Review Articles

Debating Religion

A Prehistory of Religion: Shamans, Sorcerers and Saints, by Brian Hayden, 2004. Washington (DC): Smithsonian Books; ISBN 1-58834-168-2 hardback, £31.40 & US$60, xi+468 pp., many ills.

Timothy Insoll

This is a weighty volume at thirteen chapters long (414 pages of text) plus 41 pages of references, and a glossary. It is well-written and has been thoroughly copy-edited and proof read. Moreover, the illustrations chosen are clear, informative, and indicate that a considerable amount of effort must have been invested in their accumulation, and also one imagines, in gaining the accompanying permissions to reproduce. It is a thought-provoking volume which I would recommend that people interested in archaeology and religion read. These points made, it is necessary for this reviewer to state that in his opinion the volume is problematical in various ways; in the definitions employed to categorize religion; in the overall methodology of 'cultural ecology' utilized; and in the evolutionary edifice that is created, and it is necessary to examine each of these in turn.

Firstly, religious definition; this might seem like a secondary concern or something that at least could perhaps be accepted as a given, but is in fact a main (the main?) part of the structural framework upon which Hayden's thesis is constructed. Thus if it can be isolated as problematic, which it is, this obviously needs consideration. The inherent problems in religious definition — types, components, alternatives, have been considered by this reviewer at length elsewhere (Insoll 2004), and essentially Hayden seems to fall into the trap of too simplistically dividing religions into what he defines as 'book' (world) and 'traditional' religions. Now such a division obviously exists but it is far from clear-cut, and the way it is defined in this volume does not really allow for the ambiguity, 'grey' areas, or 'fuzzy' boundaries which exist between the two sets.

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This can be more clearly seen if attention is shifted to Hayden's more detailed criteria of difference for his two groups of religions, as for example in his point 1 — 'world view' (p. 5) that in book religions the god or gods are typically located in the heavens whereas for traditional religious practitioners, 'the sacred is everywhere'. This is incorrect; does Hinduism then become a book or a traditional religion based upon his criteria? (see for instance Chakrabarti 2001). Equally, if we consider another of his more detailed religious distinguishing criteria, that concerned with 'Gods and Morality' (p. 10), we are told that 'tribal religions are not moral systems'. Besides the slippage into the use of the term 'tribal religions' with its outdated connotations, the point is quite astounding. In the experience of this reviewer traditional religions can provide as much of a moral system as book religions. This point is both simplistic and dangerously reductionist and it should be noted that there is frequently more to the latter than singing, dancing, feasting, and the occasional trance. The type of definitional framework Hayden provides would seem to people book religions with automata, in contrast to the image presented of happier, vibrant communities of traditional religious adherents.

Such flaws might in part be due to a degree of incoherence as to who exactly is the projected audience for the volume. Rightly enough, in the preface Hayden notes that a wide audience is aimed for. This is to be commended, but in actuality the audience would seem to be perhaps primarily a secular one. For example, the point made under the overall heading 'the sacredness of food and dance' that in industrial societies 'we have become completely divorced from any sacred aspects of killing animals or eating meat' (p. 7) is a basic error that obviously does not apply to many readers (for instance, Muslims and Jews). More such critical points concerning the posited definitional divisions between Hayden's religious types could be made, but it is necessary to move on to consider the more general methodology employed.

As noted, this is described as 'cultural ecological' in outlook, with the core element being that religion, past and present, has been structured by ecology and 'an innate emotional foundation in humans that distinguishes us from other animals' (p. 3). The latter point is absolutely correct and no fault can be found there,

but this reviewer finds the emphasis upon ecology not so convincing. Undoubtedly it is a major variable but not the sole one, nor necessarily the most important variable generating religious behaviour, thoughts, or religions themselves. In fact what is missing from the equation in emphasizing ecology, cultural or otherwise, is the fact that faith is seemingly absent as an explanatory device for why religions developed, exist, and persist; instead behaviour is given precedence. Hence, then, the motive of religious fervour underlying the construction of Stonehenge is described from a cultural ecological perspective as 'ridiculous' (p. 18). But is it? Could it not have been a mixture of just such ideas, combined perhaps with more prosaic functional elements such as coercion, that produced this monument? Cultural ecology seems to be limiting interpretive horizons somewhat.

Moreover, the cultural ecological approach in its application to the construction of an evolutionary religious trajectory also sometimes seems to resemble those presented in Marxist approaches to religion. The jargon is almost identical, so that, for instance, we get told that religious developments in Europe during the Neolithic were due in large part to the strategies of 'aggrandizers' concentrating 'power and wealth in their own hands' based 'on manipulating circumstances and people in order to gain control of surplus resources and labour', moreover, 'legitimizing inequalities in power or wealth' etc. (p. 268). Such text, relabelled, could happily be slotted within a Marxist tract with its emphasis upon inequality, elites and the like; whereby religion becomes the delusional opium of the masses (see Marx & Engels 1972).

Both the definitions and methodology are obviously used to some purpose by Hayden, and this is for creating a 'prehistory of religion'; an evolutionary sequence, basically from between *c.* 1 million and 250,000 years ago, through to the modern era of the 'industrial world'. Very briefly summarized, some of the salient points of this are:

- **1 million–250,000 years ago.** First material indications of symbolic or ritual activity evident in the archaeological record; defleshing/cannibalism and the use of ochre, for example.
- **250,000–35,000 years ago.** Increasing complexity manifest in intentional burials, some components of Shamanism appearing, and evidence for 'animal cults' (p. 121) appears.
- ***c.* 35,000 years ago.** Complex hunting and gathering cultures and associated religious expression appear *c.* 35,000 years ago in Europe. Shamanism, elite cults (secret societies), common cults, and fertility cults present.
- **Neolithic.** The emphasis on human, animal, and plant fertility increases. Feasting develops significantly and ancestors grow in importance. The division between elite and other religious beliefs and activities becomes clearer.
- **Indo-Europeans (Bronze Age).** The divisions of society become more explicit, as does the dualism between good and evil.
- **Celts (Iron Age).** Druids, ancestors, tribal and war deities, as well as pan-Celtic cults are all manifest.
- **Early States and Empires.** The formal assumption of divinity by rulers occurs in many instances. Rituals increasingly become spectator events. The economic demands of rulers sometimes under the guise of honouring state deities increase. Mystery cults, religion for the 'socially displaced citizens' (p. 379), develop.
- **Judeo-Christianity.** Mystery cults, as exemplified by Christianity, which grew as the Roman Empire crumbled, for it could provide 'important social and material benefits' (p. 398).

Although obviously being partly workable in reflecting some of the broad trends evident in the archaeological record, such an evolutionary scheme can be criticized in various ways, and three examples may be considered here. Firstly, it is somewhat beguiling in its simplicity that stage 1 evolves into 2, 3, and so-on, but it has to be remembered that religion is not a simple organism, but rather a complex phenomenon with social, political, and economic elements which Hayden considers at length, and also less tangible ones based on the numinous, faith, and belief, which are less well-considered. Hence the notion of a rhizomatic structure is perhaps preferable to a linear one.

Secondly, and this is a more general point, related to this is the notion of 'ages and stages' (source unknown) present in any religious evolutionary sequence. These do not really allow for overlap, coexistence, or merely plain syncretism of religious forms, for a pure example of the latter is seemingly an elusive thing. Hence it is the notion of syncretism and convergence which is probably of greater use to archaeologists than a search for the development of the essences of the religious forms in them. Thirdly, in terms of archaeology, although Hayden is to be congratulated on incorporating a wide range of case studies drawn from a broad area geographically and temporally, it can be asked whether those areas almost wholly omitted, Meso- and Southern America and Sub-Saharan Africa for example, really concur with such an evolutionary typology. In order to make it convincing, the hard task of integrating everything, impossible as this may seem, needs to be undertaken.

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Finally, the discussion is anchored in the modern era and some interesting points are made about the industrial world and the place of religion and spirituality therein. Hayden is quite correct in signalling that new forms of spirituality and 'cults of a new age' (p. 407) are developing in the modern era, though whether this really perhaps signals a return to the 'popular and more universal roots' (p. 414) of religion after 30,000 years of attempts by elites to monopolize control of the supernatural is of course open to debate. In summary, although this review has been critical, it has to again be stated that Hayden has provided a thought-provoking book which deserves to be bought, read, and discussed, and for that he is to be congratulated.

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6000 Years of Mound Building

The Moundbuilders: Ancient Peoples of Eastern North America, by George R. Milner, 2004. (Ancient Peoples & Places 110.) London: Thames & Hudson; ISBN 0-500-02118-X hardback, £28 & US$39.95, 224 pp., 153 ills, b/w & col.

