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PART I

BUTCHERY AS CRAFT AND SOCIAL PRAXIS

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CHAPTER ONE

ANIMAL BODIES, HUMAN TECHNOLOGY

FROM FLESH TO MEAT

Some 2.5 million years ago, the evidence points to a radical departure in how our early ancestors acquired flesh from the carcasses of animals. Archaic hominids began to mediate their consumption of meat through technology. By using lithic implements to butcher, a small step for these proto-humans initiated a gradual cascade of new ideas and practices, becoming a crescendo that would drastically alter how humans interacted with each other, with other animals, and with their environment. In one way or another, many of the ways in which humans interacted with animals ended at the edge of a knife, a knife driven by *knowledge* of butchery.

Butchering is a uniquely human characteristic. Butchery is a concept that does not find expression in the natural world, despite the fact that other animals 'dismember carcasses' (Lyman 1994: 294). Initially, at an early stage in evolution, humans employed simple techniques and basic technology. For an immense time span, it seems, relatively little changed. Skipping many millennia, as humans move beyond the initial stages of domestication and husbandry intensifies, the implications of butchery for wider social practice become more evident. From the mid-Holocene, perhaps as a consequence of the influence of agriculture, we start to see steady, and at times explosive, modification in both the technologies of butchery and in the ways the animals are processed. One of these explosive moments coincides with the advent of

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metal: the techniques and tools that are developed make it easier to overcome the constraints of the animal's skeletal structure. More complex and varied knives are forged and utilised. New paraphernalia, like butcher's blocks and meat hooks, are created to facilitate processing. The scale of activity intensifies such that this additional equipment becomes a necessity. The practitioners themselves become specialised, branching out and diversifying into slaughterers, butchers, tanners, and horn workers. The networks around those who process animal bodies expand and include farmers, drovers, blacksmiths, and blade smiths. Roles within each craft profession are gendered, hierarchically structured, and diverse, with some working part time, others full time, and some seasonally.

A host of supplemental activity flows as a consequence of feedback mechanisms but also as a result of the diversification of the socioeconomic contexts of meat consumption. Butchery facilitates the scales of sharing and exchange, from interpersonal to long-distance transport of meat and by-products. Animal bodies are modified to accommodate the resources extracted from them. Initially, they are improved to increase their capacity for work, for traction in fields and for transport (Albarella et al. 2008). Later, changes in morphology become attuned to producing better-quality meat in greater quantity (MacGregor 2012: 426). With augmented production for flesh and amplified consumption, processing also intensifies, leading to special requirements to deal with waste, which has environmental ramifications. Originally, this is managed by simply siting carcass processors close to water (Goldberg 1992: 64–6; Yeomans 2007: 104–5). By the post-medieval period, in many large cities in Europe and America, processing is centralised and localised in the abattoir: geographies of slaughter become institutionalised (Lee 2008: 4).

The above describes the path of what is perhaps the earliest example of production and consumption, two perennial research topics in archaeology. Butchery complicates the connection between *making* and *consuming*. The butcher deconstructs a product of hunting or farming, the animal, and produces another, meat for cuisine. Thus, the activity of butchery occupies an interesting conceptual and intellectual space between production and consumption; it also mediates between animal body, food, and symbols.

A number of important questions – and concomitant hypotheses – emerge. For the prehistoric context, did changes in butchery also depend on a deepening understanding of animal morphology and ethology, at the point of transition from carcass disarticulation to true butchery? When did the division of flesh at a kill become sharing of meat in a settlement? For later periods, how do peoples' perceptions of animals change, for example, if we compare exploitation of wild versus domestic fauna, or with intensification in animal husbandry? Interpersonal relationships, within and between communities, affect how animals are perceived, hunted, and processed. What can

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butchery reveal about differences between categories of animals, systems of management, and the roles in society of those who slaughter, butcher, and process animal bodies?

The primary aim of this book is to examine butchery, butchering, and cut marks (an outcome of butchering) in layered, intertwined, and yet distinct relationships to one another. To do this, the book poses a key question: how do the operational sequences – the gestures, steps, and unfolding component parts – of a butchery event both reflect and shape wider economic and cultural drivers? What can the signs of butchery reveal about these broader conceptual and practical worlds in which the butchery took place?

