

Something Out
of the Ordinary?

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*Interpreting Diversity
in the Early Neolithic
Linearbandkeramik and Beyond*

Edited by

Luc Amkreutz, Fabian Haack,
Daniela Hofmann and Ivo van Wijk

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PREFACE

ALASDAIR WHITTLE

As the late, legendary American baseball player, Yogi Berra, put it, “when you come to a fork in the road, take it”. In the context of LBK studies, it was Pieter Modderman who put up the first really clear road sign signalling the avenue of exploring diversity. For quite a while, the LBK research community seemed slow to react, perhaps unsure which fork to go down. But for some time now the traffic has been flowing in the right direction and this volume underlines that welcome trend in a very timely and helpful way.

LBK research presents a number of distinctive challenges. While the archaeological evidence for LBK communities is so widespread and so easily recognizable, its very abundance, still increasing, makes it hard for any one specialist to make sense of it all. There is then the danger of seeing the LBK as “fractal”, as the same thing over and over again. There is the temptation to apply single, big models—one size fits all—as we have seen over the years with the *Hofplatzmodell* (or single homestead or yard model), and to some extent with the notion of patrilocality, and may be witnessing again now in the form of the house societies model. There is also the risk that specialists in any given place will be content simply to unravel local or regional situations, and leave it at that. I think that all these tendencies should be resisted, because to give in to them is to throw away some of the most interesting dimensions of the LBK, which include what is shared across vast areas and how, and what is not and why. Was there ever a total LBK world which any one person of the time could grasp? Perhaps not, but familiar-looking—even if not identical—buildings, gardens, crops, animals, pots, and stone tools must have been encountered by anyone travelling widely in the later sixth millennium cal BC, and people away from home might well have known how to fit in at the gatherings and funerals of others; it may all have also sounded familiar, depending on issues of language and dialect. So it is the relationship between shared practice and widely held beliefs and values on the one hand, and local and other ways of doing things on the other, that seems to me to really matter. This set of new papers, which seek to unpick

diversity and variability, from an impressive range of perspectives, is therefore important.

Writing a preface is a bit like being the *compère* of a music hall act: enthuse the audience, tell a joke or two, and build up anticipation, but don't get involved with the performance. In the case of this LBK variety show, as I read the papers, I wanted to respond to and engage with each single contribution. I am sure other readers will react in the same way.

—Cardiff, 27.10.2015

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CONTRIBUTORS

Luc W.S.W. Amkreutz
Curator Prehistory, National
Museum of Antiquities
Papengracht 30
P.O. box 121114
2301 EC Leiden
The Netherlands
l.amkreutz@rmo.nl

John C. Barrett
Department of Archaeology
University of Sheffield
Northgate House
West Street
Sheffield S1 4ET
UK
j.barrett@sheffield.ac.uk

Robin A. Beck
Museum of Anthropology and
Archaeology
University of Michigan
1109 Geddes Ave.
Ann Arbor, MI 48103
USA
rabeck@umich.edu

Jaromír Beneš
Institute of Archaeology
Faculty of Philosophy
University of South Bohemia
Branišovská 31a
370 05 České Budějovice
Czech Republic
benes.jaromir@gmail.com

Penny Bickle
Department of Archaeology
University of York
The King's Manor
York YO1 7EP
UK
penny.bickle@york.ac.uk

Laurence Burnez-Lanotte
LIATEC
Department of Art History and
Archaeology
University of Namur
Rue de Bruxelles 61
5000 Namur
Belgium

Lech Czerniak
Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii
Uniwersytet Gdański
ul. Bielańska 5
80-851 Gdańsk
Poland
lech.czerniak@ug.edu.pl

Maciej Dębiec
Uniwersytet Rzeszowski
Instytut Archeologii
ul. Moniuszki 10
35-015 Rzeszów
Poland
debiecmaciej@gmail.com

