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Intercultural contacts between Blicquy/Villeneuve-Saint-Germain populations and Grossgartach/Planig-Friedberg populations from the Aldenhoven Plateau and surrounding areas

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Varia neolithica X



*Beiträge der gemeinsamen Sitzung der Arbeitsgemeinschaften
Neolithikum und Bronzezeit 2017 im Rahmen
des 9. Deutschen Archäologiekongresses in Mainz
& Aktuelles aus der Neolithforschung*

Beiträge zur Ur- und Frühgeschichte Mitteleuropas 91

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Herausgegeben von

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Solène Denis

Intercultural contacts between Blicquy/Villeneuve-Saint-Germain populations and Grossgartach/Planig-Friedberg populations from the Aldenhoven Plateau and surrounding areas: diffusion of siliceous raw materials and technical traditions

Summary: This paper focuses on the intercultural contacts between the Blicquy/Villeneuve-Saint-Germain and the Grossgartach/Planig-Friedberg cultures. At the turn of the sixth to the fifth millennium BC, a historic rupture in the Linear Pottery Culture colonisation movement is palpable. At that time, the Linear Pottery Culture breaks up into a mosaic of cultural entities like Blicquy/Villeneuve-Saint-Germain (BQY/VSG) which occupies the northern half of France and Belgium, while in the Rhine basin and the surrounding regions, the Hinkelstein (HK), Grossgartach (GG) and Planig-Friedberg (PF) cultures follow in sequence. These different entities are partially contemporaneous. We thus attempt to track the origin of these populations using an original method of lithic artefact analysis including the study of exogenous raw materials and technical traditions.

Keywords: Early Middle Neolithic, Aldenhoven Plateau, lithic technology, technical traditions, diffusion networks

Zusammenfassung: Der Artikel untersucht die interkulturellen Kontakte zwischen den Gruppen Blicquy/Villeneuve-Saint-Germain und Großgartach/Planig-Friedberg. An der Wende vom sechsten zum fünften Jt. v. Chr. wird ein historischer Bruch in der Kolonialisierungsbewegung der Linearbandkeramik deutlich. Zu dieser Zeit zerbricht die Linearbandkeramik in ein Mosaik kultureller Einheiten wie etwa Blicquy/Villeneuve-Saint-Germain (BQY/VSG), die in der nördlichen Hälfte Frankreichs und in Belgien verbreitet sind, während im Rheingebiet und den angrenzenden Regionen die Kulturen Hinkelstein (HK), Großgartach (GG) und Planig-Friedberg (PF) aufeinander folgen. Diese verschiedenen Einheiten sind teilweise gleichzeitig. Wir versuchen daher, den Ursprung dieser Bevölkerungen nachzuvollziehen, indem wir die Analyse lithischer Artefakte mit Herkunftsanalysen von Rohmaterialien und technischen Traditionen in einer neuen Methode kombinieren.

Schlagwörter: Frühes Mittelneolithikum, Aldenhovener Platte, Schlagtechniken, technische Traditionen, Ausbreitungsnetzwerke

Introduction

The Neolithic developed in temperate Europe with the Linear Pottery culture (LBK). This entity spread from Transdanubia, a western region of Hungary and the Danube, to the Paris Basin (France). Over about six centuries, between 5600 and 4900 BC, Neolithic ways of life took over most of the regions in north-western Europe. But at the turn of the sixth to the fifth millennium BC, a historic rupture in this colonisation movement is palpable. At that time, the Linear Pottery culture breaks up into a mosaic of cultural entities. The Blicquy/Villeneuve-Saint-Germain (BQY/VSG) culture occupies the northern half of France and Belgium, while in the Rhine basin and the surround-

ing regions, the Hinkelstein (HK), Grossgartach (GG) and Planig-Friedberg (PF) cultures follow in sequence. The chronology of these different cultural entities and the relationships between these populations are still a subject of debate (e. g. Denaire u. a. 2017), although the contemporaneity between the Blicquian settlements and the sites of Grossgartach and Planig-Friedberg on the Aldenhoven Plateau seems to be well established (e. g. Constantin/Ilett 1998; Zimmermann u. a. 2006; Gehlen/Schön 2007; Nowak 2013). For this latter geographic zone, the end of the Linear Pottery culture appears to be accompanied by the desertification of the plateau, which was only repopulated at the end of the Grossgartach sequence (Zimmermann u. a. 2006; Zimmermann 2009, 121–123; Balkowski

2017). This considerable demographic decline at the end of the Linear Pottery culture entails a breakdown in raw material diffusion networks, a decrease in the number of settlements, the construction of enclosed sites and a regionalisation of ceramic styles (Lehmann 2004, 297).

