neolithic exchange systems has barely advanced since the time when the first axe was sliced in 1928. Like nineteenth century Cornishmen, archaeologists have boiled the axes in water: but why remains still the riddle?

There has been a general tendency to concentrate exclusively on the raw material characteristics of artefacts, when these are definable. Since Peacock's demonstration that certain pottery styles in prehistoric Britain could be petrologically related to single sources, and the consequent collapse of the culture model based on an assumption of home-produced ceramics, most pottery studies in Britain have been concerned with clays and sources. The 'cultural' approach to stone axes had died long before, perhaps partly as a result of the onslaught by Kruller and others on a 'collector mentality' in the 1930s, and certainly by the time Stone and Wallis rejoiced in the 'certain degree of detachment' which they felt petrological data gave them (Stone and Wallis 1951, 131). By focusing too narrowly on physical characterisation, however, archaeologists are inevitably limiting the potential of their enquiries. Despite the vast amount of work expended on the petrological identification of stone axes from Britain, there has never been a full consideration of the axes as axes: objects with defined roles, functions and values subject to changing demands, production organisations and so on. Neither have corpora been prepared detailing the available data (much of the best unpublished, most of the worst unknown) nor the factors that disturb the sampling ideal and enormously complicate our attempts to understand prehistoric societies been considered.

The writer's thesis, in preparation, deals with and attempts to overcome such problems, using two major data-sets: a detailed record of some 2000 stone axes (of which c.1100 are flint) and a comprehensive study of contextual and affiliated information.

Reference

THE STATUS OF THE CLACTONIAN INDUSTRY
by John Wymer

A paper published by Milla Y. Obel in Current Anthropology in 1979 has emphasised the problem of assessing what the Clactonian Industry means