The Art of Assemblage: Styling Neolithic Art

Andrew Meirion Jones

The art of Neolithic Britain and Ireland consists of a variety of curvilinear and geometric motifs pecked into stone (in open-air rock art or passage tombs) or carved into portable artefacts of chalk, stone or antler. Because of its abstract nature the art has proved problematic for archaeologists. Initially archaeologists assumed the art was representational; now most scholars have abandoned this view, and simply approach the art stylistically. Here I argue that stylistic analysis is insufficient to understand this art: instead the process of making provides a fuller understanding of this art. It is argued that the practice of assemblage is a key aspect of the process of making.

The paper considers the assemblages associated with Neolithic art from Britain and Ireland on a series of registers. I examine Neolithic artefacts from Yorkshire and Dorset as groups of artefacts; in terms of their relationship with other artefacts in the same deposits; and as components of a larger corpus of decorated artefacts and places. The paper demonstrates that each of these senses of the term 'assemblage' is significant: each actively intervenes in the formation of the assemblage. They cannot be disaggregated and isolated; they are part of an indissoluble whole. Because of this, I argue that the act of decorating is itself an act of assemblage making.

After the Eye Goddess

In a book entitled *The Eye Goddess*, O.G.S Crawford wrote one of the most engaging works to study the visual motifs of Neolithic Britain and Ireland (Crawford 1957). According to the foreword of the book, the study began as a response to the discovery by Richard Atkinson of axe and dagger carvings at Stonehenge. Crawford begins with an assumption, and a question: 'there was an axe cult here—did it link up with similar cults elsewhere? (Crawford 1957, foreword). In fact the book has little to say about these axe carvings, but it led Crawford on an intellectual journey:

> One thing led to another and eventually the faint outlines of a coherent picture began to emerge. The axes receded and the Faces obtruded themselves. A theory of racial and cultural expansion evolved itself in my mind, arising quite spontaneously and almost, as it seemed, inevitably from the facts.

Crawford becomes interested in what he believes are the depiction of faces in the curvilinear rock art of Ireland and Britain, and *The Eye Goddess* traces the origin of the depiction of faces to the eye-idols of Tell Brak, Syria, and the fertility goddess Anat/Ishtar. The book traces images of faces and eyes to the Aegean, Greece and Italy, with examples including the face-sherds of Troy and the face-sherds of Stentinello Ware. The story then takes us to Iberia and the slate plaques of Portugal and western Spain, the bone-idol of the Shepherds Cave, Valencia, and the face-pots of Los Millares. Following this, Crawford compares Iberian stelae with images on Breton menhirs. The carved nested arcs of Gavrinis passage tomb receive a chapter of their own, and here we begin to see comparisons with Irish passage-tomb motifs, including those at Loughcrew, Co. Meath. The central chapters discuss passage-tomb art in Iberia, Brittany, Ireland and Britain, while the book ends with a wider comparative discussion of imagery in Ethiopia and the Canary islands. Crawford's analysis moves from the known (the literate cultures of Syria and Egypt) to the unknown (prehistoric Europe), while he also reinforces his analysis with ethnographic parallels. The narrative he weaves is familiar from many other culture-historical accounts, and the trajectory—moving from the known to the less known—follows the edicts of Christopher Hawkes' famous 'ladder of inference' argument: to proceed from the known to the unknown

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(Hawkes 1954). Crawford creates a coherent narrative and network of associations from the appearance of visual depictions in the archaeological record of Mediterranean and Atlantic Europe, which he traces across prehistoric Europe. While much of Crawford's evidence could now be criticized on a chronological basis (he happily discusses Troy alongside Neolithic Stentinello Ware, while the Chalcolithic date of Iberian slate plaques and Los Millares does not appear to bother him), what is interesting here is to see what evidence is assembled, and how it is assembled, to create the sense of a changing cult whose visual depictions alter as its members migrate through prehistoric Europe.

Most striking is that, just over a decade after Crawford's book was published, new radiocarbon determinations decisively showed the early age of Breton and Portuguese megalithic monuments (Renfrew 1973), effectively cutting the network of visual associations that Crawford had previously established.