It is thus pertinent to question the origin of the populations settling on the Aldenhoven Plateau at the beginning of the Middle Neolithic (according to German terminology). Originally, the Hinkelstein and Grossgartach cultures appeared to emerge further south, in the Neckar and Rhine-Hesse regions. However, the study of the lithic artefacts of populations from the Aldenhoven Plateau and the surrounding regions suggests strong affinities and influences from Blicquy group populations (Gehlen/Schön 2007, 650), as does the discovery of Blicquian sherds at the sites of Langweiler 10 and 12 (Spatz 1991).

We thus attempted to track the origin of these populations using an original method of lithic artefact analysis. This study was carried out as part of a post-doctoral fellowship between July 2016 and March 2017, at the Institute for Prehistoric and Protohistoric Archaeology at the University of Cologne.

Lithic artefact study method

The study of the circulation of raw materials clearly plays a fundamental role in tracing the origin of settlement on the Aldenhoven plateau as it enables us to identify the geographic provenance of exogenous raw materials and the conditions of their diffusion. In this perspective, the analysis carried out by B. Gehlen and W. Schön is extremely pertinent (Gehlen/Schön 2007; Gehlen/Schön 2009a; Gehlen/Schön 2009b). We wished to add a point of view from the west, based on our knowledge of deposits from the Paris Basin and Belgium acquired during our PhD on Blicquian lithic assemblages (Denis 2017). For Belgium, the construction of the lithic library for western Hesbaye is still in progress and will in long term refine the first observations presented here.

But the innovative aspect of this study is based on the characterisation of the technical traditions of the knappers from these Neolithic villages. Indeed, the technological study of the lithic assemblages enables us to assess the level of knapping skills, by considering general qualitative and quantitative criteria, such as the observation of accidents, technical errors, and the regularity of knapping products. A detailed examination of the blades, based on a description of the butts, the section, and debitage organization, and especially on the technical processes of preparation through to removal and percussion techniques allows for the identification of „ways of doing things” (Pelegrin 1995, 36). „Technical behaviours are transmitted by observation, and are reinforced and stabilized by effective repetition. In this way, the conditions of acquisition convey a certain inertia on technical skills, by respecting common standards and habits. This justifies the term ‘technical tradition’, the sum of shared and transmitted choices [...]”

sites	number	weight (in g)
LW10	108	486
LW12	117	1595
HA260	357	2901
total	582	4982

Fig. 1: Number and weight of the studied lithic industry.

(Pelegrin 1985, 83). The study of levels of skill and technical traditions is still underexploited today for Neolithic lithic assemblages. However, they reflect distinct social groups (Roux 2010), and tracking them in time and space enhances our understanding of the actors of Neolithisation and their interactions.

In the scope of this article, we will focus on the earliest occupation traces from the beginning of the Middle Neolithic. However, as the material from the site of Hasselweiler 1 is still untraceable, the material from Langweiler 10 (Eckert u. a. 1971; Spatz 1991), Langweiler 12 (Ihmig u. a. 1971) and Hambach 260 (Dohrn-Ihmig 1983) will form the basis of our study corpus (Fig. 1).

Results for the diffusion of raw materials and technical traditions

This is a preliminary study and a more in-depth spatial analysis will refine these first observations.

Exogenous raw materials

As highlighted by the study by B. Gehlen and W. Schön, exogenous siliceous raw materials from Belgium were diffused towards the sites of the Aldenhoven Plateau (Gehlen/Schön 2007; Gehlen/Schön 2009b). This circulation of exogenous raw materials is not attested at Langweiler 10

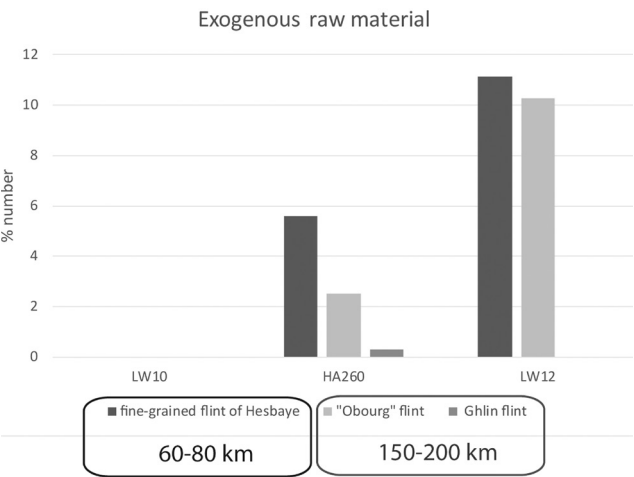


Fig. 2: Diagram of the exogenous raw material found in Langweiler 10, Langweiler 12 and Hambach 260.

