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6

The Middle and Late Neolithic
Le Néolithique moyen et récent

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Abstract

The documentation available for the post-Danubian Neolithic presents contrasted characteristics according to the addressed periods. The Middle Neolithic is known for its vast mining complexes, enclosed sites, abundant surface material and some graves in rock shelter. From the beginning of the third millennium B.C., collective tombs in cave become widespread throughout the Meuse basin and constitute, with about 10 megalithic monuments, the sole testimonies of the intense occupation of the Seine-Oise-Marne culture in Belgium. The Final Neolithic is only illustrated by a few sporadic finds. The data allow, however, to deal with questions as crucial as the interactions that were at the origins of these cultural phenomena. The Belgian group of the Michelsberg culture would be related to its developments in northern France, but with marked Chassean and Rhenan influences throughout its expansion in Middle Belgium and in the sandy regions. The Seine-Oise-Marne culture seems related of the Parisian basin in the first place, but the influences of the Wartberg culture must not be underestimated. Finally, the Final Neolithic belongs as much to the Seine-Oise-Marne and Artenac traditions (Deûle-Escaut group) as to more eastern cultural groupings (Bell Beaker phenomenon).

Résumé

La documentation relative au Néolithique post danubien offre des caractères contrastés selon les périodes auxquelles on s'adresse. Le Néolithique moyen est surtout connu au travers de vastes complexes miniers, des sites enceints de palissades et/ou de fossés, un abondant matériel de surface et quelques sépultures en grotte. Dès le début du 3e millénaire, les sépultures collectives en grotte se rencontrent par centaines dans le bassin mosan, formant, avec une dizaine de monuments mégalithiques, les seuls témoignages de l'intense occupation de la civilisation de Seine-Oise-Marne en Belgique. Enfin, le Néolithique final n'est illustré que par quelques trouvailles sporadiques. L'ensemble de ces données permettent cependant d'aborder des questions aussi cruciales que les interactions qui préludèrent à l'installation de ces courants culturels. Le groupe belge de la civilisation de Michelsberg serait tributaire des développements de ce taxon dans le nord de la France, marqué cependant par des influences chasséennes et rhénanes au cours de son déploiement à travers la Moyenne Belgique et les régions sableuses. Le Seine-Oise-Marne semble avant tout dépendant du Bassin parisien, mais les influences de la culture de Wartberg ne sont pas à négliger. Enfin, le Néolithique final ressortit tantôt aux traditions Seine-Oise-Marne et artenacienne (groupe de Deûle-Escaut), tantôt à des courants culturels plus orientaux (civilisation campaniforme).

1. MIDDLE NEOLITHIC

The Middle Neolithic in Belgium is still often considered as consisting of two distinct cultural groups, i.e. the one responsible for the flint extraction sites and the other responsible for the Michelsberg culture pottery. This apparent dichotomy is partly based on the differences in lithic technology and the fact that the chronological and geographical distribution of the Neolithic mining phenomenon only partly matches that of the Belgian Michelsberg culture. Moreover, the dichotomy is based on the explanatory models of the emergence of a new Neolithic way of life, not directly related to the former Danubian traditions. On the territory of present day Belgium there is a chronological gap of at least four centuries between the last dates of the Early Neolithic and the first of the Michelsberg culture sites.

In the past few years numerous excavations have yielded additional information to this debate. Although most studies are still in process, a first review of the situation can be presented. Chronologically, the systematic anteriority of the first mining exploitations on the arrival of the Michelsberg culture is no longer evident. Moreover, recent studies focussed on Middle Neolithic economic practices, while the settlement system remains poorly known. Finally, several cave tombs were recently discovered, shedding new light on the funeral practices of the period.

1.1. Origin of the Belgian group of the Michelsberg culture

In his 1982 synthesis [6.56], Sigfried J. De Laet estimated that the first industrial flint exploitations were connected to the acculturation of

the autochthonous Mesolithic people by Rössen groups, settled for a while in Belgian and Dutch Limburg. The success of flint work would have attracted groups of the Michelsberg culture that originated from the Rhenan basin. This hypothesis must be questioned, since our archaeological record is still characterised by the virtual absence of the Rössen culture. Proof of Epirössen presence is also very scarce and restricted to a few stone artefacts (see van Berg & Hauzeur, this volume) and the unique and still largely enigmatic site at Givry-*Bosse de l'Tombe*. Hence, no element of the late Danubian groups correspond to the geographical distribution of the flint mines, nucleated around Mons (Spiennes) [6.84; 6.91; 6.96], in Hesbaye (Jandrain, Orp) [6.87] and north of Liège (Voeren, Rijckholt-Sint-Geertruid) [6.14; 6.44; 6.76; 6.56]. Additionally, the hypothesis of a direct relation between the Belgian and the Rhenan Michelsberg cultures has to deal with several chrono-typological difficulties. The seriation of Jens Lüning, established on Rhenan pottery [6.119] can only with the utmost caution be applied to the Belgian finds [6.173].

More recently, Christian Jeunesse has proposed a northern French origin for the Belgian Michelsberg group [6.105]. It would have entered the present day Belgian territory in Western Hainaut and Southwestern Flanders, coming from the east, via the Epiroessen north of the Paris basin (*Style de Menneville*). The oldest Middle Neolithic sites of Belgium are indeed located in its Southwestern part (Le Gué du Plantin at Neufvilles, Thieusies-*Ferme de l'Hosté*, Kemmelberg, Schorisse-*Bosstraat* and Spiere-*de Hel*) [6.52; 6.176; 6.177; 6.120; 6.160; 6.174]. In general, Pierre M. Vermeersch puts forward a similar hypothesis [6.172; 6.173], while insisting on the Rhenan and Chassean influences that have been superposed afterwards on the Belgian group, mostly during its expansion to the sandy regions of northern Belgium. Additional arguments in favour of such a South to North expansion, as opposed to the previously supposed East to West, can be found in the analyses of pottery technology (i.e. tempering agents) and the lithic typology. Concerning the latter, we mention the *tranchet* or flake axe, absent in the Rhenan assemblages but represented in the Cerny culture. The recent discovery of collective graves in cave in the Meuse basin [6.149; 6.32; 6.37] also confirms marked links with southerly regions (Lorraine and Jura), where similar funeral practices are documented, while these are totally absent east of the Rhine.

The adoption of this general framework evidently urges us to re-evaluate the relation between the Belgian Michelsberg culture and the flint mining sites. A supposed anteriority of the first mines to the appearance of the first Michelsberg pottery in Belgium is not confirmed by recent ^{14}C dates. The sites of Spiere-*de Hel*, Schorisse-*Bosstraat* [6.174] and Kemmelberg [6.160], for instance, are contemporary with the oldest dates obtained for the Spiennes flint mines [6.38; 6.91]. Moreover, we might consider the long stressed differences in material culture as a functional distinction. A mine is not a settlement and a difference in tools used should therefore not surprise us.

