

***Thinking Mesolithic*, by Stefan Karol Kozłowski, 2009. Oxford: Oxbow; ISBN 978-1-84217-335-0, hardback.**

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Stefan Karol Kozłowski's *Thinking Mesolithic* is a remarkable, unusual book but ultimately fails to convince the reader in the picture it creates of Mesolithic Europe. It is a difficult book, and likely to be one that is infrequently read in detail. This is unfortunate, as some of its flaws and problems are informative about the challenges of producing accounts of the Mesolithic in Europe that aspire beyond the detail of local sequences.

Kozłowski has been a doyen of Mesolithic studies in Europe since the rapid expansion of the field in the 1970s, a community of researchers exemplified by the ongoing Mesolithic in Europe conferences, the first of which was held in Warsaw 1973 and the proceedings of which Kozłowski co-edited. Kozłowski's latest book is a pan-European vision of the Mesolithic. *Thinking Mesolithic* is not really about how Mesolithic people thought, but is a book that results from over 40 years of *Thinking about the Mesolithic*. The book is 'a collection of fragments of the author's papers from different periods, as well as some new ones written specifically for this edition' (p. xi-xiii). A great deal of the book is devoted to the loving detail of typologies (especially of lithics) but it is framed by broader discussions: with chapter headings including 'What and how?', 'Where?', 'There!' and 'When?'. This includes the 'Mesolithic Atlas' a series of maps presenting the distribution of particular types of artefacts.

The book is wonderfully idiosyncratic, and although entertaining, this can create some problems of comprehension. The retrospective assembly of sections does lead to repetition and contradiction (sometimes, but not always, acknowledged). The captions for many illustrations are somewhat minimalist, and are not always paragons of clarity. Some artefacts appear in multiple illustrations, and greater editorial control would have been helpful. Kozłowski's prose is distinctive, sometimes aphoristic – and no less entertaining for that: "The structure of this chapter is hardly consistent and not even very logical, because it is for the most part a collection of encyclopaedic sketches that the Author felt might be of use to readers." (p. 27). Or, in a characteristic mode, "To be honest, one should not expect a greater individualization of the general model anytime in the nearest future. Not only fortuitous discoveries are required for such work, but also intelligent researchers" (p. 91). The book includes chapters in English, French, Italian and German, and the publisher might forewarn potential purchasers of this.

Kozłowski's emphasis is on the overriding need for understanding Mesolithic Europe through both the large geographical scale of analysis as well as the regional focus, rather than an emphasis on either extreme. He is sharply critical of the dominance of local studies of Mesolithic cultures that have led to a proliferation of mutually incomprehensible terminologies. He eschews the use of terminologies such as 'early' and 'late' Mesolithic for different regions, arguing that these provide a barrier to the construction of large scale models. Even some well known culture historical

descriptions are dismissed thus the Tardenoisian and Maglemosian "are deficient, because they leave out at least a half of Europe from this time" (p. 527). Kozłowski prefers typological terminologies that extend beyond particular political boundaries, such as the Sauvettarian (characterised by microblades and narrow microliths) that expands from the south into the north in a process of 'sauvetterization' (e.g. p. 531). The use of these terms, many unfamiliar, and some notably dated (when was the last time the Mesolithic of Britain was described as the Shippea Hill culture?), makes aspects of the discussion feel very exotic.

His European canvas is vast, extending from the Atlantic to the Caspian, and frequently examining sites on the south of the Mediterranean as well as the expansion into the Arctic. It seems likely that Kozłowski's Polish background is reflected in these broad geographies. One of the consequences is a displacement of a Mesolithic European geography that has often been dominated by the Atlantic West (especially in the Anglophone literature). These are useful lessons in perspective. Britain and Ireland feature little in this discussion; cut off from many broader trends such as the 'Castlenovization' (a shift to large blades and trapeze armatures) that occurs across almost all of the rest of the Europe and is seen as a key step towards Neolithization. Britain does not participate these developments and remains in the 'Sauveterrian Commonwealth' (p. 354) whilst Ireland's later Mesolithic is simply a "curious stone industry" (p. 331).

