

It was at first thought sufficient to find artefacts similar to the type of 'palaeoliths' found in Europe, on the assumption that primitive implied ancient, especially if found in a geological deposit. The weakness of this approach was first that 'primitive' might simply indicate the early stages of an artefact's production, not its antiquity; and second, the deposit might be recent, ancient but redeposited, and/or include recent artefacts that had been incorporated through animal burrowing, or other forms of bioturbation. Emphasis then shifted to skeletal remains, but with no better success; first, they might simply indicate a recent intrusive burial; and secondly, Ernst Hrdlička—America's foremost physical anthropologist—steadfastly rejected all suggestions that *Homo sapiens* had a deep ancestry, and thus all human remains in North America were, by default, recent. The burden of proof therefore shifted to geologists, but they had their own major problems in establishing a Pleistocene framework, such as determining the number of ice ages or whether loess was deposited by wind or water. The eventual key to unlocking North America's remote human past lay in establishing the context of a find: in other words, leaving it in the ground until its geological context could be confirmed by those with sufficient authority to be believed—that is, a professional, rather than the amateur enthusiast who may have found it. It was here that Folsom was so conclusive; thanks to telegrams sent to various authority figures, crucial evidence was left in the ground until its context had been independently confirmed and recorded by professional authority figures such as Alfred Kidder, the leading American archaeologist at that time.

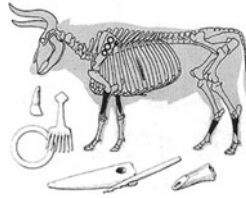
This book, 670 pages long, with 100 pages of endnotes and almost 50 pages of references, is the outcome of immense scholarship and meticulous research. It is also a labour of love; this is not a dry catalogue of past errors and triumphs, but a gripping account of the protagonists and the issues, claims and counter-claims with which they grappled. The only British work that I think rivals this in showing how palaeoanthropology developed is Marianne Sommer's (2007) account of Paviland from its discovery in the 1820s through to the present. A vain hope perhaps, but I would recommend palaeolithic archaeologists of any region to read Meltzer's book, and anyone interested in the history of archaeology more generally. This is not only a great read, and a brilliant piece of scholarship, but also a mirror image of what our European predecessors faced (and still face) when documenting our deep past.

References

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ROBIN DENNELL
Department of Archaeology,
University of Exeter, UK
(Email: r.w.dennell@exeter.ac.uk)

PETER WOODMAN. *Ireland's first settlers: time and the Mesolithic*. 2015. xii+366 pages, 32 colour numerous b&w illustrations. Oxford & Havertown (PA): Oxbow; 978-1-78297-778-0 hardback £50.



This is a book that only Peter Woodman could write. It is a personal exploration of the archaeology of the Mesolithic in Ireland. It is also a very

ambitious book. It seeks to change attitudes to an undervalued and under-studied period of Ireland's prehistory. Woodman wants to counter the many misunderstandings of the period that he has come across in the archaeological literature. He further seeks to situate the Irish Mesolithic in its wider European context, while simultaneously seeing it as distinct and in need of treatment on its own terms. In all of this, he succeeds admirably. If some of the questions he asks cannot be answered, it is not his lack of skill but the lack of current evidence that stands in the way.

The book provides both a useful and comprehensive introduction to the details of the Irish Mesolithic and a thought-provoking challenge to current understanding. There are five major sections: 1) the historical context of Irish Mesolithic studies; 2) an account of the Irish Mesolithic archaeological record; 3) a re-evaluation of the period—especially initial settlement and lithic technology; 4) a re-evaluation of the Mesolithic way of life in Ireland; and 5) suggestions for future research.

The book's introduction is in many ways quite traditional and follows the lead of Grahame Clark in Britain by foregrounding the ecological context of the Mesolithic, providing an account of the late and

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post-glacial environment and the distribution of lithic raw materials.

Part 1 is a welcome history of Mesolithic studies in Ireland, placed in their wider context with reference to developments in Britain. Full regard is given to the unique place of Irish religion and politics as constraints on early archaeological endeavours. Nevertheless, research followed a similar timescale to studies in Britain, with slow recognition of the Mesolithic during the 1920s and then firm foundations laid in the 1930s. Likewise, Woodman recognises a perception of the Irish Mesolithic as marginal and primitive, lacking confidence about its own identity within the Mesolithic of Europe. Woodman's own contribution to establishing the Irish Mesolithic and moving on from the old stereotypes is clear. The lesson he derives is valuable for archaeologists everywhere: "We should be humbled to see how often conventional wisdom constrained the exploration of alternative ideas and approaches" (p. 69).

Part 2 is a straight account of the archaeological record. It is comprehensive with abundant illustrative plans. Where this part is particularly useful is in Woodman's discussion of how this record has been compiled since the nineteenth century, along with environmental factors affecting its discovery and the resulting biases in the evidence. The predominantly low-lying riverine, lacustrine and coastal distribution of the Mesolithic is evident. Woodman has a lot to say on lithic material, correcting current misconceptions about typology and dating.

Part 3 covers the origins of post-glacial settlement in Ireland. Woodman discusses the likelihood of evidence for Palaeolithic settlement being found or not, and in passing also gives a good, clear summary of the British evidence. The earliest secure settlement of Ireland is from *c.* 9800 cal BP and seems to be strongly related to the earliest phases of the later Mesolithic in Britain, perhaps arriving through the Manx basin. There is an early emergence of a distinctive Irish Mesolithic, and Woodman puts forward a suggested chronological scheme of an Early Mesolithic in two phases (Mount Sandel and Creagh) of 9800–88/8600 cal BP, and a Late Mesolithic, also of two phases (Cushendun and Newferry), of 88/8600–*c.* 6000 cal BP.