Since Renfrew's radiocarbon analysis, the Neolithic art of Britain and Ireland has been considered on a more restricted regional canvas. For example, Elizabeth Shee Twohig's survey of megalithic art, published in 1981, restricts itself to the megaliths of Western Europe, particularly Britain, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and France (Shee Twohig 1981). On a yet more local regional scale, in *The Social Foundations of Prehistoric Britain* Richard Bradley (1984, 38–67) argues for a series of core regions in late Neolithic Britain and Ireland linked by shared traditions of monumentality (including passage graves, henges and stone circles, cursus monuments and single burials) and material culture (especially Grooved Ware) and by the exchange of prestige goods. The decorated artefacts that are the focus of this paper are typically characterized as prestige goods or 'symbols of power' (Clarke *et al.* 1985). I believe this characterization is questionable, though I do not have space to expand on this point here (see Jones & Díaz-Guardamino in prep., for elaboration). For the purposes of this paper it is sufficient to note that the Late Neolithic communities of Britain and Ireland are considered to be related by shared traditions of monumentality and material and visual culture.

In further work, Bradley and Chapman (1986) extended their examination of community interaction to Western Europe. Importantly, in *Rock Art and the Prehistory of Atlantic Europe*, Richard Bradley (1997) also examines the shared visual traditions of prehistoric Atlantic Europe, particularly northern Spain, western France, Britain and Ireland. His main focus is open-air rock-art traditions in these regions, but his wide-ranging analysis also includes passage-tomb art and decorated artefacts. This book conclusively establishes the existence of common traditions of visual culture across Britain, Ireland and parts of western Europe during the Neolithic.

Cup-and-ring motifs and cups with tails or gutters characterize the open-air rock art of Britain and Ireland (Bradley 1997). This visual tradition is shared with northern Portugal and Galicia, northern Spain (Alves 2012), where these abstract images are combined with representational images of zoomorphs (mainly deer), weaponry and the occasional anthropomorph (Fabregas Valcarce & Rodriguez-Rellán 2015). More complex motifs, such as rosettes, double spirals, stars and nested arcs are shared between passage tombs, certain open-air rock-art panels, pottery and decorated artefacts in Britain and Ireland (Bradley 1997; Cochrane *et al.* 2015; Jones *et al.* 2011), while some of these motifs—such as nested arcs—are also found in French passage tombs (Shee Twohig 1981). Recent excavations around rock-art sites in Britain have produced Neolithic dates (Bradley *et al.* 2012; Jones *et al.* 2011). By contrast, dates for rock art in other regions of Atlantic Europe, such as Portugal and Spain, are debated and may easily continue well into the Bronze Age (Fabregas Valcarce & Rodriguez-Rellán 2015).

Neolithic art: a changing assemblage

Over the course of 40 years (from the publication of Crawford's book in 1957 to the publication of Bradley's in 1997) the assemblage associated with Neolithic art altered. In Crawford's day the network of visual associations extended from Britain and Ireland to Syria and Ethiopia; now the network only extends to northern Spain and western France. One account of this would be to say that radiocarbon dating proved Crawford wrong. This would be a partial reading of the changing interpretation. Another, more nuanced account would be to say that the assemblage has been re-articulated to provide a different account of reality. By considering interpretations as assemblages, we are acknowledging that each component of the assemblage has equal weight. New scientific techniques do not arrive out of the ether simply to prove an earlier interpretation wrong. Rather, it is important to point out that new scientific techniques (in this case radiocarbon dating) are critically important components of the new assemblage: they help to alter its trajectory and formation. Likewise, archaeological theories also play their part in the formation of assemblages. Crawford's notion of cults associated with visual imagery have been replaced by prestige-goods models whose

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ultimate origins lie in Marcel Mauss' (1925) reading of Melanesian ethnography.

The significance of archaeological concepts and ideas as components of assemblages is one of the key points that Chris Fowler (2013) makes in *The Emergent Past*: archaeological evidence and interpretations are produced from a series of components, each of which act together. These components can include archaeological theories, as well as scientific techniques (see also Jones 2002). Moreover, assemblages can be complex, and can be composed of a constellation of sub-assemblages, each of which is composed of concepts, ideas and techniques that are so well established that they are 'black-boxed' or rarely examined.

What is clear is that certain aspects of the assemblage of concepts relating to Neolithic art have changed, while others endure. What has changed is the tacit assumption that Neolithic art is representational. Crawford assumed that this was the case, as denoted by his book title *The Eye Goddess*: Crawford traced representations of what he thought were faces from Syria westward to Britain and Ireland. Other concepts endure: Crawford applied a stylistic approach to the examination of differing motifs, and stylistic analysis still forms the backbone of recent approaches to Neolithic art (e.g. Robin 2012). Stylistic definitions still form the basis by which 'Atlantic' art traditions are established in Britain, Ireland, western France, northern Spain and Portugal.

