

A Study of Palaeolithic Artefacts from Selected Sites on Deposits Mapped as Clay-with-Flints of Southern, England

Vicky Winton

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Winton's book is a publication of her doctoral thesis work completed at the University of Oxford in 2002 under the direction of Derek Roe and Julie Scott-Jackson. The subject matter is as the title describes it. The so-called Clay-with-Flints deposits are sediments, not necessarily clays, located on the plateaus and hilltops of southern England, an area rich in Lower Paleolithic sites. Winton emphasizes hilltops and plateau deposits, arguing from the work of Scott-Jackson there, that these are a primary, *in situ*, context unlike similar slope and valley deposits in secondary context. From these deposits, Winton looked at two collections in particular: Wood Hill (Kent) and Dickett's Field (Hampshire).

These two assemblages are the volume's principal difficulty. They present numerous challenges for thesis writing, including small sample sizes, biased and variable collection methodologies, and difficult to non-existent archaeological context. Wood Hill is a relatively recently collected sample of surface and excavated material. The total sample size is 600 artifacts, less than half of which come from excavations, including three handaxes, five handaxe fragments, and assorted tools (exact counts are difficult to establish as artifacts are described piece by piece and summary tables are not provided). Adding to the difficulty of this assemblage is evidence that it derives from three separate occupation layers that for various methodological and geological reasons can not be reconstituted in the collection. Thus, Winton is obliged to treat the collection as whole. Dickett's Field consists of material recovered from surface collections spread over four decades starting in the 1920s. It has been analyzed, under the name Holybourne, by a number of authors and there is some debate as to whether the collection is Acheulian, Mousterian of Acheulian Tradition, or a perhaps a mix of the two, and some have argued that the assemblage is not *in situ*. Here too the size and typological character of the collection that Winton uses in her work is difficult to assess, but it is again small enough that piece by piece descriptions of most of it are possible.

What Winton does to overcome the difficulties of these assemblages is to rely on experimentally derived supplemental data to aid in interpretation. For instance, Chapter 2 is built around the study of the waste flakes resulting from the experimental manufacture of a single, ovate handaxe. This then serves as the basis of her analysis in the following two chapters of the Wood Hill tools and debitage. Following this is an experimental study in Chapter 5 in which a few handaxes of different shapes are used to butcher a red deer. Slightly over four minutes of video from this experiment is included in a companion CD-ROM. In addition, Winton studies the handaxes produced by novice and skilled flintknappers in an effort to determine what aspects of handaxes can be used to assess knapping skill. Chapter 6 is a presentation of the Dickett's Field assemblage and the recent survey work done there, and Chapter 7 is an experimental study in alteration sources including patina, staining, and physical damage. This work is motivated by the condition of the surface collected artifacts at Dickett's Field, and in the end Winton is able to develop a model relating the sedimentological environment to the patination. This information is then placed into the context of landscape

scale variation in sediments and expectations for the kinds of patina in various locations and for artifacts of various time periods.

The final chapter is primarily an overview and summary of the findings outlined in each chapter. Here, Winston attempts to use her data set to comment on existing debates and ideas concerning Lower/Middle Paleolithic behaviors including mobility, tool re-use, tool re-sharpening, the effects of raw material on reduction strategies and final form, and the role of handaxes in Paleolithic society. But this is where the limitations of Winston's data set, including the replicative experiments, with their small sample sizes and explicit emphasis on piece by piece descriptions, become most problematic.

For example, in Chapter 5 Winton conducts an experimental study of handaxe manufacture using two skilled and three novice flint-knappers to determine which handaxe attributes can be used to assess skill. Based on these results, she suggests that handaxes F38 and BF7 from Wood Hill were made by skilled knappers. She then argues that the shapes produced by skilled knappers are a more reliable indicator of desired shape, and, because the shapes of F38 and BF7 are quite different, they must have been made for different tasks. Next, based on the experimental butchery of a red deer, she concludes that different shapes have different butchering properties and, therefore, White's arguments—that in the absence of raw material constraints ovates are the preferred form—cannot be supported.

It is questionable whether inferences drawn from two handaxes from one site with context issues, five modern humans experimentally knapping handaxes, and one modern human, butchering one deer (with its head, lower limbs and internal organs already removed due to foot and mouth regulations) with six handaxes of different shapes can inform us on the validity of White's detailed, quantitative, replicable, study of 1,266 handaxes from 20 British handaxe assemblages. Similar argumentation is found throughout this volume, and when the volume is viewed as a thesis, some of this is understandable. However, Winton's thesis is also characteristic of a growing body of Paleolithic literature that emphasizes detailed morphological and technological studies of small samples and individual artifacts as an effective way to understand past behavior. The point here is not to debate this approach, but rather to sound a word of caution when attempting to use inferences drawn from one type of study to question the conclusions of studies done using other methodologies.

In sum, Winston has difficulty overcoming the limitations of the data set to comment more broadly about the British Paleolithic and this will limit this volume's utility. What the volume does is give a more detailed picture of these two assemblages, and some data are included from the Wood Hill assemblage in the appendix. I expect that this volume will be of interest primarily to those pursuing experimental studies in some of the above mentioned areas.