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Evaluating Vere Gordon Childe Non-Functional Artefacts in Prehistory

Bog Bodies of Norway

Anthropophagic Engravings

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*B = LONG BEAKER, W etc = WALTERMENBURG B etc = BERNBURG J = JORDANSMÜHL

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Editorial

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I am delighted to be writing my first editorial for The Post Hole and can only apologise for the long delay between issues - I can assure the readers that the next issue will be published within the next three months. Many thanks, as ever, to my fantastic editorial team for their hard work on this issue.

It seems almost redundant to state that this is an exciting time for archaeology, but it is worth revisiting some of the archaeological headlines from the past few months. The extreme heatwave over the summer proved a boon for landscape archaeologists, as previously hidden features revealed themselves in the parched fields, from the buried foundations of country houses to Iron Age barrows in nearby Pocklington. It is to be hoped that the sites identified from these cropmarks may now be preserved and the subject of future research.

Particularly relevant to the contents of our October issue is the discovery of the earliest known drawing by *Homo sapiens* in Blombos Cave, South Africa, a stone flake cross-hatched with ochre pigment (for further information, see Henshilwood et al. (2018). 'An abstract drawing from the 73,000-year-old levels at Blombos Cave, South Africa.' *Nature*, 562(7725), pp.115–118). This obviously has fascinating implications both for our understanding of early cognition and the behaviour and purpose behind prehistoric art: a topic which is expanded upon in this issue by Courtney St. Clair Miller, who takes a theoretical approach to investigate non-functional artefacts as a reaction to societal pressures in prehistory. Also in this issue, James McCrea analyses an engraved bone from Gough's Cave as evidence of deliberate imitation of osteophagia; and Yuxi Xie assesses the impact of Vere Gordon Childe on modern theoretical archaeology. The Editor's Choice this issue is Alphaeus Talk's work on the presence, and notable absence, of bog bodies in Norway. This fascinating examination of a vastly under-researched topic outlines the existing evidence of Norwegian bog bodies, possible reasons for their under-representation in the archaeological record, and areas for future investigation.

Finally, I'm happy to announce that our colleagues at the Scottish Student Archaeology Society have published their first issue of *Barrow Magazine* since 1980. The Summer 2018 issue is available online at <https://barrowmagazine.wordpress.com/> and I would strongly encourage our readers to subscribe to this varied and interesting magazine.

We are currently accepting submissions for our January issue! If you would like to share your thoughts, research or experience on a wide range of archaeological topics, please submit your work to submissions@theposthole.org. For guidance on submission, please visit our author advice page at www.theposthole.org/authors.

Kind regards,

Eleanor Drew

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Evaluating Vere Gordon Childe and his Impact on Archaeology: A Critique

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Introduction

It may be argued that Western archaeology has always been dominated by Capitalism (Hodder 1995, 199; Hamilakis 2007, 15-16). However, in the last century, due to two world wars and rapid changes in technology, people have started to view the world from different perspectives. During this period, archaeology itself started to change and improve, both theoretically and scientifically. One of the most important individuals behind this progress was Vere Gordon Childe, an Australian scholar who focused mainly on European Prehistory, with a strong belief in Marxism. This article will critically evaluate Childe's archaeological theories and practices in three parts: the first section will focus on how Gordon Childe positively influenced archaeology; the second section, on the possible flaws in his ideology; and the third section will conclude with the author's personal opinion on Childe's contribution to the field.

Theories, Methods and Influence

Marxist archaeology, as its name suggests, is a field of archaeological theory influenced by the German philosopher, Karl Marx. Marxist archaeologists hold the belief that the development of human society is a result of production and class struggles (Faulkner 2007). In contrast to processualism and post-processualism, the Marxist model considers both objective and subjective archaeological interpretation as essential and dialectical (Johnson 2010, 95-97). Marxism, however, was not introduced into Western archaeology until Childe visited the Soviet Union and became the first Western archaeologist to apply Marxist theory to his work (McGuire 1992, 69). Although Marxist archaeology may never be fully accepted by European archaeologists, the impact that Childe's ideas had on the West have been significant.

Some archaeologists argue that there is a conflict between being a humanist-historian and being a Marxist. However, Childe arguably succeeded in combining these different concepts, evidenced by his use of Kossinna's conceptualisation of race and Montelius's chronology method for dating

materials (Childe 1937). Although these concepts and technological skills may seem questionable in the present day, Childe was one of the earliest archaeologists to combine different approaches and results (Trigger 2006, 243), which, importantly, provided archaeology with a new perspective. Therefore, Childe is considered both a processualist and a post-processualist. On the one hand, Childe's theory impacted objective processualism, also known as New Archaeology, by integrating two new principles into the theory. Firstly, Childe interpreted material evidence as the scatters of functioning society, which cannot be regarded as static entities (Trigger 1980, 181). Secondly, Childe explained how systems of change played a significant role in human social development (Trigger 1980, 181). In contrast, Childe is also seen as a "prototypical post-processualist archaeologist" due to his subjective interpretation and belief that humans see the world only in the way they want to (Trigger 1994, 24; Trigger 2006, 349). It seems reasonable to believe that this evaluation is true, as in Childe's paper "Is Prehistory Practical?" (1933), he claimed that "It is probably impossible to approach all the problems...in a purely objective manner." In short, it can be argued that Childe's Marxist approach to these widely accepted Western archaeological theories represents an important contribution to the discipline.

In terms of his research methods, Gordon Childe was also one of the very first archaeologists that started to use radiocarbon dating in his research. Although he only published one paper using this "technique, "Comparison of Archaeological and Radiocarbon Datings" (1950), it can be argued that he still played a key role in developing the radiocarbon technique for two major reasons. Firstly, he arranged for Willard Frank Libby, the American pioneer of archaeological radiocarbon dating, to give a lecture at the London Institute of Archaeology, despite Libby's intention to only present the technique to the Royal Society (Harris 2009, 130-131). Secondly, although sceptical about the radiocarbon dating method in the conclusion of his first and only paper on the subject, using phrases like, "the method will require considerable checking and refinement before it can provide reliable dates" (Childe 1950), Childe recognised that radiocarbon dating was better and more reliable than the previous techniques (Harris 2009, 131). In brief, he provided the opportunity for Libby to introduce radiocarbon dating to Britain's most important archaeological school and importantly, tested the method himself in its early stages. Although Childe did not fully accept this technique himself, he still appreciated it as a feasible scientific method in his published papers. These actions certainly affected the Western archaeological view of this new technology, and Childe's endorsement helped to generalise the technique academically.

Finally, Childe not only improved archaeology in an academic respect, he also helped to publicise the subject through publications like "Man Makes Himself" (1958a) and his involvement in the archaeological TV show "Animal, Vegetable, Mineral" during the 1950s. Therefore, he was seen as one of the most influential early TV archaeologists (Fowler 2016, Part 1.3).

