People in the Mountains

Current Approaches to the Archaeology of Mountainous Landscapes

Edited by

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Archaeopress Archaeology

Archaeopress Publishing Ltd
Gordon House
276 Banbury Road
Oxford OX2 7ED

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978 1 78491 817 0
ISBN 978 1 78491 818 7 (e-Pdf)

Cover image: Bieszczady Mountains (SE Poland). Photo by Andrzej Pelisiak

Printed in England by Oxuniprint, Oxford
This book is available direct from Archaeopress or from our website www.archaeopress.com

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Introduction

Andrzej Pelisiak, Marek Nowak and Ciprian Astaloş

The inspiration for this volume came from papers presented during a session entitled *People and the mountains – entering into the new landscapes*, organised in 2014 by Andrzej Pelisiak (Institute of Archaeology, University of Rzeszów, Poland), Marek Nowak (Institute of Archaeology, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland) and Ciprian Astaloş (Satu Mare County Museum, Satu Mare, Romania) within the frameworks of the 20th Annual Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists in Istanbul. The session included 17 papers and two posters presented by 41 researchers from 12 countries in Europe, Asia, and Australia. The papers and posters addressed the complex issues of the archaeology of mountainous areas, presenting new materials as well as current conclusions and interpretations. The geographical scope of the discussed issues was very broad, and they linked to various periods of prehistory, to the recent past.

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The volume opens with a presentation of basic issues and problems of research into Neolithic communities in mountains by **Paweł Valde-Nowak.** The author discusses both archaeological and paleoenvironmental research, palynological in particular. He outlines the fundamental problems posed by such research, but also suggests solutions to them. With respect to studies on the environment he emphasises that, in mountains, natural processes strongly transforming the landscape may be initiated by man but later continue to operate without human contribution. In Valde-Nowak's opinion the increase in research, as well as the increase in the imagination of researchers, has meant that 'the archaeologists have learned to understand still better the exceptional form of Neolithic remnants from the mountains. There is a growing evidence for the penetration of such regions already in the Early Neolithic. Such finds, as well as Late Neolithic ones, are not connected with transitional passing through the mountains, as was thought before. The amount of such traces in each mountain group is so large that it is important to take mountain territories into serious consideration with regard to the everyday lives and economic activity of Neolithic man'.

The extensive paper by **Francesca Romana Del Fattore**, **Anna Rizzo**, and **Alessandro Felici** presents the research in the Tasso-Upper Sagittarius Valley, in the Abruzzo Mountains (Central Italy). It has been carried out since 2006 within the framework of the *Fluturnum Project*, a part of a broader, international research enterprise. The project's tasks fall within six categories: 1) Preliminary activities: census of materials and known archaeological evidence, 2) Acquisition of ethno-anthropological data, 3) Surveys, 4) Test excavations at known sites, 5) Design and creation of an *Antiquarium* in the town of Scanno, 6) Definition of historical and nature walks. Its goal is 'to document the human settlement history of the Tasso-Upper Sagittarius Valley over the long term, from its earliest occupation in the Palaeolithic until the present day'. The authors present, in chronological order, the materials uncovered in the territory. With respect to the Neolithic and Eneolithic, they point towards the archaeological evidence for vertical transhumance. In their research, they make use of historical and ethnographic data, and the project refers in part to historical times (Antiquity and later periods).

Lionello F. Morandi and **Nicholas P. Branch** focus on the exploitation of mountain and upland landscapes for animal grazing, starting from the Middle Neolithic. Their deliberations concern the regions of Emilia-Romagna and Liguria, in the northern Apennines (Italy). The authors discuss issues connected with short- and long-distance transhumance, and the definition of transhumance itself, and the research is based on archaeological and environmental materials, zooarchaeological in particular. In the area under consideration, caves and rock shelters are sites of particular importance. The authors

conclude that seasonal mountain grazing was gradually gaining in importance beginning from the Late Neolithic. They also present in-detail research into a peat bog, Prato Spilla 'A'.