1.2. Settlement patterns and brief halts

Although numerous (recent) discoveries indicated Middle Neolithic domestic presence, no clear settlement pattern could be defined. The Belgian Michelsberg culture has settled in quite diverse geographical positions, varying from alluvial plains, Pleistocene terraces and plateaus, to the caves in Southern Belgium. Moreover, the remains the occupations left are quite diverse as well. Several sites were enclosed by palisade and/or ditches. The enclosed area varies from a few to about 30 ha, and yielded very few remains of domestic life. Some of these constructions, e.g. those at Blicquy-*Couture du Couvent* [6.42; 6.43; 6.65], Énines at Orp-Jauche [6.17–20] or Thieusies [6.177], have been extensively excavated. From the point of view of its shape and entrance device, each enclosure is a particular case; the sole permanent feature is the opportunism to use the local topography to enclose vast surfaces by easy means. The function of these constructions remains difficult to determinate. Some elements, like the chicane entrance of the enclosure at Blicquy-*Couture du Couvent* and the topographical location of sites as Thieusies, indicate a defensive configuration. On the other hand no elements allow to affirm a univocal function of the constructions that very probably also served as gathering places, occasional refuges or as *kraals*.

The remains of dwelling structures are limited to few postholes of which repartition is difficult to assess. In Thieusies, a cluster of postholes can be interpreted as a sort of small

Site	Description of the site	Date B.P.	Date B.C. cal. (1σ)	Laboratory ref.
Ittre, Mont-à-Henry	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	5,950 ± 150 5,640 ± 120	5,050–4 620 4,660–4,350	Lv-1575D Lv-1576D
Spiere-de-Hel	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	5,620 ± 80 5,400 ± 40 4,890 ± 70	4,520–4,360 4,330–4,160 3,770–3,630	GrN-22661 GrN-22662 GrN-22663
Jandrin-Jandrenouille	Mine of flint	5,445 ± 260	4,550-3,950	IRPA-367
Schorisse-Bosstraat	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	5,550 ± 130	4,540-4,240	Lv-1720D
Petit-Spiennes	Mine of flint	5,420 ± 75	4,360-4,160	GrN-4674
Kemmelberg	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	5,430 ± 100	4,360-4,080	Lv-599
Ittre, Mont-à-Henry	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	5,330 ± 200	4,360-3,940	Lv-1577D
Spiennes, Camp-à-Cayaux	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	5,420 ± 75	4,350-4,150	GrN-4674
Mesvin, Sans Pareil	Mine of flint	5,340 ± 150	4,340-4,000	Lv-216
Hamoir, grotte Lechat	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	5,350 ± 80 5,350 ± 60 5,330 ± 90	4,320-4,040 4,320-4,040 4,320-4,040	Lv-1407 Lv-1334 Lv-1333
Thieusies, Ferme de l'Hosté	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	5,300 ± 130	4,320-3,980	Lv-776D
Mesvin, Sans Pareil	Mine of flint	5,220 ± 170	4,310-3,810	Lv-65
Dinant, abri des Autours	Grave with characteristic burial good	5,300 ± 55	4,230-4,040	OxA-5837
Thuin	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	5,310 ± 80	4,230-4,000	Lv-1288
Hamoir, grotte Lechat	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	5,240 ± 90	4,230-3,960	Lv-1406
Thieusies, Ferme de l'Hosté	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	5,250 ± 45	4,220-3,980	GrN-7012
Hastière, caverne D	Grave without burial good	5,235 ± 45	4,220-3,980	OxA-9022
Ittre, Mont-à-Henry	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	5,180 ± 100	4,220-3,800	Lv-1619
Petit-Spiennes	Mine of flint	5,131 ± 123	4,220-3,780	BM-417
Hastière, caverne B	Grave without burial good	5,180 ± 45	4,040-3,940	OxA-9021
Thieusies, Ferme de l'Hosté	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	5,130 ± 65	3,990-3,800	Lv-775
Waulsort, caverne AB	Grave without burial good	5,130 ± 45	3,980-3,810	OxA-9023
Thieusies, Ferme de l'Hosté	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	5,070 ± 70	3,950-3,790	GrN-7240
Hastière, La Cave	Grave without burial good	5,070 ± 60	3,950-3,790	OxA-9088
Kemmelberg	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	5,020 ± 95 5,000 ± 120	3,950-3,710 3,950-3,670	Lv-525 Lv-524
Neufvilles, Gué du Plantin	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	4,845 ± 225	3,950-3,350	IRPA-189
Hastière, trou Reuviau	Grave without burial good	5,025 ± 65	3,940-3,720	OxA-5677
Thuin	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	5,010 ± 90	3,940-3,700	Lv-1289
Oudenaarde-Donk	Workshop of antler	4,990 ± 70	3,930-3,700	IRPA-667
Godinne-sur-Meuse	Grave with burial good	4,970 ± 80	3,910-3,650	Lv-1173
Neufvilles, Gué du Plantin	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	4,740 ± 225	3,800-3,100	IRPA-187
Dinant, grotte d'Anseremme	Grave without burial good	4,945 ± 55	3,780-3,660	OxA-9089
Neufvilles, Gué du Plantin	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	4,740 ± 170	3,750-3,100	IRPA-186
Dinant, abri du Pape	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	4,450 ± 360	3,700-2,600	Gx-20206
Salet, trou des Nots	Grave with characteristic burial good	4,820 ± 60	3,690-3,520	Lv-1473
Neufvilles, Gué du Plantin	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	4,650 ± 230	3,650-3,000	IRPA-192
Hamoir, grotte Lechat	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	4,750 ± 60	3,640-3,380	Lv-1332
Comblain-au-Pont, trou de La Heid	Grave with characteristic burial good	4,650 ± 60	3,510-3,340	Lv-1586
Waulsort, caverne Q	Grave without burial good	4,620 ± 50	3,510-3,140	OxA-5840
Hastière, la Cave Maurenne	Grave without burial good	4,635 ± 45	3,500-3,350	OxA-9025
Neufvilles, Gué du Plantin	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	4,440 ± 230	3,500-2,700	IRPA-193
Petit-Spiennes	Human bones in a pit (mine of flint)	4,500 ± 50	3,340-3,090	Beta-110683
Furfooz, trou du Frontal	Grave with characteristic burial good	4,430 ± 80 4,430 ± 30	3,300-2,920 3,100-2,930	OxA-4196 GrN-10179
Petit-Spiennes	Mine of flint	4,230 ± 130	3,030-2,610	BM-289
Chaumont-Gistoux	Settlement with characteristic artefacts	4,040 ± 90	2,860-2,450	Lv-290