Problems and Disputes

Despite Childe's positive contributions to archaeology, there are still some problems with his concepts and methodology. Firstly, although there are archaeologists, like Trigger (1994a, 24), who considered Childe one of the founders of cultural-historical archaeology, Childe proposed a misleading definition of culture. According to Trigger and Brothwell, Childe's definition and understanding of "cultural" was explained with "deceptive brevity" (Trigger 2006, 244 and Brothwell 2009, 194). Culture, however, was not the only concept that Gordon Childe may have glossed over.

There are multiple examples of the use of non-academic terms in some of his more notable publications, including "Prehistory and Marxism" (1979) and "Retrospect" (1958b). Childe used terms such as "savages" and "barbarians" to analyse different types of classes and civilisations, which may be considered misleading to his readers. This point is supported by Trigger (1994b, 95), who claimed that Childe had been using these terms informally until 1942, and Flannery (1994, 103), who pointed out that civilisations of the prehistoric world were more complex than Childe's classification.

Moreover, although Childe contributed much to European archaeology through incorporating Marxist theories, most of the data he synthesised has been proven either wrong or untestable (Tringham 1983, 87). Childe even showed uncertainty with some of his own analysis due to the lack of evidence. For example, in his 1929 book "Danube in Prehistory", he postulated that Bronze Age metal grave goods were imported from other countries, but in his later article in 1937, he argued that they were produced locally and admitted that he had no precise date on traded goods (Trigger 1980, 39). Additionally, Childe admitted that he had carefully selected evidence that was suitable to his intended purpose (Allen 1967, 56), which arguably made his data untrustworthy.

There were also issues concerning elements of Childe's theory. For example, during his discussion of ancient economics, he neglected to comment on the situation in far east Asian countries, for instance China (Goody 2006, 504). As a result, it can be argued that Childe's confined focus on European areas suggests he viewed the world narrowly. To summarise, some of the major problems surrounding Gordon Childe include his use and description of certain terms, limited and deceptive evidence and his arguably incomprehensive view of the world.

Conclusion and Evaluation

Gordon Childe is considered one of the most famous and controversial archaeologists in the last century, whose impact on the discipline can be perceived both positively or negatively. However,

one cannot evaluate his contribution to archaeology without having an in-depth and critical understanding of his work. The research for this essay has prompted a complex consideration of Gordon Childe as an archaeologist. Firstly, he developed new theories and new ways of thinking, integrating Marxism into different concepts in the Western world. Secondly, as a Materialist, he advocated the use of scientific methods. In addition, he moved beyond his academic circle to influence public interest in archaeology and human history. As a result, it can be argued that Childe moved the discipline of archaeology forwards, both at a theoretical and a practical level. Fundamentally, while it may be suggested that Gordon Childe failed to provide convincing evidence to support some of his theories, it can be argued that his overall influence on archaeology was mostly positive.

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Non-Functional Artefacts in Prehistory: The Rise of Symbolism or Reliance on Material Culture?

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Introduction

For archaeologists, the process of understanding prehistoric non-functional material is fraught with ambiguity. When an artefact or structure does not have obvious utility within a prehistoric society, a range of interpretations may present themselves. Those interpretations depend heavily on the individual archaeologist's theoretical viewpoint, and common debates stem from the Functionalist versus Post-processual movements. Functionalism concerns "the use of an organic analogy in the explanation of societies, with particular reference to system, equilibrium and adaptation" (Hodder 1994, 48). Conversely, Post-processualism – often viewed by some as an 'anti-science' - "centres upon the forms of knowledge appropriate to a social science, how society may be conceived (reconciling both patterning or structure and individual action, intention and agency)" (Shanks and Hodder 2007, 3). Due to the strength of both theoretical arguments, it is difficult to determine whether the presence of non-functional material culture indicates the presence of symbolism, or a dependence on the aggregate of physical objects. Archaeologists sometimes argue that both instances have occurred simultaneously throughout prehistory; for example, this is seen in the versatility of Upper Palaeolithic cave art. Factors including societal pressures, changes in subsistence, and symbolic development greatly influenced the extent to which a society produced non-functional material. Nevertheless, it is important to consider biases within prehistoric samples, as survival rates of artefacts and structures may differ depending on post-depositional factors. Therefore, one must consider preservation bias when determining the number of non-functional artefacts and structures present within the record.

Beyond the controversies of Functionalism versus Post-processualism, the question of what is considered 'non-functional' must be re-evaluated. Exposure to aspects of the modern world, such as individual experiences and contemporary trends, naturally lead archaeologists to make biased interpretations when examining material culture. Thus, objectivity during interpretation is an illusion which cannot be overcome (Hodder 1999). Within archaeology, artefacts and structures are routinely misconstrued as having no obvious utility, leading them to be labelled as non-

functional. However, artefacts and structures can have a symbolic function. For example, following ethnographic studies, Mesolithic amber pendants are thought to have been worn to protect children from evil spirits, and as such they played an active role within that society (Petersen, 2016). The line between symbolism and functionality can be blurred to the extent that they are not considered mutually exclusive. It is important to consider how an artefact or structure was originally perceived when making interpretations; complex symbolism may represent an increased reliance on material culture.

The Middle Palaeolithic

Within scholarly literature, there is little evidence to suggest non-functional structures were habitually produced in the Middle Palaeolithic. The paucity of paleontological data is often misconstrued by archaeologists as proof that the Neanderthals were not capable of complex symbolic thought. However, recent excavations at Gorham's Cave in Gibraltar have revealed an ostensibly symbolic motif dating to 39 kya. The pattern, (Figure 1), which consists of "a deeply impressed cross-hatching carved into the bedrock of the cave" (Rodríguez-Vidal *et al.* 2014, 13301) contributes to contemporary narratives within archaeology that suggest the Neanderthals could conceptualise symbolic and ideological ideas. Nevertheless, the speculative nature of this interpretation signifies possible contention within Middle Palaeolithic studies. Rodríguez-Vidal *et al.* (2014) utilised experimental archaeology to challenge such scepticism and prove the markings were deliberately produced. It was revealed that "the number of strokes needed to carve the complete pattern ranged from 188 to 317" (Rodríguez-Vidal *et al.* 2014, 13305), indicating that the individual[s] had intended to leave a lasting impression on the cave wall. Furthermore, the quantity of strokes demonstrates that considerable time and skill went into producing the pattern, reinforcing its value to the creator[s]. The "engraving represents the first case in which an engraved



Figure 1: The Neanderthal "hashtag" (Rodríguez-Vidal *et al.* 2014, 13303).

pattern permanently marks a space within a habitation area in a cave" (Rodríguez-Vidal *et al.* 2014, 13305), thus implying that the design held symbolic significance for multiple individuals. This evidence indicates possible societal reverence for the pattern, suggesting the Neanderthals may have created the elaborate structural design as a visual representation of complex symbolic or ideological concepts within the group. Nevertheless, few publications have attempted to interpret the markings; a weakness which should prompt research in the future.

