

Nick Ashton and Andrew David (eds) 1994. *Stories in Stone. Lithic Studies Society Occasional Paper No.4, Proceedings of the Anniversary Conference at St. Hilda's College, Oxford, April, 1993. pp.218, Figs., Tables, and Photographs. Price: £10.00*

The 1993 'Anniversary' conference of the Lithic Studies Society, 'Looking Backwards and Looking Forwards' - was one of the most exciting, stimulating and good natured academic meetings that I have attended over the last five years or so. That the proceedings were produced so quickly and to such a high standard, within eighteen months (unlike this review!) is a tribute to the conference organisers, the editors and the contributors themselves.

The book is divided into five sections, each with an introduction by a recognised figure in the respective field, and these are as follows: Dating and Scientific Techniques (Mike Tite), Raw Materials and Petrology (John Wymer), Resource Management (Andy Brown), Technology and Use Wear Analysis (Nick Barton) and Typology (Frances Healy). All of these introductions set the scene clearly and concisely for what is to follow - and what follows is excellent; some twenty one papers involving thirty authors, which give up to date accounts of topics as wide ranging as resource management to re-fitting studies. On the evidence presented here lithic studies, generally, are in a very healthy state.

I found this a genuinely exciting read and I have considered each paper here in an attempt to give something of the overall flavour of the book.

Part 1: Dating and Scientific Techniques. The papers in this section all deal with the application of various scientific methods to lithic studies.

Debenham produces a clear and concise statement on recent advances and problems in the TL dating of flint assemblages (4-6), while Hedges and Freeman approach lithic dating from the perspective of diffused nitrogen profile assessment (7-9). This latter is a statement on an on-going programme of research using SIMS (Secondary Ion Mass Spectrometry) and if the method can be validated then it holds out exciting possibilities for the dating of early lithic assemblages. On a different tack, Robert Ixer addresses the issue of whether ore petrography has a practical role in the finger-printing of rocks (10-23). On the basis of results from the analysis of millstones from the Mediterranean island of Pantelleria, he concludes that ore petrography may help in the reclassification of some of our common axe groups, especially those comprising, greenstones, basalt-dolomites, fine grained tuffs, ashes and lavas and greywackes. If this is the case then Peter Berridge might certainly be interested in the technique (see below).

Cattaneo *et al.* report on the difficulty of identifying blood residues on stone artefacts from prehistoric contexts (in this instance arrowheads from Crickley Hill), (24-27). Again, this is on-going work and further results are promised.

For me the high spot of this section was, David Bridgland's masterly review of Lower Palaeolithic industries in the Lower Thames terrace sequence. In twelve pages (28-40) he introduces his revised interpretation of the Lower Thames sequence (an expanded version of this can be found in this 1994 book, *The Quaternary of the Thames*), and highlights the fact that now, the terrace sequence *itself* provides the frame work for dating the artefacts contained within it rather than it being the other way around, as was the case in the early years of the century. This is the result of the correlation of the development of the terraces with the Oxygen Isotope sequence. Bridgland's discussion of the significance of this new scheme for Palaeolithic archaeology (34-39) is clear, understated if anything, and highly readable. It is obviously the product of a researcher totally on top of his material.

Having said all this it seems ironic that the only mix-up with figure/table numbering that I spotted in the volume comes in this paper. On pp.32-33 in the section dealing with Chronostratigraphy, there is reference to Table 1 and Table 2. The latter never appears.

Part II: Raw Material and Petrology

This section starts with another impressive contribution, this time from Peter Berridge, which is a deconstruction of ideas about the so called 'Cornish Axe Factories' (45-56). This should be recommended reading for all undergraduates as an example in textual criticism and logical thinking. He sets out the background to the establishment of the Cornish rock groups and details the models put forward by Cummins and Mercer, among others, to explain the distribution of the axes supposedly made from these rocks (in the course of this 'lebensraum' is spelled wrongly on page 47). He shows the subjective nature of rock characterisation and how, in the nature of some archaeological writing, tentative statements become truths in the re-telling. He then discusses, in detail, the problems with the standard interpretation of the Cornish data. These are too many and varied to be discussed in this review, suffice it to say that he takes the axe trade models apart as being anachronistic, and he highlights the inability of researchers to pin-point a definite 'factory' site in Cornwall and also the fact that rock identification by thin section is not as objective a people once thought. He lays great stress too on the possible role of rocks from secondary sources being used as blanks for axes. In this respect he brings back some of Stephen Briggs' often ill criticised work into the mainstream. In his conclusion he makes a plea for the strategic, use of thin section work, in an effort to bring the technique to bear on finds from sealed, datable archaeological contexts. He suggests that the most important area for future research on potential stone axe raw materials in the distribution of material in derived sources, what he terms 'the natural pattern of raw materials'. He believes that without significant advances in this area most future petrological work in this country will be meaningless.