James Brown

Two grand narratives — the original peopling of the western hemisphere and the story of how civilization developed in Mesoamerica — have long dominated representations of the pre-contact archaeology of North America. Leading the way is the environmental subdivision called Eastern North America, or the Eastern Woodlands, that has long offered steadfast resistance to change in narrative. Early on, the mounds that dotted the landscape appeared to Euroamericans as obvious evidence of the handiwork of a civilization from the South, if not outright colonization from that quarter. Nowadays, the cultural stamp of Mesoamerica has lost its force, and certainly whatever form it might turn out to be it has to be a much more nuanced one than originally envisioned. In an increasing number of ways the contribution of one and a half centuries of archaeological research has reinforced our understanding of how distinctive the cultures were in this section of the world. But the mound label has stuck as a readily identifiable image that applies to the area. Thus, the book title of 'moundbuilders' serves to stand widely as a hallmark for a distinctive, regional 'civilization' — if one could be permitted the application of such a loaded term. Today, among laypeople particularly, no single term carries more recognition than this.

George Milner is particularly well positioned to write an overview of this large and diverse area. For years he has immersed himself in the very fruitful archaeology and bioarchaeology programmes centred in the Illinois River and the Mississippi River valley of the greater St Louis area. At the same time he has worked in Kentucky and elsewhere to come out with first-hand experience over a broad range of archaeological projects — including archival research. His training as an osteologist has brought the tools of that methodology to bear on his perspective toward ancient demography and warfare. The book has greatly benefited from the totality of his experience. The author speaks precisely from well-considered evidence and highly appropriate examples. Excellent illustrations make his points well, whether they are about older techniques or about better-supported conceptualizations of village layouts and the construction of burial chambers and buildings. The colour photographs of Dirk Bakker that are used deserve the wide dissemination that this book provides. My favourites are the photos taken from the author's collection of postcards.

Milner has used numerous vignettes of specific site contexts — such as the feasts documented at the Toltec mounds, the Mesoamerican contacts at Spiro, and the evidence for warfare at Norris Farm — to punctuate the skein of generalities necessitated by the sheer breath of the topic. The scale of the problem is illustrated by the roughly 1.2 million square miles of United States and Canada and 12,000 years that are encompassed in this book.

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The accumulated knowledge about economy, society and polity has revealed a history that follows a well-known evolutionary line repeated independently many times over elsewhere. Milner has constructed his account chronologically with chapter headings that separate the history into subsistence periods that have certain distinctive characteristics. Generalized foraging, a period of mixed plant cultivation and foraging, and finally a period in which maize and later the 'three sisters' — maize, beans and squash — dominate the farming system. The author elaborates concisely and thoroughly just how these different patterns have supported specific kinds of social, economic and political relations. His choice of examples plays to the diversity of relations. Although his sketch carries the main narrative thread, the geographic scope of study is so large that many regional exceptions to these generalizations have to be left out. Milner does, however, offer a deftly-worded account that does more justice to some of this diversity than other overviews. We learn of the economies of the Atlantic estuaries, the non-agricultural economies of the Calusa located in southwestern coast of Florida.

A striking feature of the archaeological record is the centuries involved in the shift from foraging to cultivation, presumably with numerous instances in which the mix shifted back and forth. A consistent characteristic was that aggregations moved freely from place to place. Eastern North America was never heavily populated by Mesoamerican or Eurasian standards. But from an early period (*c.* 6000 BP) aggregations of populations became established in resource-rich environments. Unsurprisingly, earthworks appear in the record when and where these aggregations first become documented.

Mound-building has an unexpectedly old history in the Eastern Woodlands. Milner brings out the new-found discovery that mound-building precedes any documented instance in Mesoamerica, thereby confounding the procrustean perspective that no achievements were made here without outside help. Watson Brake is an early, well-dated example of a metrically-planned geometric arrangement of mounds. Nothing so far indicates a burial use, but the earthworks are substantial in size. Nor were these alone. Now numerous examples have been documented along the relatively warmer Gulf Coastal Plain.

Mounds are frequently interpreted as part of the architecture of funerary ritual. They were the architectural form for elevating respected leaders and even served as an architectural method of elevating complete villages. But it is the funerary context in which mounds dominate, whether they enclose the grave or are part of a larger, ritual landscape. In certain periods mounds are part of sacred enclosures and can even take the form of animal effigies. In this volume we are informed of how they take the form of earthen platforms upon which sacred buildings once stood. Commonly these sacred structures or charnel houses held the remains of elite dead, usually reduced to packages of teeth and bones. Mounds were frequently reused and frequently incorporated into later sacred precincts, even long after the original grave builders had absented themselves.

In this overview we see something rarely presented and that is a well-illustrated acknowledgement that aboriginal earthworks have taken a place in public space since Victorian times. This use provides a counterpoint to the sad story of wanton destruction, often for mere commercial land value.

The archaeology of the Eastern Woodlands speaks more broadly than to a regional audience alone. It is the home of repeated cultic inter-group connections, called interaction spheres, that unite ever-increasing numbers of distinctive local societies with a common material ritual. The massive earthworks of Poverty Point are the centre of what is arguably the first of these. Remarkably for the care with which these and later earthworks are laid out in accordance to specific orientations and to a metric system, these earthworks were constructed on a foraging economy, albeit one that was made possible by a particularly rich aquatic ecosystem in the southern reaches of the Mississippi River valley. The Hopewellian followed millennia later with many more centres incorporating a multitude of geometric enclosures as well. Amazing accumulations of numerous kinds of exotic finished goods were placed in ritual caches and next to the dead. The far-flung distance for certain materials, such as obsidian, to reach their point of final interment has provoked astonishment from the earliest discoveries. While the cultivation of weedy annuals provided a dependable plant resource base to supplement fishing and foraging, the economic base did not depend upon cereal grain farming. Quite unexpected from the customary perspective, the largest and most elaborate of these Hopewellian earthworks in south-central Ohio were not accompanied by a large resident population. This seeming discordance between construction scale and resident population betrays an unusual macro-regional story that has yet to be revealed. When a third cultic integration took place around AD 1050 maize agriculture appears to have forced a transition from a Hopewellian-like repeat to a pattern of temple-town organization dominating a nearby district. I think that the surplus-producing potential of maize is the

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telling factor. By 1200 a pattern of chiefly-led districts becomes established that bears strong resemblance to parallel developments elsewhere around the globe. Milner provides some of the richness of the research on post-1050 Mississippian Period socio-political organizations that has been so productive to our general understanding of the organizational variety of chiefdoms.

This book begins to lay out some of the reasons why the two grand narratives that have dominated conceptions about the Eastern Woodlands require revision or refinement. The evolution of subsistence patterns has evolved independently, starting from early steps in plant modification of locally available species and later with the selective adoption of tropical plants at particular points in time. This evolution has taken place with growing population aggregation and has undoubtedly quickened with the capacity for maize to produce surpluses for funding specific projects through expansion in land given over to arable production. Mound-building and chiefly organization as well as other social and political characteristics at one time attributed to contributions from tropical America no longer carry persuasion. This is not to say that beliefs and practices of a stylistic sort have not circulated across the continents, but such patterns are significant on a wholly different level from the forms of organization grown locally.

George Milner has provided a carefully-articulated account of the connection between material practices documented archaeologically and connected social, economic and political organizations. What remains to be accomplished is complementing this account with specifically-cultural dimensions. One can gather a taste for the potential of these dimensions by sampling the photographs published in this volume. They imply additional rich insights. We eagerly wait for what is in store in this respect.

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Setting the Agenda for Wider Study of the Neolithic in Northwest Europe

Neolithic Settlement in Ireland and Western Britain, edited by Ian Armit, Eleen Murphy, Eiméar Nelis & Derek Simpson, 2003. Oxford: Oxbow Books; ISBN 1-84217-091-0 hardback, £35 & US$63, ix+224 pp., many ills.

Lesley McFadyen

This publication arose from a conference that was held in Belfast in April 2001. One of the objectives of the conference (and publication) was to promote the role of the Irish evidence in setting the agendas for wider study of the Neolithic in northwest Europe. Many of the papers present new and challenging late fifth and early fourth millennium BC archaeological evidence, and what is refreshing is that the papers take inspiration from this complex evidence in order to develop different concepts of Neolithic settlement.

The book opens with two contributions that deal with recent histories of the Neolithic of southern England. Alison Sheridan and Anne Tresset have written interesting papers on 'French Connections', but this work is slightly at odds with the rest of the volume in its emphasis on the definitive arrival of the Neolithic from elsewhere, and in highlighting evidence from southern England. This may be intended to set up a deliberate contrast with the different concepts of Neolithic settlement gained from the evidence from Ireland, the west coast of Scotland and the Isle of Man. The remainder of the book contains discussions of these different concepts of Neolithic settlement and the papers move back and forth between regions. The publication ends with a summary by Richard Bradley.