Table 1
Radiocarbon dates of the Middle Neolithic
Datations radiocarbones du Néolithique moyen

irregular dwelling [6.177]; postholes have been noticed at the Kemmelberg site, but their chronology is uncertain [6.160]; at Ottenburg-Grez-Doiceau, three pits and three postholes have been discovered [6.16]; at Schorisse-*Bosstraat*, some aligned postholes have been excavated (partially destroyed house or part of a palisade?) [6.174]. There is no doubt that soil erosion and present day urban and industrial developments led to a massive destruction of Middle Neolithic domestic sites. However, this explication is not satisfactory and the *a priori* of a well organised house, like the Early Neolithic examples, may also raise some difficulties. The unique example of Mairy (department of French Ardennes, France) [6.126] with its large rectangular constructions have been excavated, may not really be pertinent to illustrate the typical Michelsberg housing. We should be very careful with imposing so-called universals to the agricultural world of the Middle Neolithic. Aware of the profitability of his plantations and of the renewing of his livestock, the farmer is all too often seen as a character obsessed by the preservation of his fields: how to imagine a better justification of ownership than a permanent and well-built house! But the model is wrong. Ethnography has already demonstrated, in central Africa for instance, that people do not always own the fields they cultivate. If the Middle Neolithic communities once had to justify their possession of the territory, they resorted to other means. Hazard of the excavations, scarcity of the research or destruction of sites are not the sole causes: settlements are partialy known, but they are very often restricted to camps or poorly built halts, to small houses, rather than well established implantations [4.8].

Apart from the previous sites, mainly situated in Middle Belgium, brief halts in caves have also been discovered. For a long time, Michelsberg material was known in a cave at Waulsort [6.179], but the phenomenon has been confirmed by the excavations carried out at the Abri Lechat in Hamoir [6.108; 6.109], in the Chauveau massif at Godinne [6.8] and, more recently, at the Abri du Pape at Dinant [6.116].

1.3. Domestic economy and flint exploitations

Untill recently, cereal production was mainly indicated by pollen analysis (e.g. at Schorisse-*Bosstraat* [6.174 : 209], Thieusies and Spiere), or by the presence of grinding stones (e.g. at Camp à Cayaux at Spiennes, Boitsfort, Blicquy, Thieusies). Additionally the ditch fill of the site at Spiere yielded a large number of charred remains of cereals, mainly *Triticum aestivum*. Direct faunal evidence is present on about all sites. When bones have been collected and analysed (for instance at Gué du Plantin, Thieusies or at Mairy), cattle dominate, followed by pig and ovicaprids [6.161]. A few exceptions must be noticed. At Spiere pig is largely dominant (determination by Wim Van Neer, Museum voor Midden-Afrika, Tervuren), while at Hamoir-*Abri Lechat* [6.109] or at Oudenaarde-*Donk* [6.51; 6.106; 6.137], wild fauna, aside pig, were the most important protein sources. At the Abri du Pape, Dinant, fishing and bird hunting were major activities [6.116].

One of the better understood aspects of the Middle Neolithic economy is the industrial exploitation of flint. This aspect has already been the subject of numerous publications [6.14; 6.38–40; 6.44; 6.84; 6.86–88; 6.91; 6.96; 6.151; 6.168] and it is not in the intention of the present authors to describe each mine. However, we do note that new fieldwork carried out in Spiennes, under the supervision of the "Direction des Fouilles du Ministère de la région wallonne", has yielded significant results that highlight the interest of modern and pluridisciplinary excavations in the reconstruction of mining activities [6.38–40].

In order to be as complete as possible, we also note the recent study on the so-called mineworkers discovered at the beginning of the 20th century in Neolithic mines [6.53]. None of the chronological attributions of these skeletons proved to be correct. False pieces, negligence or forgery are at the origins of these documents that for a long time were masterpieces in museums that reinforced the image of courageous miners. The parallel with the coal miners that made the fortune of the industrial basin of the Sambre and Meuse valleys in the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century is evident.

1.4. Funeral practices

The funeral practice is—apart from the skeleton found at the domestic site of Thieusies [6.177]—only known from evidence in the Meuse basin, where natural cavities have allowed bone conservation. Since Middle Neolithic settlement is scarce in this area, the data cannot be considered as representative for the entire

Belgian Middle Neolithic presence. Even within the Meuse basin, there is no typical Michelsberg funerary practice.

Individual burials (Mont-Godinne, Salet) [6.8; 6.135] have unfortunately been discovered during poorly scientific explorations. Thanks to rigorous studies an interpretation as burials under small cairns, could be made [6.8; 6.135].

Apart from this, numerous collective graves have been discovered, mainly during the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Although the quality of these excavations is not very high and related diagnostic artefacts are lacking, radiocarbon dates have recently confirmed the importance and the value of the phenomenon [6.37]. This data is supplemented by two recent investigations. At the 'Trou de La Heid' (Comblain-au-Pont), at least one child and one adult have been deposed in the small cave, with an abundant ceramic and bone material characteristic of the Michelsberg culture [6.149]. At the Abri des Autours (Dinant), the remains of at least nine individuals, of which six were probably children, were concentrated in an area of less than a square meter. Such a deposit could result of the burying of a few bones, kept in a bag or something alike. Several bone and flint tools were deposited aside [6.30–32].

To complete on the human remains that can be attributed to the Middle Neolithic in Belgium, we mention the skull exhumed in a small cavity at Moniat, near Dinant. This object has been considered lost for a long time, but was rediscovered a few years ago in a museum in Asheville, North Carolina. The radiocarbon date obtained in the U.S. places it to the very end of the 5th millennium, in a chronological interval that perfectly matches the date of the Abri des Autours. Moreover, the excavations recently organised at the flint mines of Spiennes (prov. of Hainaut) have yielded the nearly complete skeleton of an adult, who was left in the filling of a flint extraction shaft, dated in the second half of the 4th millennium [6.39]. Finally, a few months ago, during the re-examination of the Goyet caves (prov. of Namur), the skeleton of a child has been discovered in a small fissure located quite far of the entrance. No burial goods were placed with the small skeleton, largely preserved in anatomical connection in spite of the absence of any burial procedure. A radiocarbon date proves him to be of Middle Neolithic date (Toussaint, oral communication).

Resuming, the accumulation of bodies in natural caves seems to have been a recurrent phenomenon, of which the exact nature is difficult to assess. Multiple or collective graves, collections of individual burials or simple deposits of bodies without burying procedures; all potential cases seem to be documented. This diversity is also noted by the recent excavation of other sites in France or in Belgium. This diversity may also express a constant wish to negotiate the value of each dead, in order to get as much profit as possible or to protect oneself from the deceased in the most adequate way. No more argument is needed to recognise the great value of the dead: things that poorly matter are not constantly negotiated.

