



Davies, S. R. (2007) "Conference Report: Neolithic Studies Group Meeting, Autumn 2006. 'The Archaeology and Science of Human and Animal Mobility in the Neolithic', The British Museum, 6th November 2006". *Rosetta* **2**: 56-59.  
[http://www.rosetta.bham.ac.uk/Issue\\_02/Davies.htm](http://www.rosetta.bham.ac.uk/Issue_02/Davies.htm)

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**Neolithic Studies Group Meeting, Autumn 2006**  
**The Archaeology and Science of Human and Animal Mobility in the Neolithic**  
**Organisers: Dr Volker Heyd & Dr Joshua Pollard (University of Bristol)**

Reviewed by S.R. Davies

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The theme for the 2006 meeting of the Neolithic Studies Group, held at the British Museum, was mobility in the Neolithic, with several papers concentrating on scientific techniques recently applied to the subject. Mobility is still a key issue within both the British and continental study of the Neolithic, but with, perhaps, a different emphasis within each. British archaeology, with much of the leading post-processual work concentrated on the chalk lands of southern England, has tended to portray the Neolithic as a predominantly insular phenomenon, where groups continued to move around the landscape taking advantage of the yearly cycle of wild resources, and also following a cultural or social round. This view is obviously a reaction to the New Archaeology's sedentary farming Neolithic of longhouses and incoming farmers from the continental, that was heavily influenced by work on the European linearbandkeramic (LBK). However, there has been little in-depth work done to understand patterns of mobility within the British Isles and north-western Europe. There is also a continuing argument for a partially sedentary British Neolithic based upon evidence from, and work done within, Ireland and the parts of Britain bordering the Irish Sea (e.g. Mercer 1981; Gibson 2003). Central continental work on Neolithic mobility, on the other hand, tends more towards the movement of populations and spread of culture: understandable as the evidence for sedentary farming groups is much stronger.

These differing approaches to the subject of mobility were apparent within the presentations given. Johannes Müller's "*Scales of human mobility in the Neolithic*" examined eastern European LBK territory sizes and extents, to question whether the spread of material culture across large areas represented movement of populations or communications between existing groups. Müller used a derivation of central place theory to show that territories were sufficiently close to each other to allow the exchange of cultural ideas, thus negating the need for mass migration in explanations of change. In contrast, in "*Evidence for mobility of the Late Neolithic in Switzerland: the example of Arbon Bleiche 3 (3384-3370 BC)*", Jörg

Schibler & Stefanie Jacomet suggested that migration may be responsible for the cultural polarity that they have found within the settlement of Arbon Bleiche 3. In this interesting village, situated on Lake Constance, Switzerland, there were found two distinct but contemporary faunal and ceramic assemblages, seemingly divided dependant upon proximity to the shoreline. Volker Heyd followed the theme of population movement in “*Between the Ural and the Danube: Yamnaya on the move*”. Heyd used the evidence of the third millennia BC migrations into eastern and central eastern Europe, and the circular migration back to the Pontic, to create a “*Yamnaya Package*”: a collection of social structures, technologies and material culture that spread across Europe and possibly had influence as far a field as southern Britain as evidenced by the White Horse Stone longhouse in Kent.

Alex Bentley in “*Mobility, specialisation and kinship in the Neolithic of Europe and Southeast Asia*” introduced isotopic evidence to suggest that distinct groups, such as farmers and hunter-gatherers, mixed, possibly by intermarriage. His fascinating case study indicated that at particular occupation sites (for instance Flomborn) the males tended to a south-eastern origin, whereas the females tended to originate from the north. Stable isotope analysis was also employed by Cooper, Evans and Montgomery for “*Foragers, Farmers or Foreigners? An Assessment of Dietary Strontium Isotope Variation in Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age East Yorkshire*”. This research suggests that the Neolithic group procured food from a number of geological regions, possibly suggesting movement around the landscape. However, in the Bronze Age food was obtained from only two geological regions, suggesting that movement and food procurement were less formalised and controlled in the Neolithic than the Early Bronze Age.

Gordon Noble, in “*‘Dismantling the house’: timber architecture and the regeneration of life in the Danish Earlier Neolithic 4000-3500BC*”, re-examined settlement architecture to suggest that the occurrence of longhouses doesn’t necessarily mean permanent settlement. Noble argued that longhouses might have been deliberately dismantled and reassembled elsewhere. The rebuilt structures might have been funerary architecture, or they could have been new longhouses, thus demonstrating that houses do not prove sedentism. Mike Parker Pearson, in “*The First Stonehenge Free Festival: houses and mobility at Durrington Walls*”, also considered the topic of Neolithic houses with his review of recent work at Durrington. Here the remains of a number of houses, not dissimilar in plan to those of Orkney, have come to light. This evidence, coupled with isotope analysis of the *Amesbury Archer* and *Boscombe*

*Bowmen*, suggest that the mobility in later Neolithic Wessex is even more complex than previously thought.

Also looking at southern Britain were Whittle, Healy, Bayliss and Wysocki with “*Frame by frame: bodies and times in the early Neolithic of southern Britain*”. This intriguing study sought to address mobility by looking at timescales of tasks. This is done both in terms of the impact of activity upon the individual, and in refining the dating evidence for barrows and causewayed enclosures. It would appear that the period during which causewayed enclosures were built might have been significantly shorter than previously thought, and that some of the Cotswold-Severn barrows had a mere three to five generations of (primary) use. This presentation also saw an enthusiastic discussion on the value of Bayesian analysis.

Thus, to summarise, this meeting reinforced the growing view that mobility in the Neolithic is no longer a clear choice between the Mesolithic type movement around the landscape to procure wild resources, and the LBK-style of permanent settlement and reliance on domesticates. Indeed, recent work within both Mesolithic and LBK studies has also cast doubt upon whether either of these previously accepted *extreme* models of mobility ever existed at all (e.g. Spikins 2000; Whittle 1997). Mobility is, perhaps, the most exciting area of Neolithic study at the moment as it encompasses so many aspects of the day-to-day lives of Neolithic people. And given the three approaches shown in this meeting: stable isotope analysis, refinement of dating and a (debatably) improving ability to allow the evidence to shape the theory, mobility studies now offer greater than ever potential in understanding and defining this most enigmatic of periods.

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