



Book Reviews

FLINT DAGGERS IN PREHISTORIC EUROPE EDITED BY CATHERINE J. FRIEMAN AND BERIT VALENTIN ERIKSEN

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Flint (and stone) daggers are amongst the most recognised and iconic prehistoric artefacts. They occur across Europe and beyond, and although they have been extensively studied, research has, until relatively recently, focused on typo-chronological aspects of the artefacts, rather than their wider social and political meaning. But research has been uneven with European countries, notably Scandinavia, leading the field from the 19th century, indeed so numerous were they that a separate 'Dagger Age' between the Stone Age and Bronze Age was suggested. This situation is aptly summed up by Frieman (p.3): 'While books were written about flint daggers from France, Germany and Scandinavia, [only] a single 10-page article [by Grimes in 1932] was accepted as the definitive statement on British daggers until the 1980s'.

This volume is largely the result of a session entitled *Flint Daggers in Europe and Beyond*, held at the 2011 European Association of Archaeology in Oslo, Norway, which brought together researchers from across Europe. The aim of the session was to broaden the discussion of flint daggers as artefacts by examining wider technological, chronological and social issues as well as developing a research agenda for future studies. In addition to the papers originally given at the EAA session, the volume has been supplemented by a number of contributions written especially for it.

There has often been a sense that lithics were used to mimic metal weapons, and thus flint or stone daggers were seen as inherently less 'valuable' or important than the new materials and technology of metal but clearly the true picture is somewhat more complex. Bone, wood and other materials were sometimes used for daggers, and it is this choice of raw materials that we should be interested in rather than making modern judgments about the relative 'value' of materials. This volume attempts to move the discussion away from simple artefact studies, and is a timely exploration of the current state of research.

In all there are 13 papers preceded by an introduction; the last paper by Frieman acts as a conclusion. The introduction (Frieman & Eriksen) sets out the background by going back to basics and defining what a dagger is, and this point is picked up by a number of contributors (e.g. Zimmerman) – for the purposes of the volume a broad definition of a 'double-edged knives with a broad tip that are less than 35cm long' (p.2) has been adopted, although it is readily acknowledged that this definition excludes curved Egyptian *psS-kf* daggers (Graves-Brown Chapter 2), and there are obviously widely differing regional types. The introduction also explores some of the themes picked up later in the volume including raw materials and production; spheres of deposition and the position of flint daggers within a metal using society (i.e. the 'Metal Age'). It is encouraging that so much research is currently being undertaken in what could be seen as a comparatively narrow field. The wide geographical spread of papers (Asia, Egypt, Italy, France, Britain, Poland, Czech Republic and the Netherlands) is also impressive.

In Chapter 1 Zimmermann describes lithic daggers in the ancient near-east in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic and Late Neolithic, and he sets out the evidence for daggers and leaf shaped blades, including the ones most people will be familiar with – the very elaborate examples from Çatalhöyük which 'remain awkwardly isolated from the overall lithic

traditions of the Ancient Near East in terms of their date and technology' (p.17). Differences in raw material (imported fine grained tabular flint being used for one of the most elaborate examples above the usual obsidian from central and eastern Anatolia) may be significant here but as Zimmerman concludes much more is known about the use of obsidian than flint in this area. Use wear analysis of the utilitarian and elaborate artefacts may help understand their life histories.

Graves-Brown describes (Chapter 2) dagger-like implements including bifacial knives and sub-forms, ritual tools known as *psS-kf* and large projectile points from Bronze Age Egypt; morphology and context are examined as well as function. Textual and iconographic sources are also used to explore the differences in function. Replication using copper-tipped wooden percussion tools equates with scenes in tombs and texts but is difficult for modern knappers leading to the suggestion by some that the ancient artists had a poor understanding of knapping. Graves-Brown shows that although flint tools were used in ritual contexts – *psS-kf* being almost exclusively used in religious settings, bifacial knives were also used in utilitarian contexts. Projectile points are shown to be secular. Usewear analysis of some flint knives has identified their use on wood, plant remains and other materials. However, Graves-Brown argues that all flint tools would have been imbued with symbolism and linked with the gods.

Chapters 3 (Guilbeau) and 4 (Steiniger) discuss the origins and development of flint daggers in Italy and flint and copper daggers in Chalcolithic Italy respectively. Flint daggers appear in Italy in the first part of the fourth millennium and production can be linked to two main flint outcrops (the Lessinian Hills in the north and the Gargano in the south). Guilbeau examines their distribution, context and technology concluding that regional variations can be at least partly explained by local and regional cultural choices and different traditions of flint knapping within those areas. Steiniger examines the occurrence of flint and copper daggers in the Chalcolithic of Italy. From the late fourth and beginning of the third millennium BC a developed flint knapping technology existed alongside the use of copper. By the later third millennium BC however the numbers of both flint and copper daggers had declined perhaps as a result of differing burial customs. It appears that edges of copper daggers mimicked the general shape of flint daggers hence the differing shapes from the north to south reflecting the differing types of raw materials available in those regions. Although the 'primary' raw material type cannot be stated with certainty there is likely to have been a reciprocal relationship between the two material types.

