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Interpreting the Axe Trade documents the changing character and context of stone axe production and exchange in the British Neolithic. Drawing on a variety of studies, the authors explore some of the problems and potentials that attend archaeological discussions of exchange at both a theoretical and a methodological level. Out of this critique arises an argument for an integrated approach to the production, circulation and consumption of past material - an approach which acknowledges the subtle and complex roles that 'things' may play in the reproduction of social life. These arguments provide the basis for a case study which explores the links between the social contexts within which Neolithic stone axes circulated in Britain, and the social and material conditions under which those objects were originally produced. Field survey, excavation and detailed technological studies at the largest stone axe source in Britain are set alongside analyses of the changing character and social context of axe circulation and deposition across the country as a whole. These different analytical threads are then woven together in the final section of the book, where the authors suggest that the patterns explored in the course of their work reflect major changes in the nature of social life during the Neolithic.

The Neolithic—a period in which the first sedentary agrarian communities were established across much of Europe—has been a key topic of archaeological research for over a century. However, the variety of evidence across Europe, the range of languages in which research is carried out, and the way research traditions in different countries have developed makes it very difficult for both students and specialists to gain an overview of continent-wide trends. The Oxford Handbook of Neolithic Europe provides the first comprehensive, geographically extensive, thematic overview of the European Neolithic—from Iberia to Russia and from Norway to Malta—offering both a general introduction and a clear exploration of key issues and current debates surrounding evidence and interpretation. Chapters written by leading experts in the field examine topics such as the movement of plants, animals, ideas, and people (including recent trends in the application of genetics and isotope analyses); cultural change (from the first appearance of farming to the first metal artefacts); domestic architecture; subsistence; material culture; monuments; and burial and other treatments of the dead. In doing so, the volume also considers the history of research and sets out agendas and themes for future work in the field.

This collection of 24 papers aims to reconsider the nature and significance of the Irish Sea as an area of cultural interaction during the Neolithic period. The traditional character of work across this region has emphasised the existence of prehistoric contact, with sea routes criss-crossing between Ireland, the Isle of Man, Anglesey and the British mainland. A parallel course of investigation, however, has demonstrated that the British and Irish Neolithics were in many ways different, with distinct indigenous patterns of activity and social practices. The recent emphasis on regional studies has further produced evidence for parallel yet different processes of cultural change taking place throughout the British Isles as a whole. This volume brings together some of these regional perspectives and compares them across the Irish Sea area. The authors consider new ways to explain regional patterning in the use of material objects and relate them to past practices and social strategies. Were there practices that were shared across the Irish Sea area linking different styles of monuments and material culture, or were the media intrinsic to the message? The volume is based on papers presented at a conference held at the University of Manchester in 2002.

Ethnographic and archaeological records feature a rich body of data suggesting that understandings of the mineral world are in fact both culturally variable and highly diverse. Soils, Stones and Symbols highlights studies from the fields of anthropology, archaeology and philosophy that demonstrate that not all individuals and societies view minerals as commodities to be exploited for economic gain, or as passive objects of disembodied scientific enquiry. In visiting such diverse contexts as contemporary India, colonial-period Australia and prehistoric Europe and the Americas, the papers in this volume demonstrate that in pre-industrial societies, minerals are often symbolically meaningful, ritually powerful, and deeply interwoven into not just economic and material, but also social, cosmological, mythical, spiritual and philosophical aspects of life. In addressing the theme of the mineral world, this book is not only unique within the social and geo-sciences, but also at the forefront of recent attempts to demonstrate the importance of materiality to processes of human cognition and sociality. It draws upon theoretical developments relating to meaning, experience, the body, and material culture to demonstrate that studies of rock art, landscapes, architecture, technology and resource use are all linked through the minerals that constantly surround us and are the focus of our never-ending attempts to understand and transform them.

