

# The tip of the iceberg? Reply to responses

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We would like to thank all four authors for their thoughtful responses to our paper and the assemblage it describes. In some cases those comments confirmed things we had thought already, but in others they surprised us, confronting us with ideas that we had never previously considered. Collectively this has made us think hard about future research possibilities.

We were very glad to note that everyone was in broad agreement about the interest and importance—but also the rather confusing character—of the assemblage recovered at Old Quay. For example, Warren highlights the “transformative power of archaeological research” (p. 972) (something that we too picked up on in our paper)—as he puts it, “we can find the unexpected and it can make us look at things anew” (p. 972). Equally, Marchand discusses the fact that the assemblage “challenges the most deeply embedded ideas of Mesolithic specialists” (p. 974), raising the rather confusing issue of ‘southern’ style lateralisation in a ‘northern’ style artefact assemblage. Thomas too suggests that the Old Quay assemblage adds an important new dimension to our understandings of the relationship(s) between Britain and Ireland and continental Europe during the fifth millennium BC, and thus also the wider debates surrounding these.

As well as confirming our broader feelings about the significance of the assemblage, the four commentators introduced various new dimensions to our appreciation of the material. Crombé adds further weight to the suggestion that the microliths are most likely to date to the fifth millennium BC, highlighting their proximity to the Mesolithic–Neolithic transition in Britain. He reminds us that, during the latter part of the fifth millennium BC, widespread transformations along similar lines were occurring right around the North Sea; the events and processes that led to the presence of *trapèze asymétrique*-type microliths at Old Quay may well have been bound up in this much broader period of change. Staying with the process(es) of transition, Marchand also makes the very interesting observation that the east–west connections along the length of the Channel observed in our paper are perpendicular to those suggested by Sheridan (2010) for the same period. This does not render her model ‘wrong’, but rather stresses that the process of transition may well have been a ‘messy’ one occurring in multiple directions (see Anderson-Whymark & Garrow 2015). On this note, Thomas raises the intriguing possibility that the groups visiting Old Quay during the Late Mesolithic may well have been composed of people from a disparate

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suite of places (not just one), conjuring up a very interesting image of the waters around Britain as a melting pot of different groups from different locations (who would, of course, have made microliths in different ways).

Both Crombé and Thomas pick up on the newly reported evidence of wheat DNA from Bouldner Cliff, Isle of Wight (Smith *et al.* 2015). In that study, Smith *et al.* argue that the wheat signature is indicative of transported products around 6000 BC, rather than early agricultural activity on the island. This would suggest extensive interaction networks across broad swathes of Europe (not just along coastal and riverine corridors), with domesticated wheat moving over the continent far faster and much earlier than any other dataset has previously indicated. This discovery is intriguing for the reactions it promotes and the broader implications it raises. Although questions of taphonomy are certainly of interest within the context of the Old Quay microliths, they become of central importance within the Bouldnor study. The material nature of our microlith finds engenders a different set of questions and concerns than those raised by the wheat DNA. This being said, both sets of data force a cognitive readjustment and require careful consideration. Significantly, this cognitive process relates not solely to what we think happened in the past, but how we function as researchers today.

As Warren notes, engagement with the data that we have presented requires us to reconsider well-established narratives born of national research traditions. This is not an easy thing to do. As they do not fit with what is expected, for some the inclination might be to discount such finds as anomalous and therefore of little material or interpretive meaning. If we follow this route however, we can never benefit from the transformative power of the unexpected. To do this, we need to be able to keep an open mind through the peer-review process, to accept that the unexpected may be possible and certainly worth discussing. It is for this reason that we took pains to put forward multiple hypotheses as to how the Old Quay assemblage may have been generated. In a similar way, the wheat signature from Bouldnor is valuable not for what it definitively tells us about the past, but for the way in which it forces us to consider how it may have been generated and what this means for future research.

A number of interesting points were raised about future work that could answer some of the questions that the Old Quay material throws up. Marchand and Thomas, independently, both use the phrase “tip of the iceberg”, suggesting that perhaps, once we start looking, we may yet find more evidence of contact along these lines—especially along the south coast of England; this is certainly a possibility that others have raised with us as well. As a community, we will all have to start looking (with an open mind) and who knows what might emerge. Crombé suggests that we also look hard amongst our Neolithic pottery from the site for signs of continental contact—a good idea, but one that has not thus far borne fruit, with the assemblage being largely unremarkable stylistically and with no obvious continental origins. The material is similar to that found on the Cornish mainland from during the fourth millennium BC. In relation to future research, Warren stresses that in order to make such connections (in the Mesolithic or Neolithic) we need to work across modern national borders (and indeed typologies). He very kindly commends us for our engagement with the “loving detail of French lithic typology” (p. 972), something which was indeed a linguistic as well as a typological challenge. As our acknowledgements make clear, we are extremely grateful for

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all of the help we received from those with a more intimate understanding of the material in establishing those connections. Continental connections in the past require continental connections in the present in order for us to see them—we are lucky to have happened upon such an intriguing assemblage, and to have had such a lot of help in interpreting it (both in writing the initial paper and subsequently within this comments section).

## References

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