Similarly, the discovery of a proto-figurine ‘mask’ from the Mousterian period at La Roche-Cotard in France, reinforces this idea that Neanderthals produced symbolic, non-functional artefacts. The sculpture consists mainly of a large flint stone featuring a "natural tubular perforation" (Marquet and Lorblanchet 2003, 663), in which bone was purposely wedged to create the appearance of a human face (Figure 2). Careful examination demonstrates that “the object has been worked to give it a more regular shape” (Marquet and Lorblanchet 2003, 664), suggesting the individual[s] who created the mask laboured to produce an intentional image. Furthermore, it is significant that the mask was “not only picked up and brought into the habitation, but was also modified ... to perfect its resemblance to a face” (Marquet and Lorblanchet 2003, 667). This, coupled with the time it took to manufacture, indicates the value of the artefact to the creator[s]. In addition, at the time of its production (approximately 32,100 kya), the “existence of beliefs and symbolic behaviour is already firmly attested; people were burying their dead, sometimes with offerings and deposits or spreads of red ochre” (Marquet and Lorblanchet 2003, 669). The mask could thus be viewed as a symbolic “ornament” (Marquet and Lorblanchet 2003, 669), perhaps to embody a deceased individual or idol. Archaeologists may therefore interpret the ‘mask’ as representing complex symbolic ideas which centre on the notion of death. However, it is possible, through active representation of an individual, that the figurine acted as a functional artefact. The value of the item, combined with inferred links to burial practices, suggest that the artefact may have been used in ritualistic performance associated with mortuary rites; it may be argued that this represents a reliance on material culture in ritual practice, although this cannot be corroborated.



Figure 2. The proto-figurine “mask” (Marquet and Lorblanchet 2003, 664).

The Upper Palaeolithic

The Upper Palaeolithic period is typically concerned with an “unprecedented explosion of creativity” (Gabora 2003, 1). This is due to a substantial increase in the quantity of non-functional artefacts and structures available in the archaeological record; the most eminent being examples of European cave art. Generally, the overwhelming metanarrative is that rock art structures represent attempts to contact the symbolic world. Lewis-Williams (1991) controversially argues for the presence of shamanism within the Upper Palaeolithic, suggesting art was created by individuals who entered trance-like states. This is reinforced by ethnographic examples, such as 20th century descriptions of the San people of southern Africa, who, due to a “shared

neurophysiology and interest in fauna” (Hodgson 2006, 27), created images of geometric forms and animals in a process that is likened to shamanism. This indicates that the increasing presence of seemingly non-functional structures represents a measure of symbolic complexity.

However, recent scholarly literature emphasises the importance of functionalist interpretations, arguing that symbolic explanations of cave art are too speculative. Barton *et al.* (1994, 185) suggests the art has “a social function... of information exchange,” implying that cave structures were utilised to convey messages to the inhabitants. Sugiyama (2001, 223) subscribes to this theory, claiming that cave paintings are a form of symbolic narrative which were vital to the development of oral language. In this way, these archaeological structures can be deemed functional, clearly acting as facilitators to the progression of society. This suggests that individuals increasingly relied on art as material culture in the Upper Palaeolithic to improve their methods of communication. In addition, Steven J. Mithen (1998, 672) suggests environmental stresses may have contributed to the production of cave art. He states that “the subsistence economy came under stress in terms of increases in the fluctuations in yields” (Mithen 1998, 690). Therefore, art could have been utilised by Upper Palaeolithic groups as it enabled the “facilitating of information flows about alternative resources at times of shortfalls” (Mithen 1998, 691). This demonstrates another possible functionalist purpose for cave art, as it acts as a conveyor of dietary information. This is important, as it does not deny the possible symbolic significance of the art in question but argues that functionalist explanations must be addressed to explore all possible interpretations.

Prominent examples of non-functional artefacts in the Upper Palaeolithic are the anthropomorphic statuettes, or ‘Venus’ figurines. Historically, archaeologists have viewed these artefacts as sexual objects, created solely by males, as “clearly no other group would have had such an interest in the female form” (Collins and Onians 1978, 12-14). This is supported by Karel Absolon, who reviewed the figurines in his 1949 publication “The Diluvial Anthropomorphic Statuettes and Drawings, Especially the So-Called Venus Statuettes, Discovered in Moravia: A Comparative Study” (Absolon, 1949). When referring to Venus XIII, he believes that the “statuette shows us that the artist has neglected all that did not interest him, stressing his sexual libido only where the breasts are concerned” (Absolon 1949, 208). This interpretation stresses the figurines’ functionality as ‘prehistoric pornography’. However, some academics argue that this interpretation is sexist. Recent explanations, such as that of LeRoy McDermott, propose the figurines have an alternate symbolic value. To prove that the figurines are symbolic objects, McDermott (1996, 227) effectively uses “photographic simulations of what a modern female sees of herself”. The results demonstrate that the figurine’s shape was carved according to a woman’s “relationship to the eyes and the relative effects of foreshortening, distance, and occlusion” (McDermott 1996, 227). The link between modern women’s interpretations of the female form and the figurines, as shown in

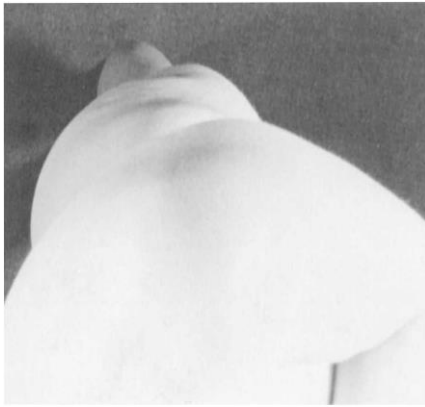


Figure 3. Photographs comparing a six-months pregnant 26 year old Caucasian female of average weight with a cast of Willendorf Number 1 (McDermott 1996, 243).

Figure 3, cannot be easily dismissed. From this perspective, the statuettes represent reference points for the women to symbolically connect with their bodies through visual art. Therefore, the increasing frequency of these figurines arguably represents complex symbolic and ideological ideas about self-expression. Generally, the non-functional artefacts and structures reviewed for the Upper Palaeolithic imply that symbolism and functionalism can occur in unison. Yet, some archaeologists, like Lewis-Williams, over-romanticize symbolic interpretations, which must be considered when exploring the meaning of non-functional material culture.