In their chapter, **Radu-Alexandru Dragoman**, **Dan Pop**, **Bogdan Bobînă**, **Marius Ardeleanu**, **Călin Şuteu**, and **Ciprian Astaloş** present the results of research initiated in 2012 in northern Romania, in the eastern part of Maramureş: in the Prislop Pass (1414 m a.s.l.), which links Maramureş and Bukovina and in the region of the Geamănul Peak (1539 m a.s.l.) to the east of the Prislop Pass. Field works conducted in these areas resulted in the discovery of prehistoric sites represented by lithic finds, 'post-Roman' pottery, relics of military features from WWI and WWII, and traces of modern-period shepherds' structures. The authors discuss the importance of mountains for prehistoric communities, including their different symbolic meanings, and support the discussion with ethnographic and historical data.

Taras Tkachuk's paper is focused on the Neolithic and Eneolithic of the Carpathian Basin and to the east of the Carpathians. Within the scope of the author's interest are the cultures of Trypillia-Cucuteni, Tiszapolgár, Bodrogkeresztúr, and Petreşti, separated by the Carpathian range. He discusses the role played by the Carpathians in the Neolithic and Eneolithic, trying to determine whether these mountains were an impermeable barrier or a border area which posed no basic obstacle for intercultural contacts. Tkachuk points to the presence on the Trypillia-Cucuteni sites of copper objects, gold jewellery, and vessels which were either imports or imitations of artefacts typical of the Tiszapolgár and Bodrogkeresztúr cultures. On the other side of the mountains, artefacts made from Volhynian flint are common finds in the Tiszapolgár and Bodrogkeresztúr sites. In the author's opinion, these examples are solid proof of Transcarpathian contacts, one of its forms being the exchange of prestige objects made of gold and copper (originating from the Carpathian Basin, from the milieu of the Tiszapolgár and Bodrogkeresztúr cultures), and artefacts of Volhynian flint (originating from the Trypillia-Cucuteni area).

Noémi Beljak Pažinová focuses her interest on the Zvolen region in central Slovakia, and on various aspects of human activity (settlement, economy, material culture) in the Late Neolithic, Eneolithic, and Bronze Age. The author concludes that factors such as climate and the presence of limnoquartzite outcrops – raw material used in chipped lithics production – favoured human settlement in the region. She points to transformations in settlement patterns, including a tendency to establish settlements in high locations, discernible from the times of the Epi-Baden culture, which was also connected with natural defensive potential. She highlights the noticeable geographical isolation of the Zvolen region, pointing at the same time to the evidence of contact with neighbouring areas, well-confirmed in archaeological material.

Andrzej Pelisiak's study is devoted to his research in the Polish Bieszczady Wysokie Mountains (SE tip of Poland). Archaeological research in this area was inspired by the identification of palynological traces of human activity from c. 3200 BC in pollen diagrams. Numerous finds of single lithic artefacts at heights above 1000 m a.s.l. confirm seasonal grazing of animals from the Late Neolithic. At a similar height, stone structures were discovered, referring to similar constructions known from the Alps, where they are dated between 2600 and 700 BC. Defensive structures were discovered as well, in the form of stone and earth ramparts. The determination of the chronology and function of these structures will be the goal of the planned excavations. Another line of research in Bieszczady Wysokie consist on studies of local siliceous raw materials, their outcrops, and possible places and forms of their exploitation in prehistory. The research is interdisciplinary, with contributions from environmental, geological, and paleoclimatic studies.

In his paper on palynological indicators of human activity in the Neolithic in the Polish Western Carpathians, **Marek Nowak** argues that these data do not suggest a radical deforestation in the Neolithic period in the Western Carpathians. However, in a number of profiles, the presence of human indicators was recorded, generally throughout the whole of the Neolithic. They occur with varying – but generally low – intensity. They have a discontinuous nature, which mirrors the short duration of the use of a given area. Thus, anthropogenic indicators only reflect human behaviours associated with animal (forest)

husbandry, and possibly very local and short-term cultivation. Consequently, the great importance of such activities as hunting or participation in Transcarpathian communication is highly probable. Changes of species composition within forest cover, most apparent in the 3rd millennium BC, should not be regarded as evidence of human activity. Such activity would have to have been extremely intense and far-reaching to cause such changes.