Michaela Divišová
Institute of Archaeology
Faculty of Philosophy
University of South Bohemia
Branišovská 31a
370 05 České Budějovice
Czech Republic
mdivisova@seznam.cz

Marjorie E. Th. De Grooth
Independent Researcher
Bad Münstereifel
Germany
grooth@t-online.de

Louise Gomart
Trajectoires UMR8215
University Paris 1/CNRS
21 Allée de l' Université
92000 Nanterre
France

Fabian Haack
Archäologisches Landesmuseum
Baden-Württemberg
Benediktinerplatz 5
78467 Konstanz
Germany
haack@konstanz.alm-bw.de

Anne Hauzeur
National Centre of
Archaeological Research
Section Prehistory
241, rue de Luxembourg
8077 Bertrange
Great-Duchy of Luxembourg
ahauzeur@yahoo.fr

Daniela Hofmann
Universität Hamburg
Archäologisches Institut
Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, Flügel
West
20146 Hamburg
Germany
daniela.hofmann@uni-
hamburg.de

Alexandra Fletcher
The British Museum
Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3DG
UK
afletcher@britishmuseum.org

Alexandre Livingstone Smith
Department of Archaeology
Royal Museum of Central Africa
Leuvensesteenweg 13
3080 Tervuren
Belgium

Joachim Pechtl
kelten römer museum manching
Im Erlet 2
85077 Manching
Germany
joachim.pechtel@museum-
manching.de

Matthew Spriggs
The Australian National
University
School of Archaeology and
Anthropology
Sir Roland Wilson Building
Canberra, ACT 2601
Australia
Matthew.Spriggs@anu.edu.au

Barbara Van Doosselaere
LIATEC
Department of Art History and
Archaeology
University of Namur
Rue de Bruxelles 61
5000 Namur
Belgium
barbara.vandoosselaere@gmail.com

Ivo van Wijk
Archaeological Research Leiden
Einsteinweg 2
2300 RA Leiden
The Netherlands
I.vanWijk@archol.nl

Marc Vander Linden
Institute of Archaeology
University College London
31-34 Gordon Square
London WC1H 0PY
UK
marc.linden@ucl.ac.uk

Václav Vondrovský
Institute of Archaeology
Faculty of Philosophy
University of South Bohemia
Branišovská 31a
370 05 České Budějovice
Czech Republic
vaclav.vondrovsky@gmail.com

Jarosław Wilczyński
Institute of Systematics and
Evolution of Animals
Polish Academy of Sciences
Sławkowska 17
31-016 Kraków
Poland
jaslov@wp.pl

Andrea Zeeb-Lanz
Generaldirektion Kulturelles
Erbe Rheinland-Pfalz
Direktion Landesarchäologie,
Außenstelle Speyer
Kl. Pfaffengasse 10
67346 Speyer
Germany
andrea.zeeb-lanz@gdke.rlp.de

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: DIVERSITY AND UNIFORMITY IN LBK STUDIES

DANIELA HOFMANN, LUC AMKREUTZ,
FABIAN HAACK AND IVO VAN WIJK

The Linearbandkeramik, as the first farming culture over a vast area between the Ukraine and the Paris Basin, and between Hungary and the North European Plain, has long fascinated researchers. Its quick spread from a core region in Hungary and Austria, its enormous geographical reach and the similarity of its material culture traits, from pottery and stone tools to houses, the basics of an agropastoralist economy and burials, have made it something like a brand: a phenomenon with a high recognition value and with a large impact on people's lives in the past.

Yet like with any brand, the way the LBK has been viewed and interpreted is constantly under revision. One core issue has been the relation between the large-scale material culture similarity and the role of regional and local differences which increasingly came to light. The relative explanatory weight accorded to these opposed poles of uniformity and diversity has shifted repeatedly, but so far no satisfactory resolution has emerged. Is there, in the face of increasingly fine-grained patterns of divergence at ever smaller scales, even such a thing as a "LBK culture"? Or is a focus on diversity just an obsession with detail which distracts us from the important parts of the bigger picture? This is the debate to which the present volume seeks to contribute.