The Mesolithic

A phase of prehistory which is often neglected in archaeology is the Mesolithic era. Only recently defined within the discipline, it has been loosely termed by academics as “that period of the Postglacial prior to the introduction of agriculture” (Price 1983, 762). Typically, associations with Mesolithic populations, especially those located in southern Scandinavia, suggest an increasing reliance on material culture. As previously

mentioned, amber pendants are often thought to have had a practical application within society. Modern ethnographic studies, such as those referenced by Vang Petersen, indicate that they may have been used as protective charms. In a recent publication, Petersen (2016, 233) comments:

“Among the world’s hunter-gatherer societies there is a general perception that children are particularly vulnerable to the influences of unseen forces. In these societies, a common safeguard against illness and the ‘evil eye’ is to furnish a child’s body and clothing with evil deprecating amulets”

Naturally, archaeologists are aware the pendants do not possess genuine protective qualities, so they are often labelled as non-functional artefacts. However, the concept of function may have been different for prehistoric societies. Mesolithic populations may have held the belief that the pendants were actively protecting their children from harm, much in the same way that Native Americans believe in the properties of the dream catcher: to them, the pendants physically perform a function. There is no tangible evidence to suggest that the pendants did work in this way. Nevertheless, if Mesolithic societies had strong beliefs in their effects, then this could reinforce their reliance on the pendants as material culture. In the Mesolithic, child mortality rates were high

due to the challenging nature of their lifestyle. Eleanor Scott states that “a key feature of Ertebolle burial practice is the presence of neonatal and young infants” (Scott 1999, 124). As such, people may have relied on material culture to ensure the safety of their children. In summary, Mesolithic amber pendants may represent a complex symbolic belief system, in which children commit to wearing the jewellery to survive.

Archaeologists such as Jacob Weisdorf often argue that “the rise of Neolithic agriculture is unquestionably one of the most important events in human cultural history” (Weisdorf 2005, 561). Consequently, one might assume that changes in subsistence and mobility during this period may have instigated an increase in the production of non-functional material culture. Such a profound change from hunting to animal husbandry is naturally a risk for any population (Whittle 2009, 84-86). Negative effects can include an intensification of labour, increased vulnerability to disease, and the possibility of crop failure due to harsh weather. To ensure continual and successful yields, populations created ostensibly symbolic artefacts, a proportion of which feature animal imagery and figurines. Conventional arguments suggest that the representation of animal figurines clearly denotes an increase in symbolic material culture. This is corroborated by Nanoglou (2009, 199), who states that people:

“reaffirmed the importance of their mode of subsistence by symbolically stressing the animals they looked after. Thus, their economic dependence on sheep, goats, cattle and pigs would have guided the rendering of these species in clay and the use of these images in various contexts”.

This indicates the value of domestic animals to farming populations and suggests their symbolic significance when represented as clay figurines. Ethnographic studies, such as those conducted by Loze (1983, 11), reinforce the importance of symbolism in ensuring successful returns. Loze states that cultures such as the Giliaks of Amuria used animal imagery to ensure successful hunting and fishing, a practice not dissimilar to Neolithic figurines. Furthermore, increasingly sedentary lifeways, once established, arguably gave individuals more time to produce non-functional objects, as they were not preoccupied by hunting food resources. Colin Renfrew himself “noted that it was only with the coming of the Neolithic that the symbolic use of material culture began to seem familiar to our modern human minds” (Renfrew 1996, cited in Watkins 2002, 3). However, there is “limited knowledge of the role animals played in the symbolic world of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic” (Peters and Schmidt 2004, 216). Consequently, it may not be valid to comment on some of the more drastic symbolic interpretations, for example that animal figurines represent “demons” (Peters and Schmidt 2004, 215). Nevertheless, it is clear that non-functional animal figurines represent increasingly complex symbolism in the Neolithic.

The animal figurines may also have been viewed as functional items which enabled trading within groups. Martin and Meskell (2012, 401) corroborate this idea, suggesting the statuettes play “roles

in real everyday activities, such as animal exchange, herding, management, hunting and tracking". This is a compelling explanation, as the development of farming and housing within societies meant that new concepts about ownership may have been managed through the exchange of figurines. This interpretation suggests an increased reliance on material culture, which was vital to the continuation of early economies. Yet, "it is unlikely that a single interpretation of animal figurines would ever adequately describe the full range of their functions and meanings" (Martin and Meskell 2012, 414). Functionalist and Post-processualist interpretations may both be correct and may have occurred simultaneously. In this way, it is clear that non-functional material culture in the Neolithic can represent an increasing reliance on material culture, as well as complex symbolic and ideological ideas.

An issue that must be addressed when conducting archaeological research, especially when investigating prehistory, is the possibility of biases resulting from post-depositional effects. It is well known that "different forms of site (temporary or permanent, domestic or ritual) have different implications for excavators, while environmental conditions (such as wetness or aridity) affect the nature of deposits and the survival of artefacts and structures" (Greene and Moore 2010, 113). Therefore, answering paleontological questions which focus on quantifying the occurrence of artefacts or structures is difficult. The frequency with which archaeologists find prehistoric material culture naturally varies depending on post-depositional factors, as well as the age of the site. For example, in the Palaeolithic, early "settlements associated with hunter-gatherers were predominantly temporary" (Greene and Moore 2010, 113), often exploiting seasonal resources. This is a problem for archaeologists, as these sites are "particularly susceptible to erosion and other forms of natural disturbance" (Greene and Moore 2010, 113). In addition, caves may be exposed to "natural weathering and sedimentation" (Greene and Moore 2010, 113). Therefore, there will be a low frequency of material culture recovered from this period, which can negatively influence our understanding of prehistoric sites. Conversely, as farming came to replace the hunter-gatherer lifestyle in the Neolithic, populations became more sedentary, enabling the production of a deeper stratification (Whittle 2009, 81). Therefore, survival rates are likely higher. Archaeologists must acknowledge these differences in survival rates to increase the objectivity of their interpretations. If this is not taken into consideration, there may appear to be an increase in the frequency of material culture throughout prehistory, when, in reality, post-depositional factors have affected the sample.

In conclusion, clear examples, such as Neolithic animal figurines, suggest that populations increasingly relied on 'non-functional' material culture. This was to cope with societal pressures, which aimed to enhance the practice of mortuary rites, aid communication between individuals, combat high mortality rates in children, and enable management of new complex economies.

Similarly, in all periods there is evidence that populations produced 'non-functional' material culture which represented symbolic and ideological concepts. Arguably, this can be viewed as a separate response to ease the same societal pressures. Therefore, it is apparent that symbolic and physical measures were utilised concurrently through prehistory as a coping mechanism for stress. However, it is important to acknowledge the possibility of biases resulting from post-depositional effects which impact the frequency with which archaeologists find prehistoric material culture. One must also consider the possibility that functionalism and symbolism are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, examples such as the Mesolithic amber pendants show that both concepts can be applicable to material culture simultaneously. These concepts should be considered during future research.

