

rhetorical and aesthetic dimensions' (p. 224); but the subsequent discussion is rather impoverished. Discussion of ethics in archaeology is (mis)represented by one introductory reader, and the possible implications of a Levinasian ethical imperative are only sketched out. Yet this, for example, would also have been an excellent place to grapple with the problem of epistemically competing narratives more recently discussed by Cooper (2006, 145), who tellingly suggests that there is a 'very real issue at stake, one that we should not allow to be disguised by a flaccid rhetoric of the "respect", "openness" and "inclusiveness" that archaeologists should be displaying'. Exactly how 'unconventional' attempts at evocation (or empathy — formerly strongly criticized by Thomas) might 'broaden our appreciation of the richness and unfamiliarity' of past lives (p. 235), rather than those of present-day academics, needs much more than a single paragraph. 'Evocation' or a piece of poetry arguably may be just as indiscriminating (or pointless) a tool for enriching the past as any analytical technique in the wrong circumstances — highlighting an apparent lack is not the same as proposing creatively plausible interpretations (Fleming 2006). Discussion of archaeological democracy and dialogue is limited to managing archaeologists on site. There are thus major lacunae not only in his sketch of what a dialogical and democratic excavation might be like (and which many others have tried to put into practice) — but also about how important issues such as the involvement of other people, groups or communities might be negotiated, and their relationships to 'archaeologists'. Thorny philosophical, ethical and political issues are excluded here. This is very much a professional view looking outwards (and down?). In fieldwork as elsewhere, archaeologists typically have multiple, complex, dynamic and often competing responsibilities and constituencies (Pluciennik & Drew 2000). There are plenty of counter-modern archaeologies in the sense of the exploration of dialogue (Joyce 2002), sensitivity to difference between present and past, and explicit engagements with political and ethical stances. Thomas might argue that grappling with the above is too much to expect from a book rather trying to out-line some of the consequences of archaeology's symbiotic history with other aspects of modernity. Rhetorically though, this book relies too much on exaggeration and, ironically, totalization, to make points which are partly valid but, equally, partial: the characterization of archaeology seems to stop somewhere around 1980; Cartesianism is simply 'wrong'; 'modern thought' denies 'the possibility of any other perspective' or of 'shared ethical values' (p. 229). I would argue — and I think the book suggests and is itself evidence of this too — that, insofar as 'modernity'

has a coherent meaning and structure, it has been enabling as well as constraining.

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Neolithic Scotland: Timber, Stone, Earth and Fire, by Gordon Noble, 2006. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; ISBN 0-7486-2337X hardback £55 & US\$90; ISBN 0-7486-2338-8 paperback £22.99 & US\$35; x+262 pp., 143 ills.

Alison Sheridan

Neolithic Scotland sets out (p. 2) to present 'a synthesis and interpretation of countless excavations and previous interpretations of the Scottish Neolithic' to the general public, producing 'a volume that considers the entirety

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of the Scottish Neolithic, no matter how tentative, general or provisional the conclusions'. Since it forms part of a wider, ongoing debate about the nature of the Mesolithic–Neolithic transition in Britain and Ireland, we can note with approbation that Noble is no slave to the 'indigenous acculturation' school of thought. He is not afraid to acknowledge that the changes that occurred at the beginning of the fourth millennium were substantial, and to claim that 'indigenous hunter-gatherers may have had relatively little input into the introduction of new forms of material culture, plants and animals' (p. 43). He accepts the possibility that there had been some population movement, even if he stops short of articulating a clear model of Continental immigration, of identifying specific potential areas of origin, or of discussing the socio-economic dynamics in Continental Europe that might have been responsible.

The book's key themes and structure are set out in the Introduction, along with a brief and incomplete 'history' of Scottish Neolithic studies. The themes are stated to be a presentation of regional variability within broader historical trajectories and a focus on areas of Scotland other than Orkney.

