

## Axes of alpine jade in Denmark: the point of view of an alpine prehistorian

Pierre Pétrequin\*

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This article presents the typological and chronological relationship between information derived from the central find locations for alpine jade axes around the area of Mount Viso, and the examples found elsewhere in Europe. Furthermore, by making comparisons between the composition of the hoards of alpine axes found in northwestern Europe to those located in southern Scandinavian, it is argued that the Scandinavian examples presumably reached the area via secondary centres of distribution.

**Keywords:** Alpine jade axes; centres of distribution; circulation; hoards

Denmark, and especially the island of Zealand, represents the northern border of the distribution of large axes of alpine jade. The two most famous finds (Fischer 1880; see contribution L. Klassen, this volume, Figure 1.1–2) have been subjected to analysis with reflectance spectroscopy (Pétrequin *et al.* 2012, pp. 440–532). The results leave no doubt about their origin in the quarries at Mont Viso in the Italian Alps, at a distance of 1200 km as the crow flies. Based on macroscopic comparison with an extensive reference collection, the same origin can be assumed for the remaining eight large axes from Denmark (Pétrequin *et al.* 2012, pp. 292–419). However, many of these axes lack information on their find location, which has led some researchers to doubt whether these objects really represent trans-European exchange in the Neolithic. Instead, they are proposed to be recently acquired collector's items.

The Danish axes belong to well-defined types and this question can, therefore, be addressed by placing them in their European chronological, typological and spatial context. In the hoard from the island of Zealand (Hessisches Landesmuseum Kassel), an axe of the Puy type (23.7 cm) is associated with an axe of the Chelles type (36 cm, with traces of cutting). Also considered are one further axe of the Puy type (no find location information, private collection, 18.4 cm (fragment)), see Klassen (this volume) Figure 1.6) and a further two Danish axes belonging to the Bégude type (1. Haraldsted: National Museum Copenhagen, 20.5 cm, and 2. probably Magleby, Zealand: Moesgård Museum, 18.7 cm). The most frequent is the Durrington type with five examples (1. southern Jutland: private collection, 12.7 cm, 2. Hyllested, Zealand: National Museum Copenhagen, 12.8 cm, 3. Lolland-Falster (?), Lolland-Falsters Stiftsmuseum Maribo, 17.2 cm (see Klassen (this

volume), Figure 1.5), 4. no find location information: Horsens Museum, 15.1 cm (see Klassen (this volume) Figure 1.4) and 5. no find location information, Besançon, 17.3 cm). The following picture emerges when we return to Mont Viso in the Alps and look at the chronology and distribution of these axe types (Pétrequin *et al.* 2012, pp. 574–727, 623, Figure 49):

The production of large jade axes begins at the end of the 6th millennium BC. At the beginning of the 5th millennium BC, the most common type in northern Italy was the Bégude type (torpedo-shaped with round cutting edge). It reached southern France and the Morbihan, where it was associated with the oldest of the giant tumuli in the Carnac region, shortly before the mid-5th millennium BC.

From 4500 BC onwards, new types dominated the exchange towards the north-west: the Altenstadt type (large, flat, symmetrical and triangular in shape) and the Durrington type (somewhat thicker water drop-shaped axes, see Klassen (this volume), Figure 1.3–5 and 7). At this point in time, a 'Europe of jade', as opposed to a 'Europe of copper and gold', emerges and England, Scotland and Germany are included in the distribution area of jade axes.

In northern Italy, the Puy type (compact axes with rectangular cross section and sub-rectangular cutting edge, see Klassen (this volume) Figures 1.2 and 6) displaces the earlier types after 4300 BC. Oversized axes of this type seem to appear in southern France and Germany at the turn of the 5th to the 4th millennium BC and replace the Altenstadt axes.

Until now, we have been concerned by exchanges from the production centre, the Mont Viso and to a lesser degree,

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\*Email: [Archeo.Petrequin@free.fr](mailto:Archeo.Petrequin@free.fr)

the Mont Beigua, towards the periphery of Western Europe. But there were also secondary centres of redistribution where the alpine types were modified by repolishing in order to obtain thinner axes of new, original shapes. The secondary preparation of the axes appears in the Paris Basin, but primarily in the Gulf of Morbihan, which attracted the largest axes of jadeitite. Here the axes were repolished in order to obtain the so-called Carnac-type axes. Some of the Carnac-type axes have subsequently been re-injected into circulation, as were other older, repolished axes (f.ex. re-polished axes of the Bégude type). These axes reached the Atlantic coast of Portugal, as well as the centre of the European continent in Switzerland and, additionally, many parts of Germany, where their circulation is connected to the appearance of the first *menhirs* and *stelae* in the second half of the 5th millennium BC (Pétrequin *et al.* 2012, pp. 1015–1045).

In this context, the Danish jade axes raise some serious problems as the Bégude type, the oldest type, is represented by two pieces. It is difficult to imagine that these have arrived in Scandinavia in the mid-5th millennium BC without intermediary points of diffusion. Furthermore, the Durrington type is normally associated with the Altenstadt type but in Denmark this is not the case. Therefore, from an alpine point of view, the association of the types observed in Denmark neither equates to that of northern Italy nor, more regionally, to that of north-western Europe. This observation could lend support to the theory that Alpine jade axes never circulated as far as southern Scandinavia.

However, the matter is more complicated. The composition of the hoard of two large axes of jadeite from Zealand does, in fact, conform completely with other hoards from western Europe at the transition from the 5th to the 4th millennium BC. Furthermore, in a second peripheral region of Europe, the Netherlands, an association of ‘old’ axes of the Durrington type with that of ‘young’ axes of the Puy type also can be observed. Here the Altenstadt type, which is very frequent in Germany, is very rare. Another factor is the European distribution of the Durrington type (Klassen (this volume) Figure 3) which allows us to identify an exchange between the northern Paris Basin and the southern part of Denmark

on a path west and north of the distribution of the Altenstadt axes in Germany.

The impression is therefore, that most of the axes of alpine jade known from Denmark reached the region from secondary centres of distribution, like the Paris Basin, without any direct connection to the areas of large concentrations of jade axes at the end of the 5th millennium BC (as f.ex. Germany or Great Britain). The influence of the Morbihan and the axes of Carnac type are without any doubt present in Denmark as attested by imitations made of local types of rock and flint (Klassen *et al.* 2011).

In other words, if the axes known from Denmark were no more than recent acquisitions from the antiquities market, the represented types certainly would have been dominated by those that are most frequent in Europe (Altenstadt, Puy). This obviously is not the case.

It is not possible, within this short contribution, to comment on the context of circulation of alpine jade axes and the values attributed to these exceptional objects, which are dominated by religious concepts and social functions. The reader is referred to the recent monograph covering this topic (Pétrequin *et al.* 2012).

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