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Bog Bodies of Norway: In search Of Nordic Noir

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Introduction

Since their discovery in the 17th century, bog bodies have gripped the imagination with their ability to tell fascinating, mysterious and macabre stories of our past, due to their remarkable preserved states (van der Sanden 1996, 19); their skin dyed dark in the peatlands of Northern Europe where the sphagnum moss produces a substance, called sphagnum, which preserves the bodies of the deceased (Asing and Lynnerup 2007, 278). By studying these bodies, archaeologists are provided with insights into people's lives, including how they died, their appearance, illnesses, environment and diet. Bog bodies have been discovered in many places across Northern Europe, but whether there are any "bog bodies proper" in Norway is a controversial topic. This is largely due to the limited data available from excavation (Nordeide and Thun 2013, 200), as well as lost archived bodies (van der Sanden 1996, 20). Norway's bog bodies are therefore a mystery which needs further investigation.

The Bog Bodies of Norway

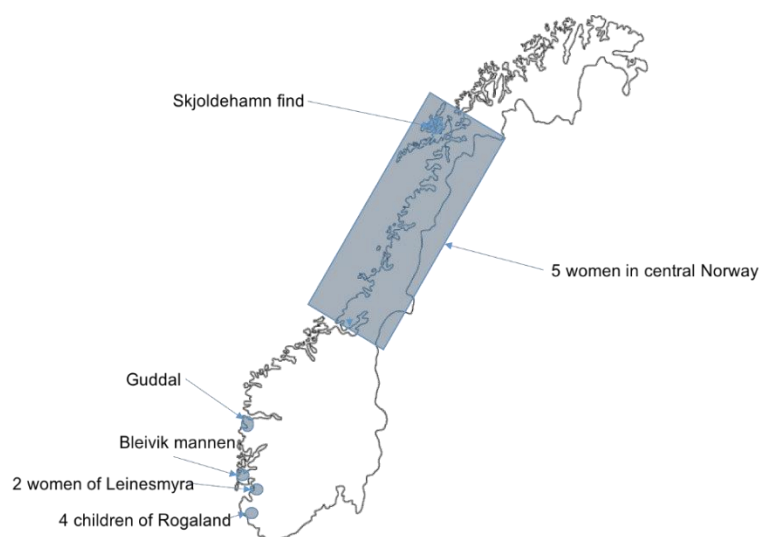


Figure 1: Map of bog bodies discovered in Norway.

Arguably around fourteen bog bodies have been discovered in Norway, as shown in Figure 1. However, there is a debate about this number, with Turner-Walker and Peacock proposing fifteen (2008, 151), Brothwell and Gill-Robinson only two (2001, 121) and Dieck suggesting ten (Aufdeheide 2010, 176). The bodies have been excavated from eight different sites, of which two are only evidenced in oral tradition (Nordeide 2017). They represent both sexes, a variety of ages and date from 500BC to 550AD (Henriksen and Sylvester 2007). However, arguably none of the bodies so far discovered are “bog bodies proper” (van der Sanden 1996, 85) with the exception of those found in Guddal (Nordeide 2013, 1-6). “Proper” bog bodies are bodies which



Figure 2: Grauballe Man, pictured when first discovered (Tollundman 2004),



Figure 3: The remains of 4 children from Rogaland (Lillehammer 2001, 49).

are preserved with soft tissues, such as skin. The best known examples include Tollund Man and Grauballe Man from Denmark (see Figure 2), where these bodies have been deliberately deposited in a bog context (Asingh and Lynnerup 2007).

Some of the arguments over numbers arise as we cannot correspond today's map with the past environment (Mitsch and Gosselink 2015, 344-345). Five women were buried in Central Norway in three different sites, but these are only recorded in oral tradition. Out of these five, four were supposedly deposited in swampy water between 30-550AD and the fifth is dated to the Viking Age and buried when the ground was firm, indicative of an ordinary burial. A further two were found in Leinesmyra, north of Trondheim (van der Sanden 1996, 85), just 30cm apart, although they date to two different times (Henriksen and Sylvester 2007, 345-6).

Bog bodies are often associated with mystery and murder, as well as ritual, according to P. V. Glob's book, *The Bog People* (1965). Furthermore, at Bø in Rogaland, bog body remains of four children (see Figure 3), have been linked to infanticide, and a contemporary report by Tacitus in 98AD stated that the punishment for infanticide was “drowning in a morass” (Lillehammer 2001, 49;53). At Skjoldehamn, it is suggested that a body, deposited in a bog, was

“buried for his evil deeds” (Løvlied 2010), although the fact that the deceased was placed on top of a reindeer hide and covered in birch bark (Nordeide 2013, 4) perhaps indicates that it was just a pre-Christian burial.



Figure 4: Clothing materials excavated from the site of Guddal (Nordeide and Thun 2013, 187).

Well preserved bodies seem to generate their own mythology. Out of all the so-called bog bodies in Norway, the “Bleivik funnet” is the most well-known. Although the skeleton was incomplete, it nonetheless inspired songs about the body (iamsirious 2014). Bog bodies are also mentioned in Norse sagas (van der Sanden 1996, 71). However, despite the reservations about bog body discoveries in Norway, the site of Guddal in Western Norway (see Figure 4), contains a burial ground which may fit a “bog bodies proper” definition (Nordeide and Thun 2013, 190). This site is yet to have an extensive archaeological survey, but excavations in 1903 revealed a young woman with long red hair and van der Sanden stated that “every detail of the person could be observed” (Nordeide 2013, 1-6).

Why are Norway’s bog bodies so elusive?

Norway has more peatland than Germany and Denmark, the countries with the most bog body discoveries; the second highest percentage of wetlands; and the third most hectares, as shown by Figure 5 (European Environmental Agency 2017). So why are there so few well-preserved bog bodies?

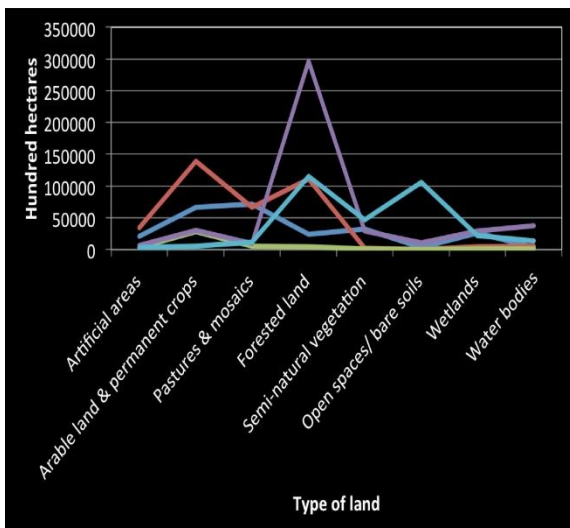


Figure 5: The different percentage of land cover in Norway, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and the UK (European Environment Agency, 2012).