In this introduction, we begin by outlining, in necessarily broad brush strokes, the changing fortunes of "diversity" as an explanatory concept in the LBK. We then draw out some of the connecting themes which cross-cut the papers presented here and especially reflect on how the inclusion of additional case studies beyond the LBK, which grapple with a similar tension between diversity and uniformity, can inform further research on the Early Neolithic of central Europe, but also more generally on the archaeological entities we term "cultures".

Diversity

Identification of the LBK as a unified culture was a step-by-step process. The culture as such was already defined in the late nineteenth century and the term *Bandkeramik* coined by Klopffleisch in 1883. In the following decades of the twentieth century, scholars in different countries and regions identified their finds (often originally referred to by terms such as *Spiralmäanderkeramik*, *Omalien* and so on) as being part of this cultural unit. Once the LBK had thus coalesced, and once its chronological relationship in the European culture sequence had been finally established as lying early in the Neolithic sequence, one of its main virtues was the ease with which it could be accommodated into the prevailing culture-historical models of that time. The contrast between it and the preceding, mobile Mesolithic way of life seemed overwhelming, and so there was little reason to doubt its spread by a form of population movement, initially connected to the exigencies of slash and burn cultivation. This was indeed a “people”, an ethnic unit carrying with it not just a few items of material culture, but an entirely new way of life. In Childe’s memorable quote, this was “a Neolithic population whose whole culture down to the finest details remains identical from the Drave to the Baltic and from the Dniestr to the Meuse” (Childe 1976, 105).

With the post-war period and the beginning of large-scale fieldwork projects in several European countries—perhaps most notably the long-running excavations in the French Aisne valley (Ilett 2012; Ilett *et al.* 1982), on the Aldenhovener Platte of the German Rhineland (e.g. Stehli 1994) and in adjacent Dutch Limburg (Modderman 1970), and at Bylany in the Czech Republic (e.g. Pavlů 2000; Soudský 1962)—the wealth of information on the LBK increased exponentially. It became—and still is—impossible for a single researcher to keep abreast of the new and ever more detailed information generated everywhere. This increasing mass of detail led to diversity at two different levels. On the one hand, as part of the general development of prehistory as a discipline, regional and national research foci began to differ to an extent. On the other hand, and perhaps not entirely unrelated, regional and chronological diversity in the archaeological material began to move centre-stage.

The definition of the Earliest LBK by Quitta (1960) and Tichý (1961) is one such example and opposed an early horizon of flat-based, generally thicker and organically tempered wares with simpler decoration to a later phase with more inorganically tempered, round-based vessels which could be very finely made and elaborately decorated. It also became clear that the spatial extent of this earliest LBK phase was reduced and that in turn

material culture was comparatively more uniform than later on (Cladders and Stäuble 2003). It is only from the succeeding Flomborn/Ačkovy phase that the Rhine is decisively crossed, and the LBK reaches as far as the eastern Paris Basin, with a further westward spread later on (Billard *et al.* 2014, 333–338; Ilett 2012, 69). From Flomborn onwards, regional diversity increases apace and becomes particularly pronounced towards the end of the LBK, when a variety of regional decorative styles and techniques (e.g. comb impressions) are in use (e.g. Jeunesse 1995; Meier-Arendt 1972; Pechtl 2015; Strien 2000, 66–71).

One main way in which these differences could be and were used was to refine the chronological fine-tuning of the LBK sequence. This kind of operation generally implies a unilinear trajectory, mostly from simple to more complex, and in the case of the LBK also to more idiosyncratic, decoration. The guiding assumptions are that a new motif will be introduced slowly, reach a peak and then “fade out”. While the mechanisms by which new motifs were introduced could be varied, in practice the question of why this stylistic divergence began and progressed has only just begun to be tackled for the LBK (see Pechtl 2015 on pottery; more generally: Van de Velde forthcoming). Implicitly, then, regional difference was generally treated as analogous to a process of genetic drift: pottery simply became more different over time, as random “copying errors” were introduced (although interestingly, formal modelling from an evolutionary perspective suggested that simple drift was unlikely to explain the observed pattern, see Shennan and Wilkinson 2001).