Chapter 1 presents the geographical and palaeo-environmental background and divides 'The Neolithic' into an Earlier Neolithic (4000–3300 BC), characterized by regionalized traditions in monuments and material culture, and a Later Neolithic (3300–2500 BC), characterized by massive circular enclosures and Grooved Ware. Chapter 2 discusses actual and alleged evidence for *pre-4000 BC* 'Neolithic' activity in Ireland, the Isle of Man, some of the Hebridean islands and Arran. The maritime orientation of such island communities, he claims, brought them into early contact with Continental farmers, and this will have served as a catalyst for the wholesale adoption of farming in these areas around 4000 BC. Noble goes on to argue for a difference between Neolithization in Atlantic Scotland and in the eastern lowlands.

Chapters 3 and 4 explore this 'eastern' Early Neolithic, emphasizing the extensive use of trees and timber in domestic and ceremonial structures (including non-megalithic barrows) and exploring the symbolic significance of trees as metaphors for people and for human existence. Deliberate burning of most of these structures — a dramatic, ritualized, intense experience for the participants — is interpreted as a way of creating memories of an ancestral past: 'Through destruction, something more permanent was created' (p. 70). Burning of timber funerary structures is presented as a metaphor for the transformation of the soft human corpse into hard cremated remains. His discussion of non-megalithic barrows in Britain and Ireland includes a lengthy discourse on the function and symbolic sig-

nificance of split-trunk settings, previously interpreted by some as mortuary houses or exposure platforms. Noble rejects these interpretations, arguing for the symbolic primacy of the split tree, set up and allowed to decay *in situ*: 'the dead were offered to the place where the tree had decayed' (p. 93).

Chapter 5, 'Megalithic architecture in Atlantic Scotland' (including the northeast mainland), highlights regional variability but argues that a consistent and widespread change can be discerned, from the use of simple, small, often closed chambers, to larger, more elaborate monuments that allowed access to the human remains within and provided areas such as forecourts for public gatherings. This is interpreted as a change in the relationship between the living and the dead, from where the dead were simply disposed of, allowing the living to sever their links with them and move on, to one where the ancestors were central to ideas of kinship, identity and inheritance, and were thus the focus of ancestral rites.

Chapters 6 and 7 deal with the Late Neolithic. Chapter 6 reviews ceremonial complexes in different parts of Scotland. Noble argues that they are located on significant routeways, facilitating inter-regional communication, and would have been constructed by and for 'extensive networks of [small-scale] dispersed communities' (p. 192) with 'fluid' power structures. They are located in areas that had seen lengthy previous human activity. Chapter 7 seeks to demonstrate that their architecture was designed to draw people in while, in some cases, allowing privileged access for certain participants. Monument design, he argues, drew on domestic architecture; following Colin Richards, he uses Skara Brae and Barnhouse as his principal examples, and suggests that social structure was modelled on that of the household. Noble points to the high incidence of non-local artefacts found in ceremonial complexes as support for his idea that they were meeting places for dispersed communities.

Chapter 8, covering the 'Early Bronze Age', *c.* 2500 (no mention of a twenty-fifth to twenty-third century Chalcolithic) to 1600 BC, proposes that the appearance of Beaker pottery and other novelties around 2500 BC indicated 'escalated contact between the British Isles and the Continent' (p. 219), resulting in deconstruction of past practices and traditions, a remodelling of society, and a shift in the dominant route for Continental contacts from the Atlantic to the North Sea.

The volume is a bold and interesting attempt to shake the kaleidoscope of evidence and to present a new and comprehensive account. Has the author got his facts right? Are his arguments convincing, adequately substantiated, well presented? Would someone who knows nothing about Neolithic Scotland be enlightened

by this book? The answer to most of these, alas, is 'No' even if the author is commended for trying.

