
2 Introduction

The Scord of Brouster settlement and field system (HU 2560 5165) is situated in the west mainland, or Walls peninsula, of the Shetland Islands, at the northern shores of Gruting Voe (Illus 1). At the time of the Scord of Brouster excavation, the area of the Gruting Voe inlet had already been extensively investigated, and the site formed part of a group of mainly Neolithic and Bronze Age house sites and settlements (Calder 1956; Calder 1964). Scord of Brouster was excavated by Alasdair Whittle in the late 1970s, and the main purpose of the investigation was to shed light on early agricultural settlement in Britain by examining a settlement site in a remote part of the country, unspoilt by modern development. The fieldwork produced sizeable assemblages of pottery, stone tools and lithic artefacts (almost exclusively quartz), with struck, and probably struck, quartz numbering nearly 10,000 pieces. Unfortunately, the worked quartz was characterized at a time when quartz technology and, in particular, the associated bipolar technique was poorly understood, and, as the excavator puts it, ‘. . . further advance in our understanding of this important raw material must be wished for as soon as possible’ (Whittle 1986, 64).

To increase our understanding of quartz as a lithic resource, the project ‘Quartz Technology in Scottish Prehistory’ was initiated (Saville & Ballin 2001). As part of this project, Scottish Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age quartz assemblages have been characterized, compared and discussed, with the lithic finds from Scord of Brouster forming part of the Neolithic reference material. The present analysis of the assemblage aims to:

- Characterize the lithic finds from Scord of Brouster according to modern standards, mainly by incorporating bipolar types of débitage and cores into the general type schema
- Discuss the spatial distribution of the lithic artefacts, within the individual buildings and across Houses 1–3, as well as the activities associated with these artefacts
- Date the quartz assemblage, and its various sub-assemblages, by the recognition of diagnostic types and technological attributes; special attention is given to the presentation of the curved knives (Whittle 1986, 64–74), a tool type which may be chronologically and regionally diagnostic
- Compare the quartz assemblage from Scord of Brouster with contemporary lithic assemblages from other parts of Scotland, with the purpose of placing the site and assemblage in a regional context.

The lithic assemblage is characterized with special reference to raw materials, typological composition and applied technology.

The re-evaluation is founded upon a detailed catalogue of all the lithic artefacts from Scord of Brouster, and the artefacts in this paper are referenced by their number in this catalogue (CAT number); AW numbers refer to illustrations in Whittle’s monograph on the Scord of Brouster (Whittle 1986). The catalogue is an archive document, copies of which are available on request from the National Monuments Record, Edinburgh.