Providing chronological clarity is only the first step, rather than the aim of archaeology. Accordingly, in Part 4, Woodman turns his attention to Mesolithic ways of life. On site location, he is tentative

about territoriality and mobility—which is to be welcomed as a form of archaeological honesty—although he highlights the need to look more closely into movement between coastal and inland resources. Looking at the foods exploited, he suggests the importance of eels in the diet as well as off-shore marine foods. While he considers the whole range of potential resources, his discussion underlines the need for more evidence—there is more to Mesolithic archaeology than flint-tool typologies. Woodman emphasises that there was probably no single subsistence strategy across the whole of Ireland, and that archaeologists need to begin to think regionally.

The final part of the book looks at what future work could be undertaken. Woodman asks whether there is enough of the right kind of fieldwork, critically examining excavation methods, and suggesting the need to search in areas where sites are likely to be preserved under later deposits. He also asks whether there are any new areas of research that could be pursued. In some ways, this is the least satisfactory part of the book. As he points out, the evidence from both Ireland and Britain differs from that in other parts of northern Europe and, in many cases, is simply lacking or has not been seriously studied (e.g. the evidence for the treatment of the dead). This leads to the contradictory position of looking abroad (chiefly to Denmark and other parts of northern and western Europe) to inform understanding of some (non-economic) aspects of Mesolithic life in Ireland. The application of these comparisons to the Irish context is necessarily somewhat speculative. More fruitful is his treatment of the transition to the Neolithic as a complex phenomenon that has yet to be studied in thoughtful ways. He usefully presents the evidence from between 6200 and 5800 cal BP, such as cow bones on various late Mesolithic sites, and urges an understanding of the complexity and variety that might underlie the change from Mesolithic to Neolithic culture.

Woodman sums up by reiterating that the Irish Mesolithic is different, and that while much is known, much remains to be discovered and understood. What he provides is, in places, a welcome rethinking of his own earlier views. An important underlying thread running through the book is the limited quality of the available evidence and the need for more excavated sites and finds from secure contexts. The archaeology of the Irish Mesolithic needs to be more than a contest between visions of the noble savage

and the impoverished native. Woodman's account is a worthwhile step to advance the archaeology of this period.

DON HENSON
Department of Archaeology,
University of York, UK
(Email: dh625@york.ac.uk)

CATHERINE FRIEMAN & BERIT VALENTIN ERIKSEN (ed.). *Flint daggers in prehistoric Europe*. 2015. viii+165 pages, numerous colour and b&w illustrations. Oxford & Philadelphia (PA): Oxbow; 978-1-78570-018-7 hardback £40.



This collection of papers examines the regional variability and socio-technical complexity of Neolithic flint daggers in Europe and beyond. The volume is well edited, the language fluent and most of the figures are nicely reproduced, including some in colour. Following an introduction, 12 papers cover

daggers from the Near East, southern and western Europe, northern Europe, southern Scandinavia and eastern Europe; a chapter dealing with the Bronze Age metal and stone daggers of north-east Asia falls somewhat outside the book's general theme—even if it is interesting in its own right. A conclusion summarises some of the threads running through the contributions, and points towards future research. A huge amount of detailed information is presented in the papers, and this review can touch upon only a few of the many interesting aspects covered.

The introduction tackles the issue of dagger definitions—and this turns out to be tricky. Daggers were manufactured in a variety of raw materials, using different methods and techniques, and producing diverse shapes; their use and deposition also varied across time and space. Seen from this perspective, it is curious that the category of 'dagger' is still considered useful at all. The introduction suggests that the meaning of daggers is relational and thus only to be understood within specific temporal and

regional contexts. This implies that any ambition for an all-encompassing typology is redundant. Yet daggers—hand-held, sharp objects with two edges converging towards the tip—are objects in need of little analogical reasoning in order to be understood; it might even be justifiable to speak about them in essentialist terms. Daggers are still used today and are instantly recognisable. Made in a variety of materials, they featured in hunter-gatherer contexts of the early Holocene in north-eastern Europe and in contemporary Neolithic contexts in the Near East. The mere fact that the volume exists is a confirmation of the importance of historical continuity, and that feels refreshing. After all, typological discussions have been ongoing for well over a century without achieving consensus.

Zimmermann presents the lithic daggers of the Near East, starting with the earliest pressure-retouched blade daggers of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A in Anatolia and northern Syria, and ending with pressure-flaked, pre-dynastic Egyptian knives. With a background in Scandinavian archaeology, I noticed that the former have striking formal and technological similarities with early Mesolithic Kunda points from the Preboreal eastern Baltic area. Is this a coincidence? Future research might shed light on this aspect. In general, Zimmermann's paper provides an excellent framework for the early Anatolian obsidian daggers that most of us only know from the excavations of James Mellaart and Ian Hodder at Çatalhöyük.

Graves-Brown describes dagger-like flint objects from Bronze Age Egypt, and an intriguing paragraph in her paper concerns the reliefs and paintings that depict the manufacture of flint-knives. Modern knappers have not been able to make sense of these paintings, and it has been assumed that the artists misunderstood the production process. Recently, however, Marquant-Lund has managed to replicate daggers consistent with these pictures by using a copper-tipped 'Ishi stick' vertically. This illuminates the importance of the distinction between 'method' and 'technique' developed by the French school of lithic studies: while a lithic production method (the direction, order and sequence of individual flake removals) can be fully reconstructed through refitting, the interpretation of the production techniques (the ways in which the energy is transferred from the knapper to the tool) is dependent on experience and knowledge, and can always be improved upon. The Egyptian daggers were apparently not used for fighting but rather for slaughter. This is in line with the evidence of the Iliad

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