Style and assemblage

I have established that the assemblage we describe as 'British and Irish Neolithic art' has undergone considerable changes since its inception, and that these changes are best considered as a process of changing assemblage formation. Alongside these changes certain concepts appear resilient, in particular that of style. Style—like typology—is a core concept that enables archaeologists to differentiate material forms. I mentioned above that some concepts are so commonplace that they remain 'black-boxed' or unexamined. Style is just such a concept. What happens when we open the black box labelled 'style'?

We tend to think of styles or types as static or fixed components of artefacts (Weissner 1990). Fixed styles are often conceived as devices for signaling identity (Weissner 1983; Wobst 1977). In fact, for styles or types to be comprehensible and fixed, they rely on numerous iterations or reiterations: a recognizable style is composed of innumerable repeated actions (Jones 2012, 21). When we open the black box of style we recognize that, rather than styles being static, they are composed of a host of activities; some of these activities will promote similarity, others will highlight differences. While similarity and difference are keys to the notion of style, and archaeologists have internalized the fact that differences in form are critical to their desire to understand taxonomic distinctions, they have not paid sufficient attention to the act of differentiation. An understanding of the process of differentiation is critical if we wish to consider the *making* of artefacts, while an understanding of difference is sufficient if we are only interested in the *finished* artefact. Opening the black box marked 'style' allows us to discover that styles are made, not found. It is this act of making which is important, as it is during the making process that differentiation occurs. Through differentiation new connections and directions are forged.

My starting-point for thinking about the making of artefacts is Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze 1994). Here Deleuze is concerned to distinguish between resemblance and repetition. Resemblance implies similarity to the same, while repetition involves differentiation—difference from the same. Repetition is best considered as an activity involving discovery and experimentation, which evokes differentiation. Differentiation lies at the heart of the notion of assemblage: new things happen as elements are assembled and brought into relation. Alongside the notion of differentiation, I also introduce a discussion of the processes of de-territorialization and re-territorialization. These processes are discussed in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). As differentiation or change occurs in the network of relations that form the assemblage, de-territorialization occurs. De-territorialization implies disorder, or re-arrangement of the assemblage. Forces of de-territorialization are always accompanied by forces of re-territorialization, implying the creation of stability and order. Differentiation is therefore an activity that creates instability at the border of assemblages, and this instability leads to the force described as de-territorialization followed by the twin force of re-territorialization, which then leads to the re-arrangement and re-ordering of the assemblage.

I find these ideas useful for thinking through practices of making in the Neolithic. What happens when things are altered, or worked? Are new elements brought into play during the working process? What significance did these acts of differentiation have for people? Where and when did differentiation take place? How did these acts of differentiation alter the networks or assemblages in which artefacts are situated?

I next explore the concept of assemblage at multiple registers. Above, I examined the notion of assemblage as discussed by Fowler (2013), though I believe

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Fowler's notion of assemblage by no means exhausts the possible definitions of the concept. Here I treat assemblage as a malleable concept: assemblages might be visible at the level of the artefact, groups of artefacts, might include a regional or national grouping of artefacts, or may involve a heterogeneous group of materials. I also examine assemblage as a verb, rather than a noun: one of the lessons of Deleuze and Guattari's work is that assemblages are not fixed; they are constantly being re-worked and altered (deterritorialized and re-territorialized).

The Folkton Drums

The Leverhulme-funded *Making a Mark* research project uses digital technologies to record Neolithic art from Britain and Ireland. The project is recording and creating a database of the over 1000 decorated artefacts from the region. Here I will discuss artefacts from only two locations: Folkton, Yorkshire, and Monkton Up Wimborne, Dorset. In each case I will consider the way in which Neolithic art articulates assemblages at a number of registers.

The Folkton Drums are some of the most remarkable decorated artefacts from Neolithic Britain (Fig. 1). They were excavated by the Rev. William Greenwell between 1866 and 1868 (Greenwell 1890) and were found in an oval barrow deposited alongside a child burial at Folkton, Yorkshire (Kinnes & Longworth 1985). The dating of the site is equivocal. The site is presumed part of a wider tradition of single inhumation burials, including Liff's Low and Duggleby Howe, dating to the later centuries of the fourth millennium BC (Gibson & Bayliss 2010; Loveday & Barclay 2010; Loveday *et al.* 2007).

The 'drums' are three solid cylinders of chalk, of varying size (Jones 2012, 176). Recent digital analysis of these artefacts has revealed considerable evidence of erasure and re-working produced during the working of the chalk and subsequently (Jones *et al.* 2015). I do not wish to dwell on this evidence in great detail here. Instead I want to draw attention to the Folkton Drums as a group or assemblage.