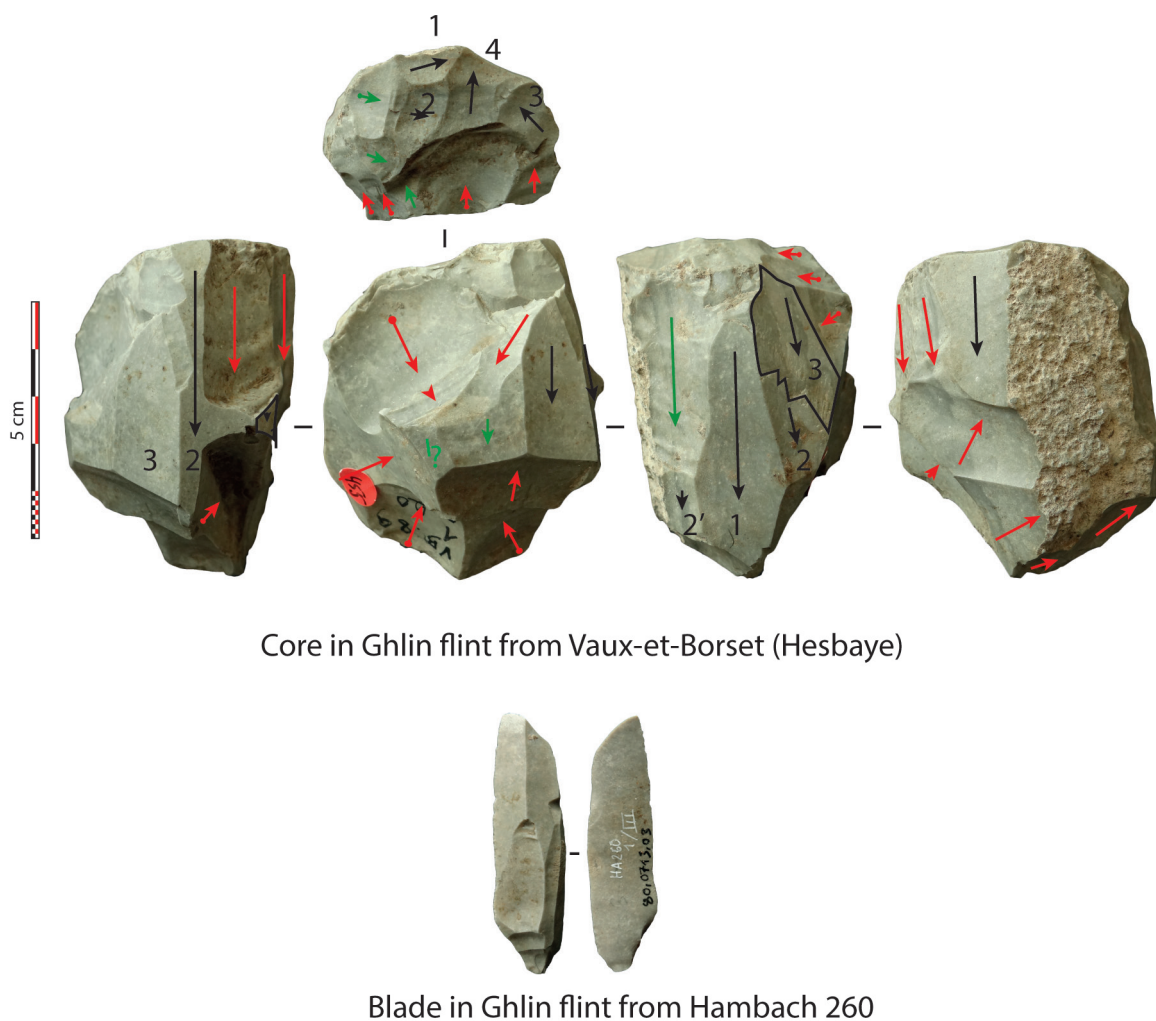


Fig. 3: Comparison of the Ghlin raw material characteristics between a core from Vaux-et-Borset and the blade discovered in Hambach 260.