The book picks up the story of butchery at the point when metal tools, specifically iron implements, become the mainstay of the craft, from late prehistory. Bone from this and later periods capture the dependence on agriculture and intensified animal husbandry, as well as increased centralisation of the population and burgeoning urbanisation. My emphasis on metal tools does not exclude those researchers working on lithic-tool butchery from this call for a far-reaching, root-and-branch revision of our collective protocols and methodology. The point is to observe and respond to the differences between assemblages created with stone versus metal tools in order to better understand how best to study each dataset. The approach and conceptualisation developed in the book applies to the spectrum of butchery studies. The introduction of metal is itself an important feature of changes happening at a societal level. The shift from lithics to metal knives for carcass processing represents the single most important development to have taken place in 'butchery' – as a concept and activity – until the advent of mechanisation.

The book also provides a methodological treatment of butchery. Studying archaeological butchery invariably involves the analysis of cut marks. These might be thought of as an indication of a specific activity, namely, the disarticulation of limbs and cutting of meat. But, as the arguments in this book will make clear, such a definition is too simplistic to describe *butchery*. Butchery involves cutting up animal bodies using tools according to a preconceived plan. Consider the physicality that exemplifies butchery (the activity), the intangibility of butchering (the cognition), and the progressive nature of the act of carcass processing. Butchery includes all of these components; as such, butchery data represent complex systems of interactions involving tool, practitioner, and carcass (Seetah 2008), and social and economic drivers (Seetah 2004, 2007). That such a complex constellation of interrelated factors would necessarily involve significant empirical variability should be clear, as should the utility of this variability for hypothesis building and interpretational breadth. However, in much of the literature so far, the tendency has been to focus on relatively narrow and specific aspects of the butchery record, which has hampered the scope of inference.

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Gaps in our current approach exist for various reasons and stem from basic principles to do with how analysts approach the data. Butchery and butchering are situated at the intersection between the biology of the animal, the production and use of tools, and the cognitive expression of human intelligence and resource extraction. Zooarchaeologists, who are ideally situated to serve as the point of intersection, approach the topic from the perspective of one data source, bone. Though essential, by definition this is limiting. Cut marks are found on animal bone but are not part of the animal's biology. A conceptual incompatibility exists as the actual situation in life deals with flesh, with meat.

From a methodological perspective, analysts have yet to satisfactorily resolve a problem identified over three decades ago: 'an over emphasis on the minutiae of the cut mark' that derives from a focus dominated by bone (Dobney et al. 1996). To further complicate matters, methods to study cut marks have typically been developed from assemblages created with lithic tools, and then generalised for application across regions and time periods. Despite the fact that there are considerably larger, better-preserved faunal assemblages from historic periods, we still lack a dedicated recording system for metal-tool butchery. Where theory is concerned, we have not yet conceptualised, indeed intellectualised, what butchery represents beyond 'the removal of meat' (Russell 1987: 386), and the multifaceted role of the practice in society.

This book argues that it is now time to consider the limitations of these approaches and to begin to take up the task of improving on them. It does so by raising and examining a number of key points. First, there are fundamental differences between butchery using lithics versus metal implements (Maltby 1985a, 1989). Assemblages created with metal versus lithic tools are different in a number of significant ways. At the very least, we need to consider the utility of the more diverse cut marks that derive from historic periods, and how these might inform our methods. Invariably, distinctions also exist in how we interpret: meat is part of the process of 'calorification' or of 'commodification', depending on whether we are discussing prehistory or later periods, respectively. Finally, our recording systems do not easily accommodate the underlying fact that butchery, as activity, represents a trinity of evidence: the locational and typological characteristics of the mark, details of the tool used, and function. By recording only a portion of the data from the butchery record, it is difficult for analysts to infer on knowledge, intent, or cultural traditions.

However, perhaps the main barrier to overcome is that academic studies are absorbed with the products and outcomes of butchery. Anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and ethnographers discuss meat, the meat trade, and meat sharing and consumption. Zooarchaeologists study cut marks. Therefore, scholars interested in topics such as food assembly and consumption, and the place of animals in society, would benefit from a more nuanced

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assessment of the techniques and craft of butchery, the knowledge inherent in that practice, and the butcher.

PRACTICE

'Practice' and 'knowledge' serve as bridging agents, providing the impetus for employing analogy and ethnography, developing ethnoarchaeology, and undertaking actualistic studies – all approaches unified under middle-range theory. Indeed, through middle-range research, butchery has enriched archaeology (see Binford 1978, *Nunamiut Ethnoarchaeology*). Situating craftspeople has also been a concern to analysts using the *chaîne opératoire* approach, who endeavour to better understand activity from a range of perspectives (see Chapter 3). *Chaîne opératoire* helps to contextualise how knowledge and practice coalesce to reveal 'the whole person, indissolubly body and mind, in a richly structured environment' (Ingold 2000: xvii).