The issue of French involvement in the Mesolithic–Neolithic transition in Ireland and Britain is important and Sheridan's paper discusses points of connection between Brittany and Argyll that would have involved the movement of both people and material culture. Similarly, Tresset highlights the different contexts where there are early dates for domestic cattle in southern England. Here she points out that fully domestic cattle seem to have appeared suddenly and in large numbers in Neolithic contexts, having moved from the Paris Basin to southern England. In Ireland she clearly states that the evidence points towards several — possibly independent — periods

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of domesticate introduction (i.e. pre-4000 BC and just after 4000 BC). Both papers involve the movement of people, material culture and animals. Concepts of mobility figure strongly in these papers and yet the reader has to wait until Peter Woodman and Margaret McCarthy's paper for this dynamic to be picked up on. Their paper discusses the significance of cattle bone from late Mesolithic contexts in Ireland and the Later Neolithic significance of red deer. It is argued that these are kinds of animal that have been transported. Rather than this evidence being used to determine the character, or responses, of a particular kind of people as Sheridan and Tresset do (i.e. of Mesolithic or Neolithic origin), they go on to focus on later Mesolithic macrolithic flint-working technology in Ireland since this is the context in which the cattle bone appears. They demonstrate that there was an insular or island dynamic for the movement of worked flint and stone, in contrast to cattle which had been moved over greater distances. They then make the important point that '… significant levels of social contact could exist even where artefacts and raw materials were not being transported' (p. 36).

Cattle in later Mesolithic contexts in Ireland, or cattle in early Neolithic contexts in southern England, or particular kinds of pottery on the west coast of Scotland, are evidence for the movement of things. However, there were earlier, other and further points of connections between people where 'artefacts' were not being transported. The dynamic, the ability to move people/animals/material culture, involved the specific technology of making sea-crossings. An important question which is not asked is, is this kind of knowledge better understood as having been a part of Mesolithic hunter-gatherer lives or that of sedentary agricultural communities?

Point of contact, or the origin of movement, studies need to consider the significance of sea-passage technology, and consider this as a part of their enquiry into the nature of Neolithic settlement. There needs to be a context for how farmers made journeys. This point is spelt out more literally in Roger Mercer's account of skin-covered craft, the importance of sea-passage to local Mesolithic populations, and the issue of how land-based agriculturalists of northern Europe could have invented sea-faring techniques to move people, animals and material culture to Britain.

The book then neatly continues with a critique of these 'French Connections' by Patrick Ashmore. His paper attempts to understand the connections that can be made in material culture studies within different regions of Scotland in a different light. Ashmore asks the reader to consider what we mean by concepts of regionality through a consideration of network theory. Similarly, Gabriel Cooney and Carleton Jones discuss concepts of Neolithic settlement in a landscape context. Cooney considers the effectiveness of living and constructing in particular ways rather than giving import to where things come from or what belongs to whom (i.e. hunter-gatherer, pastoralist and/or agriculturalist). This paper is remarkable because rather than again simply using the fact that the Irish evidence consists of settlement structures, enclosures and field-systems, it goes on to consider how this evidence does not simply *record* a sedentary farming way of life. Cooney argues that the communities that constructed and lived with these architectures, lived lives that comprised a diversity of practices. He does not question the concept of sedentism outright, but neither does he take understanding Neolithic life in this way to mean that archaeologists can simply use a concept to focus their study inwards on a series of site-based studies. Rather than simply equating an enclosed area to an independent settlement, Cooney explores how inside and outside these structures every aspect of life was interrelated.

Cooney also asks how the concept of 'short-term' or 'permanent' is to be defined when attempting to understand the structures at these sites. He questions whether the short-term life span of a structure can simply reflect a shifting community or whether the focus on sites such as Knockadoon, Lough Gur, as locales for repeated and continued activity, take on more permanent notions of place. Interestingly, this point is also picked up in Ian Armit's interpretation of the Scottish site Eilean Domhnuill, North Uist. This is an artificial islet on which several structures were excavated, although it appears that only one or two were in use at any one time. Late in the settlement sequence the islet was completely submerged, but once the waters had receded occupation resumed with several new phases of building construction. Armit argues that the islet was demarcated as a place of significance through 'the actions of maintenance and replacement of the structural features over many generations' (p. 99). Permanence is understood through people's repeated actions and through a place being continually in the process of construction, not through being lived in a continued and fixed sedentary way. This is very similar to the concept of 'persistent place'. The example of the latter, cited within Mesolithic landscape research, is that of Waun Fignen Felen from the Black Mountain uplands of south Wales. It is argued that this lakeside location was frequently revisited specifically for hunting (see Barton *et al*. 1995, 111). That is not to revert back to a Mesolithic context, or to use an argument of

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a universal or generalized concept of mobility within Neolithic contexts (see Cooney's paper in this volume for a rightful criticism of this view), but is to remind us of the fact that Mesolithic settlement was also varied and complex.

At Eilean Domhnuill, there is no evidence for earlier stages of grain processing although saddle querns and large amounts of pottery were recovered; Armit suggests that these are evidence for food having been prepared and eaten there. Similarly, live animals were not kept there but had been butchered and consumed. This site was not an independent farming settlement and would have been, as Cooney suggests in his paper, interrelated to a series of other sites. It is only in Bradley's summary of the book that the reader will find any discussion of the nature of the mobility of pastoralists or agriculturalists.

Concepts of Neolithic settlement are kept open and diverse throughout the book. For example, the following series of papers consider evidence from the Isle of Man. Peter Davey and Jim Innes give an account of fifth-millennium cereal-type pollen associated with woodland clearance and a late Mesolithic context. Similarly, Timothy Darvill argues that there was a late Mesolithic context for pit-digging activities at a site at Billown where a causewayed enclosure was later constructed.

It is not to be forgotten that this volume includes Gordon Barclay's useful compilation of evidence for Neolithic houses or structures in Scotland, and a series of case studies of recently-excavated house or structure sites in Ireland. The case studies are written by Paul Logue, Dermot Moore, Catherine Dunne, Cormac McSparron, Cóilín Ó Drisceoil and Jacinta Kiely. These are followed by Sarah Cross's paper in which she argues that the substantial rectangular structures of the earlier fourth millennium in Ireland were communal feasting places.

Alex Gibson's paper argues that the concept of Neolithic settlement should look beyond the structural evidence. He is quite strict in saying that we can no longer afford to fix our sights on house plans but that instead we must engage in the study of all this evidence for how Neolithic people went about living their lives. It is to the credit of the other papers in this volume that Gibson's important paper, which comes close to the end of the book, has slightly had the wind taken out of its sails since the volume does discuss many aspects of fifth- and fourth-millennium evidence and in an interrelated way. However, both Gibson and Bradley make the important point that this evidence must be connected to monuments of the same period and the publication has made a clear decision not to do this. If, as Bradley suggests in his summary, there was no clear-cut division between ritual and daily life for people living at this time, then we radically need to connect this evidence together.

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Reference

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Taking Stock: the Past and Future of Medieval Archaeology

Medieval Archaeology: Understanding Traditions and Contemporary Approaches, by Christopher Gerrard, 2004. London: Routledge; ISBN 0-414-23463-8 paperback, £19.99 & US$34.95, xvii+302 pp., 64 ills. + 16 boxed text.

Oliver Creighton

Gerrard's historiographical overview of the archaeology of the medieval period in England, Scotland and Wales is a very welcome book. The volume is especially valuable given that general treatments of the history of archaeology have rarely done justice either to the growth of medieval archaeology into a vibrant field of study in its own right, or the contribution of medievalists to archaeology as a whole. While medieval archaeology is, relatively speaking, a fairly recent field of study, it stands to benefit immensely from the type of reflective treatment provided in this volume. This is not to say, of course, that the practitioners of medieval archaeology have in any way lacked the ability to think critically about the subject in the past; rather it is that such reflection has largely taken place in the context of discrete research questions and has been explored in print in a rather limited way, rather

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than developing into a wider body of critical and theorized literature. The book is also timely, published when an entire generation of medieval archaeologists, both in the world of academia and as often influential figures within the public sector, have retired, having made their mark. It is probably for the good, however, that this is a work by a younger scholar. Given that the book marks the first coherent attempt to chart the origins and growth of medieval archaeology, it is all the more important that the author has avoided a rose-tinted-spectacled view of the subject, while Gerrard's expertise in fieldwork and excavation mean that it is rooted in the practical realities of research on the ground.