2. Late and Final Neolithic

At the end of the fourth millennium B.C. and during the following one, the territory encompassed between the estuaries of the Meuse and of the Rhine, and the Parisian basin is subject to influences of two major contrasted cultural entities. East and south, one can see a well developed megalithism, represented by the Wartberg culture (Hesse, Westphaly, Lower Saxe) and by the Seine-Oise-Marne culture (Parisian basin). North, in the middle and lower Rhine basins, the Single Grave culture and the Bell Beaker phenomenon, which are rather difficult to distinguish, belong to another cultural universe, that will play a major role in the development of the first Protohistoric cultures throughout most parts of Europe.

In Belgium, the available documentation is quite variable from the quantitative and qualitative point of view. This situation does not simply result from a peculiar state of research. If the archaeological richness of the Meuse basin is closely related to the work of pioneers working at the end of the 19th or the beginning of the 20th century, such as Dupont, de Loë or Rahir, one must admit that systematic excavations carried out these last years, including work done as part of the Köln-Paris high-speed train line, are mute about the terminal period of the Neolithic. Behind these absences, one can most probably find out peculiar settlement strategies but also problems of colluvion and soil erosion: indeed, countless surface finds demonstrate the existence of a general occupation of the territory during the Late Neolithic.

2.1. The Seine-Oise-Marne culture

As in the Parisian basin, the Seine-Oise-Marne culture is mostly known in Belgium by its funeral practices. Settlement traces can be resumed to the inventory of brief halts, essentially under rock shelters (Abri du Pape at Dinant, caves of Han-sur-Lesse) [6.116], more rarely in open air (place Saint-Lambert at Liège). Contrary, tombs attributable to this cultural group are known by hundreds [6.34]. Most of them have been laid out within numerous caves of the Meuse basin. In the Fagne-Famenne area, about ten megalithic tombs illustrate another facet of the Seine-Oise-Marne funeral practices [6.100; 6.147].

A total of more than 120 collective graves are attributed to the Late Neolithic, sometimes on basis of a well characterised archaeological material (Vaucelles, Ben-Ahin, Martousin-Neuville) [6.60; 6.70; 6.123], generally according to ^{14}C dates. These caves vary in both shape and dimension: largely open caves ("O" cave at Waulsort), narrow rock shelters difficult to enter (fissure Jacques), entrances of caves (Abri du Pape). There is no correlation between the quantity of inhumations and the volume of the cave. For instance in the Bibiche cave, remains of 11 individuals were concentrated in a volume inferior to 1 m^3 [6.35].

Actually, this absence of physical constraints in the choice of the sepulchre is partially related to specific funeral practices. These are very diversified: primary deposit, secondary burials, sorting of bones, diverse manipulations, ... Constantly redefined and manipulated, the body, because of its volume, is by no means a constraint to the choice of the sepulchre. Remains of the dead are periodically visited and subjected to a dynamic that ties together the becoming of the body and of the living.

Funeral populations are generally constituted of around twelve individuals, of both sexes and all age classes, with a high proportion however of young individuals. Although some sites have indeed yielded far more bodies, the situation remains quite different of the dozens of dead inhumed in some contemporary megaliths of the Parisian basin or of western Germany. The high proportion of young individuals is remarkable but it does not correspond to any normal demographic curve [6.129]. Indeed, the peri-natal individuals are rare, contrary to their predicted massive representation for such society. There was thus selection of the individuals according to criteria that remain out of reach.

Comparatively to the high frequency of funeral monuments in neighbouring regions, the megalithism in Belgium is confined to the southerly regions of the country [6.147]. About ten monuments are inventoried, of which the majority is only known thanks to generally old and brief descriptions. For instance the passage grave of Laviô (prov. of Luxembourg) is nowadays buried under a modern construction and has never been really excavated [6.101]. Except of this last site, only three megalithic tombs still present a preserved room: Lamsoul (province of Namur) [6.156], Wéris I and II (prov. of Luxemburg) [6.152; 6.94; 6.97]. A few standing stones—or menhirs—are also documented, most of them in the near vicinity of Wéris [6.154–155]. On this last site indeed, passage graves and menhirs are integrated in a vast megalithic complex. It is organised in parallel rows, which are all oriented on a SSW-NNE axis and seem to extend on nearly 3 km. Since these alignments are not directly related to the nature of the geological substratum, do they have an astronomical or, more simply, topographical value?

Building techniques are relatively standardised. Both in Wéris I and II and in Lamsoul, the monument is built around a vestibule and a principal room of sub-rectangular form. The monuments, which correspond to the passage grave type of the Parisian basin, are constructed with big stone slabs (orthostats and cover slabs) but also with numerous small wedging blocks. Used materials change from one site to the other [6.138]. At Lamsoul, the huge slabs are made of limestone, present at less than 2 km of the site. Albeit this distance may seem short, the journey from the extraction site presents numerous natural obstacles (slope, rivers) that surely made the work rather uneasy. At Wéris, the builders have used erratic blocks of conglomerate, but also limestone that had to be moved on several hundreds of meters if not kilometres. For the small blocks, locally available materials were generally used. Although in most cases people resorted to sub-local materials, these acquisition strategies have surely demanded some important human resources.

All these megaliths have yielded material culture attributable to the Seine-Oise-Marne

culture (poorly made ceramics, stemmed arrowheads). Bell Beaker, Protohistoric, Roman and medieval potsherds also attest of the long history of these monuments (see below) [6.99]. This may explain the low frequency of human remains (8 deceased for Wéris II, including children and adults), although this quantity recalls the funeral population estimated for collective graves in cave. Only the passage grave of Jemeppe-Hargimont would have contained about 250 bodies. Unfortunately, in this case, the information is particularly poor and the collections have disappeared.

The absence of wooden sepulchral constructions must also be noted, contrary to the site of Stein [6.132] or the Parisian Basin [6.110; 6.130].

2.2. The Gord-Deûle-Escaut group

If it was suggested some twenty years ago that the Seine-Oise-Marne culture extended as far as the Bronze Age [6.21], nowadays it is currently admitted that local groups emerge in the cultural continuity of the Seine-Oise-Marne and Artenac traditions [6.6]. These are regrouped under the "Gord-Deûle-Escaut group" label.

Contrary to the Seine-Oise-Marne, the Gord-Deûle-Escaut is exclusively known through settlements. Six collective graves in cave in the Meuse basin are dated after 2,500 B.C. but their geographical setting sharply differs of the Gord-Deûle-Escaut repartition. Therefore, no element allows to distinguish these tombs of those of the first part of the third millennium.