In addition to pottery, other items of material culture were recognized as showing increasing regional divergence over time. To name but one example, houses of the developed LBK look rather different to those of the earliest phase, and within the later horizon there are distinct regional preferences for certain kinds of post settings and orientation, as well as in the average size of the buildings, the ease with which internal partitions can be identified, and so on (e.g. Coudart 1998; Modderman 1970; 1986). Although buildings are readily accepted as being closely connected to people’s way of life and worldview (for the LBK e.g. Bickle 2013; Hofmann 2013; Veit 1996, 63–67; Whittle 1996, 162–166; 2003, 136–141), the models proposed for architectural diversity did not actually differ all that much from those for pottery. Decreasing post densities over time were connected with increased building efficiency (Modderman 1970, 119), while otherwise the appearance of regional diversity remained undertheorized. In addition, there was a counter-tendency in seeing architecture, and particularly the organization of site space, as a powerful unifying factor of the LBK, starting with Hodder’s (1990) ideas of a

specific worldview expressed in “the” LBK longhouse and ending with the widespread and inter-regional application of the “yard model” of Bandkeramik settlement development (Boelicke 1982; Kuper *et al.* 1974; Zimmermann 2012).

As similar debates developed regarding differences in burial customs, economic preferences, knapping styles and the use of personal ornaments, a new consensus regarding the role of diversity in our interpretations of the LBK began to emerge. An important role here was played by P.J.R. Modderman, one of the founding scholars of LBK research in Europe. Based on his meticulous contributions on the LBK in Dutch Limburg, he developed important typo-chronological systems for pottery and house typology, which—albeit slightly refined—are still at the heart of many studies into the LBK (Modderman 1970). By their inherent logic, these typologies in themselves also helped to reinforce the idea of a very structured and uniform set of practices and material culture within the LBK by providing the tools to categorize and analyse them. Yet, at the same time Modderman stressed the opposite, the overall diversity underlying the apparently uniform LBK cultural complex. In his seminal paper “Diversity in uniformity” (1988), he drew attention to the many characteristics of the LBK that were not the same throughout, ranging from the frequency of tripartite longhouses, the choice of personal ornamentation, or the kinds of flint tools in use to physical diversity between cemetery populations and possibly even differences in social organization. Reflecting on the geographical and social dimensions that may form the basis of this diversity, Modderman (1988, 130) concluded that “different solutions were chosen for problems that were not identical everywhere”. Yet at the same time, he insisted that many of the differences he detected, especially in later LBK phases, were “no more than the gradual changes that can be expected in any human society” (Modderman 1988, 130).

Overall, then, a certain ambivalence remained, and indeed looking closely, the kinds of diversity that Modderman defined throughout his text are of very different orders. Sometimes, they concern regionality, at other times chronological differences. In the case of burial grounds, these can be combined: the need for cemetery burial arose with increasing territoriality, and this may not have affected all regions equally (Modderman 1988, 73). At other points, individual or idiosyncratic factors are stressed, such as where differences in economic success between settlements are attributed to the skill and shrewdness of the inhabitants (Modderman 1988, 88). “Diversity” thus came to cover everything from accidental drift to flexible reaction to local environments, from the continuation of local Mesolithic

traditions to the emergent properties of weakly hierarchical social systems, and from individual preferences to group organization. The relative importance of geography, historical trajectories and individual inventiveness differed with each aspect considered, but one single term was used to cover them all. In this way, it became difficult to disentangle the different factors contributing to “diversity”. This problem is also stressed by Lenneis (2012) when she points out that typological schemes drawn up for the western LBK are often used to classify material from the “core regions” of early settlement further east, potentially conflating regional diversity and chronological changes.