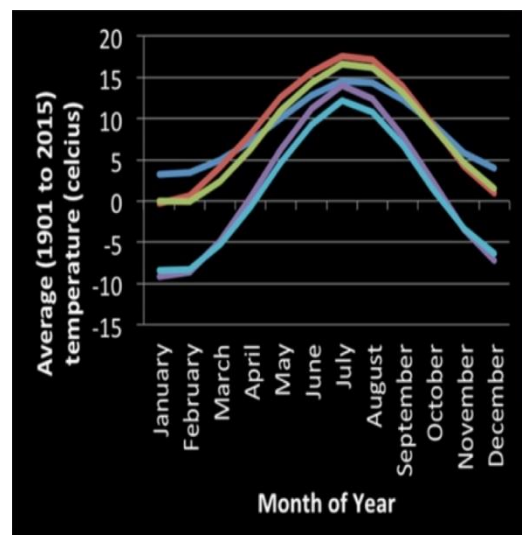


Figure 6: The average temperature Norway, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and the UK (The World Bank Group, 2017).

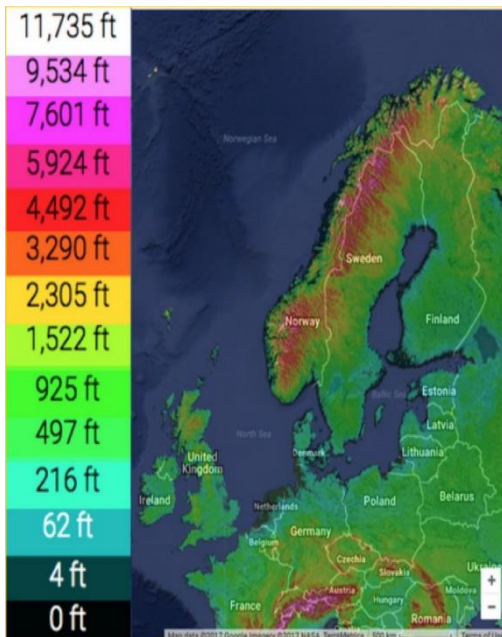


Figure 7: Map showing the topography of Northern Europe (Topographicmap.com, n.d.).

The reasons can be summarised as topography, climate, pH and human factors (Fletcher, A. 2017). Topography affects the number of bog bodies, as human tissue is best preserved in low moors (Aufderheide 2010, 173). On a slope, water does not stay stagnant for enough time to create these bogs (Brothwell and Gill-Robinson 2001, 122), and bogs spread further on flat land than in steeply sided basins (Chapman 2016, 111-2). The topography in Norway is generally more mountainous than the rest of Northern Europe, as shown by Figure 7.

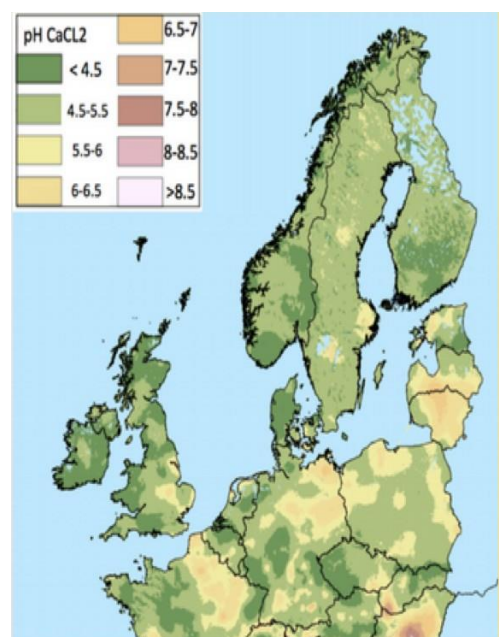


Figure 8: Map showing the different soil pH levels in Northern Europe (European Soil Data Centre 2010).

Climatic conditions also affect bog formation, through temperature, wind and precipitation (Lindsay et al, 1988, 29). Bog body preservation requires temperatures between 0 and 4 degrees Celsius (Jeremiah 2014, 58). As shown in Figure 6, Norway has the coldest temperatures, with an average of 1.02 degrees Celsius throughout the year, which would preserve bog bodies. November is the only month with ideal temperatures, with other months being too warm for good preservation, or too cold to allow bodies to be placed in bogs.

Soil bacteria and insects are not good for body preservation and thrive best at neutral pH values, therefore either high or low pH will aid the preservation of bog bodies (Schotsmans et al. 2017, 124). Aufderheide states that the pH in most bogs yielding mummified remains is around 5.5 to 6.5, very slightly acidic (2010, 174). According to a publication produced by The British Museum, the high pH of a site helps with the preservation of soft tissues but is destructive to the calcium in bones, leaving leathered human soft tissue, with little preservation of bones insides (Wills et al.

2015, 56). In the case of Norway, the land has pH values between Denmark and Germany, as shown in Figure 8, so this is not a reason for few bog bodies being found in Norway.

Human Factors

There are several human factors that will also affect the amount and preservation of bog bodies, such as laws, population, ritual, and modern-day human activities, referred to as anthropogenic activities.

Norway is one of the few countries to introduce laws to restrict peat extraction (World Energy Council 2016), since 1949. With fewer hectares of peat being extracted it is possible that there are bog bodies present in the Norwegian peatland, as yet undiscovered. (Fletcher, A. 2017).

It could be that population numbers could affect the number of bog bodies in Norway. In general, most bog bodies are buried around 0 AD in Northern Europe, a time of change towards a more socially organised society (Coles et al. 1999, 7). Norwegian bog bodies have been dated from 500 BC – 500 AD, roughly corresponding to the Iron Age. This may be linked to migrations of Germanic tribes (Stenersen and Libæk 2007, 15-17). As a result of the problems associated with the dating of finds and population records, it is reasonable to speculate that the population may have been small during this period and, as a result, there was less need to bury the dead in liminal places (Nordeide and Thun 2013, 191).

As mentioned earlier, bog bodies are often associated with ritualistic activities. Bodies have been found with multiple injuries. Many of the bodies found in Northern Europe have evidence of strangulation as well as cut marks (Fletcher, J. 2017). There is also evidence to suggest that the victims ate a ceremonial meal before being killed. Green in her book states that this “murder most horrid” was even an act of divine intervention (2001, 16). Seeing as there are few bodies in Norway, it would therefore be suggestive that Norway had a different belief system. Nordeide and Thun associate the discovery of the site in Guddal with divine intervention, since Canon law stated that all people must be buried within a fenced courtyard. The boggy nature of the land used as a church yard at Guddal led to the preservation of the deceased as bog bodies (2013, 3).