A few domestic sites are concentrated in the western Hainaut. The Brunehaut complex is settled on a plateau above the Escaut, located nearby the French border [6.63]. Only one site has no domestic vocation, the so-called 'Pierre Brunehaut' menhir. As in Wéris, this standing stone seems to be part of a megalithic complex mostly known in the French territory that comprises standing stones and passage graves. Three domestic sites complete this whole. If the sites of Jollain and Rongy are only known by surface finds, the site of Lesdain has partially been excavated during several excavation campaigns [6.63]. Except rubbish pits and traces of hearths, a partially destroyed apsidal house and no more than 270 small postholes (10–20 cm of diameter) have been found. Despite the complexity of this setting and the absence of chronological data, the excavators have seen in it a circular enclosure, by analogy with Early Bronze Age sites of the Hilversum culture.

Ceramics are mostly coarse and recall the Seine-Oise-Marne tradition. However, the presence of some fine potsherds as some typological elements (round shape of the rim, large neck) suggest an attribution to the Gord-Deûle-Escaut group. These comparisons are reinforced by the lithic material, characterised by numerous peculiar scrapers (*micro-denticulés*) and notched elements, which find comparison with artefacts found at Raillencourt-Sainte-Olle or at Annœullin (North department, France) [6.11; 6.139]. ^{14}C and TL dates assign the Brunehaut complex to the first half of the second millennium B.C. (^{14}C: 3,240 ± 165 B.P.; TL on ceramics: 3,315 ± 285 B.P.; 3,190 ± 280 B.P.; 2,910 ± 270 B.P.; 3,430 ± 400 B.P.).

Another domestic site has recently been discovered in the industrial zoning of Ghislenghien (Western Hainaut) [6.68]. Partially excavated, this site is known for the moment by a double palisade of postholes that form two segments of 100 and 120 m, but whose total length must be of around 500 m. Nearby this structure, pits, with a similar filling, have yielded ceramics attributable to the Gord-Deûle-Escaut group.

2.3. The Bell Beaker phenomenon

The Bell Beaker phenomenon is poorly known in Belgium. In the north (provinces of Limburg, of Antwerp and Eastern Flanders), some funeral sites are known, flat graves or under barrows, as well as surface finds [6.3; 6.4; 6.83; 6.54; 6.143]. The site of Mol (prov. of Antwerp), excavated in the early 1960's, remains by several aspects the most classical Belgian Bell beaker site [6.3; 6.4]. This barrow contained a pit with four postholes at the angles, that suggest the existence of a funeral house. The funeral pit, aligned on a NW-SE axis, has yielded three nicely made vases and a flint knife. Because of the acid nature of the soil, no human remains have been clearly identified. Unfortunately, this last point must be generalised to all the sites. If the practice of inhumation is thus suspected, cremation is possible (Kruishoutem) [6.12; 6.13; 6.58]. If no single burial is known so far for the southern part of the country, it must be noted that the tombs of Wallers [6.75] and Aubigny-au-Bac [6.66] are only a few kilometres away in France. Settlement traces are much

reduced. One can only quote the discovery of coarse ceramics at Harelbeke, that suggests the possibility of a settlement [6.69].

The only finds documented for the southern part of the country are restricted to funeral contexts. Bell Beaker potsherds have been found in the two passage graves of Wéris [6.99] and in two cave graves, the Humain cave (Entre-Deux-Falleux) [6.181] and the Trou de La Heid (Comblain-au-Pont) [6.149]. The value of the Bell Beaker elements in this last site is difficult to appreciate. Indeed, the potsherds, of AOO style, were found at the top of a funeral Michelsberg layer, without any sure stratigraphic association. The way these potsherds enter the archaeological record are thus rather obscure and do not seem to be directly related to the funeral activity of the site. Nine potsherds of a same AOO beaker (type II according to van der Waals and Glasbergen's typology [6.159]) were discovered within the passage grave of Wéris II. These complete the find of a rim fragment and of a bellow fragment in the neighbouring site of Wéris I. Bell Beakers potsherds discovered at Waulsort were published in past inventories but a recent re-examination indicated that these were actually Urnfields artefacts.

Other objects were found by chance (surface finds, dragging, development of Gent and Antwerp harbours) [6.136; 6.29] and must be noticed in this brief synthesis of the Late Neolithic period in Belgium. For the most part, it consists of battle-axes, traditionally assigned to the Single Grave Culture or the Bell Beaker phenomenon. These axes are essentially located in Eastern Flanders, although some are known in the Meuse valley (provinces of Namur and Liège).

Numerous Grand-Pressigny flint daggers have been found throughout the Belgian territory [6.64; 6.98]. These discoveries actually reflect the geographical setting of Belgium, between the Artenac production centres and the Single Grave culture where daggers seem to have been successful in funeral contexts. Local population seem to have taken advantage of this intermediary status. Indeed, from northern France to the entire Low Countries, imitation of Grand-Pressigny daggers made of locally available bartonian flint heavily circulated, as local producers have superposed their own economical network on the preceding one.

3. CONCLUSION

Based upon the available data, the Belgian Michelsberg culture should be considered as a material culture. New elements were imposed upon a regional substratum, which could keep its own personality. By comparison, the Chassean culture, from southern France to the Parisian basin or Britain, seems to develop by closely related strategies: transfer of a ceramic style, without any manifest consequence on the way of life.

The value of the Seine-Oise-Marne culture remains a thorny problem. Is it only a funeral facies—but then who were the contemporary living?—or a larger unit, completely under documented? If the documentation is almost lacking for the Bell Beaker phenomenon, we shall notice that, as elsewhere in the Bell Beaker area, the characteristic material culture is exclusively located in funeral context. Therefore, does this phenomenon imply anything else than a transformation of the status of the dead in the conduction of daily life? While, before, the fate of the deceased was constantly discussed, here it always matters to mark the identity of the dead by recurrent procedures, of which the most salient expression in our regions is the deposition of the beaker.

