to allow researchers to present new results from excavations—frequently results in a series of site reports in the subsequent publication, an option offered to all congress participants (Uomini 2008). We concur that the palaeoecology volume reads very much as a collection of such reports and while there is most certainly value in this type of publication, the quality and relevance of the individual articles varies considerably and the volume lacks coherence.

There are four sections—three of them contain papers from general sessions and the final section comprises three posters. Section 3-I contains three very brief pieces focusing on cave sites and begins with Konik and Kervaso's report on the sedimentation and palaeoenvironment of the Cusoul de Vers Rockshelter, France. They overemphasise the difficulties in interpreting the site rather than the interpretations themselves and a brief mention of the site's context would have been helpful; however, their methodological points are meaningful and the authors identify three major sequences in the record. Kervaso and Ferrier's short but informative paper that follows discusses the sedimentary deposits in three separate areas of the Grotte du Placard, France. Although some of the issues mentioned in the abstract are not addressed in the paper, they do highlight the difficulty in using cave stratigraphy to develop regional climate models, and provide a good description of the cave's unique stratigraphic history. The final short paper in this section examines the nutrition and subsistence of individuals recovered from Upper Paleolithic, Neolithic, and Bronze Age occupation layers at Grotta Continenza, Italy. Bertoldi et al. use multiple lines of evidence including faunal, microwear, and isotope analysis to trace trends in the human population's relationship to different aspects of the non-human fauna. By virtue of the many types of data and different analyses reported, more in-depth expla-

nations of each were warranted; in particular, the treatment of the microwear analysis lacks depth and adds little to the reader's understanding.

Section 3-II begins with Aranguren et al.'s synthesis of the sedimentological, palynological, and archaeological data from Bilancino, an Italian Gravettian site characterised by the presence of Noailles burins. They identify three distinct palynological sequences and infer from these and the local geomorphology that the nearness of water and likelihood of flooding made the site a temporary settlement supporting the harvest of hygrophilous herbs. The article is somewhat difficult to read and their claim that the site "suggests a new vision on the scientific debate regarding the Noailles Burins lithic industries" requires greater explanation and further analyses to be properly demonstrated. Pernaud et al.'s article which follows provides a description of the large carnivore and bovid fauna from Castel Cave, France. There is a comparative aspect to the study, which is well-written and thoroughly referenced, although the paper is overwhelmed by tables of data that could have been presented in a more informative manner. It is a shame that the concluding paper of this section by Brugal et al. did not have a more comprehensive English abstract for non-French speakers, as the article is an interesting synthesis of information regarding faunal change in France between the last two climatic extremes. More formal statistical analyses are required to demonstrate this, however, they provide a helpful synthesis of the presence/absence and distribution of mammal species during this time period.

Zeitoun begins Section 3-III by revisiting the multi-regional hypothesis and the role of *Homo erectus* in the emergence of modern humans. The author posits that the multi-regional model is better understood if all species within the genus *Homo* are considered subspecies and advocates this approach to the issue. Although it is in some places a well-written synthesis of previous research in this area, there is ultimately no innovation in the work presented. Krönneck provides a reminder that both archaeozoological and paleontological methods can be applied to fossil assemblages in order to answer different questions in a brief paper summarising the site history of Bockstein, Germany. The third paper in this section is the most in-depth in the entire volume. Smyntyna's report identifies five different archaeological areas in the Ukraine and provides explanations of these

differences in terms of palaeogeography, vegetation, fauna, and living structures. Although it lacks somewhat in the interpretive aspect, the discussion is thorough. Dolukhanov et al.'s paper discussing the Mesolithic and Chalcolithic archaeological history of the Odessa Oblast (Province), Ukraine, follows. The aims of their two year field project are laid out, however, the remaining text is primarily a description of the site and its artifacts rather than a thorough explanation of how the project answered their initial questions. Dobrzańska et al.'s paper investigating the interaction between the human population at Zofipole, Poland, and the local environment concludes the section. Although lacking a French abstract or summary, the aims are clearly laid out and the paper is structured logically; the authors investigate Zofipole's pottery industry in light of local vegetation and water availability during the Roman Period.

The final section comprises three poster presentations. Posters do not always translate well into papers, but two of the pieces in this section are interesting and informative. Unfortunately, the first one, Bartoli et al.'s discussion of the paleonutrition of prehistoric Mediterranean populations over time, does not clearly convey the isotopic research conducted. It appears that the very brief poster text, accounting for only one page in five, is all that is contained here within the paper; tables and figures abound, but are not explained adequately in either the text or captions. The second paper, Valensi et al.'s detailed study of *Cervus elaphus* in the Paleolithic, is the strongest of the French papers. Although a brief conclusion would have been helpful, they show that the smaller *Cervus simplicidens* indicates a temperate environment whereas the larger *Cervus elaphus* was present only during colder stages. The final paper of the volume, Sümegi et al.'s discussion of the identification of Bronze Age agriculture through palynological analysis in the Carpathian Basin, is concise, but informative.

The international nature of the congress is clearly reflected by these papers; authors are conducting research across Europe and report on a wide variety of sites and methodologies. One of the strengths of the volume is that it reflects the diversity of ongoing research of interest to archaeologists, particularly in Europe. However, both this diversity of interests and the format of the congress (with its focus on site reports) means that the volume lacks a statement regarding the "bigger picture" and one cannot draw major palaeoecological conclusions from reading it in its entirety. One might argue that this was not the purpose of the book itself and so we can not find fault in it for

this. However, research in any format must be communicated effectively and here it suffers its greatest flaw. Authors could opt to write in either English or French and it is clear that both are second languages for some of them. Consequently, much of the writing is unclear and this was not addressed during the editorial process. Many of the papers are rife not only with just spelling errors, but also poor phrasing and grammatical mistakes that sometimes render the content incomprehensible. There were also minor issues, such as a lack of italicised species names in some papers; these smaller problems contribute to the difficulty in reading many of the pieces and infer a lack of care when assembling the volume.

There is no set standard for certain aspects of the articles. Tables, figures, and images are produced in many different formats and are not always found within the text in the appropriate places. Additionally, some of the articles lack abstracts or summaries in both French and English, which is a critical omission when the readers will not always be able to comprehend both languages and must rely entirely on an abstract or summary to understand the contents. Overall, this volume is a dizzying, disjointed read. Individually, assuming one has a particular interest in a specific site or region, the articles will have more merit. Had the authors consistently put more effort into turning a conference presentation script or poster text into a comprehensible publication, and had these contributions been appropriately copy edited, a more useful volume relating to European palaeoecology would have resulted.

BAR is a perfect format in which to publish site or otherwise short reports of ongoing research. However, much as one can forgive occasional typos or awkward turns of phrase, many of the contributions herein are frustrating reads and would not have been acceptable for publication in most other journals or edited books. Comprised of papers of such variable quality and readability, this volume will most likely contain helpful information for those with an interest in a specific site or region, but is of limited value to someone looking for a major contribution to paleoecological theory and practice in archaeology.

REFERENCE

- Uomini, N.T. 2008. Book review of "Acts of the XIVth UISPP Congress, University of Liège, Belgium, 2-8 September 2001. Section 5: The Middle Palaeolithic. General Sessions and Posters." *PaleoAnthropology* 2008: 205-206.