The book is structured into three parts, containing diminishing numbers of chapters; thus the period up to 1945 is allocated three chapters (39 per cent); 1945–89 two chapters (39 per cent); and 1990–present one chapter (22 per cent). It is tempting but erroneous to assume that medieval archaeology in Britain is essentially a post Second World War development. As Gerrard emphasizes, the post-war boom in medieval archaeology represented the subject 'coming out of its shell' after an important and often neglected ancestry. The origins of medieval archaeology are traced back to the treatment of monastic fabric after the Dissolution and, in particular, the work of antiquarians and architectural scholars. In one respect at least the subject has come full circle: reports, papers and books written in the personalized style that is becoming increasingly popular in the twenty-first century have something of an antiquarian resonance about them. Discussion of the nineteenth century is naturally dominated by the Gothic Revival, and attention is paid both to the construction of new buildings in an appropriated medieval style and the restoration of medieval structures.

Following this preliminary scene-setting introduction to the roots of medieval archaeology, the core of the book comprises a chronologically-based review of the advancement of the subject during the twentieth century. An inevitable by-product of this structure is to portray medieval archaeology as developing on an ever-onward, ever-upward trajectory, growing in self confidence and sophistication to the present day. An important sub-theme that emerges, however, is the complex interrelationship between medieval archaeology and other areas of scholarship. Two trends can be seen as having particular importance. First, we see the increasing integration of medieval archaeology within the subject as a whole through the second half of the twentieth century. Secondly, and in parallel, we see a gradual breaking-away of medieval archaeology from medieval history to attain its own identity and develop its own research agenda. The 25 years following the end of the Second World War are, unsurprisingly, seen as crucial to the development of the discipline and a massive time of data collection — much of which, chillingly, remains to be published. The burst of urban redevelopment in the 1950s and 60s acted as one of the main motors for the growth of the subject, while on the rural scene deserted villages and moated sites were energetically excavated. At this stage, history was a major driving force and in many cases archaeological research strategies were aimed at addressing what were essentially historical questions, either explicitly or implicitly. In the 1970s and 80s Gerrard contrasts the profound impact of new technologies with the rather more modest influence of theory. A move away from elite sub-fields such as sculpture is also notable, as is the emergence of techniques such as spatial analysis and refinements to terminology.

The chapters follow a fairly formulaic pattern, reviewing in turn the study of major types of site; thus in each major period of the subject's development we examine urban sites, rural sites, churches, monasteries, castles and so on. This allows for easy cross-comparison between the key phases of the subject's development but also reflects, of course, the high level of compartmentalization (and, some might argue, fragmentation) so characteristic of British medieval archaeology. It is manifested for instance, in the structure of discrete research groups and bodies such as the Castle Studies Group, the Finds Research Group, the Medieval Pottery Research Group, the Medieval Settlement Research Group, and so on. The structure certainly gives an accurate reflection of how these separate threads of research have developed but also, of course, highlights the many (and sometimes false) divisions and dichotomies — for instance between sites of high and low status, those in town and country, and the ecclesiastical and secular worlds — that have so profoundly influenced the way Britain's medieval archaeology has been written. A key challenge for the future is progressively to break down divisions between such tightly-defined and cosy areas of scholarship.

Any author endeavouring to write what amounts to a new intellectual history of a field of study inevitably faces the considerable challenge of not being turgid through excessive attention to factual detail, and walking a delicate tightrope between genuine critical reflection and plain navel-gazing. It is to Gerrard's immense credit that he has been successful in both respects. Throughout, the author strives to provide explanation to accompany the mass of data relating

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to excavations, fieldwork and all manner of projects, though it is only truthfully in the final part that he is able to break free from the shackles imposed by the book's structure to deliver a cutting commentary that really points the way forward for the subject. Chapter 6, 'Retrospect and Prospect', is compelling reading: threats, challenges and prospects are all discussed; the organization, funding and academic base of medieval archaeology are all examined, as are theory and research tools with massive yet under-realized potential. Gerrard is at his best in this chapter, though it finishes on a somewhat depressing note, strangely at odds with the spirit of the rest of the work, pondering whether 'a truly distinctive contribution to debates about social and economic issues is being made or whether sophistication of argument is being confused with real achievement'. The future for the subject is surely brighter than this.

The volume of raw information contained in a relatively slim book is remarkable, ensuring that it will serve readers at many levels, constituting an invaluable and compact catalogue of important projects and publications as well as a historiography and critical commentary. The bibliography — running to 59 densely-packed pages — will be a much used source of reference. The contents of the bibliography, however, also highlight a major problem for researchers: the numerous references to the 'notes and news' sections of *Medieval Archaeology* emphasize the sheer number of significant excavations that remain unpublished. A particular problem is with urban sites. The absolutely key excavations at Winchester in the 1960s, for instance, are only now emerging to full publication, and for other seminal excavations that remain nameless, the findings exist at present in the form of interim reports, and time and again general volumes produced for the 'popular' press are invaluable in the absence of definitive publication. A reluctance of academics to engage in genuine synthesis remains another outstanding issue; those that span the pre/post Conquest divide are especially rare — Hinton's *Archaeology, Economy and Society: England from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Century* (London: Seaby, 1990) is exceptional, as are works taking a view across the British Isles (as apposed to an Anglo-centric perspective) and, even more so, those examining the wider European scene. On the contrary, a powerful trend in scholarship — related in no small way to the sheer volume of data available — has been towards stressing the uniqueness of given sites and landscapes, and away from broad-based generalization. Projects returning to classic sites in order to shed new light using new approaches and technologies are also comparatively rare in medieval archaeology. Another challenge that remains is the definition of a research agenda for the subject. If anything, the agenda was more clearly defined in the 1960s than at present, with seminal projects investigating the origins of castles and the nature of deserted villages, for instance, although some would claim these were set within narrow historical paradigms.

In terms of the overall appearance and feel of the book, one small feature that stands out is the excellent idea of using multiple selected quotes from deliberately-varied sources to start each section; this is a strikingly effective — and unpretentious — way of highlighting the multivocality that has always characterized the field of study. The human dimension is also emphasized through focus on the many colourful, eccentric and energetic scholars that lit the subject up. The volume is also generously illustrated; the author has clearly searched widely for the photographs, and the range of material is excellent and on the whole clearly reproduced. The success of the case studies highlighted through the use of 'boxed text' is more variable, giving the book the appearance of a textbook when it is actually much more.

This said, the book has two limitations which reflect wider malaise in medieval archaeology. First, the European dimension is somewhat lacking. The simple fact that many medieval archaeologists have worked exclusively in Britain (or one of its component parts) is overlooked somewhat, while the historical differences in the evolution of the subject in Scotland and Ireland are underplayed. Conferences such as the Château Gaillard Colloque and Ruralia give scholars a European stage, but levels of international collaboration and international study are perhaps lower than elsewhere within British archaeology — perhaps inevitably so given the historical dimension to the subject, but this remains a major challenge nonetheless. Certainly, in this respect, the current state of medieval archaeology compares badly to the recent upsurge of exciting and theorized new work in the archaeology of the contemporary past, energized by North American scholarship and firmly embedded within, and enriched by, world archaeology. Second, the book deals overwhelmingly with the period from the eleventh to the end of the sixteenth century, what is called the 'Later Middle Ages'; in short there is very little information on the early medieval period. New directions in this area have a very clear role to play and in some senses point the way forward. A key strength of the journal *Medieval Archaeology* is that it cuts across this division (indeed, an interesting section of the book details the debate over the precise naming of the society, founded

in 1957, and its journal), and it is unfortunate that this volume limits itself chronologically. While it might be argued that the post-Roman period is so distinctive in its archaeology to merit separate consideration, it is now crystal clear that the period *c.* 800–1200 saw critical and widespread changes in town and country, as shown by a number of seminal projects that have shown a pre/post Norman Conquest division to lack any real meaning on the ground.

Overall, the book serves as a thought-provoking retrospective, but also as a biting critical commentary on the subject and its particular challenges — not least the classic issue of judiciously combining historical and archaeological data without the former prejudicing the latter — and a forward-looking and thoughtful statement about its future. This work is doubtless destined to become required reading for all undergraduates dealing with any aspect of medieval archaeology, but contains lessons for archaeologists of any period; it is, in short, essential.

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Idols of the People

Miniature Images of Clay in the Ancient Near East: the Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 2001, by P.R.S. Moorey, 2004. Oxford: Oxford University Press; ISBN 0-19-726280-5 hardback, £17.99 & US$45, viii+82 pp, 16 ills.