Anthropogenic activity is also a great influencer, as van der Sanden writes: “Bog bodies are wonderful finds, but unfortunately they were discovered far too early” (Nordeide 2013, 7). A possible reason for the uncertainty surrounding the number of bog bodies discovered in Norway is due to there being oral or written notes about bodies that were reburied, desiccated, destroyed or lost (Cowie et al. 2011, 1-45); the records of these bodies are therefore inaccessible.

The search continues

Although the total number of bog bodies in Norway is debatable, it is certainly true that there is a lack of “bog bodies proper”. There are many possible reasons for this, but one thing is for certain: bog bodies will retain their hold on our imagination and continue to fascinate people. The search will go on for these bodies that can tell us tales from the past. When asked if bog bodies in Norway should be studied, H.B. Bjerck, Professor of Archaeology at Bergen, replied “Jeezus...of course” (2017).

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Anthropophagic Engravings: Evoking the Natural World Through Cannibalism in Gough's Cave

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Introduction

For Palaeolithic hunters and their prey, the arena of life and death was universal. The movements of the universe that affected beasts influenced early humanity equally, perhaps causing communities to view themselves as part of naturally occurring cycles of life and death. As such, these hunters acted as active participants in an environment not yet mitigated by technological advances associated with mankind. This concept manifests visually in numerous forms ranging from cave paintings, rock art, wearable objects, and funerary arrangements (Vialou 1998) Yet there are mysterious artefacts pertaining directly to human remains as material culture, which incorporate bone in what is often considered funerary ceremony, cannibalistic ritual, or a combination of the two (Bello 2017). Of particular distinction in this category is a human forearm found in Gough's Cave of Somerset, England, dating to approximately 14,700 BCE (Bello 2015). This bone—a right radius classified as M54074 (Bello 2017)—bears not only evidence of butchery, but also enigmatic engravings that seem to bear no practical purpose. Whilst the general consensus regarding this artefact links it to some form of cannibalistic ritual (Andrews 2003, Balch 1947, Bello 2017, Cook 1991, Currant 1989), the overall purpose of this ascribed behavior has been given little consideration after the observation of cannibalism is made. In examining the engravings of this bone, the human-made decorative marks bear striking similarities to markings left on bones that were gnawed by ungulates (large hooved mammals). I suggest that these similarities are not incidental, but rather visual evidence of attempts made by the community of Gough's Cave to symbolically rationalize acts of cannibalism by mimicking the actions of herbivores that were witnessed uncharacteristically feasting upon animal bones.

A brief archaeological history of the site is necessary to better articulate this hypothesis. Gough's Cave received consistent attention in the public eye after its initial discovery in the 1880s, culminating in its retrofitting as a display space outfitted with electric lights (Currant 1989). In two of the most recent excavations undertaken by the Natural History Museum in 1986 and 1992, a

previously unexamined area revealed the presence of numerous artefacts ranging from stone tools to human remains (Charles 1989). Of these human remains, 205 individual specimens were identified from an assemblage comprising primarily of fragments (of which only five anatomical refittings could be made for certain). Most strikingly, 58% of the postcranial bones are emblazoned with cut-marks associated with butchery, while 32% were cracked to extract marrow (Bello 2017).

Silvia Bello's deliberations about the findings in Gough's Cave have revealed a specific usage of human bone featuring markings both decorative and for de-fleshing, which she refers to as not merely emblematic of cannibalism but rather of a ritualistic quality welded to cannibalism (2015). Bello's supposition is far from unreasonable, as human remains attributed to cultures of late Upper Palaeolithic Europe reveal consistent occurrences of funerary practices involving the removal of flesh from bone. In the French archaeological record alone, less than 10 complete skeletons were found compared to over 200 individuals whose skeletal record manifests disarticulated and fragmented, and, most strikingly, 40% of those 200 individuals bear evidence of de-fleshing (Bello 2017, 170). When viewed even in a strictly utilitarian perspective without consideration for potential ritualism, this evidence infers the practice of cannibalism since the de-fleshing process itself suggests the utilization of muscle tissue for food. Therefore, if the human bones in question at Gough's Cave are indeed indicative of cannibalism, the questions remain of why this cannibalism occurred and why the engravings were necessary. In attempting to explicate my hypothesis regarding the decorative treatment of the human radius bone in Gough's Cave, I rely on formal visual analysis of the bone's various cut-marks, coupled with interpretations derived from the studies of scholars within seemingly disparate anthropological and scientific fields.

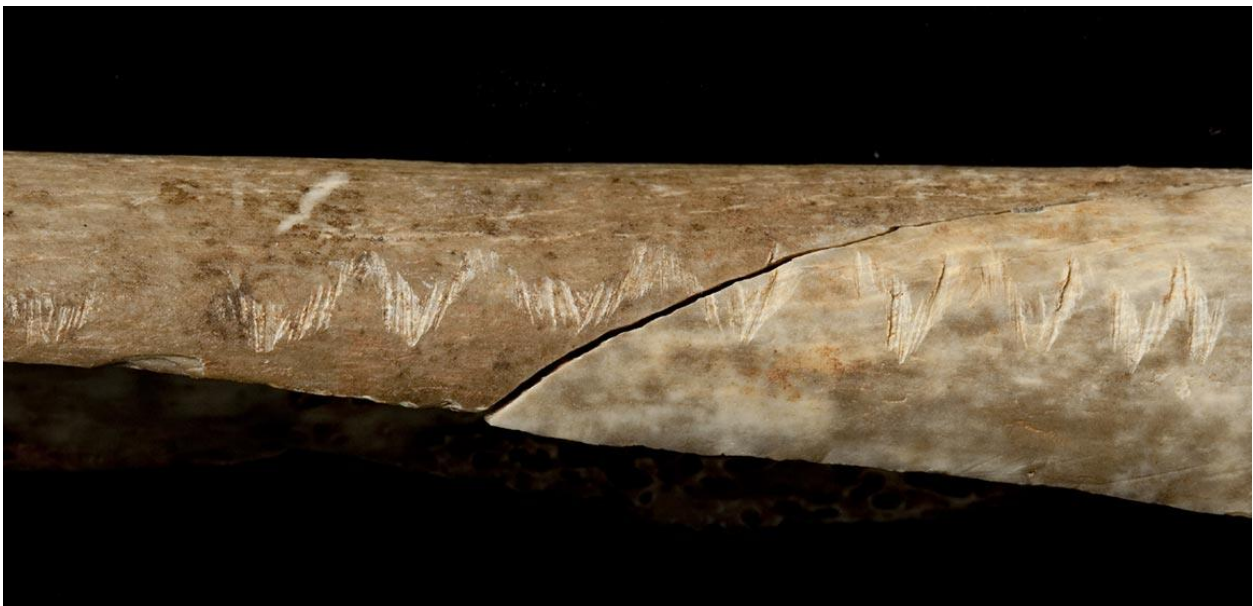


Figure 1: Bone M54074, a forearm excavated from Gough's Cave in Somerset, which displays post-mortem engravings. © The Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London. Licensed under the Open Government Licence.