Space permits just one substantive example to be discussed here: his argument that the western (Atlantic façade) seaway and its maritime island communities played a key role in a wholesale switch to 'Neolithic' life around 4000 BC. The crux of his argument is the contentious assertion that migration of incoming agricultural groups 'is a *process* that almost always depends on contact with, and knowledge of, the destination' (p. 42). Noble infers that there must have been regular two-way contact with the Continent over the course of the fifth millennium BC but the Ferriter's Cove evidence for the precocious appearance of west French cattle in Ireland in a late Mesolithic context remains a one-off, with no other unequivocal evidence for 'Neolithic' material in Ireland until towards the end of that millennium. Although Noble cites the article that demonstrates this, he fails to take this fact on board. Elsewhere, his argument rests on contentious evidence (e.g. claims for pre-elm decline cereal pollen), and on a model of Mesolithic–Neolithic continuity at Billown (Isle of Man) which its excavator has had occasion to re-think. Furthermore, in using field systems as one of his signs of a settled Neolithic in the islands of the west and north, he elides evidence from different places and times: the Céide Fields in Co. Mayo date not to the earliest Irish Neolithic, but to c. 3600 BC, while the Shetland field systems are yet later. These fields have nothing to do with the appearance of either the Breton-derived Atlantic Neolithic between 4200 and 3900 BC or the northeast French 'Carinated Bowl (CB) Neolithic' that appeared around the thirty-ninth century BC (Sheridan 2004).

Indeed, these two major strands of Neolithization fail to appear as clearly articulated phenomena, even though Noble is right (for the wrong reasons) to emphasize that the western seaboard was an important route for the transmission of a new way of life around 4000 BC. In drawing a distinction between 'west' and 'east', he gives the misleading impression that the CB Neolithic was limited to the east, when sites such as Lochhill, Slewcairn and Cairnholy I in southwest Scotland, and the entire CB Neolithic in Ireland, the Isle of Man, Wales and much of England, provide plentiful evidence that we are dealing with a truly widespread phenomenon.

The book ignores and virtually excludes material culture. His brief section on Neolithic pottery, for instance, is a half understood, misquoted and poorly illustrated mish-mash. Carved stone balls, one of the most intriguing and symbol-laden categories of Scottish Neolithic material culture, get mentioned only once; and jadeite axeheads, a striking feature of the CB Neolithic, do not get a look in at all.

The lack of discussion (and, dare one say it, of knowledge) of the Continental Neolithic leaves a gap where the question of the origins of Continental aspects of the Scottish Neolithic comes in. There has been plenty of discussion in recent Anglophone publications; it seems curious that, while Gordon Barclay's 2002 report on the Claish hall is included in the bibliography, there is no comment on Barclay's discussion there of Continental comparanda for this structure (or indeed of this reviewer's discussion, in the same publication, of the Continental background to CB pottery).

Radiocarbon dates seem to be treated as a necessary evil, to be covered by uncritically compiled and inadequately documented, tables which also omit many important recently-obtained examples. The lack of source criticism extends to excavation results, where often Noble relies on commentators' opinions rather than on original sources. This, and an apparent lack of attention to the content of publications listed in the bibliography, has resulted in one of the book's most egregious errors. On p. 200 we are told that, at Skara Brae, 'Unlike the other houses, the door of house 7 can also be controlled from the outside (Clark [sic.] 2000[sic.]): 90'; and that 'As Colin Richards has shown the other houses at Skara Brae were comparatively clean and house 7 was the only house where large numbers of artefacts were found'. In fact, the cited article — by David Clarke (and dated 2003, not 2000) — actually exploded both of these Skara Brae myths.

Other sins abound. To name but a few: i) straw man arguments (e.g. the basic premises underlying the book's key themes, or the incorrect assertion that 'the sea is notably absent in accounts of the Neolithic period' [p. 25]); ii) increasingly confident presentation of unsubstantiated assertions as facts (e.g. regarding the date of the Twelve Apostles stone circle); iii) major omissions (e.g. due discussion of Kinnes's views on non-megalithic funerary monuments; the Orkney Vole and the role of links with Ireland c. 3100 BC in the emergence of Maes Howe-type passage tombs; any discussion of the possible links between Clyde Cairns and non-megalithic funerary structures); and iv) self-contradictory arguments (e.g. closed funerary monuments as indicating cutting of links with the dead (p. 132), against the construction of closed non-megalithic monuments as a way of monumentalizing past generations and keeping their memory alive). Furthermore, bibliographic conventions are not always correctly followed. A final, infuriating aspect of the volume is its illustrations. Not only do we have the fashionable inclusion of the frankly vacuous (e.g. figs. 4.19–22 of modern trees, or fig. 2.1, a view of the sea captioned 'The tides and currents of the sea'); we also find that perfectly good line drawings have been manipulated: was this to avoid the process