The study by **Paweł Jarosz** is a recapitulation of the hitherto research on the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age settlement in the Carpathians. Human activity is analysed here in the context of climate transformations, which makes the information recorded in Carpathian pollen diagrams particularly important. The archaeological basis for the analysis are sepulchral and settlement sites. With respect to the oldest Early Bronze finds in the Carpathians, one can notice a continuation in the location of graves: burials from the oldest phase of the Mierzanowice culture were often dug into Corded Ware Culture barrows. The issues pertaining to the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age in the Carpathians are analysed against a broad Central European geographical and chronological-cultural context.

Using the example of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age in the Polish Western Carpathians, **Marta Korczyńska** and **Klaus Cappenberg** demonstrate that, despite poor archaeological sources, graveyards in mountain regions can provide very valuable information given the proper digging methods and detailed examination of pottery taphonomy and technology. For instance, it seems that in the case of graveyards, pottery deposited in tree windthrow structures creates an opportunity to reconstruct grave inventories and can also be taken into account when estimating the number of graves. Therefore, in the authors' opinion, the common consideration of graveyards in the Polish Carpathian as being small and few, may in most cases reflect only their poor state of preservation.

Ewa Lisowska's study is devoted to the acquisition of stone raw materials in the Sudetes in the Early Middle Ages. The identification of the applied stone material is based on petrographic analyses (electron microprobe analysis, rare earth element analysis and x-ray diffraction). The author presents the state of research on the issue of her interest. The analyses encompassed more than 2,000 artefacts from 179 archaeological sites. Field research was supported with the analysis of geological maps, and of LIDAR and Mestischblatter data. The results allowed her to outline the development of stone acquisition in the Middle Ages, including the methods of acquisition and the types of quarries. She points to the diversified applications of stone as raw material, from making objects of everyday use to architectural complexes. She divides the development of stone acquisition activity into four chronological phases.

The chapter by **Katarína Kapustka**, **Matthew Walls**, and **Jan Eigner** presents their research into the Mesolithic occupation in the Bohemian Forest region. The authors present the results of excavations and surface surveys carried out within the framework of a project initiated in 2011. The identified sites are situated at heights ranging from 1010 to 1150 m a.s.l. The investigated sites yielded artefacts made from Bavarian lithic raw materials, which in the authors' opinion indicates that groups of Mesolithic population crossed mountain ranges. These findings confirm that, rather than being an 'empty space', Bohemian Forest was regularly exploited by hunting-gathering communities during the Mesolithic.

Bina Gandhi Deori's paper focuses on Arunachal Pradesh, the most north-eastern state of India, in the foothills of the Himalayas. It is mainly devoted to indigenous communities living in the different valleys of Arunachal Pradesh. The inaccessible topography prevented regular intercommunication between these valleys. The geographical isolation from each other has resulted in the survival, almost to the present day, of specific cultural attributes, in language, dress, customs, etc. Each group has its own defined cultural identities which present a unique scenario of unity in diversity in Northeast India. Thus, in the absence of any major influence from outside, the indigenous customs are practiced more or less in their pristine forms without much modification. Interestingly enough, although agriculture is the main mode of subsistence, many of the tribes still subsist also on gathering, fishing, and occasionally hunting. The developed oral history of the tribes carries rich information regarding their migrations, genealogical histories, and the geographical boundaries of their ancestral territories. Through oral

narratives, community ownership over their territorial lands is established. These communities have a deep and profound spiritual connection with their territories. They do not see themselves as separate from nature but a part of nature. Mountains, hills, forests, trees, agricultural fields, rivers, streams, etc. are associated with spirits and sylvan deities that protect them.

