

July 5, 2004

Hi Steve,

A few months ago you participated in an apologetics program at St. Mary's in Westphalia. I was able to take most of it in and was very impressed. Converts like you, Mark Shea, Scott Hahn and so many others are truly great gifts our Lord has sent to enrich and renew the Church. I picked up a couple of your tape series and have really benefited from them.

I noticed that you have a thing for artifacts and tangible pieces of biblical history. I am a flintknapper and primitive skills enthusiast and also enjoy studying artifacts. I replicate prehistoric stone tools, mostly out of flint, so when I heard you mentioning things like ancient flint knives, I decided to make you something just for fun. Consider it a token of my appreciation for what you and your family do for the Church.

The large knife is a blade made of jasper from Madagascar set in a black bear jaw. The blade is a replication of what many knives of the stone-age world looked like. The smaller "pieces" of flint are also a type of knife that was made throughout the world using what is called core/blade technology. These blades were struck from a flint core, then used for any number of utilitarian purposes. Remarkably few people realize just how sharp these primitive flint knives were. (If you have hairy arms like me, and are so inclined, put a dab of shaving cream on your arm and see for yourself if one of these will shave hair.)

The difference is this. Blades like the one set in the bear jaw were made using a controlled fracturing process called bifacing, culminating in a serrated blade that cuts efficiently, yet is fairly resilient to repeated and heavy use. The blades struck from cores, on the other hand, have a pristine, but comparatively delicate edge. I included one set in a handle of river cane, but most were just held with the fingers for very controlled, precise uses. For ancient surgical needs, I believe these would have been the tools of choice.

So what's my point? I have always found it fascinating that God commanded Joshua to make flint knives to perform circumcisions on the Israelite men. God obviously knew that the bronze-age knives of the period, though eclipsing breakable stone knives, were not capable of surgical sharpness. Serrated, bifacially-knapped flint knives certainly would have worked, but having used these in many different applications, myself, **THEY'RE NOT THE TYPE OF BLADE I WOULD CHOOSE TO BE CIRCUMCIZED WITH!**

Now I can't prove it, but I'd bet my last nodule of flint that Joshua, as well as Abraham, performed the delicacies of circumcision with core-struck flint blades. I'm certain that it would have been less painful and resulted in quicker healing from such clean cutting action. If it's worth anything, I can also attest from accidental experience that incisions with these core blades result in less scar tissue, too! Though in the context of circumcision, that's a talking point that may have been lost on the Israelite guys.

Now this obviously doesn't have any huge theological ramifications, but I thought you might enjoy ruminating over it. If nothing else I think it shows how God has always been concerned with our well being, even when it came to making His covenant of circumcision with His people less traumatic and painful.

Have some fun with the tools.

By the way, an evangelical friend of mine has been listening to your tapes and he and his family are knocking on the door of the Catholic Church. Using your gifts is no doubt bearing much fruit that you never see.

In Christ,

Mike



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