Alan Saville (57-70) reviews sources of raw material in earlier prehistoric Scotland. As one would expect from him, this is a very well written piece which comments on changing patterns of resource exploitation over time, from the Mesolithic to bronze age periods. Contrasting the exploitation of rocks such as bloodstone and pitchstone he explores the local/long distance exploitation of some sources of rock. He discusses the use of the Buchan Ridge flint source and raises the issue of the transportation of artefacts from Scotland to Yorkshire and vice-versa and even as far afield as Scandinavia. He contrasts opportunistic patterns of stone exploitation in the Mesolithic with more strategic use of the resource in later periods.

Going beyond the British Isles to Italy, Lawrence Barfield (71-83) outlines some of the results of his survey and excavation at the Monti Lessini flint source in northern Italy. The 'Iceman' was a user of this type of flint, and Barfield argues for the exploitation of flint in secondary sources in the area, the development of a specialised flint working community with the emergence of the Campignian Tradition, implement specialisation and the detailed selection of blanks for specific tool forms, and different methods of quarrying at different times to obtain different raw materials.

Part II - Resource Management

This section takes the book into a totally different area of lithic studies, and begins with Andy Brown getting on his bike to 'Pedal the Management Cycle' and suggest a possible role for the Lithics Studies Society in lithic resource management.

John Schofield (90-98) produces a very upbeat discussion on maximising the usable information from lithic scatters through an English Heritage initiative linked to the MPP. This seeks to introduce some standardised recording methods that will allow lithic scatter data on SMRs to be used in trans-national comparative research strategies to highlight regional patterning in the data and to enhance our understanding of what is, for most periods of earlier prehistory in this country, a vital part of the archaeological resource. The scheme set out in this paper is being trialed at the moment and I have subsequently heard John talk about the work at the recent Society for Landscape History Conference in Newcastle - we await the results with interest.

Robin Holgate reviews provision for the curation of lithic material in museums (99-103) and quite rightly stresses the importance of 'community archaeology' programmes as a means of ensuring that non specialists are made aware of the importance of stone tools. Francis Wenban-Smith concludes the management section with a detailed programme for the management of the Palaeolithic part of the English heritage. He makes a disarmingly simple but crucial point in his conclusion that the Palaeolithic heritage must be recognised as including artefactually sterile geological deposits.

Part IV - Technology and Use Wear Analysis

Louise Austin's 'Life and Death of a Boxgrove Biface' (119-126), examines the flint assemblage from two excavated areas in the western part of the site. She highlights the point that for all the work at Boxgrove there is, as yet, no evidence for the completion of a single biface at a single location. However what her refitting studies do show is the complex nature of the transportation of roughouts and other elements of biface production across the palaeo-landscape at the site. It is a testimony to the quality of the work at Boxgrove and to her own patience and skills of observation, that this interesting contribution could be produced.

This section of the book then move to a different chronological period and geographical area with Tristan Carter's analysis of obsidian blades and cores from burial contexts in the early Bronze Age of the Aegean (127-144). This is a critical analysis of deposition patterns, among other things, in which he argues that there was a deliberate choice of only certain artefact types for inclusion in burials up to the Middle Bronze Age in the Aegean. This he argues is part and parcel of the meaningful constitution of grave assemblages in the region and he concludes with a structuralist based, oppositional, interpretation of the major, observed associations.

The last three contributions in this section are short and concise papers. Those by Hurcombe and Donahue deal with use wear analysis and Ransome's paper examines perforated mace head technology in Orkney. Of these Donahue (156-168) presents a straightforward account of the current state of micro-wear analysis. He reviews past controversies in this area of technological studies and produces a useful and up to date bibliography of the state of the art. His discussion of his own hierarchical system for micro-wear work is an interesting insight into the thinking of one researcher in the field and he concludes with an appeal for micro-wear studies to be integrated with other techniques and approaches to resolve what he calls the 'fundamental questions in prehistory'. This was a useful review but I found Hurcombe's discussion of behaviour, function and cultural choice a more stimulating piece of work. In this paper (145-155) she shows how wear characteristics on tools can be used to go beyond simple functional analysis to discuss the impact of cultural prescription on tool shape and the relationship of this phenomenon to human behaviour. Her discussion of tool use, re-use and re-cycling in conjunction with her ideas on cultural choice were clearly illustrated and integrated in her case studies, and the section on 'revising function' indicates some of the new heights to which use wear studies might take us.