The basis for the detailed models is good old fashioned typology, and some discussions are not for the faint hearted. Kozłowski relates archaeological cultures (identified on the basis of typologies) directly to populations in the past (p. 517) and stresses the considerable typological diversity of Mesolithic Europe, which is argued to ultimately reflect the presence of ecological variation and geographical barriers. These factors are central to the overall model of Mesolithic communities presented: 'Mesolithic cultures and peoples were strongly conservative, living in considerable mutual isolation' (p. 105). Mountains provide a major 'psychological barrier' to parochial Mesolithic people (p. 92) and sea crossings are occasional, not systematic (p. 96). Change arises on occasion, but 'these changes tend to be quick (reasonably rapid mutation) rather than slow, and they are separated by usually very long period of boring stability, not to say stagnation, in terms of tool style' (p. 517). Against this background, Kozłowski provides a history of Mesolithic Europe, comparing and contrasting population movement and local evolution in the face of changing landscapes and ultimately leading to the Castlenovianization, ceramization and Neolithization of Europe (the latter being seen to arise from the former processes and to be little more than a change of subsistence for socially complex societies). Kozłowski is cynical of the ability of archaeology to understand what caused change, but his general emphasis is on ecological factors as providing the external pushes that are required to change such conservative cultures.

Many researchers will find these conclusions difficult, and it is here that the evidential basis of his narrative becomes problematic. Although the book is mainly unreferenced an early section lists the main resources he has followed for particular areas and these preferred authors can then be chased through the limited bibliography (although some don't actually appear in the bibliography). The sources for many regions are very outdated, somewhat inevitably given the scale of the synthesis attempted and the way the book uses older 'fragments'. Kozłowski is

aware of the limitations of the data available and his review: "Critics will raise the point - and they will be right - that the author has failed to include undoubtedly important details Even so, the present author is persuaded that he has managed in this book a fairly coherent presentation of the cultural divisions of the continent, quite so for the first time in the history of Mesolithic research. Hence, he is hopeful that he will be excused the errors ..." (p. 217). The issue however is not just about detail, but about the level at which our narratives work: Kozłowski notes that the "weaknesses of the source base are responsible for constructing generalizations that continue to be excessively banal, general and based mostly on common sense" (p. 515). Yet his picture of highly conservative cultures, changing little over time, is a product of the resolution of the evidence he has used, which does not include some of the more recent, higher resolution understandings of particular regional sequences. Recent research is not simply more of the same, but data of a different level of resolution, that enables us to ask different kinds of questions. The use of Bayesian modelling of radiocarbon dates, for example, raises the possibility, in some circumstances, of moving towards a generational time scale for Mesolithic archaeology, whilst the use of isotopic analysis of human bones allows us to compare individual diets and patterns of mobility to the broader resolution data found in middens and other faunal deposits. Kozłowski's cynicism about how we can understand change may be a product of the kinds of data he has available.

Similarly, the culture-historical framework is problematic. Mesolithic researchers have recognised for some time that our distribution maps are characterised by overlapping regions, with different materials and types not always having coinciding boundaries. It is far from clear that these should be equated with populations and several scholars have begun to stress the ways in which particular Mesolithic communities selected aspects of broader traditions, recombining them to create particular regional Mesolithics. Kozłowski discusses the importance of how new traditions are taken up in different areas, but the sense of a ratchet like movement from one state to another is very different than an emphasis on movement, exchange and the creation of particular traditions.

The distinction between large scale explanations and small detail remains difficult for archaeology. The explosion of archaeological fieldwork in recent years, alongside the proliferation of national, regional and theoretical approaches has led to a massive expansion in the data available to us. However, this increase in the quantity of data also leads to a fragmentation of discourse and very genuine problems in keeping up to date with research in different areas. It is difficult to imagine one author now synthesising all of the available data into a new comparative analytical framework across the areas that Kozłowski does. More likely, large scale synthesis will rely on medium scale synthesis that in turn is based on local data. Perhaps the most important aspect of Kozłowski's volume is its passionate statement for the need for perspectives beyond the local – that for all of our fine grained analyses and interpretations of particular times and places we must remember to look up and out, across national boundaries and to understand how different parts of the Mesolithic European world meshed together.