and seems to occur and develop from Planig-Friedberg. Yet, this could be correlated with the fact that the Blicquian occupations of Hesbaye are only recorded during the second stage of the BQY/VSG culture. The majority of the exogenous materials identified consist of fine-grained flint from Hesbaye, now it is sure from the Campanian levels from the west of the region, about 60–80 km from the Planig-Friedberg sites (Fig. 2). In addition, I discovered a flint blade in Ghlin flint at the site of Hambach 260. This flint outcrops in the Mons Basin, about 200 km away. But the very specific characteristics of the raw material of this object are similar to those of a flint core in Ghlin flint transported to the site of Vaux-et-Borset (Hesbaye) (Fig. 3). Therefore, this is probably a secondary diffusion of this flint from Hesbaye, probably from Vaux-et-Borset. Finally, the third exogenous material is a black flint of excellent quality initially interpreted as Obourg flint (Mons Basin), illustrating contacts with the Blicquian populations of Hainaut (Gehlen/Schön 2007; Gehlen/Schön 2009b). However, neither the Blicquian populations nor the LBK populations used this raw material (Allard 2005; Denis 2017). M. de Grooth proposed an origin in the accessible levels of Zeven Wegen near the gathering places of the main raw materials on the Aldenhoven Plateau, such as the

flint from Rullen and Rijckholt, which outcrops between Maastricht and Aachen (de Grooth 2011). In order to back up this hypothesis, geochemical analyses of five samples from Hambach 260 and Langweiler 12 were carried out by L. Moreau (post-doctoral fellow, Cambridge). These tend to rule out these hypothesis (Denis u. a. 2019). Moreover, the technical characteristics of laminar production on this black flint are very specific.

Technical traditions

Through the prism of the analysis of technical traditions, which has not yet been applied to these archaeological contexts, we can glean information concerning the origin of the populations at the beginning of the Middle Neolithic.

The site of Langweiler 10 has not yielded sufficient intentional blades to undergo this examination. But two technical traditions have been identified at the sites of Langweiler 12 and Hambach 260. These differ in particular by the application of different removal processes, even though the indirect percussion technique is similar at both sites. For the first tradition, the knappers produce the blades from a smooth striking platform with no elaborate pre-