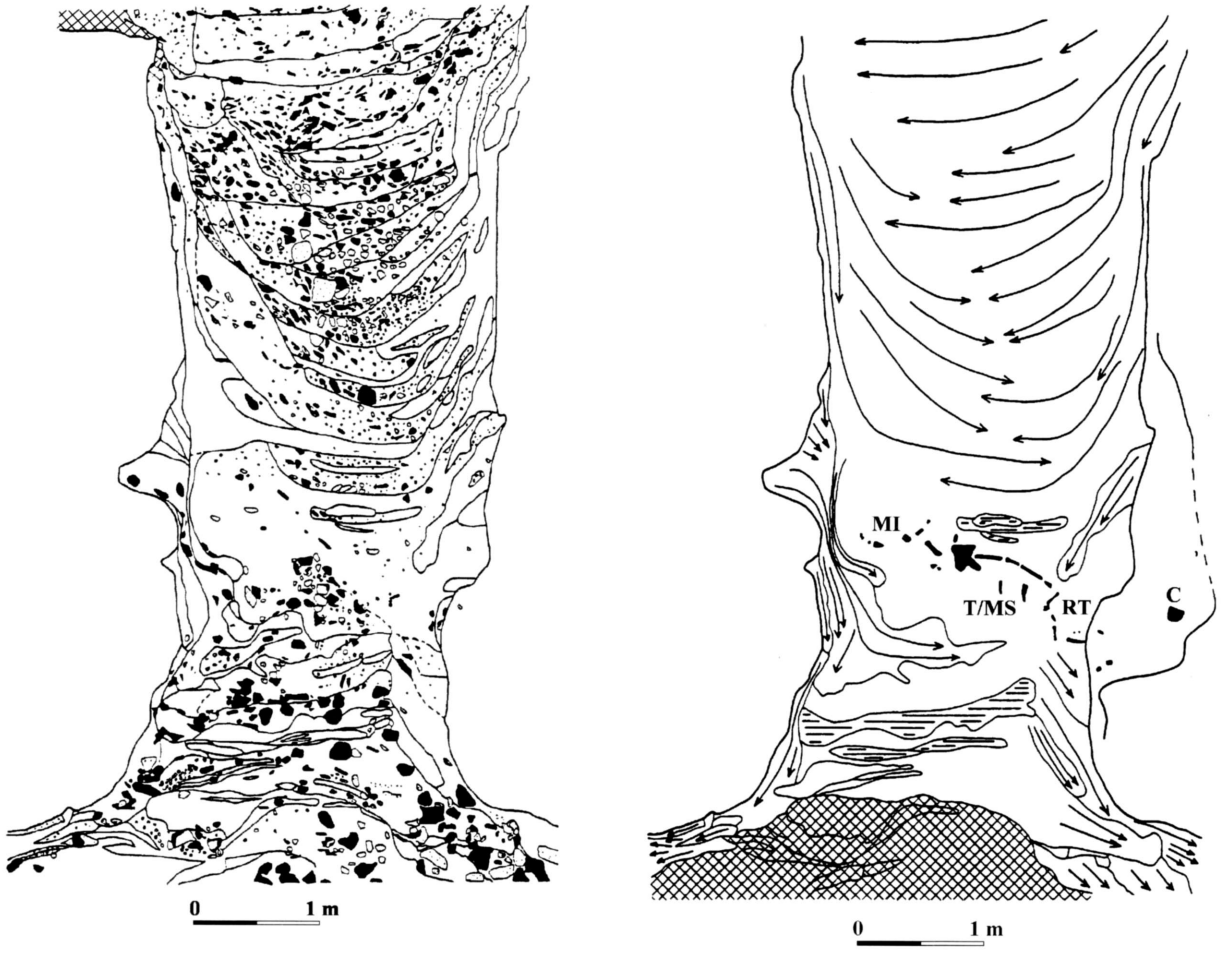

Fig. 1.

Shaft of flint from Petit-Spiennes (Pa d'la l'iau), excavated from 1997; right: South-West/North-East section; left: schema of packing and collapse dynamic with projection of the human remains found inside this pit (MI = legs; T/MS = trunk and arms; RT = upper part of the spinal column; C = skull) [6.39].

Puits d'extration du silex de Petit-Spiennes (Pa d'la l'iau), fouillé à partir de 1997; à droite : coupe sud-ouest/nord-est; à gauche : schéma de la dynamique de tassement et d'effondrement, avec projection des restes humains découvert dans ce puits (MI = membres inférieurs; T/MS = torse et membres supérieurs; RT = haut du rachis; C = calottte crânienne) [6.39].

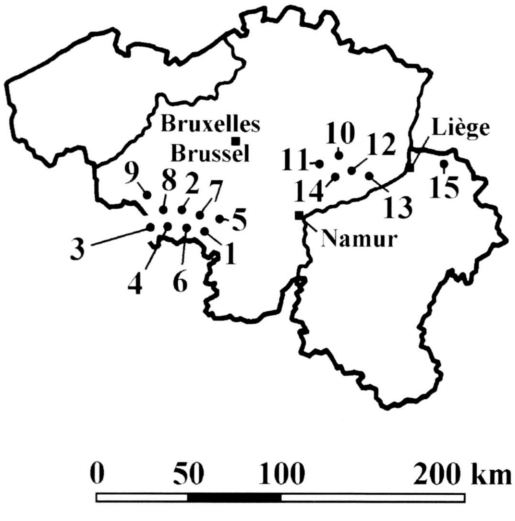

Fig. 2.

Distribution of neolithic mines of flint in Belgium [6.91].

Répartition des mines de silex néolithiques en Belgique [6.91].

1. Spiennes; 2. Obourg; 3. Flénu; 4. Ciply (Mesvin); 5. Strépy; 6. Mesvin; 7. Saint-Symphorien; 8. Ghlin; 9. Baudour; 10. Wansin; 11. Jandrain-Jandrenouille; 12. Avennes; 13. Latinne (Braives); 14. Meeffe (Avennes); 15. Rullen-Bas (Voeren).