The constellations of activity involved in butchery, in combination with the ethnographic context, have provided the stimulus for my focus on practice. This, in turn, has been motivated by personal experience. My own background is in commercial butchery, trained for seven years in Brixton, South London. In addition to my time spent as a professional butcher, I have undertaken a range of other carcass-processing roles. These include traditional pig slaughtering and butchery, termed *koline*, in Slovenia, as well as knackering horses for the hounds of the Thurlow Hunt, Cambridge. I have prepared a wide range of animals, from llamas to wolves, for various zooarchaeological reference collections. As developed in Chapter 2, all of these experiences were episodes of 'butchery', the activity, but my actions and the drivers made each of these examples a different case of 'butchering': the behaviour, a cognitive process.

Thus, in this regard, *practice* refers to observable behaviours and sequences of operations undertaken in production. The activity that underpins practice relies on *knowledge*, which refers to a range of conceptualisation with which craftspeople engage (Keller & Keller 1996: 115–16). Craft is considered to be the actions of production driven by purpose and reason. It is utilitarian, holistic, and 'involves a rediscovery of subjugated knowledge, the recovery of practices made marginal in the rational organisation of productive routines. *The potter at the wheel must conceptualise the form desired even while pulling that form up from the lump of clay*' (Shanks & McGuire 1996: 78, emphasis added). Building on approaches to situate craft knowledge as an interpretative mechanism (Bleed 2008; Marchand 2010; Walls 2016), this book also integrates a range of perspectives garnered from the contemporary context. The practicing butcher does not see butchery in the same way as the faunal analyst and vice versa, and yet the differences between points of view need to be moderated if

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we are to conceptualise butchery. As a 'butcher', when I have recorded cut marks I have in my mind unspoken gestures of the body, inferring the movement of the hand and tool in relation to the carcass. I constantly shift between scales, going through a process of reflexive negotiation between archaeological bone and entire carcass. I effectively deconstruct the animal's body through a series of plausible possibilities to the point where I arrive at the cut mark I have in my hand; however, I am now armed with an explanation of the sequence of gestures, the steps, to produce the mark.

We cannot ignore economic and social drivers; indeed, situating these socioeconomic and environmental dimensions forms a major part of this book. However, viewed from the perspective I describe above, butchery is actually about knowledge driving the body and action. These actions define individuals and groups. In much the same way that learning the alphabet can lead to reading Shakespeare, so too can learning how to process a carcass lead to perceptual changes in the way humans view their environment, the animals within it, other members of their social group, and members of other groups (Yellen 1977; Binford 1978, 1981; Testart 1987; Kent 1993; Valerie 2000; Politis & Saunders 2002; Gravina et al. 2012).

Observing the performances of butchery from an archaeological context is not an easy task, even though the residue has been left on millions of artefacts. Studying the 'techniques of the body' (Mauss 1973) as they relate to butchery, how the activity has changed through time, and whether this can be assessed in a systematic manner is critical to the analysis of cut marks. It is this largely hidden aspect of our knowledge that I believe holds the key to more effective exploitation of the butchery record, and our ability as archaeologists to better understand ancient human–animal interactions.

THIS BOOK IN CONTEXT

This book ambitiously sets out to reconceptualise what butchery 'is' for an academic audience. To do this, it provides a more holistic approach to the theoretical framework from which we study the practice of butchery. The stress on practice, and particularly social aspects of practice, serves two functions. It aligns a growing trend in social zooarchaeology, recognising the richness and diversity of the human–animal relationship, with 'craft' – observed as a usable framework for assessing production, use, and discard of objects. More importantly, it confronts some of the consequences of economic determinism and methodological constraints that have hampered butchery studies. We understand meat because it is ubiquitous. We study meat today from a nutritional and cuisine perspective, and attempt to see similarities in the past, for example, through meat cuts (see Chapter 8). Zooarchaeologists conceptualise human–animal relationships through bone but do not situate

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the practice that transforms flesh into meat. Many of the social features attributed to meat consumption are dependent on butchery and driven by butchering. The nutritional context of meat is only part of the equation; indeed, *meat* is only part of the carcass!

Incorporating ethnographic research into this book provides an updated view of how different groups around the world engage with all parts of animal bodies, building on a strong foundation of this type of research in archaeology (Binford 1978; Brain 1981; Yellen 1977). The ethnographic context also provides a window on how Western views of meat have lost an essential connection to animal bodies, the skills associated with carcass processing, and, perhaps most obviously, the act of slaughter. Ultimately, by illustrating the contours of relationships between butchery, butchering, and practice, I aim to unite the subject matter with larger issues such as social organisation, cultural transitions, and routes to specialisation.