I have earlier noted the way in which the three artefacts 'talk' to each other (Jones 2012, 171–87), designs on one drum playing off the designs on another. It is particularly important that there are three artefacts, as this allows the designs on two of the artefacts to work against the designs on the third (here I use the nomenclature adopted by Longworth 1999 for the drums). A good example of this would be the designs on the upper bosses of the drums. Drums II and III both have multiple ring motifs: drum II has a pattern of two conjoined multiple rings, while drum III has a single conjoined multiple ring motif. By contrast, drum I—while possessing a single multiple ring motif at its centre—also has a star-like pattern of triangles. Another example would be the designs on the front faces of the drums: drums I and III have distinctive 'eyebrow' motifs above a horizontal lozenge motif, while drum II has a far more abstract double spiral above a vertical lozenge motif. Again, the working of these motifs differs: the 'eyebrow' motif on drum I is carved in relief, while those on drums II and III are incised into the chalk. The evidence of erasure of 'eyebrow' motifs recently recorded on drum II (Fig. 2; Jones *et al.* 2015) suggests that differentiation of designs amongst the group of artefacts took place 'on the fly' during the act of making and carving.

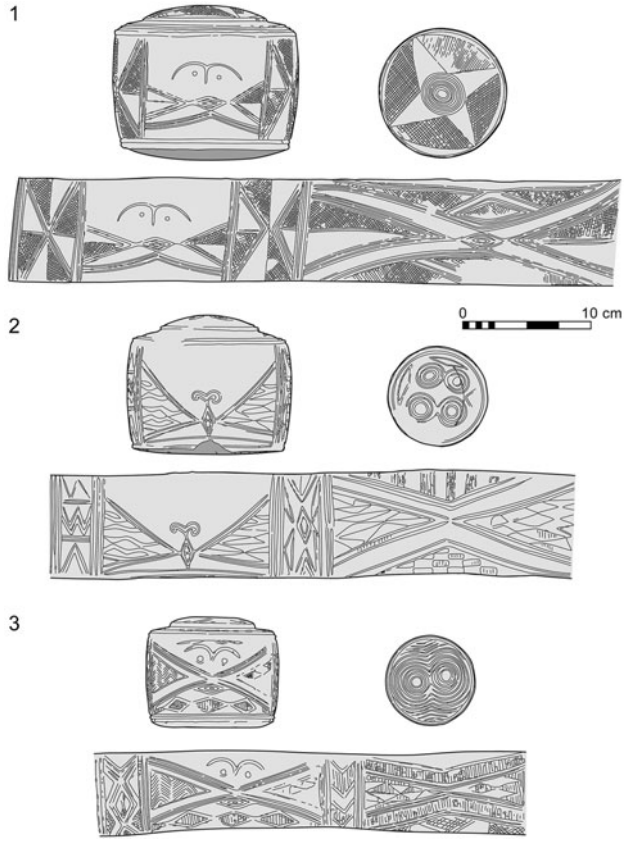


Figure 1. *The Folkton Drums. (Illustration by Aaron Watson, after Longworth 1999.)*

This play of differences in the decoration of the drums means that the Folkton drums form an interconnected assemblage, each design working alongside and playing with designs on the other artefacts. The digital analysis has revealed the care by which these designs were laid out, being erased and reworked as required. We might assume this is so

