



Book Reviews

OSSEOUS PROJECTILE WEAPONRY: TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF PLEISTOCENE CULTURAL VARIABILITY EDITED BY MICHELLE C LANGLEY

Springer Paleobiology and Palaeoanthropology Series, 257pp, 80 col and B&W figs and plates, 18 tables hb; ISBN 978-94-024-0897-3, £80.00

This collection of papers, edited by Michelle Langley, brings together an eclectic group of scholars from across the globe who are researching bone, antler, shell and ivory projectiles in the Pleistocene period. The study of early prehistoric osseous projectiles is well established, with over 100 years of work largely focused on Upper Palaeolithic artefacts in North Western Europe, and an interest in the relationship between the advent of these technologies and the emergence of anatomically modern humans in Africa. However, publication in this field has been fragmentary, with various key typologies and technological studies remaining difficult to access, and unpublished in English. As such, getting to grips with this body of literature, and accessing the knowledge contained within it, has previously presented a major challenge for new researchers. Langley's volume tackles this problem directly, providing an excellent summary of current research on a global scale, and drawing together the key authors working in the field today.

In her introductory paper, Langley sets out the volume's aim to act as a first port of call for those wishing to gain an outline of the hard animal material weaponry from within the Pleistocene record. This is no small task; with variations in the form, materials and research histories for different regions of the world. To deliver this aim, the volume therefore needs to provide an impression of the physical form, technology, chronology and context of artefacts recovered from a varied range of contexts. Consistency across the papers is therefore a key editorial challenge in the volume. This is smartly achieved, as individual authors present this information in a range of formats fitting with regional trends. The standard of illustration is generally very high, with the majority of study areas being presented in a way which makes them easy to compare and contrast. This gives new readers an excellent overall impression of the variation in these artefacts. Subsequently, it allows issues of form to emerge as a central theme within the book, and although inter-regional comparisons are seldom discussed directly, the style of presentation and reoccurrence of intra-regional variation as an area for analysis brings this firmly into the readers' grasp. There are no easy or obvious answers here, but the format of the book allows these questions to be framed, in a way which was very difficult to achieve prior to its publication.

The global scope of the volume also allows for some interesting comparisons in terms of approach. The authors demonstrate a range of motivations for studying osseous projectiles in the Pleistocene, and this itself is worthy of reflection. Certain regions place the appearance of these artefacts within the context of emerging human modernity, and as such place a key emphasis on the dating of the initial emergence of these technological practices alongside the contextual evidence for the presence of different human and hominid species. Elsewhere these tools become markers for colonisation, with their geographical spread within specific regions becoming key points of interest. In other places, the economic implications of using hard animal tissue in projectile manufacturing becomes key. The development of these large-scale research questions in relation to osseous projectile technology is often delivered critically, with several authors reflecting on the appropriateness of organic data sets in addressing these issues, and outlining alternative approaches to those previously taken. Within this context, research within the classic heartlands of osseous projectile research – Northwest Europe – seem oddly lacking. Although pushed forward by the application of new analytical techniques such as microwear, and building upon a more established basis of typological and technological understanding, research in this region begins to appear somewhat theoretically aimless within this volume. Whilst these studies are nuanced and sophisticated, it is not immediately clear which major debates within the Upper Palaeolithic that the new forms of understanding generated are being fed into.

In sum, this is an excellent volume which deserves great credit for both its scope and quality. The individual papers illustrate a range of approaches and questions in the study of osseous projectile technologies, and these have been skilfully compiled to ensure that themes emerge organically. As a research tool it is invaluable, providing starter bibliographies for any researcher looking to delve deeper into the issues presented, and a way into this fascinating body of literature which was previously very difficult to achieve.

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