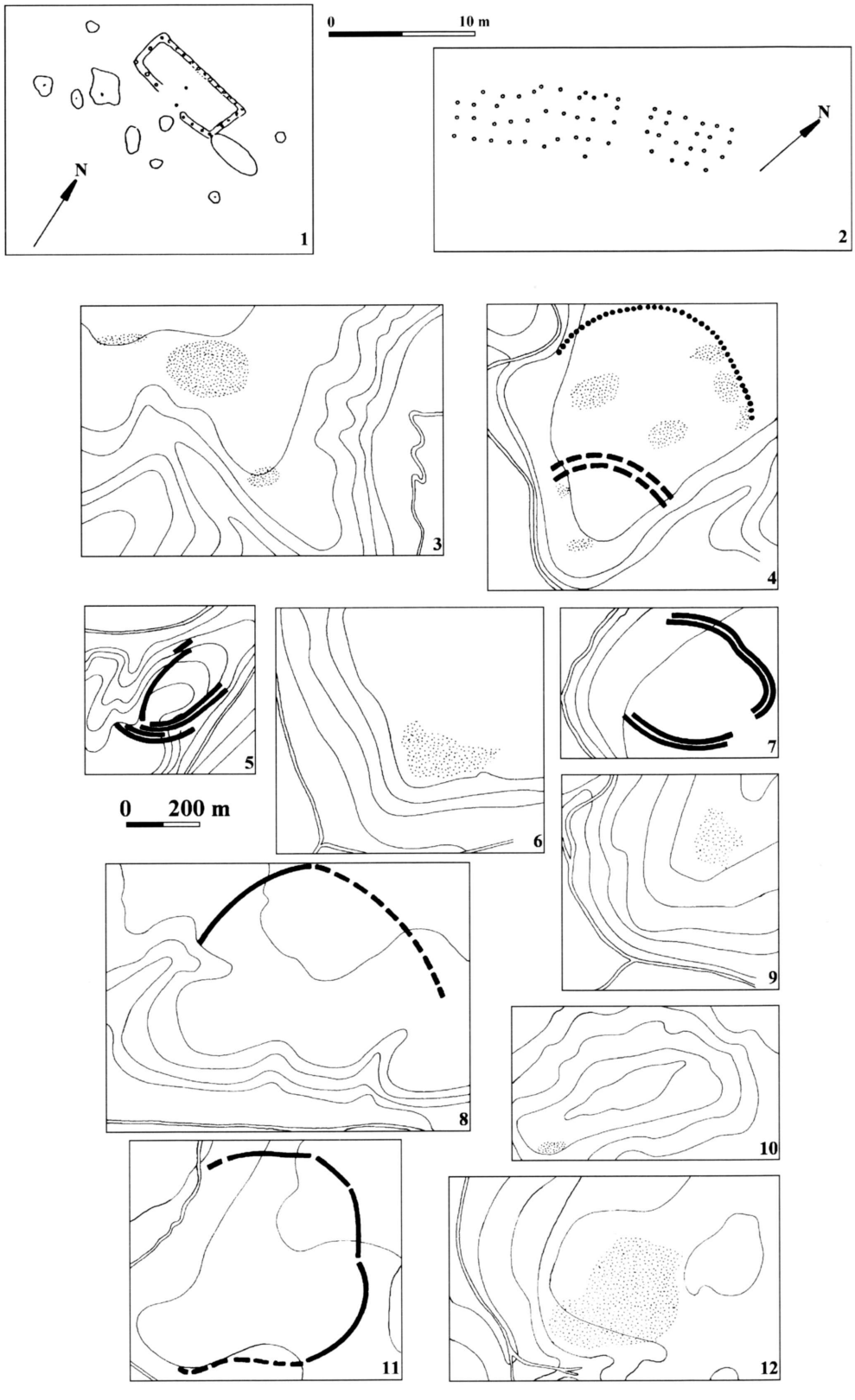

Fig. 3.

Settlements and fortifications of the Michelsberg culture (continuous line: ditch; broken line: palisade; dotted surface: distribution of the artefacts) [6.172].

Habitats et fortifications michelsberg (trait continu : fossé; trait interrompu : palissade; pointillé : distribution du matériel archéologique) [6.172].

1. Kruishoutem; 2. Thieusies; 3. Ottenburg; 4. Thieusies; 5. Boitsfort-Bosvoorde; 6. Assent; 7. Petit-Spiennes; 8. Chaumont-Gistoux; 9. Ittre; 10. Kemmelberg; 11. Blicquy; 12. Schorisse-Bosstraat.

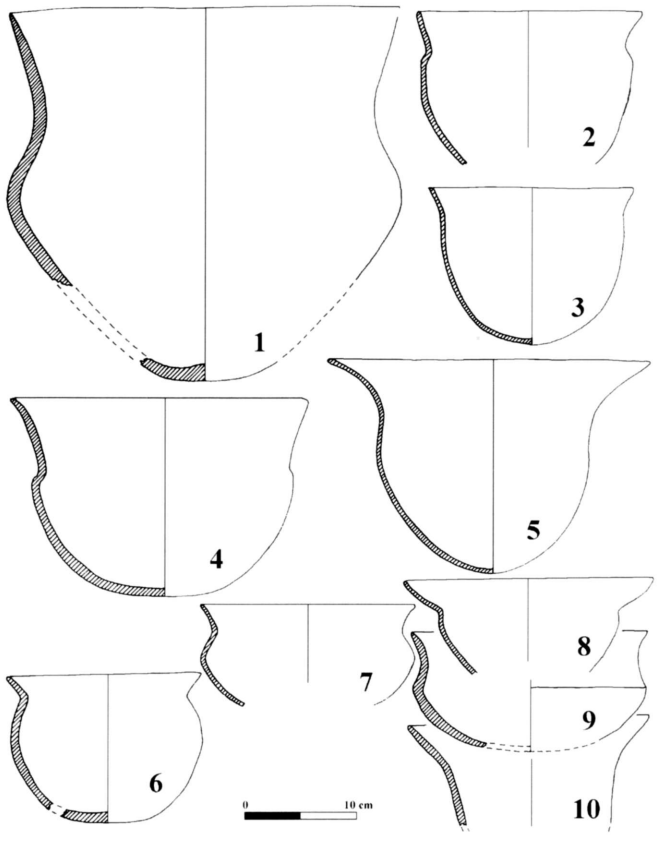

Fig. 4.
Michelsberg potteries [6.172].
Céramiques michelsberg [6.172].
1. Meeuwen; 2–3, 5, 7–8. Boitsfort-Bosvoorde; 4. Antwerpen; 6, 9–10. Blicquy.

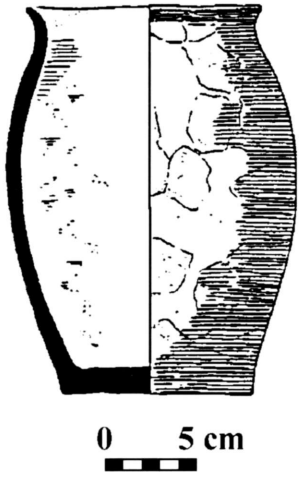

Fig. 5.
Seine-Oise-Marne type pottery from Vaucelles [6.123].
Vase Seine-Oise-Marne de Vaucelles [6.123].

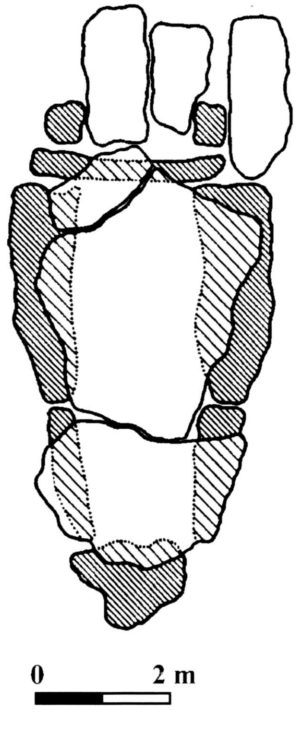

Fig. 6.
Plan of one of the passage graves from Wéris [6.56].
Plan d'une des allées couvertes de Wéris [6.56].

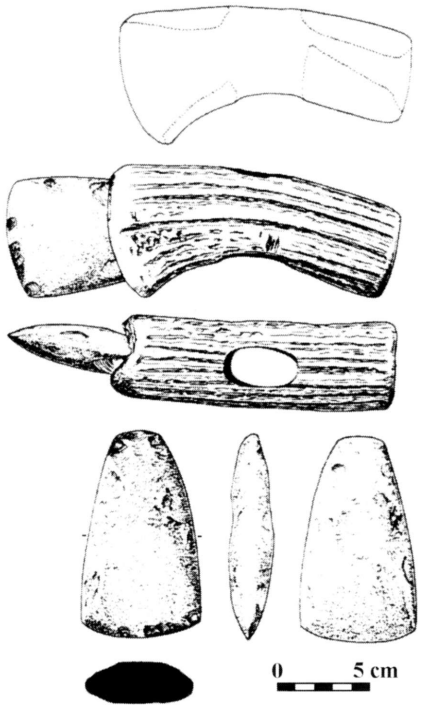

Fig. 7.
Polished axe from Betekom (Seine-Oise-Marne civilization) [6.121].
Hache polie de Betekom (civilisation de Seine-Oise-Marne) [6.121].