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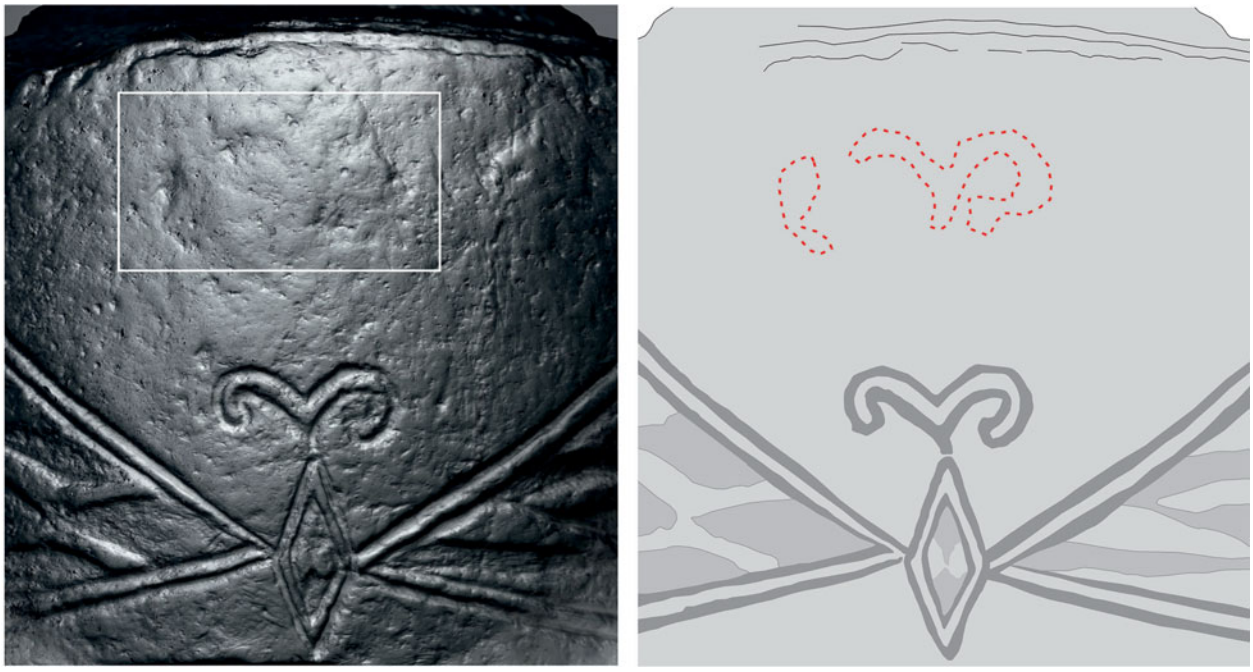


Figure 2. *(Colour online) Erased eyebow motifs on Folkton Drum II. (RTI image and annotation by Marta Díaz-Guardamino.)*

that the designs worked coherently alongside their neighbours. These differences become apparent as the drums are worked and handled. We do not know how long the drums were curated before deposition, or whether these differences in designs were apparent only to the craftsperson. What is evident from the British Museum's programme of geochemical analysis (Middleton *et al.* 2004) is that the drums were not meant to circulate widely: they are produced from a local source of chalk, suggesting probable restricted circulation, and quite rapid burial after manufacture.

In addition to being an inter-referential assemblage—in which each design refers to others in the group—the drums are also intra-referential, echoing designs found in passage-tomb art and on other decorated artefacts, such as carved stone balls. The drums are clearly a group of artefacts that work together as an assemblage; they also work as part of a wider assemblage of decorated artefacts and decorated places widely dispersed across Britain and Ireland.

The Folkton Drums, while being almost unique, also act as part of a wider group of decorated things and places. I now want to turn to another unique artefact: the decorated chalk block from Monkton Up Wimborne, Dorset, to consider how it composes part of this wider assemblage of decorated things and places.

Monkton Up Wimborne

Monkton Up Wimborne is a pit circle and shaft complex, excavated by Martin Green in 1997 (French & Lewis 2007; Green 2000). It is composed of 14 unevenly spaced pits in a circle around 35 m diameter (Fig. 3). The pit circle enclosed a large vertically sided central pit around 11 m in diameter and around 1.5 m deep. Hazel twigs from the top of this pit surface provided radiocarbon dates of 3330–3210, 3190–3150 and 3130–2910 cal BC (Green 2007, 118).

A grave was cut along the northern edge of the pit. The grave contained four tightly crouched individuals, three juveniles ranging in age from *c.* 5–10 years, and one adult female aged *c.* 30–45 years (McKinley 2007, 373); the adult was radiocarbon dated to 3500–3100 cal BC (Green 2007, 118). The grave was backfilled with chalk rubble. The demography of this grave group is suggestive of a family group and isotopic analysis indicates a history of movement between the chalk and Mendip limestones (Budd *et al.* 2003). A burial of an adult male of Bronze Age date was also located in the centre of the large pit.