Yosef Garfinkel

The main subject of this book is the numerous baked clay figurines (terracottas) of Biblical Israel, which usually depict female figures, but also males and furniture. In order to place them in as broad context as possible the late Roger Moorey provides us with a comprehensive discussion of Near Eastern clay figurines organized chronologically from the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (seventh millennium BC) to the end of the Iron Age (586 BC). The Persian period is also mentioned (end of the fourth century BC). Clay figurines are usually treated by articles and excavation reports that tend to concentrate on the finds from a given site or a specific period, and present a technical and detailed account of a specific figurine type. Moorey goes beyond typology and periodization to provided a cross-period survey of clay figurines as a cultural and religious phenomenon. The focus is the forest, not the trees. He analyzes selected sites and figurine types, and includes typology, technology, gender, context, relevant ancient texts as well as anthropological approaches when applicable. One may wonder why these figurine types were chosen and not others. The answer is practical indeed: these types are in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, where Moorey served as a keeper, and director, for many years.

Moorey uses his vast expertise on Iran, Mesopotamia, the Levant, Cyprus and Egypt to carry out a thorough investigation. Throughout the book an enormous amount of information on the cult and religions of the Ancient Near East is integrated to the discussion. No other presentation of this scope exists and we are in Moorey's debt for providing us with this well-organized, concise, rich text. Three questions are regarded as primary to the terracottas under discussion: Who or what is represented? Why are they, or it being represented? and To whom is the image addressed? As the reader will find later in the book, there are usually no clear answers to these questions.

The book is arranged in three chapters, each corresponding to one of the three Schweich lectures Moorey delivered at the British Academy. The first chapter is mainly an introduction, where various approaches to the subject are presented and evaluated. Moorey begins his survey in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B of the seventh millennium BC, although clay figurines appeared even earlier, in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (Bar-Yosef *et al*. 1991, fig. 13; Noy 1989, fig. 15). The justification for the '*longue durée*' is that the echoes of prehistory can be found in various aspects of Iron Age figurines. Chapter 2 deals with the terracottas in early complex societies with special emphasis given to the Late Bronze Canaanite figurines. These clay plaques, whose mass-production used one-piece moulds, depict a youthful nude female shown in full-frontal low relief. They offer rare access to the popular rituals of women, as distinct from those of male-dominated official, temple-based cults. The third and last chapter deals with the figurines of Israel and Judah during the First Temple period. Two key contexts are thoroughly

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investigated: Cave 1 from Jerusalem, the capital of Biblical Judah, and E-257 from Samaria, the capital of Biblical Israel.

Moorey always stands on stable ground, hardly speculating about the issues. His approach can be found in his own words:

> These lectures have been permeated by ambiguities and by consequent problems of validation. They have perhaps illustrated all too well the general view that this is a subject where too much certainty may have prematurely entered in, not least at the popular interface of archaeology and biblical studies. It may have been possible to strengthen the invalidation of some hypotheses; but rarely to offer confident confirmation of others (p. 67).

While considering the various possible functions of clay figurines (cf. Ucko 1962) Moorey writes that:

> …these miniature images were the instruments through which the people at large in their own communities approached supernatural powers for aid and comfort in ways that were, presumably, thought by them to be acceptable to the supernatural powers thus petitioned (p. 59).

Here I would like to elaborate upon five points in the data presented by Moorey, with the '*longue durée*' approach, and to concentrate on one process, which the clay figurines from ancient Israel clearly indicate: dominance and resistance in the early stages of Jewish monotheism. The following points are of relevance here:

1. Small-size clay figurines appeared in the ancient Near East as early as the beginning of the Neolithic period.
2. Throughout the millennia, female clay figurines were used extensively in domestic settings, and are deeply rooted in the cultic paraphernalia of the region.
3. Clay figurines are found in large quantities in the Biblical kingdoms of Israel and Judah — in Jerusalem alone over 2000 were found, while in many other sites dozens were reported. In both Jerusalem and Samaria concentrations were found in rather suspicious hidden locations, such as in caves or outside the city wall.
4. The paraphernalia of state-temples in the Biblical kingdoms of Israel and Judah, as exemplified at the sites of Dan (Israel) and Arad (Judah) did not include figurines or statues, and the aniconic approach is dominant in the absence of elaborate decorated cult images (for further discussion on this matter see Ornan 2004). This stands in sharp contrast with cult centres of other ethnic groups, earlier or contemporaneous, unearthed in the same area: Late Bronze Canaanite Hazor, Lachish and Beth Shean (Yadin *et al*. 1958, 83–92; 1989, 212–75; Tufnell *et al*. 1940; Rowe 1940), Iron Age Philistine Tell Qasile and Tel Miqne-Eqron (Mazar 1980; Giten 2003, fig. 4), Moabite Khirbat al-Mudayna (Daviau & Steiner 2000) and Edomite Horvat Qitmit and 'En Hazeva (Beit-Arieh 1995; Cohen & Yisrael 1995). Usually these cult centres are full of figurative expressions of all kinds. Confining the discussion here to clay figurines alone limits our understanding and blurs the situation.

   It seems to me that the official cult in the city gate can be added here as well (Blomquist 1999). While plain standing stones without any iconographic images were found in the gate of Israelite Dan, the standing stone in Aramaic Bethsaida bears the representation of an anthropomorphic figure with a bull head.
5. The clay figurine finally disappeared from Judah in the Persian period, in the fifth–fourth centuries BC, from areas known to have been occupied by returning Jewish exiles (Stern 1989, 53–4). By contrast, in Idumea, Philistia, Phoenicia and Galilee, particularly along the Mediterranean coast, there are many rubbish pits containing discarded figurines.

A clear dichotomy is observed in ancient Israel: while the official cult areas such as shrines and city gates bear no iconographic representations, domestic and hidden contexts do in rather large quantities. Moorey mentions quite often that we have no written information in the Bible concerning clay figurines, their names or identification. However, we have countless cases in the Biblical account rebuking the people of Israel for not worshipping the lord as required, but paying tributes to various gods or goddess (see, for example: Jes 44, 9–17; Jer 8, 19; Ez 8, 11–12; Hos 11, 2). There was a clear theological struggle between the monotheistic and aniconic approach of some elite circles, and the popular religion of the majority, that was never cleansed completely of good old pagan habits. These habits had various expressions (Stern 2001), the most notable of these in the archaeological record being the clay figurines. These statuettes had been embedded in the cult and ceremonies of the ancient Near East continually for six thousand years and could not be easily uprooted. They thus represent the resistance of the ordinary population to the new monotheistic aniconic theology.

Only in the Persian period then, in the early Second Temple era, did clay figurines finally disappear from the archaeological record of Judah. It seems to indicate that the process of monotheism and aniconic

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cult was finally completed. Thus, clay figurines are an indicator of the fascinating struggle between the two different religious traditions. While the new one was introduced and practised by the official state power, the regular population resisted and kept the clay figurine, which had been rooted in the region for thousands of years. In a way, similar processes occurred with the spread of Christianity in Europe, the Near East and America, when the new theological concept challenged the local, older and well-rooted pagan traditions.

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Gender and Landscape in Rock-art Research

Ambiguous Images: Gender and Rock Art, by Kelley Hays-Gilpin, 2004. Walnut Creek (CA): AltaMira Press; ISBN 0-7591-0064-0 hardback, £57 & US$75; ISBN 0-7591-0065-9 paperback, £22.95 & US$29.95, 256 pp.

The Figured Landscapes of Rock Art: Looking at Pictures in Place, by Christopher Chippindale & George Nash 2004. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; ISBN 0-521-81879-6 hardback, £65 & US$90; ISBN 0-521-52424-5 paperback, £15.36 & US$37.95, ills.

Liliana Janik

Rock-art studies are currently one of the most exciting areas of interpretation in archaeology. The subtext to this statement implies controversy, danger and contention for readers and authors alike — authors exposing their personal points of view, readers needing to keep their critical wits about them as they gaze upon the increasing quantity and diversity of studies presented to them.

General surveys of rapidly-developing fields of study can be very useful aids to study and research and can act to stimulate further debate. Or they can fossilize the *status quo* in a matrix of bland generalization. One way in which the latter fate can be avoided is for the author of the survey to present the field from a particular vantage point of their own, and this is what Kelley Hays-Gilpin attempts in *Ambiguous Images: Gender and Rock Art*, with whose publication, we

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are assured by David Whitley in the back-page blurb, 'American rock art research comes of age'.

The eleven chapters of the book provide a broad-based introduction to contemporary thinking on who made rock art, how concepts of landscape are helpful in rock-art studies (a theme to which we return in the second volume under review), and the shamans — so ubiquitous in current rock-art research. The broad basis of the book incorporates not only a wide spectrum of research questions, but also extensive reference to rock art from many different areas of the world: North America, Europe, Hawaii, Polynesia, Siberia and South Africa. The rock art presented is set in context through recourse to the ethnographic record and analyses of patterns on pottery, basketry and textiles.

