

But in what ways? Many historians would say that the real turning point in the story of global connections came not in 1300 but around 1500, when European sailors crossed the Atlantic and entered the Indian Ocean, transforming the geostrategic relations between the continents. Others would put the big break around 1700, when the gunpowder armies of China, Persia, Russia and Turkey finally succeeded in closing down the steppe highway that dominates Cunliffe's story. Others still opt for 1800 (or even 1850), when the industrial revolution made it possible for a few nations to project power globally. Each argument depends on a larger theory about the shape of world history, the workings of geography or even the fundamental properties of human nature, but Cunliffe shies away from this level of analysis.

What he does give us, however, is a magnificent and visually stunning account of over 11 000 years of human expansion. *By steppe, desert, and ocean* should become a classic.

Reference

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DAVID J. MELTZER. *The Great Paleolithic War: how science forged an understanding of America's ice age past*. 2015. xix+670 pages, 18 b&w illustrations, 9 tables. Chicago (IL): University of Chicago Press; 978-0-226-29322-6 hardback \$55 & £38.50.



David Meltzer is at the forefront of research into the colonisation and early settlement of North America, which he superbly synthesised in his *First Peoples in a New World* (2009).

Here, he explores how the antiquity of humankind was eventually demonstrated in North America between 1862—when the Smithsonian issued a circular urging people to look for artefacts that

might demonstrate a Pleistocene human antiquity comparable to that in Europe—and 1927, when the site of Folsom, Texas, clearly showed stone projectile points among the bones of extinct bison.

And what a complex and fascinating story it is. Briefly, many thought that a North American palaeolithic had been demonstrated by 1889 on the basis of artefacts that seemed similar to 'palaeoliths' in Europe. These claims were effectively trashed in the early 1890s. There followed the 'Great Paleolithic War', with claims for human antiquity repeatedly being offered, contested and rejected, often acrimoniously, until peace finally broke out in 1927 when artefacts found embedded in the ribs of bison at Folsom were sensibly left in place so that the association could be independently verified by experts. That part of the excavation was then encased in plaster and transported intact for public display. Thereafter, Clovis and a suite of other sites clearly showed by 1941 that humans had been in North America since the late Pleistocene, and had probably entered at the end of the last ice age from north-eastern Asia via Beringia. Thus, after decades of inconclusive wrangling, the broad outline of early North American prehistory was formed in little more than a decade between 1928 and 1941, with Clovis and Folsom as the earliest components; this consensus was not disturbed until Tom Dillehay showed in the 1990s that Monte Verde in Chile was even older than Clovis in North America.

The 'Great Paleolithic War' was a complex affair that revolved around which types of evidence were conclusive, how they might be verified and by whom. It took place when palaeontology, Pleistocene geology, geochronology and palaeolithic archaeology were in their formative stages in the USA. Initially, the main protagonists, as in Britain, were amateur members of local historical and natural history societies; gradually, they were supplanted by the growth of a centrally funded professional elite in state-funded institutions such as the Smithsonian, the Bureau of American Ethnology and professional organisations such as the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the National Academy of Sciences, within which there were their own elites of fellows. There were thus institutional, as well as personal, rivalries; inter-disciplinary boundaries, as well as intra-disciplinary ones (such as tensions between State and Federal Agencies). As an additional complicating factor, many of the protagonists loathed each other.

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

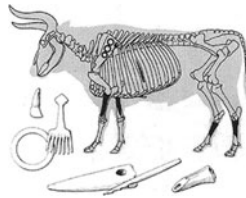
This book, 670 pages long, with 100 pages of endnotes and almost 50 pages of references, is the outcome of immense scholarship and meticulous research. It is also a labour of love; this is not a dry catalogue of past errors and triumphs, but a gripping account of the protagonists and the issues, claims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

References

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



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

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

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

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

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