The most spectacular feature of the site was a 7 m deep shaft dug through the floor of the pit to the east. During the digging of the shaft some of the spoil was used to build a platform covering much of

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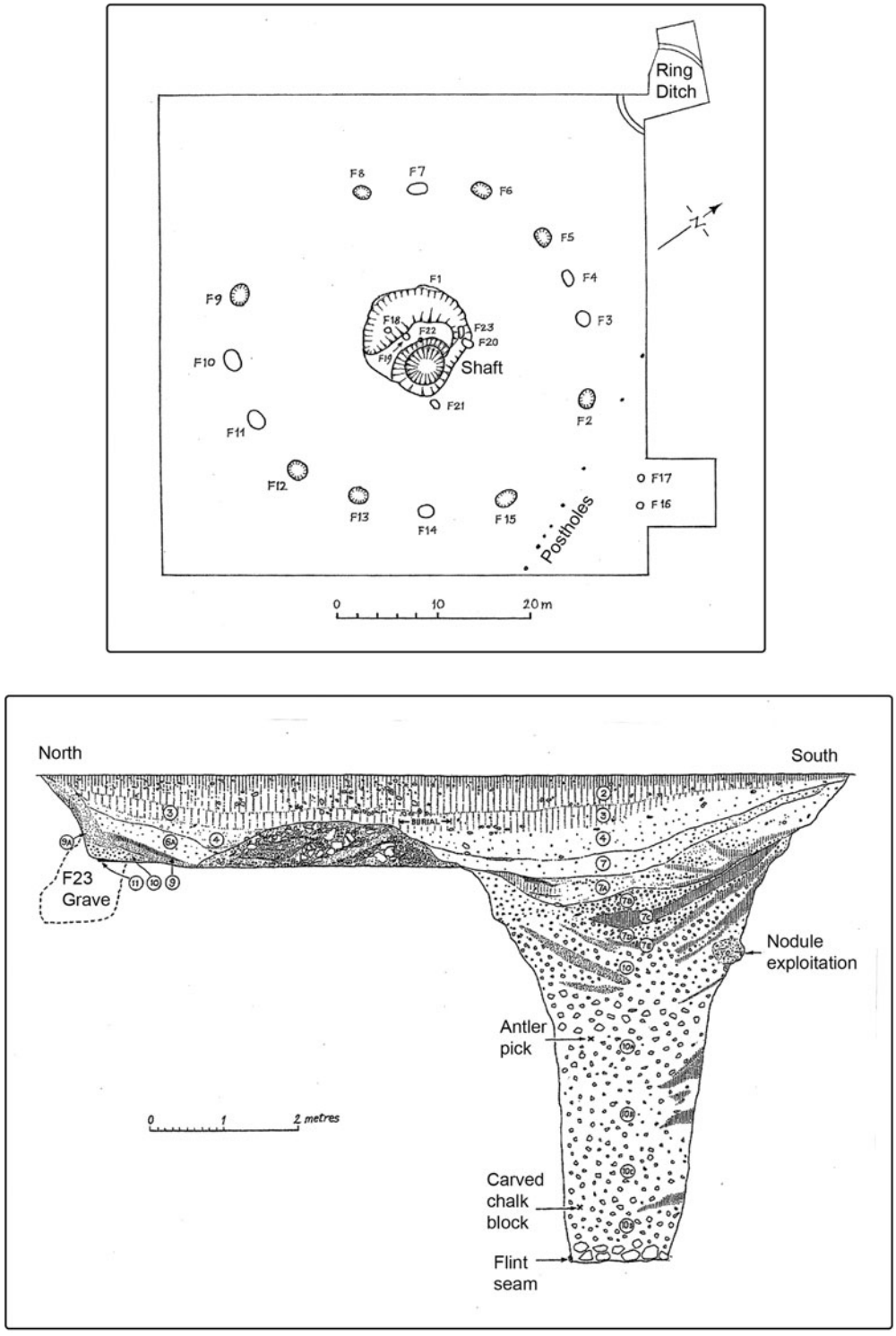


Figure 3. *Monkton Up Wimborne site plan. (Illustration by Hannah Sackett, after Green 2000.)*

the floor area of the main pit. The base of the shaft penetrated a thin seam of flint; *c.* 0.7 m above this floor were a few chalk blocks. Near the base of the shaft was a large chalk block, which was extensively decorated (Green 2007, 356). The decorated chalk block, and other chalk blocks associated with it, were further associated with scattered animal bones, mainly those of a young pig which bore clear evidence of butchery marks. Several bones had been tucked into the angle between shaft base

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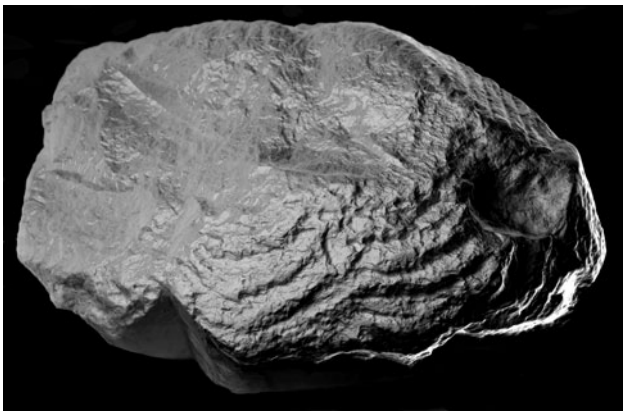


Figure 4. *The decorated chalk from Monkton Up Wimborne. (RTI image by Marta Díaz-Guardamino.)*

and wall, alongside these was a pecked sandstone ball.