When we think of archaeology, most of us think first of its many spectacular finds: the legendary city of Troy, Tutankhamun's golden tomb, the three-million-year-old footprints at Laetoli, the mile-high city at Machu Picchu, the cave paintings at Lascaux. But as marvelous as these discoveries are, the ultimate goal of archaeology, and of archaeologists, is something far more ambitious. Indeed, it is one of humanity's great quests: to recapture and understand our human past, across vast stretches of time, as it was lived in every corner of the globe. Now, in The Oxford Companion to Archaeology, readers have a comprehensive and authoritative overview of this fascinating discipline, in a book that is itself a rare find, a treasure of up-to-date information on virtually every aspect of the field. The range of subjects covered here is breathtaking—everything from the domestication of the camel, to Egyptian hieroglyphics, to luminescence dating, to the Mayan calendar, to Koobi Fora and Olduvai Gorge. Readers will find extensive essays that illuminate the full history of archaeology—from the discovery of Herculaneum in 1783, to the recent finding of the "Ice Man" and the ancient city of Uruk—and engaging biographies of the great figures in the field, from Gertrude Bell, Paul Emile Botta, and Louis and Mary Leakey, to V. Gordon Childe, Li Chi, Heinrich Schliemann, and Max Uhle. The Companion offers extensive coverage of the methods used in archaeological research, revealing how archaeologists find sites (remote sensing, aerial photography, ground survey), how they map excavations and report findings, and how they analyze artifacts (radiocarbon dating, dendrochronology, stratigraphy, mortuary analysis). Of course, archaeology's great subject is humanity and human culture, and there are broad essays that examine human evolution—ranging from our early primate ancestors, to Australopithecus and Cro-Magnon, to Homo Erectus and Neanderthals—and explore the many general facets of culture, from art and architecture, to arms and armor, to beer and brewing, to astronomy and religion. And perhaps most important, the contributors provide insightful coverage of human culture as it has been expressed in every region of the world. Here entries range from broad overviews, to treatments of particular themes, to discussions of peoples, societies, and particular sites. Thus, anyone interested in North America would find articles that cover the continent from the Arctic to the Eastern woodlands to the Northwest Coast, that discuss the Iroquois and Algonquian cultures, the hunters of the North American plains, and the Norse in North America, and that describe sites such as Mesa Verde, Meadowcroft Rockshelter, Serpent Mound, and Poverty Point. Likewise, the coverage of Europe runs from the Paleolithic period, to the Bronze and Iron Age, to the Post-Roman era, looks at peoples such as the Celts, the Germans, the Vikings, and the Slavs, and describes sites at Altamira, Pompeii, Stonehenge, Terra Amata, and dozens of other locales. The Companion offers equally thorough coverage of Africa, Europe, North America, Mesoamerica, South America, Asia, the Mediterranean, the Near East, Australia and the Pacific. And finally, the editors have included extensive cross-referencing and thorough indexing, enabling the reader to pursue topics of interest with ease; charts and maps providing additional information; and bibliographies after most entries directing readers to the best sources for further study. Every Oxford Companion aspires to be the definitive overview of a field of study at a particular moment of time. This superb volume is no exception. Featuring 700 articles written by hundreds of respected scholars from all over the world, The Oxford Companion to Archaeology provides authoritative, stimulating entries on everything from bog bodies, to underwater archaeology, to the Pyramids of Giza and the Valley of the Kings.

This fascinating volume integrates recent developments in anthropological and sociological theory with a series of detailed studies of prehistoric material culture. The authors explore the manner in which semiotic, hermeneutic, Marxist, and post-structuralist approaches radically alter our understanding of the past, and provide a series of innovative studies of key areas of interest to archaeologists and anthropologists.

The social processes involved in acquiring flint and stone in the Neolithic began to be considered over thirty years ago, promoting a more dynamic view of past extraction processes. Whether by quarrying, mining or surface retrieval, the geographic source locations of raw materials and their resultant archaeological sites have been approached from different methodological and theoretical perspectives. In recent years this has included the exploration of previously undiscovered sites, refined radiocarbon dating, comparative ethnographic analysis and novel analytical approaches to stone tool manufacture and provenancing. The aim of this volume in the Neolithic Studies Group Papers is to explore these new findings on extraction sites and their products. How did the acquisition of raw materials fit into other aspects of Neolithic life and social networks? How did these activities merge in creating material items that underpinned cosmology, status and identity? What are the geographic similarities, constraints and variables between the various raw materials, and how does the practice of stone extraction in the UK relate to wider extractive traditions in northwestern Europe? Eight papers address these questions and act as a useful overview of the current state of research on the topic.

A new generation of archaeologists has thrown down a challenge to post-processual theory, arguing that characterizing material symbols as arbitrary overlooks the material character and significance of artifacts. This volume showcases the significant departure from previous symbolic approaches that is underway in the discipline. It brings together key scholars advancing a variety of cutting edge approaches, each emphasizing an understanding of artifacts and materials not in terms of symbols but relationally, as a set of associations that compose people's understanding of the world. Authors draw on a diversity of intellectual sources and case studies, paving a dynamic road ahead for archaeology as a discipline and theoretical approaches to material culture.