

provenancing requires good thin-section petrography supplemented by accurate geochemistry, plus experience. Already these truths are being neglected, perhaps even negated, and it may be that in fifty years the portable XRF machine, or rather its indiscriminate and uncritical use, will be seen as one of the banes of early twenty-first-century archaeology.

But it is to be hoped not, for this book encapsulates what could, should and can be done with an academic life filled with lithics, imagination and flair.

Allen, J R L 2014. *Whetstones from Roman Silchester (Calleva Atrebatum), North Hampshire. Character, Manufacture, Provenance and Use: 'Putting an edge on it'*, BAR Brit Ser 597, Oxford

ROBERT IXER

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*Ritual in Early Bronze Age Grave Goods: an examination of ritual and dress equipment from Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age graves in England.* Edited by ANN WOODWARD and JOHN HUNTER. 310 mm. Pp 616, 41 col figs, 7 maps, 26 charts, 158 tables, appendices, CD. Oxbow Books, Oxford and Philadelphia, 2015. ISBN 9781782976943. £80 (hbk).

This impressive tome represents the happy medium between compendium and academic treatise and is the result of a six-year Leverhulme Trust research project involving the careful examination of some 5,665 objects from 780 individual graves. Temporally comparing the Beaker and Early Bronze Age material, this project involved a bevy of experts whose thorough notes and material analyses from the entire country (with concentrations in Wessex, East Yorkshire and the Peak District) produced an archive of 5,860 photographs accompanied by detailed descriptions and systematic material identifications and analyses.

Perhaps the greatest advantage to this work is that it is organisationally very user-friendly. After discussing the range and scope of the project and its scientific methodology, *Ritual in Early Bronze Age Grave Goods* goes on to include six chapters that address items of grave equipment (eg belt fittings, daggers and objects made from bone or antler) and personal adornment (such as

buttons, dress pins, gold and necklaces). Each chapter is very clearly subdivided by type of object or object material and is addressed within the text by the specific specialist for that artefact/material category (ie Stuart Needham for copper alloys and Alison Sheridan for jet). Extant typologies were expanded upon or devised as needed.

The authors also took on the much-needed task of systematically examining necklaces by region as well as by material. This investigation accounts for nearly 200 pages of the text and is truly awe-inspiring in terms of the painstaking care and amount of detail that were required in its production. (To put this in the proper perspective, of the 5,665 items examined in this treatise, 4,778 were individual beads contained within a series of eighty-one necklaces.) However, this volume is a far cry from being 'merely' an expert and exhaustive compendium of English Beaker and Early Bronze Age (EBA) grave goods. The last portion of the book places the findings in context, addressing chronology, object life stories, object function and regional variation. Then comes a concluding chapter, though this takes more the form of project overview and assessment than in-depth consideration of major Chalcolithic and Bronze Age thematic trends.

Aside from the advances made by the investigation of copper alloys and the identification of various raw materials (including, notably, the use of Whitby jet in Wessex and Sussex within both the Beaker period and the EBA), some interesting conclusions were drawn in relation to the specific uses to which various categories of artefacts were put. Use-wear analysis indicated that many objects hitherto interpreted as tools seem in actuality to have been used as special costume elements (eg bone tweezers were more some kind of clip than a depilatory device). Indeed, ritual costume seems to have been the major overarching conclusion drawn from the book. The investigation of the use of heirlooms suggests that not only were they already present in Beaker times, but that their use remained fairly stable throughout the entirety of the periods under investigation. Although some trends were noted for specific kinds of heirloom necklaces (or parts thereof), the authors recommend that further experimental research be conducted for their fascinating conclusions to be ratified.

Although *Ritual in Early Bronze Age Grave Goods* does not delve into the body of theory involved in Bronze Age studies, the conclusions it draws are an excellent stepping-off point for future material-based research in that vein both within England and abroad. Although it would

perhaps have benefited from more maps, Woodward and Hunter's volume will nonetheless both enable and engender a wealth of upcoming cross-Channel comparison studies, especially with the easy access (CD) of the data from the appendices. Chalcolithic and Bronze Age scholars will thrill to the new paper tool in their analytical repertoire. My copy is on order!

SAMANTHA REITER

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*Essays on the Archaeology and Ancient History of the Maltese Islands: Bronze Age to Byzantine.* By MARIO BUHAGIAR. 240mm. Pp xxiii + 498, ills (some col), maps, plans. Midsea Books, Sta Venera Malta, 2014. ISBN 9789993274827. €55 (hbk).

There is a tradition in some quarters that encourages the publication of a scholar's past work in its unedited and original form. A collection of past essays allows one the opportunity of tracing the earlier work of a notable authority on their subject, seeing how the work of their mature years has developed and perhaps judging its impact. These collected essays by Mario Buhagiar are such an example; material gathered over the last thirty-five years or more into a book comprising nineteen essays on various historical and archaeological themes about the Maltese islands between later prehistory and the Byzantine period. The author is a noted art historian first and foremost, and his approach is largely within those traditions of scholarship.

The book is handsomely produced, on good paper in hard covers and it is a well-edited and generally accurate volume, continuing an impressive tradition of academic publications from Malta on historical themes. It contains copious footnotes, an extensive bibliography and a selection of illustrations. The chapters range across the subjects that have absorbed much of the author's career: Roman–Byzantine Malta, early Christianity in Malta as expressed through necropolises and catacombs, iconography, traditions around St Paul, and occasional other themes such as the Bronze Age fortifications of Malta. Published/written or presented between 1983 and the last decade, and mostly in Malta for a largely Maltese audience, the essays are of a particular and local tradition that has a quite

antiquarian feel, and rather little sense of international critical discussion. The papers intend to reflect the wide-ranging interests of the writer, and this they certainly achieve. However, there seem to have been almost no bibliographic updates for most of the essays, which without even a postscript or short review are caught in the aspic of time rather than providing a new commentary as a base for current work.

This lack of revision (a four-and-a-half-page preface suffices) makes the book less satisfactory than it might have been had the goal been to assess how the earlier scholarship is reflected in current thinking. Even a short postscript or paragraph of explanation could have been added to each paper to the great benefit of the publication. Given that much has happened in some of the volume's thematic areas, both within and outside Malta, commentary on the last decades of work is an omission, especially when the debates have been developed by Buhagiar's students and colleagues. For this reviewer, the unrevised reprint of old material without a critical appraisal is probably a mistake, given that publication of the present and topical is normally demanded by publishers and universities alike. This interesting book has considerable merit, but is the poorer for its lack of criticality of past or present scholarship, making the collection of essays a historical artefact rather than an ongoing discussion. Buhagiar is in a position to discuss where the scholarship is and should be going, but that chance is missed.

In editorial terms, while the text is well written and proofed, not all the chapters are useful or justified for inclusion without a postscript that corrects the interpretations and facts. In particular, the first chapter on the Bronze Age fortifications is a commentary on much earlier scholarship, and written entirely from a descriptive historical perspective. Many issues relating to the Bronze Age are under critical debate today following survey, excavation and dating, but the sweeping statements, without comment or comprehension of the immense timespan implied, do not merit re-publication when the references are no more recent than c 1980.

The subsequent chapters on Roman Malta are more satisfactory, but even here they are a commentary drawing on Classical texts and history implied by Ptolemy, Cicero, the New Testament, epigraphy, odd Roman coin finds, general surveys of sites and so on. This rather uncritical scholarship draws on obscure records and catalogues of museum reports, finds, notes in reports and objects, and is exhaustive and admirable, but fails to propose what remedy