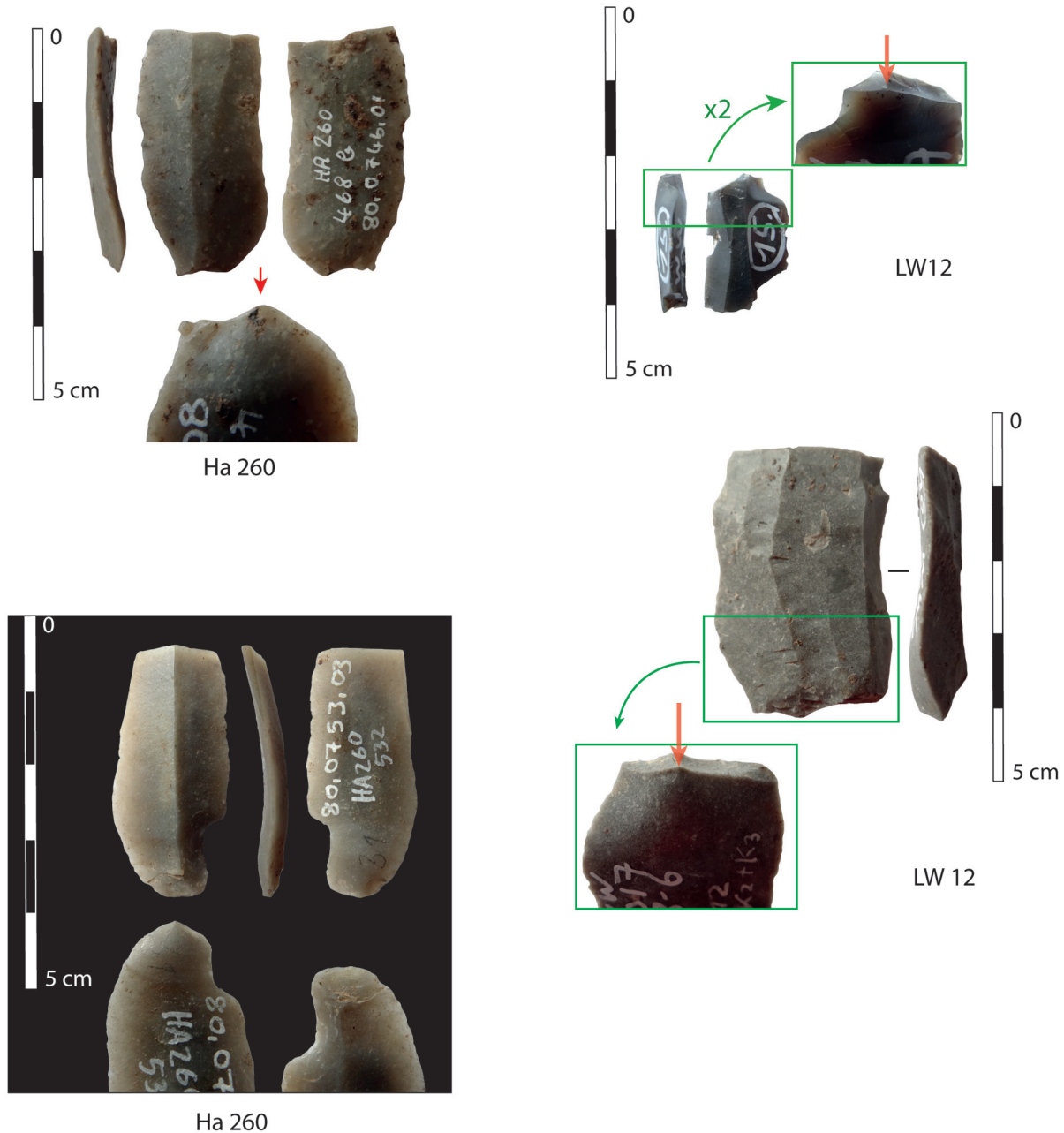


Fig. 4: Technical characteristics of the second tradition identified in Langweiler 12 and Hambach 260.

paration of the edge. The second tradition is different in that the knappers place their punch on a dihedron (Fig. 4). These dihedral butts result from faceting the striking platform in order to create a rib on which the knapper can put his punch. The blades are small in size (7–9 cm long and about 15 mm wide). In this way, the blow on the punch does not require much force to remove the blade. In this case, the position of the punch on the dihedron facilitates the initialisation of the fracture and therefore the removal of the blade (Pelegriin, oral communication), whereas for larger blades, this process could damage the punch. The blades obtained are more regular than in the first tradition, and the butts, which sometimes can be very carefully prepared, may be very narrow and very thin.

The first briefly described technical tradition has already been identified in some of the Hesbaye knapping

groups (Denis 2014; Denis 2017). In addition, pending an in-depth study of these technical characteristics, at least part of the Linear Pottery culture production from Hesbaye and the Aldenhoven Plateau appears to have been made by knappers from this same technical domain (Boelicke u. a. 1988, 787–793; Lüning/Stehli 1994; Allard 2005). On the other hand, the second technical tradition is completely unprecedented. It had never been identified up until now in the Blicquy/Villeneuve-Saint-Germain context, nor in the Linear Pottery culture context in France or in Belgium.

Discussion on the origin of the settlement of Aldenhoven Plateau at the beginning of the Middle Neolithic

This study thus reaffirms the existence of connections between the populations of the Aldenhoven Plateau and Blicquian populations through the observation of raw material circulation. Given the currently available data, these connections seem to revolve around the Planig-Friedberg stage. In addition, the only connections with Blicquian populations are with Hesbaye populations. On the other hand, the raw material previously identified as Obourg flint does not show contacts with the Blicquian populations of Hainaut, who did not use this raw material.

Lastly, the analysis of lithic technical traditions shows that the sites of Hambach 260 and Langweiler 12 were settled by two distinct social groups who did not share the same transmission networks of knowledge and skill. The first (tradition 1) came either from the local Linear Pottery culture substratum or from the integration of the Blicquian populations of Hesbaye. The circulation of raw material may elucidate this point. We thus observe that the cultural boundaries, outlined by pottery studies, are transcended by social groups and the circulation of raw materials. In addition, a social group was identified here for the first time. It does not correspond to any of the transmission networks identified in a BQY/VSG context or in a Linear Pottery culture context from the north of France and Belgium according to the available bibliographic descriptions (e. g. Allard 2005). My research will now focus on finding the geographic origin of this social group by directing my studies towards the southwest of Germany (Neckar and Rhine-Hesse), in the key zone where the Hinkelstein and Grossgartach populations emerged.

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