Rachael Ransom's paper (169-175) is all the more interesting because it stems from work that she did as an undergraduate student at Belfast. She examines the whole process of mace head manufacture in Neolithic and Bronze Age Orkney, paying particular attention to resource and time management. Figure numbers and captions were missing from her two illustrations though.

Part IV - Typology

Frances Healy begins Part V with a critical three page introduction (179-181) which this reviewer has already used as a starting point for discussions with graduate students in lithic analysis classes. She is obviously a 'lumper' rather than a 'splitter' when it comes to classification and her critical remarks set the tone for the book's last section. Ashton and McNabb offer a radical re-assessment of biface morphology, chronology and technology. They argue convincingly that archaeologists need to re-think their notion of the classic biface, and they flag up the importance of what they term non classic bifaces in lower Palaeolithic assemblages. Raw material as well as the knapper's 'mental construct' is seen as one of the major conditioning factors of biface morphology. As a non -Lower Palaeolithic specialist I found this chapter an interesting challenge to the traditional ideas I learned as a student.

Jacobi (192-198) produces a paper critical of some of his earlier interpretations of radio-carbon dates from Mesolithic sites in the north and south of England. This obviously has a bearing how we think about artefact development in the early and later Mesolithic periods, and his conclusions; that we should disregard most of the upland, northern, early Mesolithic radio-carbon dates, makes for chilling reading. But he is right to point out the problems of context, sample integrity and probability of human associations of some of the dates in question.

Michael Reynier (199-205) examines twelve morphological attributes of ten early Mesolithic microlith assemblages, applying discriminant and cluster analysis to the data in an attempt to identify stylistic components in the assemblages. Using available radiocarbon chronology, he confirms Jacobi and Pitts' earlier observations about the chronological relationship between 'Horsham' and 'Maglemosian' points and suggests that there is no radiocarbon plateau at 9,200 BP (but see Day and Mellars, 1994). He further suggests that the time span of Maglemosian assemblages should be greatly reduced. On the basis of stylistic aspects of his tribute analysis he suggests the existence of discrete territorial regions in the early Mesolithic of south east England. As such this work must be followed up and expanded upon. From et al's interim report on the Wawcott side XXX in the Kennet Valley (206-212) is a model of clarity and Woodman's attempt at a definition of early Neolithic lithic assemblages in Ireland has important implications for the Mesolithic - Neolithic Transition in Ireland (213-218).

To conclude then, this is an elegantly produced volume, with good quality illustrations. It has a massive range and scope and there is, as I hope I have shown, something in it for everyone interested in British and Irish lithic studies. It illustrates the focused nature of a lot of current work and points the way to expanding the impact and overall contribution of lithic studies to wider issues of British prehistory. I look forward to the next ten years with great excitement and interest.

References

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- Day, S.P. and Mellars, P.A. 1994. 'Absolute' dating of Mesolithic human activity at Start Carr, Yorkshire: new Palaeocological Studies and Identification of the 9600 BP Radiocarbon 'Plateau'. *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 60, 417-422.

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LEARNING TO SWIM IN THE HEURISTIC TYPING POOL: A REVIEW OF DEBENATH AND DIBBLE, HANDBOOK OF PALEOLITHIC TYPOLOGY.

André Débenath and Harold L. Dibble. *Handbook of Paleolithic Typology, volume 1, Lower and Middle Palaeolithic of Europe*. 1994. University Museum, University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia. pp 202; 502 illustr. Price: \$65.00

If I close my eyes I can still see it just as if it was yesterday. Three of us sitting in his office. He across the desk from me, irritated, and peering at me over the top of his glasses. I knew the signs only too well. Over by the door Martin Bates sat quietly, sensibly taking no further part in the increasingly heated argument.

"I don't care what they say," he said sharply. He rose from his chair and strode over to the big four drawer filing cabinet. He pulled open the top drawer, reached into the very back, and pulled out a file.

"Charente Mousterian!" He threw a sheet of graph paper across the desk at me. "I was the first person to type the High Lodge assemblage using the Bordes method, and its Charente Mousterian. See." I looked at the graph. Toward the top was a thin dark line like a flight of degraded river terraces.

"You see, Charente Mousterian," he said again.

"But it can't be, the geology is pre-Anglian." I'd just come back from working on the site. I'd been there when they had pieced it all together. High Lodge was a pre-Anglian site.

"Which do you believe, the geology," spoken derisively, "or the archaeology?" he said nodding toward the graph.

"The geology." He didn't say anything, just looked at me as if I'd stabbed him in the back.

By his own admission my old tutor was a Bordesian archaeologist, pure and