Ihuel, Pelegrin, Mallet, & Verjux (Chapter 5) present a synthesis of work on dagger production from Grand-Pressigny flint. This collaboration was led by Mallet over a period of 25 years resulting in an in-depth study. Specialised long blade production – 'NaCAL' and *livres de beurre* – and their origins in local technological traditions are described. The readily available raw material occurring in relatively large slabs (30–100 cm) enabled large blades to be produced during the Final Neolithic. These pointed blades or 'daggers' with lateral retouch and sometimes a prepared base have been recovered from various contexts across France and western Switzerland where they are sometimes found with hafts. The discovery of a cache of 134 unretouched blades at 'La Creusette' provides insights into production methods (a random sample from an incredible original production total of between 500 and 800 blades from 50 to 80 cores – estimated to have taken between one and two months to make).

In Chapter 6 Van Gijn examines Scandinavian daggers in the Northern Netherlands applying usewear analysis to aid the understanding of the use life or biography of these artefacts. Their life from importation as finished items, through use and discard is examined. Usewear analysis has shown that their function was not 'ordinary' although short terms tasks within a ritual sphere (e.g. bleeding animals or delivering the final mortal wound) would not leave a detectable microwear signature. Their display of distinctive non-utilitarian wear patterns has been used to suggest that these daggers were drawn from their sheaths many times – a phenomenon noted on other daggers (see for example, Grace 1990; Green *et al.* 1982), and faint polishing noted on an example from a Beaker burial at Shorcote Quarry, Gloucestershire (Bradley 1995, 25, 29) should be seen as further evidence of this. Their final deposition in watery

contexts in the Northern Netherlands away from settlements marks out their 'specialness'. A final ritual connection is suggested for a dagger made from striking red Helgoland flint which was reused as a strike-a-light, tools known to have been 'special' (p.81).

A single Scandinavian flint dagger (classified as Lomborg's type 1c) was found in 1971 during a period of low water in the river Waal, near Lent in the province of Gelderland (Drenth, Chapter 7). This artefact and the circumstances of its recovery are described and it is used to explore the contacts between these two regions. The artefact can be ascribed to the central Dutch Bell beaker Group and dates to between 2350–1900 BC, although it originated from the Limfjord region of northern Jutland.

In Chapter 8 the function of Late Neolithic flint daggers from Scandinavia and their role within exchange networks is examined. Possible functions are discussed testing the premise that flint daggers were too brittle to be used in combat and would therefore have been used as status symbols within the male warrior sphere, or perhaps as an object suitable for boys becoming men during rites of passage, or in complex death rituals. Other functional suggestions such as hunting tools are explored, and the point is made that not all daggers would have been used for the same purpose. The craftsmanship of southern Scandinavian daggers is well known and distinctions between the so-called 'archer's graves' with their oversized flint daggers (around 40 cm in length) and more ordinary male graves with smaller daggers may indicate divisions or rank within society.

In Chapter 9 Frieman re-evaluates the cultural and technological context of British daggers which is timely as the last synthesis on the subject was published by Grimes in 1932 although some regional studies and individual artefacts have been published – a point which Frieman makes in her introduction to the volume. This chapter begins with a re-examination of daggers in Britain, essentially presenting the results of her survey of British and Irish daggers (Frieman 2014), providing much useful data and distribution maps. The relationship between daggers and other third millennium flintwork is also examined. Contexts of deposition are explored; Beaker burials (43) and watery contexts (53) are the most common contexts of deposition where contextual information is known (and sadly many are unknown) but some have come from apparent occupation sites. She concludes that technologically British daggers are fewer in number, and less technologically impressive and diverse than their continental counterparts. However, that is not to say the British examples can yield important information about function, status and society.

Early Bronze Age flint daggers from Poland are examined in Chapter 10 where Gruzdz *et al.* present a history of study, typology and the results of microscopic analyses. Production centres have been identified and it is suggested that these centres played an important role in society at this time, perhaps linked the supply of bronze. At the beginning of the second millennium BC in Lesser Poland flint continued to be the main material for tool production with bronze being used for small items.

Chapter 11 presents a preliminary study of Early Bronze Age silicite daggers from Czech Republic and Slovakia. These artefacts tend to be imported and there is very little evidence for local production. The variety of raw materials employed suggests contacts with Poland, Germany or northern Europe although the possible use of erratics is also discussed.

In Chapter 12 Shoda discusses stone daggers in North East Asia, defined here as northeast China, the Russian Maritime Province, the Korean peninsula and the Japanese islands, in the period of metal adoption (second to first millennium BC). It is the one paper that rather stands out from the rest of the volume given the focus on European material, nonetheless the paper presents a very useful review, defining a chronology for the area which divides the daggers into five stages reflecting regional and chronological variations.

The volume rounds off with a conclusion by Frieman which summarises some of the themes that have emerged throughout the volume and the directions for future research. One theme that emerges from the volume is the use of micro-and macroscopic analyses to examine the use life or biography of artefacts. Although this technique is not applicable to all material, it can in conjunction with typological and other studies unlock insights into the uses of these fascinating artefacts.

Despite a rash of typos and some slightly stilted translations this is a well-produced volume with a range of papers that will appeal not only to those interested in lithics but also to researchers engaged in the wider aspects of material culture, the interaction of flint and metal technologies and changes in social structures during the Late Neolithic and Bronze Age. The quality of the majority of the flint illustrations is generally good although some do not have scales, making comparisons difficult. The lack of an index may be an issue for some readers of the printed version but not for the digital user as this volume is also available as an ebook. However, these are minor details and overall the editors are to be congratulated for an interesting and informative volume which will provides much direction for future research.

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Philippa Bradley
Wessex Archaeology

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