land back into agricultural use. A telling photograph of the hand digging of a field to plant potatoes in the 19th century, with individuals breaking clods of earth by spade, demonstrates the extent to which people were in every sense closer to the land and will have, perhaps quite eagerly, serviced the collectors. Several areas are looked at in greater detail; the lower Bann Valley around Portglenone and the River Maine and Long Mountain areas where findspots are compared with the distribution of known bogs and alluvial deposits.; the Antrim plateau; the headwaters of the River Braid; and the Glenwhirry Valley. The analysis concludes that there is no increase in the number of artefacts found in larger townlands and that many of these take in a range of soils a little like the well-known strip parishes of the southern English chalk areas. It points to a number of significant areas that deserve further attention.

An appendix lists over 60 of Knowles papers published between 1870–1914 and another provides potted biographies of many of Knowles contemporaries, museum curators, archaeologists, historians, naturalists and other collectors. The volume is lavishly illustrated with 120 fine line drawings, coloured distribution maps and graphs, along with 61 coloured photographs which supplement the text and make for a pleasant and enjoyable read. Knowles collection is huge and this assessment of it represents an equally massive achievement deserving of consideration by all members of the Society and, by no means least, it represents a fitting tribute to the memory of Elizabeth Anderson, much of whose excellent work and drawings are incorporated and whom many members of the Lithics Studies Society will recall was one of our fine and agreeable hosts during its splendid field trip to Ireland in 1994.

REFERENCES


David Field

HAGGARTY, B. & BROCKBANK, A. 2009. *MEZOLITH BOOK 1*. OXFORD; DAVID FICKLING BOOKS LTD.

ISBN 9780385618267. £9.99 (HB 96PP)

Available directly online from David Fickling books:

http://www.davidficklingbooks.co.uk/davidficklingbooks.asp?ean=9780385618267

Haggarly is a graphic novel published in 2009 by David Fickling Books, a relatively small but growing publishing house specialising in children’s fiction. It is the creation of Ben Haggarty, a story teller, and Adam Brockbank a conceptual artist with a background in movie set design and story boarding (Harry Potter Series, Sleepy Hollow, Troy). Together they have created a graphic novel which is not only visually compelling but has a mythic narrative drive attempting to get under the skin of hunter-gatherer psychology. The result is an original and beautiful addition to the cannon of graphic novels, which despite having a great...
British pedigree (My own favourites being Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman and Pat Mills) have never ever achieved the level of appreciation in this country that they should. For the archaeologist of early prehistory, Mezolith provides some genuine engaging stories, evocative and eerie imagery and more than a few reasons to pause for thought and think about how we tell our own stories about the past.

Before we get to the thinking part, what about the story? It’s hard to develop any narrative about our ancient hunter gatherer past without recourse to a set of standard, sometimes even clichéd tropes, and Mezolith is unflinching in embracing many of them head-on, in an orderly fashion and without shame. It focuses on a Poika, a boy on the verge of adolescence (Trope 1), who is eager to prove himself as a hunter (Trope 2) before over-stretching himself and suffering a life-threatening injury (Trope 3) which is healed only through the intervention of the insane and out-cast witch (Trope 4), all in the first chapter. You would have to be utterly impervious to mythic themes not be left in any doubt that from this point on, the lame and resurrected Poika was destined to follow a magical path through life.

These themes are thankfully handled well but it is slightly regretful that much of the magic in the book lies in inspiration from storytelling, folklore and legend rather than the efforts of our archaeological endeavours. In most of the narrative threads, Ben Haggarty, as a professional story teller, has drawn far more on the deep hoard of European folklore and myth than the details of the archaeological record. However, this work is genuinely powerful precisely at those points where legend, artwork and inspiration direct from the ground interweave. One thread of this complex narrative is the story of Talja, the old and miserable camp-keeper. His story unfolds as an aside but goes on to fill perhaps the most beautiful and haunting of the chapters, telling of his meeting with a swan spirit in the form of a beautifully fragile water-nymph. The tale draws on pure Celtic-inspired folklore, transposed back into the deeper Stone Age past. Themes of transatlantic crossings, Tolkien’s favourite perilous dilemma between mortality and chastity, the Irish myth of the Children of Lir and the recurrent hag-bride motif which pervades European literature all coalesce to underpin this story arc. The tale ends with the burial of the swan-bride in a grave with her still-born infant and a single swan’s wing, in a touching portrait reconstructing the Mesolithic burial at Vedbaek, Denmark. These themes are brought together in a masterly fashion and suggest implicitly the feeling that the surviving folklore of Northern Europe has deeply embedded roots, that our surviving canon, often interpreted as a survival of Iron Age and early medieval mythic traditions, actually has a deeper past embedded in shamanic consciousness. The story of the swan-bride, alongside that of the cannibalistic changeling, defeated by Poika in his fever-induced soul journey, are those which most consciously utilise the spirit realms as mechanisms for engaging storytelling, narrative tension and horror.

