



Book Reviews

WRITTEN IN STONE: PAPERS ON THE FORM, FUNCTION AND PROVENANCING OF PREHISTORIC STONE OBJECTS IN MEMORY OF FIONA ROE EDITED BY RUTH SHAFFREY

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The authors of this very well illustrated *festschrift* for the late Fiona Roe have perfectly encapsulated her interests and, in so doing, furnished readers with a wealth of thought provoking information about items as disparate as maceheads, querns, loom weights and *polissoirs*.

Appropriately, given Fiona's initial research interests, the volume opens with chapters on maceheads, battle axes and axes. That on Orcadian maceheads (Anderson-Whymark *et al.*) furnishes invaluable detail that has been missing until now: at last we have a clear picture of frequency, distribution, condition and use-wear across the archipelago. Variety it seems was there from the outset – they were introduced types not indigenous developments. Strikingly we learn that the proportion of unfinished maceheads is far higher away from Mainland, and particularly high in the Northern Isles. The authors suggest a number of factors that may underlie this pattern including a greater range of attractive rock types there. The fact that use-damage is even recorded on some of the very finest specimens on Mainland certainly seems to preclude simple centre–periphery dependency explanations, although ceremonial replication of otherwise mundane activities must remain a possibility.

Balin's work in Shetland provides a further geographically constrained study. It furnishes a picture of highly regulated procurement, production, recycling and discard/deposition of felsite objects that are set apart from the domestic norm of quartz. His recognition of distinct sites – 'chop-shops' – where broken felsite axes were recycled as artefacts thereafter suitable for domestic use is particularly illuminating. This could have applicability to local axe sources elsewhere (e.g. Group XX axes at Rothley, Leics.: Clay & Hunt 2016, 32–4), although such apparent centralisation of the process seems likely to have been a peculiar product of isolation. Bradley explores evidence of the mechanism underlying the opposed force – connectedness – that so strongly characterises the British Neolithic. He points to the fact that protected estuaries, such as Luce Sands, in the northern region of isostatic uplift are often marked by concentrations of artefacts. The proximity of such locales to important stone sources, or maritime accessibility to more distant ones, coupled with a lack of ordinary settlement are advanced as evidence that

they functioned as culturally neutral interaction points, not just for the exchange of stone axes, but Arran pitchstone, copper and even flint. His title 'The beach as source and destination' could stand as subtitles for the papers on eastern Yorkshire and Cornwall, areas that lie beyond the protected zone of isostatic uplift.

Terry Manby re-examines Fiona's statement that 'the cultural centrefor battle axes, is in Yorkshire' in the light of discoveries made since 1966. The fact that the regional number of battle axe associated burials equals the combined total of all other regions leaves little doubt but questions remain about the source of the most favoured stone (Group XVIII: Whin Sill). In the absence of signs of quarrying at source, utilisation of erratics from North Sea cliff exposures is judged probable, supported by an East Yorkshire dominance of unfinished specimens. Alongside the exploitation of jet and flint cliff exposures, and the widespread east coast dispersal of distinctive artefacts in these materials, this argues for the former existence of one of Bradley's protected beaching locale at the mouth of the Gypsey Race, the probability of which Terry demonstrated long ago (1988, 39).

Andy Jones *et al.* consider the implications of the evidence that in Cornwall greenstone axes appear to have been crafted from cobbles variously gathered on the shore of Mount's Bay (Groups I–III), and river valleys in the vicinity of Carn Brea (Group XVI). The varied lithologies recorded leads them to suggest that the concept of discrete Groups linked with individual axehead 'factories' should be abandoned. Selection for colour, plausibly linked to jadeite axes, rather than any specific properties, is advanced as the determining factor in selection. Noting the contrasting predominantly local distribution of Group XVI axes and widespread dispersal of Groups I/la, they suggest that the isolated, liminal aspect of the Penwith peninsula may have increased the irrational value of the latter. Bradley's suggestion of beach interaction zones, however, may offer an alternative explanation: that the Group XVI source area lacked an adjacent sheltered beach of the type that, prior to marine transgression, Mount's Bay probably furnished for Groups I–III exchange. Seaborne dispersal seems highly probable given the virtual absence of Group I/la axes across the rest of the SW peninsula but concentration in Wessex and beyond.

The late Vin Davis' historical review of research into the Group VI source valuably reminds us of the multiplicity of quarries and production sites around the Langdale and Scafell Pike area and of the need, there too, for further petrographic research to clarify the true variability of the rock sources worked. Apparent continuity of esteem for stone from this source over as much as a millennium is detailed in Fiona and Anne Woodward's paper on Group VI Beaker bracers. Examples crafted in this stone stand out by virtue of their high quality and uniform styles; the level of standardisation of one grouping being such that they are advanced as the work of a

single craftsperson or workshop. An almost total absence of other axehead sources being re-exploited for bracer production, the absence of Group VI bracers from the source region and their dominantly Yorkshire and eastern distribution must strongly suggest that such a workshop was in the east. Was there a 'chop shop' in East Yorkshire re-working Group VI stone axes or preform material carried there centuries earlier?