Hays-Gilpin's approach starts out with descriptions of how individual images from these various contexts have been interpreted and, from her engendered viewpoint, points out the possible pitfalls awaiting the gender-unenlightened. She discusses the relationship between sex and gender before turning her attention to 'the picture problem', exploring this theme through the pictorial difficulties between human figures with penises, lizards and lizard men.

The ambitious scope of the book is somewhat betrayed by the generalizations applied to some of the research discussed, which suggests a lack of familiarity with the practice of rock-art study, especially in Europe. For example, when considering Levantine rock art she places perhaps too much reliance on Margarita Diaz-Andreu's assertion that 'European traditions usually confine sex and gender; assume clear-cut and static gender duality; and [place] man and masculine supernaturals in active roles, and women feminine deities in passive, secondary or supporting roles'. Indeed, elsewhere in the book Hays-Gilpin herself provides examples of gender-based interpretations by European archaeologists that contradict such assertions, including Gibbs on Danish Neolithic and Bronze Age burial assemblages and Engelstad on depictions of human and animal bodies in Scandinavia.

Returning to my original two points, then, Hays-Gilpin, while opening up new avenues for enquiry in rock-art research with her engendered epistemology, is in danger of fossilizing the *status quo* in regard to her attitudes to gender biases in her own discipline. What may be true in America cannot be taken for granted as being the case elsewhere in the world. Perhaps the volume does represent the coming of age of American rock-art research, or at least the loss of a certain amount of innocence, but as her carefully-woven, multi-faceted arguments show, gender alone does not represent the front-door key for the interpretation of rock art.

Hays-Gilpin suspects that, in the terms of Joan Gero (1985) 'the study of rock art has been gendered as a feminine enterprise by many professional archaeologists who tend to view themselves as "the cowboys of science", the manly men who dig in the dirt and resurrect the lives of ancient game hunters'. Those of us more familiar with the Eurasian situation and its practitioners are surprised to see rock-art studies thought of as 'that girlie stuff'.

Indeed there is all-too-little girliness about the many exemplary studies in the second volume under review here (all but three of the 20 contributors are men). The four parts of *The Figured Landscapes of Rock Art: Looking at Pictures in Place* include fifteen case studies which take us from Mont Bego and Valcamonica in the Alps, Cape York in northern Australia and Wyoming in the United States via almost as wide a range of locations as are covered by Hays-Gilpin. We are launched on this odyssey with a coherent and illuminating introduction which establishes the significance of landscape context for rock art, stressing the enduring nature of the art and its settings while the meanings and symbolism of both topography and content change through time. Nash and Chippindale propose a useful distinction between 'informed' and 'formal' methods in rock-art research, which I consider to represent a significant advance in the field. The combination of these approaches allows us to develop well-founded, dynamic, vibrant and stimulating new interpretations.

There is not scope to review all of the studies presented to us in this book, but it is worth selecting three as exemplars of the general approach set out in the Introduction. Knut Helskog draws on the mythology of the Northern Peoples in his examination of the place and content of rock art in the landscape of Norway, Sweden and Russian Karelia. Despite being in the Formal Analysis section of the book, Helskog, 'informed' by the mythologies which he knows so well, argues that the prehistoric scenes he is analyzing represent a universe with a tripartite structure, comprising lower, middle and upper regions, and that the location of many of the rock-art panels, where dry land meets water, represented the meeting of the lower and upper worlds.

Perhaps the most striking part of his analysis concerns the depiction of time. He suggests that the passage of time is visualized as a sequence of events, each signifying a particular season. Different sites appear to evoke different seasons: for example, at Alta-Kåfjord in Norway spring is signified by the bear leaving its den. The bear, however, is also connected

to autumn, as another den is located in a corral full of reindeer, suggesting the autumnal bringing-together of the reindeer herds. The two dens are connected by a set of paw prints left by the bear as it walked from spring to autumn, en route passing a gathering of people beneath both the sun and moon, indicating the never-ending days of summer. Other animals are used in similar ways at other sites: the elk at Nämforsen in Sweden and the beluga whale at New Zalavruga in Russian Karelia.

Daniel Arsenault draws on Algonkian oral traditions to investigate the relationship between conceptions of landscape and rock art in the Canadian Shield. In an excellent paper which demonstrates the potential of multi-disciplinary approaches to rock art, he develops his interpretation through the use of parallel lines of argument, beginning with a consideration of general differences and similarities in rock-art locations, moving on to particular topographic features and characteristics in the morphology of the rocks themselves. He then addresses the visual and acoustic properties of the various locations of the rock art; how, for example, they are reflected in water and how light reflects off their surfaces, and the sounds of wind passing by and the echoes off the rocks. He draws all of these elements together to establish a tangible relationship between the topographical features in the landscape 'as centres of spiritual manifestation and religious and shamanic experience' (p. 311).

It is possible sometimes, amid the argument and counter-argument in the field, to lose sight of the immediate attraction of what we are studying. Anyone suffering from such impaired vision should take as a tonic Andrea Arcà's wonderful juxtaposition of photographs of Alpine rock art which he uses to present his persuasive argument in perhaps the most visually-compelling contribution to the book. Arcà takes us on a dazzling tour through the remarkable representations of the cultivated landscapes of the Neolithic to the Iron Age from Valcamonica, Mount Bego and Aussois. The depictions comprise geometrical shapes, symmetrical orientations of dots, grids and parameter lines which Arca convincingly interprets as arable plots. That interpretation is supported by the presence of depictions of ploughing, the activity which defined the landscape in the Neolithic and Copper Age but which subsequently vanished in the Bronze Age, reappearing in the Iron Age with images of granaries.

The Nashes and Chippindale round off the volume with a provocative and timely challenge to rock-art researchers to stop depending on textual metaphors in thinking about, assessing and interpreting the wealth of material such as presented in the case studies earlier in the volume. They instead invite us to look again at the pictures of the rock art, as 'each photograph tells a story based on emotion and mood; creating a visual rather than textual phenomenology' (p. 353). Once again, though, as with Hays-Gilpin, their concluding battle-cry is somewhat subverted by their own caution — for it seems that the editors, with their (albeit helpful) textual introduction to the volume, do not yet trust either themselves or their readership just to look at the rock art. Perhaps putting the photographs first, followed by text, and giving those looking at the book the choice of reading (or not reading), or staying with just the emotion and mood they conjure up, would have been a braver (if riskier) way of encouraging archaeology to start by looking, and to understanding how we see, and only then go on to enhance the visual experience of the pictures with textual interpretation.

In conclusion, the two books reviewed here reveal very different approaches to the presentation of contemporary rock-art research, with some intriguing points of contact. Hays-Gilpin surveys the field with the intention of engendering interpretations; the studies presented in *Figured Landscapes* speak for themselves, while the editors entice their readers towards a future where perhaps the rock art will speak more directly to their viewers. A theme of shared interest, and an interest which goes beyond the field of rock-art studies, is that of landscape, the creation of a sense of place, and the ways in which meanings are created, reproduced and transformed through the specific locational characteristics of rock art. Exploring the relationships between these landscape characteristics and how rock art was seen by those who created it and those who subsequently viewed it is an exciting adventure, for which these two books will provide much needed sustenance along the way.

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Mesopotamian Archaeology?

The Archaeology of Mesopotamia: Theories and Approaches, by Roger Matthews, 2003. London: Routledge. ISBN 0-415-25316-0 hardback, £55 & US$96.95; ISBN 0-415-25317-9 paperback, £14.95 & US$27.95, xiii+253 pp., 2 tables, 34 figs.

Trevor Watkins

In *Cuneiform Texts and the Writing of History* in the series 'Approaching the Ancient World' Marc Van De Mieroop (1999) remarked a lack of 'methodological discussions of art history and archaeology with specific focus on ancient Mesopotamia'. Roger Matthews has written this book in the same series in response to that challenge. I value Van De Mieroop's book, but I suspect that Matthews's book illustrates the error of that particular remark.

Matthews's objectives are to consider the theoretical and methodological alignments of Mesopotamian archaeology within the context of a selection of major research arenas. The discussion of those arenas forms the core of the book: they are (a) the transition from hunting and gathering to farming (Chapter 3), (b) the emergence of complexity in the Ubaid and Uruk periods (Chapter 4), (c) the 'archaeology of empires' (Chapter 5), and (d) the fabric of Mesopotamian societies in a variety of perspectives (Chapter 6). The first two chapters offer an historical background on Mesopotamian archaeology, a very brief summary of archaeological theory (Chapter 1), and a discussion of 'how the discipline of archaeology is currently practised in the lands of southwest Asia' (Chapter 2). The final chapter takes up issues of particular concern to the author, namely (a) how we should construct narratives of the Mesopotamian archaeological past, (b) the lack of a role for Mesopotamian and Near Eastern archaeology and ancient history within the very specific and narrow context of the school curriculum in England, and (c) the future of archaeological research in Mesopotamia.