Above these primary deposits at the base of the shaft were a series of chalk rubble layers, the result of weathering from the sides of the shaft. Within these rubble layers are a number of distinct deposits: in the upper 10A layer a portion of pig skull was found with a lump of worked chalk and part of a large flint pebble. Above this was a small red deer antler pick that had been cut and snapped. The upper fills of the shaft were composed of alternating layers of rubble. Charcoal from these upper layers produced radiocarbon dates of 3630–3590 and 3530–3360 cal BC. An important group of associated material from these upper layers includes a cow skull, an antler beam and human skull fragments. Near to this deposit was an unusual elongated chisel arrowhead. Further disarticulated human bone along with a leaf arrowhead was found in the upper layer 7a. Both the primary and secondary fills of the shaft contained sherds of Impressed/Peterborough Ware. Chalk objects with some evidence for working were found throughout the upper layers, along with a series of chalk objects with more substantial evidence for working.

The decorated chalk block from the base of the shaft is an unusual object (Fig. 4). The block (designated C1 by Green 2007, 356) is an irregular shape: 34 cm long, with a width of 25 cm. The block is 20 cm thick. The underside of the block has a hole 8–9 cm in diameter, with a depth of 10 cm. The interior of the hole is extremely smooth and well worked. It seems possible that the hole was used to mount the block on a wooden post. The block is decorated over its surface: one edge of the block has two sets of parallel grooves (distinguished by width); a further area of the block has six parallel grooves. On one edge of the stone there are two groups of nested arcs characterized by wide pecked grooves. The block was originally analysed by Richard Bradley (2007); digital analysis has confirmed Bradley's observations while also revealing evidence for erasure and reworking on the surface of the block.

Stepping back from the details of the block, let us think about the sequence of activities associated with the block and the site. The shaft was dug through the pit, 7 m deep into the chalk. Several blocks of chalk were removed from the base of the shaft (big blocks of this scale can only be found at this depth in the chalk), some were minimally dressed and worked, or incised. One of these blocks (C1) was carved, decorated, and possibly raised on a post for an unknown duration of time; this must have been a relatively short duration, as the base of the shaft had not weathered or silted up. Notably the block had also not weathered, despite its friable nature. The surface of the block was then pecked and flaked, removing some of the decoration. The block was then deposited back in the base of the shaft. A young pig was butchered and its remains deposited close to the block, along with a pecked sandstone ball; it is possible this ball may have been used for the pecking of the chalk block. We do not know the duration of this sequence of activities, though we must be looking at a relatively short duration, possibly no more than a year or two. The shaft was then allowed gradually to weather and fill, and as it did so small deposits of artefacts and human bone were introduced to the shaft. The whole cycle of events also stratigraphically post-dates, and possibly commemorates, the mortuary deposit containing the family of people buried at the edge of the main pit.

It is evident that the carving and working of chalk was part of the current of activities associated with the digging of the shaft. Some chalk was carved extensively; other pieces received minimal carving. Notably the chalk appears to have been systematically deposited in the shaft in the order in which it was extracted—with the larger blocks of lower chalk deposited at the base and smaller pieces of chalk deposited through the upper fills.

We can consider the decorated block from Monkton Up Wimborne to be a component in assemblages that work at several scales or registers. First, as discussed above, the block is caught up in an assemblage or current of activities: decoration is not an isolated activity; it is a component of other activities, such as flint extraction. The significance of the block is amplified by the activities it is associated with, in this case, burial, mortuary feasting and possibly flint extraction. Second, the block is itself an assemblage, a *group* of different motifs: each surface of the block is decorated with different designs: nested arcs and parallel grooves. Each surface has differing designs and

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the block is a condensed group of different designs. These designs are typical of Irish passage-tomb art and are found in the key Boyne valley monuments as well as Loughcrew (Shee Twohig 1981). Third, then, is the fact that the block exists as a component of a wider assemblage or network of designs that cross Britain and Ireland.

