

PRELIMINARY NOTES ON THE "EARLY AND MIDDLE
PALEOLITHIC" FINDS OF MR. T. VERMANING

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From 1965 onwards, several groups of artefacts, including collections with an "Early or Middle Paleolithic" *habitus*, have been purchased for museums in the Netherlands from Mr. T. Vermaning.

The first of these assemblages consists of 127 artefacts of "Middle Paleolithic" character, found according to Vermaning in two concentrations near Hogersmilde, prov. of Drente. These objects were bought by the Provincial Museum of Drente at Assen in 1965. In 1968, the *Stichting Nederlandsch Museum voor Anthropologie en Praehistorie* purchased from Vermaning a second, larger collection of artefacts (more than 400) also assumed to be of Middle Paleolithic age, and according to Vermaning found in the neighbourhood of Hijken, prov. of Drente.

Other objects sold by Vermaning include artefacts thought to date from periods of prehistory ranging from Early Paleolithic to Neolithic. Apart from these purchased artefacts, several other spectacular "finds" have been displayed by Vermaning, including a large collection from a third "Middle Paleolithic" find-spot (Eemster, prov. of Drente), and a smaller group, also assumed to be of Middle Paleolithic type, from various find-spots near Ravenswoud, prov. of Friesland.

Research by the present author at the *Biologisch-Archaeologisch Instituut* in Groningen has indicated that all the artefacts classified as belonging to the Early or Middle Paleolithic periods, and also various objects thought to date from younger periods, are falsifications. The main arguments upon which this conclusion is based were summarized in a preliminary report which was presented to the proprietors of the museums concerned, and to the press; subsequently, this report was published in a Dutch archeological magazine (Stapert, 1975^a). It was written in consultation with

Prof. H. T. Waterbolk; he also shared the formal responsibility for the contents of it. A definitive report, with all necessary details, will be published later in this journal. In the present short communication only a summary will be given of the most important observations concerning the alleged Early and Middle Paleolithic artefacts.

1. Virtually all the artefacts in question show uniform traces of grinding, which are in general present only upon the ridges between flake scars. These traces cannot be explained in terms of natural processes, or as use-wear. They are observed neither on naturally occurring pieces of flint in the layers indicated by Vermaning as the artefact-bearing strata, nor on Middle Paleolithic artefacts from the north of the Netherlands not associated with Vermaning. Experiments point to the high probability that these traces of grinding were produced mechanically.

2. The surfaces produced by deliberate flaking on all these artefacts have no traces at all of white, coloured, or other forms of patina, or of wind-gloss. Such surface-modifications are, however, present on all Middle Paleolithic artefacts from the Netherlands not associated with Vermaning. Moreover, naturally occurring pieces of flint in the layers indicated by Vermaning as being artefact-bearing, possess these features without exception.

3. None of these hundreds of presumed Early or Middle Paleolithic artefacts shows any evidence of secondary frost-splitting, which is, statistically speaking, a remarkable coincidence. At least one of the few Middle Paleolithic artefacts recovered from the Netherlands not associated with Vermaning, has been damaged by frost-splitting subsequent to its manufacture (Stapert, 1975^b).

4. Most of the artefacts have a glossy appearance, thus suggesting a form of gloss-patination as it is known on most of the Late Paleolithic artefacts in the Netherlands. This shiny layer can, however,

easily be washed away with the help of water and soap, which is not to be expected of natural patinas. Furthermore, this superficial gloss does not always cover the whole surface of the artefacts: in some deep hollows, present on several artefacts, it is missing, thus leaving small areas with the characteristics of freshly fractured flint surfaces.

5. Some of the artefacts preserve remnants of old natural surfaces (originated prior to manufacture), which are mostly the result of frost-splitting. Several of these surfaces hardly show any patination, indicating that the flints used for the production of these artefacts were until recently present in nearly fresh condition.

6. The type-association represented by the above-mentioned assemblages is quite surprising; this is true in particular with regard to the striking variety of handaxe-types. For example, in the collection of artefacts which according to Vermaning, were found by him near Hijken, the following handaxe-types are present (names according to the types defined by Bordes, 1961): *lancéolé*, *micoquien*, *triangulaire*, *subtriangulaire*, *cordiforme*, *subcordiforme*, *subcordiforme allongé*, *ovulaire*, *amygdaloïde*, *discoïde*, *limande*, *hache-reau*, *pic* and *divers*.

Excavations conducted by the present author at the spot indicated by Vermaning to him personally as the site near Hijken which yielded more than 400 "Middle Paleolithic" artefacts, did not produce any evidence whatsoever pointing to habitation in Paleolithic times, but on the other hand some Mesolithic artefacts were found. Artefacts of the latter period are, however, not present in the Vermaning collection in question. But during an earlier excavation on the same site, Vermaning picked up two artefacts of Middle Paleolithic character in the presence of personnel of the BAI. Similar events happened at several other find-spots of Vermaning.

As for the site of Hogersmilde, excavations carried out there in 1965 seemed to give positive evidence of the presence *in situ* for several artefacts recovered during the excavation. It should be noted, however, that these artefacts always turned up just underneath disturbed soil, so that one may suppose that they could easily have been placed there before the excavations started.

In this journal, an article on the material of Hogersmilde has been published by J. D. van der Waals and H. T. Waterbolk (1973). Both these authors now fully support the conclusions reached by the present author.

Finally, it should be mentioned here that F. Bordes (in the printed discussion appended to Waterbolk, 1971) and C. B. M. McBurney (in a letter to H. T. Waterbolk dated May 5, 1969, as a reaction to Van der Waals & Waterbolk, 1967) had previously expressed doubts concerning the authenticity of the finds from Hogersmilde, because of the clumsy way in which these artefacts were manufactured.

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