There is ambiguity in Matthews's idea of a Mesopotamian archaeology. When it suits, Mesopotamia is what one expects (the land between and around the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, now forming much of Iraq, northeast Syria, part of southeast Turkey, and part of southwest Iran). When he chooses, however, Matthews subsumes anywhere in southwest Asia within his purview. Is he really writing about Mesopotamian archaeology, or should he not label his subject Near Eastern archaeology?

But there is a more serious matter. There is a field of archaeology called Mesopotamian archaeology, just as there is a field of archaeology called British archaeology, or the archaeology of Wessex. But a problem arises from the claim that Mesopotamian (or British, or Wessex) archaeology has a status as a (sub-)discipline within archaeology. In the Preface, Matthews tells us that he wants 'to give us some idea of the special nature of this wonderful discipline', by which he means Mesopotamian archaeology. The first chapter is entitled 'Defining a discipline', and the first sentence refers to 'Mesopotamian archaeology as a modern discipline'. Just as Matthews prefers a Mesopotamian title in order to establish the parallel with Van De Mieroop's *Cuneiform Texts and the Writing of History*, so he also sets out to show us a particular specialization within archaeology that might parallel cuneiform studies. Assyriologists working on the written records of ancient Mesopotamia need specialized technical knowledge of how the cuneiform sign-system worked, of the dead languages and dialects of Mesopotamia, and of the scribal and literary traditions within which the tablets were produced.

The archaeologist does not need such special technical knowledge in order to investigate archaeological sites in Mesopotamia, or deal with what is recovered by excavation. Rather, the methods and theoretical underpinning used to investigate the transition from hunting and gathering to farming in southwest Asia are the same as those used to work on the same questions in Mesoamerica or any other part of the world. The principles, methods and theory involved in the historical archaeology of Mesopotamia are the same as those used in any other part of the world. What is important about research in southwest Asia is not the particular theoretical or methodological approach, but rather that southwest Asia is the region in the world where such research has been pursued longest and by more people. Our general ideas on the beginnings of agriculture or the emergence of the state are ultimately founded more on the understanding and writings of researchers who have worked on those matters in the context of the archaeology of the region than those of researchers who have worked in other parts of the world.

Matthews seeks to make the subject comprehensible to readers with no previous knowledge of archaeology, or the archaeology of the region, but the restrictions of the book's size (only about 200 pages in a quite small format) have enforced too great a degree of selectivity, too much simplification and compression. He provides basic, but highly-selective, archaeo-

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logical information about a few sites, their excavation and results, and a selection of theories, sketched in brief. There is not space to give a general context, whether for the origins of farming, the emergence of complex societies and states, or the proto-historical and ancient historical periods when kingdoms and empires came and went. Since I happen to have a general knowledge of the prehistory and protohistory of southwest Asia, it is very difficult for me to assess how comprehensible the selected examples would be to the kind of reader for whom the book is intended. Neither is there enough to discuss the theoretical bases from which the particular explanations that he mentions derive.

There is space here for only few examples. In the chapter on the origins of farming, Matthews tells us that the principal components of the topic are, 'climate, population, plants and animals . . . within the context of human society', and the ordering of that list is clearly significant. Such simplicity bypasses the point that the subject is and has been one of intense debate and strongly-argued differences of view. In the attempt to give some historical perspective, the highly condensed discussion includes the fundamental contributions of Gordon Childe and Robert Braidwood, but they are incorporated into the beginning of a section on climatic 'theories' concerning the origins of farming. Matthews omits reference to Childe's ideas about the Neolithic and other socio-economic revolutions. The so-called 'oasis theory' that is linked with Childe's name was a model (hypothetical, and borrowed) that situated the transformation in a particular place, time, and context of climatic change. But the oasis model is not Childe's theory concerning the existence of a Neolithic Revolution. Braidwood's field research actually caused him to *reject* environmental change as the first mover in the adoption of farming. Some of the main processualist practitioners get a mention, but there is insufficient information to enable the novice reader to comprehend the fundamentals of processualist theory.

At the end of the chapter, in the space of three and a half pages, Matthews rapidly skips through the contributions of Barbara Bender, Brian Hayden (neither of whom have worked on or with Near Eastern material, as it happens), Cauvin, and Ian Hodder, together with various gobbets of information from Natufian sedentary village sites, Hallan Çemi and Göbekli Tepe in southeast Turkey (but none of the relevant sites that were excavated in north Mesopotamia just before the Gulf War). Ian Hodder's thinking, for example, as developed in *The Domestication of Europe* (Hodder 1990) rates a mere two sentences.

When he turns to the emergence of complex and state-level societies, Matthews laments that its Mesopotamian aspect is 'such a large and diverse field that we can do no more than sample some of the major issues'. The treatment of theoretical approaches is even more abbreviated than the equivalent passage on the beginnings of sedentism and farming; consideration begins only in the 1970s and is confined to the processualist school. There is no space for the fundamentally important and influential contribution of Robert Adams, whose survey work in southern Iraq drew the landscape archaeology of the emergence of Sumerian urbanism, and who wrote so powerfully on the urbanization process.

The rest of the chapter focuses on the Ubaid period, and then on the Uruk phenomenon. Space restrictions have presumably prevented any consideration of the studies of emergent complexity in earlier periods of Mesopotamian prehistory. The Uruk phenomenon is a fascinating example of how archaeologists have sought to interpret classic forms of archaeological material — a few excavated sites, some architecture, ceramics, and cylinder seal impressions — in terms of an 'informal empire' established by the emergent cities of southern Mesopotamia across southwest Iran, the broad sweep of north Mesopotamia, and further into the resource-rich piedmont and mountains of eastern Turkey. The problem for the uninformed reader, however, is that the recounting of some of the arguments among academics involved in the debate leaves little space for any elaboration of how well or poorly the available data fits the various interpretations that are so fervently argued. Gil Stein in particular fares badly for his pains in attempting to promote the idea of an asymmetric relationship between the powerful, southern centre and the exploited periphery. Stein has been working on a large, urban-scale settlement in southeast Turkey, and he has argued on the basis of his excavated data that the relations between peoples in north and south Mesopotamia show no sign of asymmetry. We are not told how Stein has based his reconstruction on the data; ironically, he is rebuked because of his 'tight focus on the evidence from Hacinebi'. Matthews asserts that 'if we step back and look at the global picture, we soon appreciate the strong asymmetry', but this leaves the reader wondering where the original story of an Uruk informal empire came from.

The later prehistoric period and the proto-historic third millennium BC in Mesopotamia are where Matthews feels most at home. The third major theme, the archaeology of empires, ranges widely in time, down to the neo-Assyrian empire of the early first millen-

nium BC. The following chapter, entitled 'People's pasts', complements it. After a brief and selective discussion of theories concerning states and empires, the discussion looks in turn at the archaeology of imperial centres, the imperial peripheries that they ruled, and the edges of empires. Research strategies that address these aspects of the nature and life-cycles of kingdoms and empires are hard to find. Implicitly, Matthews is pointing to significant areas that are inadequately documented by the surviving texts, but in which archaeologists have scarcely begun to operate. In 'People's pasts', Matthews has set out to explore 'the role archaeology plays, and might further play' in investigating the fabric of life, society and economy. The examples of work done on urban contexts, the nature of households, life in the countryside, the role of pastoralists are very few, and not because of the pressures of space.

The final chapter, looking to the future of the Mesopotamian (Iraqi) past, seems an even glummer prospect than it did when Matthews was writing. In the section on 'telling tales and painting pictures', Matthews criticizes the mechanistic reportage of conventional archaeological writing, but he shows little awareness of the existence of very different constituencies with different claims on the Mesopotamian past. Not a lot of Ian Hodder's concern for dialogue seems to have rubbed off, despite Matthews's work in a key role in the Çatalhöyük Research Project in the mid-1990s.