In spite of these issues, this general re-orientation towards identifying “diversity” proved to be immensely creative in the following decades and its appearance on the interpretative scene of LBK archaeology—and beyond—was warmly welcomed. This is perhaps partly because its wide scope allowed its application to many different kinds of phenomena, at many scales. It enabled the search for a deeper understanding of Early Neolithic development within a regional context, re-aligning the debate by characterising LBK Neolithization as a mosaic process from the start. The problem, then, was not the introduction of diversity itself—indeed, the framework Modderman built was invaluable for moving forward the debate—but the lack of any clear definition of its nature.

Another important factor certainly was that its core idea of granting a more active role to the hitherto neglected indigenous, pre-LBK population seamlessly aligned itself with wider trends in Neolithic research, and with a shift in archaeological theory generally, in which the role of small-scale differences and agent-based narratives became increasingly important. Especially in the Anglophone literature, a certain migration scepticism had long set in and was if anything further engrained with the emergence of post-processualist approaches (as criticized e.g. in Anthony 1990; Chapman and Hamerow 1997). Put very simply, this resulted in a general outlook which valued the recognition of diversity in the archaeological record as a sign for the active role of people in appropriating, rather than passively perpetuating, forms of material culture. Diversity became equated with agency. In the Neolithization debate in particular, this was also explicitly connected to the indigenous adoption (rather than foreign introduction) of an agricultural way of life. Putative colonisers would hence be expected to import their material culture more or less unchanged and to establish it rapidly. In contrast, slow adoption, experimentation, and the introduction of changes reflect the choices of people actively selecting a new kind of lifestyle (as e.g. discussed in Robb and Miracle 2007, 100–103).

Put a little starkly, this can be summarized as follows:

Diversity : Uniformity

Agency : Structure

Hunters : Farmers

Archaeologists began to exploit work generated in other social sciences to discuss issues of creolization, the creative fashioning of new identities, and various forms of resistance. But in spite of the sophistication of some of these ideas and the work resulting from them, as well as sustained criticism regarding the prevalence of dichotomous thinking (e.g. Pluciennik 2008; Robb 2013; Robb and Miracle 2007; Thomas 2015; Whittle 1996, 355–360), these basic sets of opposites remained deeply engrained. Even recent attempts at resolving them have often ended with trying to assign a specific practice, such as wild plant use or fishing, to one or the other side in the equation, with any transgression seen as proof of Mesolithic involvement in a gradual Neolithization process (e.g. Cummings and Harris 2011; Jones and Sibbesson 2013).

This new and very productive set of assumptions was not limited to the post-processualist paradigm, as across central Europe similar arguments began to be made. The culture historical narrative, which opposed two peoples with differing material cultures, could be usefully extended to oppose two peoples with different capacities for material culture innovation: conservative foreign farmer-colonizers and creative local hunter-gatherers. Soon, the first studies along these lines began to appear specifically for the LBK (Jochim 2000; Kind 1998; Tillmann 1993; Whittle 1996, 150–152; for a summary see Scharl 2004, 57–81). In the last couple of decades, the emerging new consensus has been of leapfrog colonization, whereby some farmers migrated into central Europe and established enclaves, which acted as centres of secondary Neolithization. As this second step was largely carried by the indigenous population, diversity began to emerge (e.g. Gronenborn 1999).

While diversity was thus accorded a guiding explanatory role for our understanding of the LBK culture, the question is whether our vision of it had really changed so fundamentally. “The” LBK was still seen as intrusive, conceived as an almost pathologically uniform (Keeley 1992, 82) cultural and mental unit originating somewhere far off, and then later merely adopted by others. Only these others had the capacity to be inventive. In some cases this was explicitly seen as resistance to the otherwise stifling norms of colonisers (e.g. Jeunesse 2009). But even where this was less clearly formulated, these narratives generally assumed