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MESOLITHIC STYLE PROVINCES - A NEW APPROACH

The potential for defining distinct social territories in the western European Mesolithic can be approached by the analysis of spatially restricted distributions of artifact types, stylistic attributes, and lithic raw materials. Preliminary results of a stylistic analysis of trapezoidal microliths dating to the Late Mesolithic suggest that systematic regional variation can be monitored.

The region of study extends from the Paris Basin in the south into southern Holland in the north and comprises a total area of about 100,000 km². Within the Late Mesolithic period some 25 sites have been examined, of which 10 provide sufficient artifact samples to be included in the present analysis. The sites are situated in two principal regions : the Dutch-Belgian Kempen (Weelde 1, 4 and 5, Lommel, Maarheeze and Opglabbeek) and the Tardenois region of northern France (Allée Tortue II, IV, and X, and Montbani 13).

Each collection was examined by the author and the trapezes were classified into traditional types, continuous attributes of the specimens were measured, and specific qualitative attributes were recorded. Subsequently a series of parametric and non-parametric statistical tests were used to compare each site with one another for each attribute independently.

The analysis revealed that for most attributes that might be considered stylistic, sites within and between the two regions exhibited a remarkable similarity. Where significant differences existed, however, the variability was consistently between the two regions. Specifically the shape of the small truncation of rhombic and right angle trapezes as well as the ratio of base lengths of right angle trapezes showed strong interregional variability, while maintaining internal homogeneity within each region.

It is suggested that these differences are primarily related to style : chronological variation does not appear to be a factor while functional variation is yet problematical. This suggests the existence of variation on a regional scale related to distinct groups of hunter-gatherers. However the geographical distribution of the sites is not sufficient to confidently define social territories on this basis alone.

Further research will hope to clarify these conclusions by including

(1) the analysis of additional sites covering a broader geographic area, (2) the use of multivariate statistics to obtain a clearer picture of the relationships between the sites, (3) a study of the distribution of lithic raw materials, and (4) a consideration of the earlier mesolithic periods.

P. GENDEL