Decorated Neolithic artefacts and different assemblages

My analysis of the Folkton Drums and the Monkton Up Wimborne chalk block has discussed the role of these artefacts as parts of assemblages. These assemblages bear similarities and differences. The three Folkton Drums were considered to be an assemblage, or group, whose designs worked together. The Monkton Up Wimborne block is only a single artefact, but I also described it as an assemblage: different designs were grouped on different surfaces on the block. The Monkton Up Wimborne block was also part of a wider, heterogeneous assemblage of activities, which included burial, mortuary feasting and the digging of the shaft. We might also consider the Folkton Drums as part of an assemblage of activities, which included child burial. Finally—for both Monkton Up Wimborne and Folkton—the designs carved on the chalk artefacts echoed similar designs that occur on other artefacts and in other places across Britain and Ireland. In both cases the materials that bore these designs were clearly local, while the designs themselves spoke of other places. I argue that these carved designs are a conscious and deliberate form of social practice in the British and Irish Middle-late Neolithic: a form of social practice concerned with making or establishing connections between assemblages.

At the beginning of this paper I reviewed the changing scholarship associated with the study of Neolithic art and noted that, while some approaches to art had changed, successive generations of scholars had retained stylistic analysis as a key approach. One of the outcomes of this stylistic analysis is to locate the Neolithic art of Britain and Ireland within a wider regional grouping including western France, northern Spain and north Portugal. I have also argued that decorated Neolithic artefacts are components of assemblages that act at a local and a wider inter-regional scale. We must take care here in distinguishing between scholarship and Neolithic practices (though of course they are related as part of the assemblage we call 'archaeology'; see Fowler 2013). It is a fallacy to assume that prehistoric people operated with a corpus of designs of the kind compiled by the contemporary scholar (see Jones 2001). Instead, we need to grasp that the makers of these decorated Neolithic artefacts were *situated* in local, regional and inter-regional networks of reference, and their making will have drawn on references and associations with partially glimpsed and half-remembered artefacts from other places, with perhaps a particular emphasis on the spectacularly decorated passage tombs of Eastern Ireland. I have argued that decoration is an act of assemblage making: that it allowed Neolithic makers to relate their designs to a wider assemblage of designs. It is this process of decorating–assembling that differentiates each artefact from the other, and gives rise to distinct or unique artefacts, such as the Monkton Up Wimborne block or the Folkton Drums. Digital analysis has also revealed the role of differentiation in the experimental practice of making: a practice in which erasure and reworking was paramount. Decorated artefacts were not simply made, they were caught up in an ongoing process of making and remaking.

One of the clear themes to emerge is that the working of materials takes place alongside, and is entangled with, other activities. Working is an exploratory and experimental process. Chalk is worked into a variety of other assemblages associated with the local environment: with burial, monument building and pit and shaft digging. By contrast, carving and decorating chalk involves a transformation in the state of chalk. Carved motifs on the chalk's surface help to differentiate the chalk from its local environment, while also enabling differentiation amongst groups of artefacts, such as the Folkton Drums. The carved chalk artefacts are part of the local environment, while also standing apart from the local: they now evoke motifs found in distant places. In effect, the carved motifs fold (or bundle) another distant assemblage into local assemblages. The carved and decorated chalk is both part of a local set of assemblages, while also featuring in a wider assemblage of decorated surfaces. The simple act of carving is alchemical: at a stroke the chalky local materials are transformed and reconfigured as the designs on their surfaces connect them to wider networks of reference. Critically, the evidence of reworking and erasure on the Folkton Drums and Monkton Up Wimborne block suggests that carving was an act that both positioned them within an assemblage and could reposition them within a different assemblage, depending upon the design. In that sense the act of carving designs was an act both of de-territorialization and re-territorialization. Assemblage is an ongoing process, then, in which connections shift and are made and re-made.

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Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has discussed what happens when we closely examine the concept of 'style'. Rather than style being a routine concept, part of the everyday conceptual tool-box of archaeology, we have instead seen that style is a messy concept. Styles are best defined by how they become, rather than by their already given forms. When we closely examine how styles are made, we realize that they are composed of a variety of practices. One of these practices is assemblage. We have seen how styles are assembled from a number of differing components.

The traditional idea of style promotes a one-dimensional and static view of art and artefacts. By introducing the notion of assemblage to the study of Neolithic art, I have emphasized the importance of examining process, differentiation (in this case the act of carving chalk) and change. Neolithic motifs and decorated artefacts are not simply static designs to be compiled and analysed in the academic corpus: instead they once were active devices for visibly connecting communities, connecting the local, regional and inter-regional. These connections were constantly being assembled and re-assembled as artefacts were carved, erased and re-carved.

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