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RICHARD BRADLEY, The Social Foundations of Prehistoric Britain: Themes and variations in the archaeology of power. Longman, London, 1984. 195 pp. £6.95 (Soft) ISBN 0-582-49164-9.

Reviewed by Simon Buteux.

This volume, in the new Longman Archaeology Series, represents a significant departure in both subject matter and approach from Bradley's earlier book, The Prehistoric Settlement of Britain (1978). It is altogether a more satisfactory and readable book, and indeed, six years on, it is also cheaper (but available in paperback only).

The book is about social organisation and social change in prehistoric Britain, and covers the period from the beginning of the Neolithic to the Roman Conquest. The structure is broadly chronological, but the whole is given unity by a central concern with the de-

velopment, maintenance and expression of power. In no way can the book be considered (nor is it intended to be) a survey of British prehistory. It is an essay in interpretation, and as such, requires familiarity with the basic material. The figures, with the rather odd exception of an illustration of conjoined huts at Pilsdon Pen, are confined to maps or diagrams of various sorts.

The introductory chapter, 'Oaths of Service', stresses both the possibility of, and need for, a social archaeology, and Bradley takes issue with some of the pessimists on this score. By singling out for criticism two articles written as long ago as the mid-fifties Bradley is describing battles already fought, rather than contributing many original thoughts. If anybody is to change sides now, it will rather be as a result of the substantive content of his book. Subsequent chapters deal with particular time periods and lay stress on particular approaches or interpretive models. Thus, chapter 2, 'Constructions of the Dead' deals with earlier Neolithic society between about 3500 and 2500 BC, and is primarily concerned with, on an empirical level, long barrows and cairns and, on a theoretical level, with the exploitation of ancestry. Chapter 3, 'Weapons of Exclusion', covers the later Neolithic period, from c. 2700 to 2000 BC, and is focussed primarily on the production and exchange of prestige objects; the development of long-range interaction; and what might be termed the 'Grooved Ware problem'. Chapter 4, 'Unnecessary Pyramids', although dealing with the period 2000 to 1300 BC, is in some respects complementary to chapter 3. Attention is focussed on the role of public monuments and elaborate burial practises. Chapter 5, 'The Embarrassment of Riches', is again concerned with prestige objects, but, in contrast to chapter 3, lays

greatest stress on disentangling the problems of deposition. Chapter 6, 'Continental Drift', takes us up to the Roman Conquest, and examines the changing scale of political relations in the Iron Age and Britain's position within the larger European system.

Bradley is concerned with developing a rounded and flexible approach to the study of prehistoric society, and each of the models considered in the five main chapters is not restricted in relevance to the time period to which it is primarily applied. Rather, the chapters have a cumulative effect, and in the concluding chapter, 'Reasoning with the Irrational', Bradley draws together the diverse approaches and examines, in long-term time perspective, the changing relationships between different parts of the archaeological record. This enables him to point out some interesting parallels between sequences whilst stressing that there are no exact cycles. Each sequence takes off from a new starting point. An uncritical application of social evolutionary schemes after Sahlins/Service/Fried is avoided.

The pioneering nature of Richard Bradley's book must be borne in mind in any assessment of its merits and defects. The only other recent book of similar scope and broadly similar aims is Paul Ashbee's The Ancient British: A Social-Archaeological Narrative (1978). Bradley's book is altogether less ideosyncratic and more analytical, and makes full use of the latest developments in research and theory. The book fills the gap between general statements of theory and 'commitment' on the one hand, and 'case studies', restricted in both time and space, on the other. Although many of the models and themes which occur in the book can be found in papers -- by Bradley and others -- elsewhere, nowhere else have they been brought

together and integrated in such a stimulating manner.

Some prehistorians of a theoretical persuasion tend to gloss over the full complexity of their material in order to press it into a predefined theoretical framework. Bradley's approach to interpreting British prehistory is refreshing because he recognises the enormous variability and complexity of his material as a valuable clue to its meaning, rather than as an inconvenience to be argued away. Thus, he attempts to see both the wood and the trees at the same time. He may not always succeed, but this is less important than his demonstration of the possibility. To take one example, Bradley is amongst the first writers to have begun to make sense of the bewildering patterns of regional divergence and convergence in the British later Neolithic.

In his choice of interpretive models, Bradley is avowedly eclectic, and readers may well feel that he is rather too uncritical of some of the these models. He sometimes appears unwilling to reject anything, if he thinks it might possibly help. It may also be felt that far reaching conclusions are often drawn from rather slender evidence, but this is the nature of any enterprise where much new ground is being broken. The book opens up avenues of research which will have to be pursued in much more depth in the years to come. One final criticism: it is slightly disappointing to find (once again) a book concerned with prehistoric Britain which has such a strong emphasis on southern England -- especially in the later chapters. This is, to a considerable extent, unavoidable, but perhaps more justice could have been done to the advances in fieldwork and research which have taken place in the north and west of Britain.

A feature of the book which it is very pleasing to see carried over from The Prehistoric Settlement of Britain is the use of apposite and frequently witty epigraphs at the head of each chapter. These add a literary flavour to an already stimulating book, which no serious student of British prehistory can afford to ignore.

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JAMES MOORE and ARTHUR S. KEENE, (EDS) Archaeological Hammers and Theories, Academic Press, New York and London, 1983. 309pp. £20.00. (hard) ISBN 0-12-505980-9.

Reviewed by Valerie Pinsky

At a time when extensive discussion of the 'Big Questions' in archaeology has been neglected in favour of increasingly more detailed studies of site formation mechanics (or, as the editors of this volume put it, "stone and bone physics" (p.7)), it is extremely refreshing to encounter a renewed consideration of the broader issues of sociocultural process and change. Starting from the critical position that contemporary archaeology has been overwhelmingly dominated by methodological concerns (the "tyranny of methodology" (p.5)) to the exclusion of conceptual issues, this volume seeks to redress the balance between theory -- as questions and problems relevant to particular social and historical contexts -- and the operational procedures by which empirical links are established with the archaeological past.

Method, whether originally archaeological or foraged from a host of other disciplines, is seen to be useful only within the context of relevant and carefully considered questions and theoretical premises. The "Law of the Hammer" (pp. 4-5) is in this connection invoked to warn that the random application of methods to any and all questions will surely be inappropriate, and will generate the dangerous impression that methods are absolute. Moreover, in rejecting both "a narrow particularistic empiricism and a relativism that suggests that all questions merit equal attention" (p. 8), the book clearly implies that some theories -- namely those which focus on the dynamics of sociocultural reproduction and transformation -- deserve primary emphasis in archaeological research.

Following the Introduction (Part 1), the book's twelve substantive contributions are organised into two major sections which examine the products and the precedents of the archaeological record, respectively. The four contributions to Part 2 (the products) by DeBoer, Wobst, Cross and Braun examine the progress, assumptions and limitations of various bodies of method in studies of site formation process and behavioural archaeology, sampling, lithic analysis and ceramic analysis, respectively. Each develops an alternative approach to the received views in these areas invoking specific data to provide examples. The primary value of each has been precisely to lay bare their assumptions, limitations and potential with respect to specific questions and bodies of data. These contributions converge in providing additional, general 'state-of-the-art' overviews of particular areas of methodological concern. They do not attempt, however, to 'hammer' any particular methods home.

In contrast to the fairly limited set of issues raised in