The natural way in which these tropes play out draws attention to the inescapable, gravitational pull they have in delivering popular stories about prehistoric, aboriginal or fantastical primitive utopias. These themes are
almost inescapable; they are virtually a part of our cultural DNA and we see them uncritically reflected back in popular media as the idealised and largely sympathetic consciousness of the native American, the Na’vi or even Ewoks. If we genuinely think they are lazy devices then we should critically hold them up alongside some of our own preconceptions underpinning interpretation of the archaeological record. Even if we are at pains to avoid interpretations explicitly based on ethnographic evidence, can we be sure that the same tropes which breathe narrative life into the noble savages of sci-fi and fantasy do not unconscious permeate our interpretations of the Stone Age record?

The question we need to ask ourselves as archaeologists is whether this graphic novel could have been realised as well if it took the archaeological record and not story-telling as its inspiration. Any scholar of the Mesolithic might end up feeling a little disappointed if they were to sit down looking for realisations of Early Holocene technology. A composite spear seems to be armed with oversized microliths in one image, but most arrows are tipped with barbed and tanged points, there isn’t a tranchet axe to be seen, let alone a pebble mace head. In fact, aside for the swan burial outlined above, much of the kit, clothing and trappings of the characters, while illustrated in fine and loving detail, could have come from any generic hunter gatherer dressing up box. For me personally this did not detract from the story telling but as this story is firmly set, “10,000 years ago on the western shores of the North Sea” it was shame that only the antler frontlets, here used as hunting camouflage, hinted as to when and where this might be set. I’d like to challenge the authors to confront and build in the physical evidence more, but that probably doesn’t surprise anyone.

The liberties taken with ritual aspects are perhaps a little more forgivable but while I enjoyed the chapter in which Poika enters the cave, replete with Magdalenian bull painting, hand-prints and a very statuesque stalagmite in the form of a venus “goddess”, my inner pedant couldn’t help wanting a fuller realisation of Mesolithic ritual rather than recourse to the ochre daubed iconography of
the Upper Palaeolithic. But generally the
handling of the spirit world, permeating almost
every aspect of the hunters’ world and so
closely mediated by totemistic performances
by animals, lends this world a powerful core.
Without a narrative in which perils to the
human soul are as real as those to the body,
much of the artwork would be robbed of its
impact and the stories of their immediate
power to spell-bind.

Mezolith left me wondering about our own
attempts to breathe life into our daily currency
of perished bone and patinated rock. Attempts
to use people in costume, either as static
photographs or film are often risible, and the
use of computer graphics/VR, despite some
pioneering work, lags so far behind the quality
at the disposal of the games and movie
industries that we are unable to convincingly
pixelated the past for graphic-savvy audiences
Hand drawn illustrations by talented artists,
remains our most accessible
route to
interpretation. They are often however
reductionist, conservative, unduly static in
composition and often utterly without narrative
drive. Perhaps that how it should be, we should
use them only to enhance a little our
descriptive accounts of the past and allow the
public to conjure up their own prehistory
prompted only by illustrations which suggest
the constraints of reality or texture of daily life
for a given period. But a book like Mezolith
should give us pause for thought. Talents
which exist out there in graphic and conceptual
art and storytelling will find their way into the
past regardless of what we do. They have the
talent to translate into best-selling books
(Earth’s Children and Wolf Brother series),
Hollywood blockbusters (I haven’t actually
seen 10,000 BC but can guess) and graphic
novels (Frazetta’s Neanderthal being my
favourite). We as archaeologists can only
dream about having the outreach and
dissemination potential of even the most
poorly selling B-movie or pulp fiction, yet in
the English-speaking world, we have barely
attempted to influence media beyond
consultation with documentary makers. The
French have long embraced the comic as a
medium for engaging young people, and I am
always astounded when visiting the gift shop at
a French Stone Age site at the plethora of
narrative publications designed for young
children which use comics as the primary
medium of engagement. Part of this is
cultural: as with Japanese manga, the French
have a longer tradition of comics as a
genuinely embraced and affectionately
regarded medium. Perhaps now, as British
comic book art and production has long been
out of its infancy, we should seek to utilise its
simple narrative form in place of our traditions
of static illustrative reconstructions.

Seen in this context, Mezolith should be
applauded for portraying such an immersive
account of our stone age past. Folkloric tropes
are embraced and blend powerfully with the
evocative and sometimes horrific artwork to
portray the early British postglacial. The
period has been used well as a stage, in which
to rework a series of origin myths and revisit
primal themes of initiation, taboo and survival.
Mezolith, to most of the comic reading public
is an engaging and visually stunning example
of its medium, to
us prehistorians it also offers
a great deal of inspiration in how we bring to
life the textures and rhythms of life in post-
and protohistoric site and inventories in which lithic technology
was of alleged subordinate importance to
metal” (p7). The focus is primarily on the
initial period of transition to metal use – with
Bronze Age case studies dominating. It is
unfortunate that little attempt is made to

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ERIKSEN, B. V. (ED.) 2010. LITHIC TECHNOLOGY IN METAL USING SOCIETIES.
PROCEEDINGS OF A UISPP WORKSHOP, LISBON, SEPTEMBER 2006. MOESGAARD,
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ISBN 108788415570/ISBN 139788788415575 £52.95 (HB 260PP)

This handsomely produced volume presents 17
papers resulting from a UISPP workshop in
2006 which aimed to “gather together lithic
researchers working on pre- and protohistoric