



TACKLING THE 'PLOUGHZONE PARADOX' The case of lithic scatters

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The 'ploughzone paradox' in archaeology is described as follows: "there is a great deal of evidence [within the ploughsoil] but it lacks context from which chronology and associations can be discerned" (Steinberg 1996). The context to which Steinberg referred is the materialisation in the archaeological record of any kind of event in time. Following his assumption, it has been suggested that "a deeper understanding of the varied processes affecting surface assemblages would increase the likelihood of identifying which patterns are the result of past human actions and which are the result of post-deposition processes" (Dolan 2006: 10).

I do not agree with Steinberg's pessimistic assumption that a ploughsoil environment lacks any context when dealing with lithic assemblages. In my opinion, a ploughed prehistoric ground surface is a ploughed context. Therefore, Dolan's proposal outlined above will be an unnecessary and time-wasting step towards the creating of 'ghost contexts' from which one can try to tell stories about past peoples, their landscapes and their lives.

Relevant contextual information can more effectively be reconstructed by studying the inter- and intrasite distribution patterns of lithic raw material types, in combination with a thorough typo-technological analysis of the artifacts by every raw material type. The basic principle of this methodology lies in the fact that prehistoric flintknapping was more or less constrained in time and space, resulting in a dense distribution of waste material on the former ground surface. Tools produced during this flintknapping procedure were used and left behind elsewhere in the landscape. Repeated occupation leads to an increasing amount of raw material types within a restricted area (i.e. palimpsests). Various post-deposition processes (such as tillage) are responsible for a further mixing of the already complex archaeological archive. So, one can plead for a thorough comprehension of the lithic raw material types present in a particular 'ploughsoil assemblage' instead of executing a typo-technological analysis of the whole assemblage without paying sufficient attention to the physical occurrence of the materials. Intra- en intersite matching of raw material types can hopefully deliver the basis (i.e. context) from which chronology and associations can be discerned.

REFERENCES

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