of obtaining copyright permissions? In some cases (e.g. figs. 5.11–12) the end result looks downright mangled. Sources are not always cited, and this is a discourtesy to authors and publishers. There are also occasional howlers, such as fig. 6.21, where 'Temple Wood' should say 'the Twelve Apostles', and fig. 1.1, where 'England' is emblazoned across Wales!

Neolithic Scotland could, and should, have been much better. In this reviewer's opinion, this book has fallen victim to a combination of circumstances: the understandable desire of a recent PhD graduate to publicize his research; the inexorable pressure of the University Research Assessment Exercise to produce publications; and a publisher's desire to produce an attractive-sounding volume as quickly and as cheaply as possible. While the book contains much that is of interest, it contains little that is genuinely new or that would stand up to rigorous examination, and its presentational and scholarly failings vitiate what should have been an excellent contribution.

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From Tools to Symbols: from Early Hominids to Modern Humans, edited by Francesco d'Errico & Lucinda Backwell, 2005. Johannesburg: Wits University Press; ISBN 1-86814-434-8 hardback £38.94 & US\$59.95; ISBN 1-86814-411-9 paperback £26.49 & US\$39.95; xxxii+574 pp., 140 figs., 33 tables

John D. Speth

There are many books dealing with human evolution; and, when it comes to modern human origins, the meters of shelving needed to house the stream of volumes is taking over the task of winterizing my home. So it was a delightful surprise, when I began working my

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way into yet another addition to this array of tomes, to find it filled with fresh ideas and new looks at old issues. I enjoyed reading *From Tools to Symbols* and I learned a lot in the process. Though reviewers can always find things to quibble about, I think the over-all impact of a book is what really matters and on that score this one does very well. *From Tools to Symbols* began as a conference in 2003 at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. The scholarly get-together had two agendas, one to honour Phillip Tobias, the other to celebrate the long history of cooperation and intellectual cross-fertilization between South African and French prehistorians, a scholarly bond fittingly symbolized by the conference organizers and volume editors, one South African (Backwell), the other French (d'Errico).

Doing justice to *From Tools to Symbols* in a brief review is a daunting task, and to keep this endeavour within bounds it will not be possible to delve into each of the 27 contributions. Instead, I explore only a handful of them, and extend my apologies to those whose papers I mention only briefly.

In his opening contribution, Tobias sets the stage by briefly commenting on the long and productive interchange between French and South African scholars. Schlanger, a few pages later, develops these ideas, tracing the impact that early twentieth-century French Palaeolithic prehistory had on the development of the discipline in South Africa, and the reciprocal influence that South African archaeologists, particularly Van Riet Lowe, had on French scholarship. I found it particularly interesting that, according to Schlanger, Van Riet Lowe already in the 1930s shifted away from the predominant focus at the time on stone tool typology to a concern for the way tools were made. Schlanger suggests that Van Riet Lowe's ideas influenced François Bordes and ultimately intertwined with the trajectory of thought emanating from Leroi-Gourhan to coalesce into the current French interest in *chaînes opératoires*.

For convenience, I have grouped the remaining contributions into three sections, the first with three papers that look at links between intelligence, technology, and culture, the second with eight papers that explore issues related to early hominins, and a final group of thirteen papers that focus on modern human origins. The period between 1.5 and 0.3 million years ago (mya), unfortunately, gets conspicuously short shrift in this book.

In the first group, C.K. Brain raises an interesting question seldom addressed in palaeoanthropological circles — if technology provides such significant benefits to humans and was a driving force in their evolution, why have other animals not evolved in similar fashion? To answer this, he first identifies a set of basic