In writing this book, I have drawn heavily on my past experience to bring experiential know-how to an academic audience. In terms of constructing a new conceptual premise from which we can revitalise the study of butchery, the book incorporates a wide literature. Butchery and butchering are too complex, too deeply integral to culture, *too fundamental to people*, to be studied from one point of view or in isolation from one another. Alongside research on cut marks, the book borrows from studies of food as culture, food procurement as culture (e.g., hunting), the literature on meat, and the impressive body of work on technology and craft in archaeological contexts.

In this way, I aim to illustrate the nuanced, complex, and rich position that the topic holds in society, rooted in everyday activity. In order to better illustrate daily practice, I engage with a range of ethnographic studies, some of which are based on my own work. However, as important as it is to illustrate diversity, in the interests of thoroughness and to provide detail I have limited the text in specific ways. To achieve a balance between breadth and depth, the extended case study – used to showcase some of the ways we can better interpret the archaeological record – is focused on Roman and medieval Britain. This provides boundaries for the chronological and spatial contexts. In addition, cattle are the main domestic animal discussed throughout the text, and in the archaeological case studies a focus on cattle serves as another boundary for the book.

The book is split into two parts. Part I introduces the archaeological context, then deliberately steps away from archaeology and engages with modern case studies to situate the craft, practice, craftspeople, and technology within the book's conceptual framework. By tackling some of the gaps in our approach to metal-tool butchery, and adding richness through analogy, Part I provides a new grounding from which to renew appreciation for the subject. Chapter 2 begins by conceptualising the main topics under review, offering

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definitions for cut marks, butchery, and butchering; the chapter then describes limitations in the current analytical process, identifying how this has hampered our ability to describe the actions' of ancient butchers. Chapter 3 positions the book within the wider theoretical discourse on 'activity' in archaeology, serving to marshal the ideas and concepts that have influenced the development of this book. Chapters 4–6 then develop the wider social and technological contexts. These chapters are based on modern industrial and non-industrial case studies, drawn from published ethnographic accounts, the ethnoarchaeological literature, and my own ethnographic research, as well as an autoethnography from the modern trade. These chapters examine the 'practice' of butchery, and I deliberately deviate from a focus on cut marks in order to better do this.

Part II recentres the objective on archaeological enquiry. Equipped now with a more representative and accurate view of the craft and people involved, the book draws on Part I to illustrate gaps in our methodological approach to cut mark recording. This section of the book shows how to mitigate some of the challenges faced by analysts recording this complex dataset and the ways in which we can enrich our interpretation.

Chapters 7–9 assess the state of the art in archaeology, and how we can enhance our current approach. Chapter 7 discusses how cut marks have been studied from archaeological bone; Chapter 8 describes some of the negative implications for interpretation that have arisen as a result of limitations in our methods. Methodological problems are based on a simple premise: we have been 'observing rather than understanding'; we record marks, less often do we deduce practice. Chapter 9 offers a synopsis of a new methodological approach that places stress on process – the steps and organisation of butchery – as a way to overcome an overemphasis on the mark. The amendments I advocate are based on the principle of assessing the *process* of butchery, recognised as a key element of the practice (Binford 1978: 63; Lyman 1987: 252) but not utilised as a means of situating the craft. In this way, the recording system effectively encourages the analyst to build interpretation during data collection. The application of the approach proposed in Chapter 9 is explored in an extended case study in Chapters 10 and 11, which summarise and discuss the results from six British sites.

As a case focused on butchery, the book highlights issues that are relevant to archaeology. From a methodological perspective, we need to consider how the recording of cut marks can be adapted to better assess butchery, but also to become systematic and standardised, in other words, to make better use of archaeological assemblages. Zooarchaeology is increasingly turning to molecular methods, which have been a boon for the discipline (Guiry et al. 2015; Hagelberg et al. 2015). However, while offering many benefits, molecular techniques are usually possible on only a small subset of materials and provide a

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specific type of evidence. Butchery connects us back to the materials, is low cost and widely accessible (with training), and provides evidence of a range of activities that cover both social and economic factors. Studying butchered faunal assemblages does not mandate specialist equipment, nor does it need to incur additional analytical costs. As such, it is accessible to the wider archaeological community. Enhancing our studies of butchery to include new enthnoarchaeological approaches (Chapter 4) expands the types of studies that faunal analysts participate in and their research outputs.

In concluding this introductory chapter, I want to emphasise the uniqueness of the butchery record, which acts like amber, capturing a nuanced indication of human activity and behaviour at a given moment in time. As I explore in this book, butchery provides a way for us to view a long list of human thought processes, spanning the mechanisms of social stratification, to the commodification of animal bodies, and ultimately, the transformation of those same bodies into the metaphorically powerful domain of meat.

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