Piotr Kalicki, **Tomasz Kalicki** and **Piotr Kittel** discuss fog-alimented ecosystems (lomas) on the western coast of South America as evidenced in the Lomas de Lachay region. Such ecosystems were formed due to the humidity deposited on first ridges of the Andes by advection fog, during the humid season in particular. The region under consideration attracted human communities, and complex societies appeared there c. 1800 BC. As a threshold environment, Lomas de Lachay constitutes a perfect case study for the studies of human adaptive strategies to fragile mountain and desert ecosystems. Among other things, a clear trend of subsistence changes from intensive agriculture to the extensive pastoralism of camelids (associated with transhumance between the highlands and lomas) can be demonstrated. These changes can be related with fluctuations in the frequency of El Niño events (periods of increased precipitations and periods of aridization). Interestingly enough, in all settlement phases Lomas de Lachay had a relatively high symbolic status (ceremonial sites, cemeteries), which did not correlate well with its actual economic importance. In the authors' opinion, the mental reference to this region was determined by religious beliefs and power structure rather than by economic or environmental factors.

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What general conclusions can be drawn from these papers? Undoubtedly, for obvious topographical and environmental reasons, mountains separated human communities which, at least from the Neolithic, functioned in other ecological zones. In other words, mountains were barriers, border areas, etc. On the other hand, however, these barriers and borders created by mountains were seldom impermeable for humans. Prehistorical and historical facts, mentioned in this volume or known otherwise (e.g. Ötzi), demonstrate that, contrary to common belief, even high mountain ranges could be relatively easily penetrated and crossed, and not only in the Neolithic.

We can suppose that, for the Neolithic (and other) people, what lay BEYOND the mountains, in more or less distant lands, appeared exotic and new. Despite the distrust and enmity towards 'Foreigners' innate in traditional communities, and despite the fact that mountains were a specific/unusual landscape (where rare/uncommon animals could be encountered and strange atmospheric phenomena occurred, a place 'closer to the gods'), exotic, uncommon, unusual artefacts were eagerly accepted or bought, if only for purely prestige reasons. But the unknown lands beyond mountains also naturally inspired an eternal human question and dream – what if it is better on the other side? Maybe we should take a chance and seek fortune beyond these huge, dark mountains? These questions and dreams quite often fruited in smaller or larger migrations. Thus, crossing mountain barriers and boundaries was practically inevitable.

But mountains were not only the routes of migration, exchange, etc. Many papers in this volume clearly demonstrate that in the more or less distant past mountains as such, with all their environmental specificity, were exploited in various manners. Examples given many times here show that they were very flexibly and aptly used, and the potential of particular mountain zones, in terms of food acquisition, flora, fauna, natural resources, etc., was correctly identified.

Mountains were no doubt often peripheral areas when compared with dense and stable settlement in uplands and lowlands. In mountains, the patterns typical of 'central' areas were sometimes copied (or attempts were made to copy them), only with less intensity. But perhaps more often, e.g. in the Neolithic, mountains were peripheral areas where the mentioned 'central' patterns were not so much copied as supplemented, in what we could describe as a complementary approach. Finally, sometimes mountains were the arena of relatively independent social, economic, and ideological development, where specific forms of settlement, modes of subsistence, and social structures developed. The latter could sometime be in a kind of opposition/contestation to social structures typical of other landscape zones.

Last but not least, the papers gathered in this volume show that there can be many facets to mountain archaeology. What they have in common is the specific nature of the finds, different from those recovered from other ecological zones more typically exploited by human communities. Moreover, this specific nature manifests itself in various dimensions. It takes much patience, consideration, and analytical and interpretational skills to discover these specific finds, properly classify and interpret them, and set them within their proper cultural and natural contexts. The practice proves, however, that systematic, consistent, and long-range research programmes realised in mountain environments will ultimately produce desired, interesting, and sometimes surprising results.

Acknowledgements

We greatly acknowledge the invaluable help in editing all contributions provided by PhD students of the Institute of Archaeology, Jagiellonian University: Agnieszka Brzeska-Pasek, Robert Kenig, Tomasz Oberc, and Justyna Zakrzeńska. Thanks are also due to Aeddan Shaw and Piotr Godlewski for language proofreading of all texts.