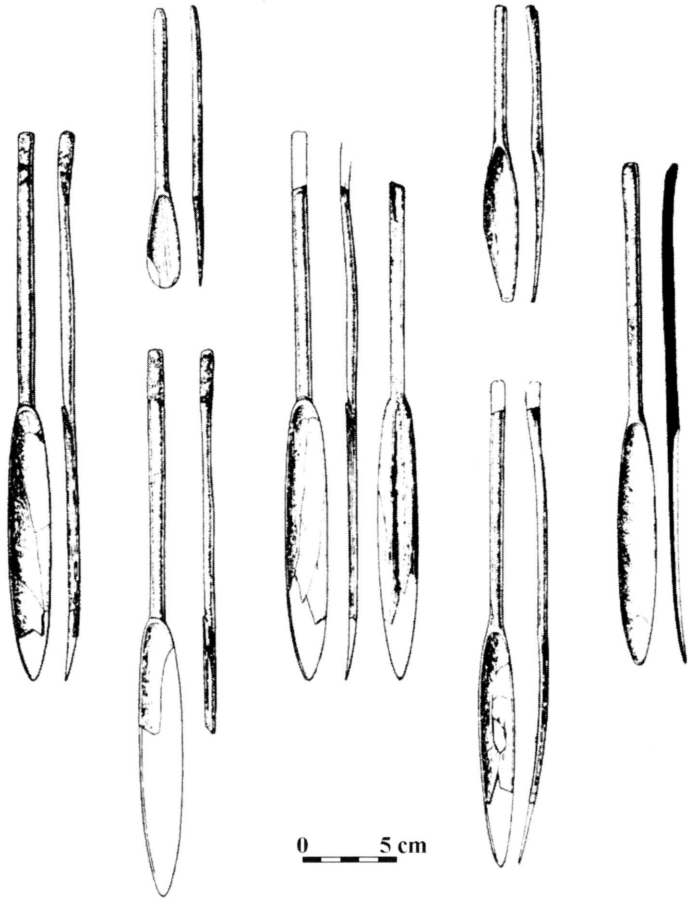

Fig. 8.
Bone spoons from Han-sur-Lesse (Seine-Oise-Marne civilization) [6.121].
Cuillères en os de Han-sur-Lesse (civilisation de Seine-Oise-Marne) [6.121].

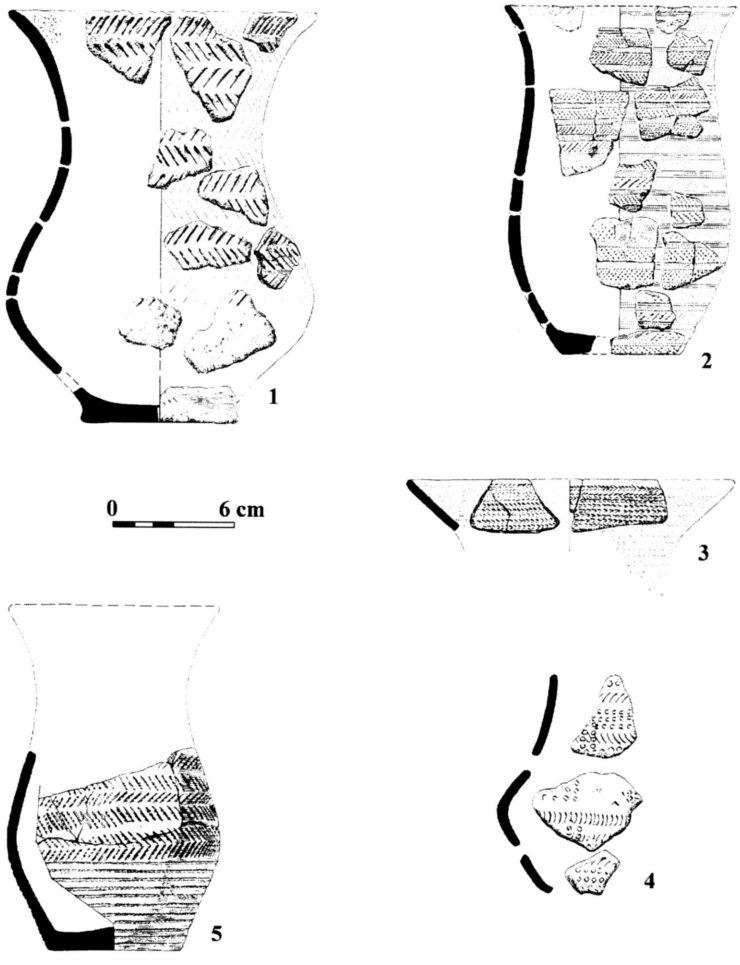

Fig. 9.
Bell Beakers potteries [6.125].
Céramiques campaniformes [6.125].
1–3. Overpelt; 4. Merksplas; 5. Lommel.

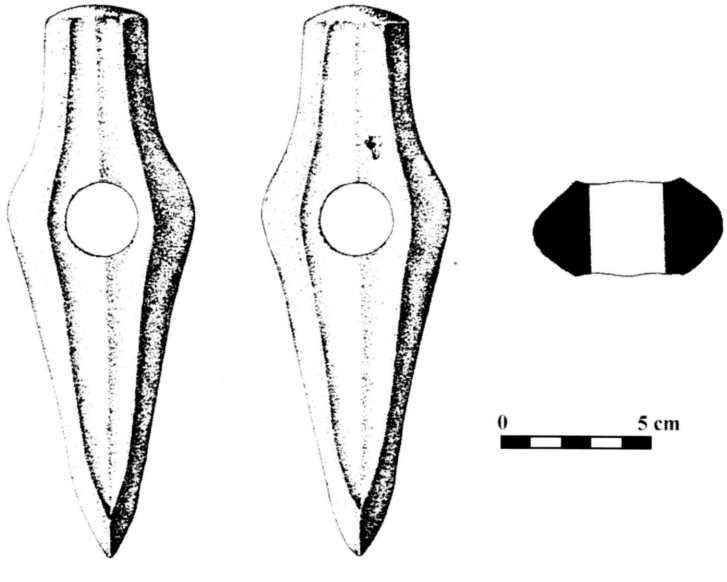

Fig. 10.
Battle axe from Wichelen [6.56].
Hache de combat de Wichelen [6.56].