Evidence of tool manufacturing or maintenance, furnished by *polissoirs* in the Avebury landscape, is examined by Michelle Drisse. Her detailed fieldwork has located a significantly higher number of stones bearing areas of polish amongst the monuments than previously recorded, in contrast to those still lying in the surrounding landscape. This is explained in terms of deliberate selection of stones with group associations and social memories for incorporation in monuments. If so we might expect these to have the deepest working but her recording shows the opposite – deep working is almost totally restricted to landscape stones. Might the pattern instead be open to a straightforward functional explanation – the sharpening of axes during construction work on stones awaiting erection? The current tendency in Neolithic studies to invest materials used in monument building with identity and power has an inhibiting effect on such practical explanations.

Querns appropriately form the second main focus of the volume since in recent years Fiona had concentrated a great deal of her energy into resolving the question of their enigmatic absence from most Neolithic sites. John Cruse's painstaking analysis of Neolithic querns is an invaluable contribution that would have delighted Fiona. Size range and fragmentation methods are detailed and compared to continental data. The numerical dominance of causewayed enclosures as locales for quern recovery is detailed, coupled with the 'largely unremarked (fact) that these sites have a paucity of intact examples'. Destruction to the point where grinding surfaces may be missing entirely alerts us, as Fiona had done, to the fact that querns are probably under reported. Seeking an explanation for fragmentation at causewayed enclosures he considers the possibility that involvement in ritualised feasting may have rendered them inappropriate for subsequent profane use. But equally fragmentary quern material came from 'domestic' middens at Hazleton and Eton Rowing Lake.

Fragmentation was also a feature of querns from Amesbury Down, Wilts. At a locale famous for rich Beaker burials, Alistair Barclay and Pippa Bradley report two quite different ones: placed into pits along with midden-like material that included sherds of large, communal pot-beakers, quern fragments and cereals – important evidence of the reintroduction of cultivation with the Beaker 'package'. Seeking answers to this exceptional intrusion of the 'domestic' into Beaker funerary practice, they note the matrix resembles feasting debris and that these pits-burials lie just outside the site of a substantial Neolithic post circle that conceivably retained significance. It

is an arresting fact that quern fragmentation appears to have been the norm in both the Early Neolithic and Beaker periods despite an apparent intervening hiatus in cereal cultivation of at least 500 years.

Evidence once held to mark out Beaker invaders – the presence of querns of so-called Niedermendig lava, most notably stratified at the Sanctuary, Wilts. – is critically examined by Andrew Fitzpatrick and found wanting. Considering evidence of exploitation in the source area and the distributional range of products, he concludes the fragments in question are probable intrusions of late Iron Age/early Romano-British date. Nevertheless, tight clustering of potential Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age find spots around Avebury is surely noteworthy. Should we necessarily expect evidence of exploitation at source to be detectable for items brought from potentially short-lived homelands by small groups of mobile incomers?

Susan Watts examines querns of Iron Age date from the iconic lake village sites of Glastonbury and Meare where exceptional preservation and extensive excavation enables detailed analysis. Significantly greater numbers of rotary querns at Glastonbury, it is argued, reflect that site's domestic nature whereas higher numbers of saddle querns at Meare West are seen as a product of a seasonal assembly/ market role; these less valued querns being left for use on return. This finding has potentially wider application, for instance to hillfort studies, as do those that most querns were placed in open or sheltered working areas rather than in houses, and that concentrations at particular mounds at Meare probably points to communal food preparation.

These quern studies ably support and extend Fiona's work and demonstrate the largely untapped potential of this field of research – might, for instance, the fact that early quern fragments are frequently burnt reflect their recycling as hearthstones in cooking, a procedure later superseded by the introduction of clay ovens?

Shaffrey provides a stimulating critical review of one of the most glibly identified of artefacts – stone loom weights. After examination ranging across space and time, but limited by generally poor on-site recording, her conclusion is that 'loom weights' are so rarely associated with spindle whorls that this, as circumstantial evidence of association, ranks no higher than chance. That expectation may, of course, arise simply from our presumption of domestic production (low levels of association at high status sites like Little Woodbury and Danebury possibly reflecting larger scale organisational distinctions), but she demonstrates that the larger loom weights are beyond the capacity of a warp-weighted loom. Explanations advanced for these include looms with warp-retaining rods simply weighted at each end, and thatch-retaining weights.

Alison Sheridan follows Fiona's concern to pass on the skills of artefact study by generously sharing with the reader her expertise in jet artefact examination. We learn how small details of form and use-wear can inform reconstruction and how degrees of consistency of style and manufacture can illuminate scales of production. Fascinating case studies exemplify the process and demonstrate how individual detail can enable the history of an artefact to be reconstructed.

Anne Teather demonstrates that it is possible to produce an interpretive classification of chalk artefacts, items previously regarded as essentially random creations and, using the Folkton and Lavant drums, even to recognise a measure of standardisation. This is particularly surprising in a material so easily shaped at individual whim. Her illustration of proposed types will greatly assist future recognition and analysis.

The volume ends with Fiona's hugely impressive bibliography – proof of her total commitment to the study that she did so much to advance.

As with the best of such *festschriften* the papers in this volume raise a myriad of future research questions. Is use-wear equally detectable on maceheads beyond Orkney? Can 'chop-shops' be identified in the orbit of local axe sources away from Shetland? Do Bradley's sheltered beach 'markets' have applicability to concentrations elsewhere such as foreshore of the Thames in London? What does the high incidence of querns tell us about the function of causewayed enclosures and why were so many fragmented? And how did social formations in eastern Yorkshire maintain their grip on prestige artefact production from Group VI axes through to Group XVIII battle axes and jet jewellery?

Fiona would have been delighted. She richly deserved this fine *festschrift*.

References

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