The Radius in Gough's Cave

Visually, the bone itself is covered in a range of incisions and grooves falling into two broad categories according to the means by which the marks were made; those made as a result of de-fleshing, and those made intentionally for non-utilitarian purposes. Butchery marks consist of two clusters of linear incisions on the proximal end of the anterior side and the distal end of the posterior side, a crack along the length of the bone on the anterior side, and a scattering of human teeth-marks across the proximal end; engraved marks only occur on the anterior side of the radius, nearer to the proximal end rather than the distal (Bello 2017, 2-3). Electron microscope photography reveals distinct differentiations between engraving and filleting, with the former being denoted by single slices and the latter evidenced by less precise sawing patterns (Bello 2017, 4-10). Of these proliferate marks, the engravings are noteworthy in that they form a row of v-shaped arrangements.

Also of note is that these engravings only occur on parts of the bone originally devoid of muscle. In contrast, the two clusters of butchery cuts appear along attachment points for the *extensor pollicis brevis* and *flexor pollicis longus* muscles, lending credence to Bello's assertion that these were made during the process of de-fleshing rather than for decorative purposes. Two other indications of cannibalistic treatment imposed on this bone are human teeth-marks and a crack running lengthwise along the radial shaft, which was likely a result of percussive damage made to access marrow within the bone (Bello 2017, 13). While the percussive crack aligns with no musculature, the teeth marks occur throughout the area of the *pronator quadratus* muscle, implying manual removal of muscle tissue without obvious tool-usage. In this context, the presence of engravings only on areas without evident muscle attachment dismisses these engravings as utilitarian.

While this wealth of visible evidence supports Bello's claim of cannibalistic intent, the purpose of the decorative engravings remains difficult to ascertain. However, the work of ethno-archaeologists and ethnographers may shed light on potential purposes. For example, Erica Hill examines the treatment of butchered seal bones in maintaining sufficient prey for the coming hunting seasons in Yupiit and Inupiat cultures of Southeast Alaska (2012). Numerous sites throughout the Nelson and Nunivak Islands contain middens of seal bone in the archaeological record, often placed at the periphery of human inhabitation bordering pure wilderness (Hill 2012, 48-49). By examining extant regional ethnography, Hill explains these assemblages as evidence of ritualistic behaviours rather than simple middens of post-butchery waste material, asserting that strategically-placed burials of butchered seal bones represent dynamic points of contact between the hunters and the prey (2012, 48).

Such ethnographic data suggests a functional purpose for prehistoric hunting societies to form some manner of metaphysical, inter-species dialogue in that the specific treatment of butchered carcasses was intended to ensure productive hunting seasons. These middens are markedly similar to the assemblage of modified human remains in Gough's Cave, and as such speak to a level of agency on the part of the artist in transforming an otherwise inanimate objects into something that fundamentally alter the movements of the world (Gell 1998, 68).

Deliberate imitation?

Regarding the bone at Gough's Cave, the engravings in question bear similar patterns to naturally occurring marks on animal bone made by the chewing process of other animals. Unexpectedly, grooves found on bones gnawed upon by ungulates bear significant similarity to the engraved human radius in question. The appearance of these marks on animal bone is surprising in and of itself, given the herbivorous nature of ungulates. However, modern-day ungulates have been observed in this act, and the bones they gnawed upon have been examined to determine patterns made by the process (Bowyer 1983, Hutson 2013). Jarod Hutson believes that these animals derive essential minerals—largely calcium—from gnawing bones, thereby filling any potential nutritional gaps occurring in a predominantly vegetarian diet (2013, 4139). Most importantly, the patterns made on bone consequent of this act of herbivorous osteophagia are most significant to my argument. Hutson describes both the resultant patterns and how they are made resulting from herbivores chewing along the long axis of bones—appearing to the onlooker much like the way a cigar is held in someone's mouth—leaving v-shaped marks along the length of the bone (2013, 4140).

These descriptions of v-shaped grooves occurring in perpendicular orientation to the length of the chewed-upon bone bear similarities to the engraved markings on the Gough's Cave radial bone. Hutson provides visual examples in which gnaw-marks made by various ungulates bear commonality in the manifestation of distinctly v-shaped grooves (2013, 4145). Also of note, this gnawing process not only removes any remaining musculature from the bone, but also has the side-effect of polishing it. Hutson recalls a scenario in which a giraffe was observed in the act of osteophagia, further explicating the chewing process earlier described as well as the manner in which bone is cleaned and polished in the process (2013, 4140).

This behavior is not unique to giraffes, as evidenced by Hutson's catalogue of such observed behaviors including various species of deer and antelope—species that are believed to be particularly drawn to osteophagia for increased calcium intake during periods of antler-growth (2013, 4140–4143). In addition, many of these animals were widespread in pre-Holocene Europe compared to contemporary populations that seem to thrive in greater numbers within ecosystems

closer to the equator (Straus 1988, 150). With this in mind, the landscape of Palaeolithic England was profuse with ungulates that could very likely have engaged in the same osteophagic behaviors seen in modern-day species. This suggests a greater likelihood of Palaeolithic hunters seeing prey animals engaging in a form of inadvertent cannibalism during the hours spent stalking. As such, the parallel between ungulates feeding on animal bone and Palaeolithic human cannibalism may become clearer. Perhaps these inhabitants saw no dissimilarity between those acts and cannibalistic acts of their own. By mimicking the practice of polishing and engraving bones, these early humans did not think of themselves as dissimilar from the beasts that inhabited their same environments.

While the presence of animal remains in the archaeological record have typically been relegated to their function sources of nourishment or beasts of burden for human usage, efforts have been made in recent years by archaeological scholars to pay attention to relational ontologies between humanity and animals (Hill 2013, 2014; Willersley 2004). Particularly, the relationship between hunters and prey have been examined in part by acknowledging ties that exist between oral histories and traditional narratives of extant indigenous cultures to those of prehistoric humanity. Erica Hill suggests that “[a] more inclusive prehistory of human-animal relations recognizes the contingent nature of our engagement with animals and embraces the interpretive possibilities of animal personhood (2013, 127).”

The concept of personhood in this case denotes an ontological relationship between early humanity and fauna that suggests animals were considered to be part-person, if not alternate forms of humanity (Willersley 2004, 633–634). As such, the ritual artist of Gough’s Cave visually evokes the grinding teeth of giant Palaeolithic deer in preparing a fallen cohabitant while the same deer unintentionally evokes the ritual artist in scavenging bones. Engraved bones may not merely represent cannibalism, but perhaps Palaeolithic humanity’s awareness of the non-human society they inhabited, and the ability to convey their cognizance through visual means.

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