A subject that seems to engage the author's feelings rather more is Mesopotamia's place (or rather the lack of it) in the school curriculum in England. The situation is 'little short of disastrous', we are told. This reviewer has not lived in England for a long time, and the intricacies of key stages 2, 3 and 4, AS/A2, and the role of the Assessments and Qualifications Alliance will probably be lost on many other readers, too. What Matthews complains of seems to me part of a much wider matter that concerns the rapid demise of a common cultural core with deep roots. Not only do most people know little or nothing about ancient Mesopotamia, and fail to see its relevance to cultural life today; most (young) people know little of Troy, or classical Greek literature, or Noah and the Flood, or Roman history, or of medieval times. Modern historians in the USA are shocked at the huge number of young people who cannot identify the historical Adolf Hitler. Similar changes affect the idea of a canon of English literature. Why should we think that Mesopotamia is a special case, and that some knowledge of its ancient cultures and civilizations is an essential component of any contemporary westerner's education? We do indeed need to think hard about what the archaeology that fascinates us might mean to others.

In summary, *The Archaeology of Mesopotamia* is a frustrating book. It is on too small a scale to allow the author to write discursively at a level that would engage the interest of archaeologists in other fields. That was not its purpose, which is a pity because Roger Matthews has wide experience and much more to say. The book is intended to be an 'introductory work . . useful as background reading on a wide range of courses'. In that regard, it may fall between two stools, for it tries to cover the principles, theory and methods of archaeology — a fat text in its own right — and the archaeology of Mesopotamia — another fat text — but all within the compass of quite a thin book.

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Mesoamerica: the Not-So-Peaceful Civilization?

Ancient Mesoamerican Warfare, edited by M. Kathryn Brown & Travis W. Stanton, 2003.
New York (NY): Altamira Press; ISBN 0-7591-0282-1 hardback, £61 & US$80, ISBN 0-7591-0283-X paperback, £27.95 & US$36.95, xii+370 pp., ills.

David Webster

My dissertation on Maya fortifications, written in 1971, includes only two references explicitly concerned with Mesoamerican war. I missed some, but a list of all those available at the time would be very short — fewer than the 15 chapters in *Ancient Mesoamerican Warfare,* much less the entries in its lengthy and useful bibliography. Such runaway proliferation in a single professional lifetime is surprising, to say the least. Right up through the late 1960s most archaeologists still bought heavily into the 'peaceful Maya' perspective. Classic Mesoamerican societies (AD 250–900) were more generally envisioned as both peaceful and theocratic, and no one

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thought about Preclassic (2500 BC–AD 250) war at all. Leaving aside those pugnacious Mexicans and Maya who lived in the few centuries prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, ancient Mesoamerica seemed to be singularly free of conflict (except for a bit of raiding for sacrificial victims), thus contrasting strongly with virtually every other early civilization.

Ancient Mesoamerican Warfare — only the second such book devoted to the region as a whole — shows how incorrect this perspective was. Substantive chapters include seven on the Maya, three on highland Mexican societies (Teotihuacan, Cholula, Oaxaca) and one on Preclassic 'Olmec' iconography. Most conspicuously absent is an overview of Aztec warfare, for which we have the most information, and which, explicitly or not, informs our models. I'm of two minds concerning this omission — certainly the Aztecs would have been a rather overwhelming presence, and Ross Hassig (1988) has elsewhere abundantly documented their martial behaviour. On the other hand, the authors make many references to Aztec war and ritual, and consideration of the Aztecs would have provided a firm ethnohistoric anchor for some of the interpretations. Maya chapters predominate in part because the Classic Maya left us such rich 'emic' documentations of war and its political consequences in the form of inscriptions and iconography. Diane and Arthur Chase provide a handy overview of epigraphic interpretations and some important applications. David Freidel, Barbara MacLeod, and Charles Suhler compare episodes of war and internecine violence at Tikal, where there are abundant texts, and at Yaxuna, where there are none. They drive home the point (as do authors of other chapters) that while texts are very informative, they are not found at most sites (even in the Maya lowlands) and that careful archaeology can itself be extremely revealing.

When a bandwagon mentality concerning explanations such as warfare sets in, some cautionary tales are necessary. George Bey provides a thoughtful analysis of assumptions about how ceramic production and distribution do (or do not) reflect war and conquest. Arthur Joyce follows up with an examination of the proposed conquest of parts of coastal Oaxaca by Monte Alban. He asserts that Teotihuacan influence is more obvious, and that evidence of apparent 'imperial' conquest and control can result from other factors. I appreciate such skepticism. My own most recent research is a reexamination of the great system of earthworks at Tikal. For almost forty years they have been interpreted as fortifications (following Puleston & Callender 1967), and were a powerful nail in the coffin of Maya peacefulness. Now I'm no longer so sure that defence was their primary or only function.

Many of the authors represent a comparatively young cohort of scholars, and there are some bloopers that show less than detailed knowledge of the older literature. I was bemused to find that I had 'discovered' that earthworks surround the site of Becan (p. 96). In fact this was known two years before I was born and several scholars early on surmised that they were fortifications (e.g. Armillas 1951). All I did was map, excavate, and date them. Similarly, the idea that warfare might have altered the Maya political landscape prior to the Classic collapse is attributed to epigraphic breakthroughs of the 1990s (p. 111). Such ideas are much older — what epigraphy eventually provided was the cultural-historical details. Charles Golden shows how we can capitalize on both epigraphy and archaeology in his study of the Middle Usumacinta political landscape and its long-standing rival kingdoms of Piedras Negras and Yaxchilan.

Two chapters are explicitly concerned with patterns of warfare that long predate any written texts in their respective regions. M. Kathryn Brown and James Garber evaluate evidence from Middle Preclassic contexts in Belize, and assert that imagery from the great Popol Vuh narrative, which has distinct overtones of conflict, was present at least by Late Preclassic times. Warfare is obtrusive in Classic Maya art and that of later Postclassic peoples. F. Kent Reilly and James Garber analyze Preclassic art — principally that of the Olmec — to show that military themes in pre-state Mesoamerican societies were much more implicit.

My favourite chapters were those on Cholula (Geoffrey McCafferty) and Yaxuna (James Ambrosino, Traci Arden, and Travis Stanton). The great urban centre of Cholula was both a perennial loser and resilient survivor in many highland Mexican regional conflicts. Particularly interesting is McCafferty's treatment of the massacre perpetrated on the Cholulans by the Spaniards and their Indian allies, and his analysis of the many conflicting interests and accounts of this event. The lesson is that during the conquest it is fruitless to try to identify good guys and bad guys among all the contentious agents and factions. The Yaxuna polity appears to have been embroiled in wars and alliances at least as early as AD 400, and yields some of the best non-textual evidence for mayhem and destruction. Along with Tikal and a handful of other sites, Yaxuna provides good documentation of the systematic elimination of defeated royal/elite factions. Shirley Mock, who earlier identified just such dynastic mayhem at Colha, contributes a chapter on the social drama associated with war, and more especially the

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trickster characters who contextualized war in macabre veins of Mesoamerican humour.

Readers would have benefited from a more comprehensive overview of warfare as a concept and a distinctive set of human behaviours. Editors M. Kathryn Brown and Travis Stanton briefly address the issue in their opening chapter, and a few of the authors offer thumbnail definitions. The general attitude, however, seems to be either that war is too complicated to deal with or that we know it when we see it. This is too bad, because I think one can develop broad and useful definitions that encompass the range of behaviours that we call warfare, as I have tried to do in my own publications (Webster 1998; 2000).

Most of the chapters are quite particularistic, although Annabeth Hendrick's study of the iconography of war at Teotihuacan makes intriguing comparisons with Islamic ideology, and Steven LeBlanc contributes a reflective contrast between warfare in Mesoamerica and the U.S. Southwest. In his final overview chapter, Payson Sheets steps back and refers to the larger comparative literature, most notably the findings of Ember & Ember (1992) that war is cross-culturally most closely associated with resource unpredictability and xenophobic perceptions of neighbours.

One reason for the current vogue in warfare is that it makes sense out of otherwise puzzling or seemingly unrelated aspects of the Mesoamerican archaeological record. Suddenly observations made long ago, often in haphazard fashion, click into meaningful focus in new ways. An example is the realization that many so-called Maya 'termination rituals' represent instead systematic desecration (and metaphorical 'killing') of an enemy's buildings and other spiritually-charged possessions (Pagliaro, Garber & Stanton). Many archaeologists have reexamined old evidence: new radiocarbon dates on a palisade excavated more than 30 years ago reveal conflict at the Early Preclassic village of San Jose Mogote (Flannery & Marcus 2003). I notice, however, that some shopworn ideas, such as the long-imagined Early Classic wars between Tikal and Uaxactun (now generally discounted) have remarkable tenacity.

The systematic study of ancient Mesoamerican warfare is still in its infancy, especially in terms of fieldwork. Most of our evidence for it, and insights about it, are by-products of work undertaken for other reasons (like my research at Becan), or chance discoveries (like the Bonampak murals). Only a handful of projects have ever been designed specifically to investigate ancient warfare in Mesoamerica. Nevertheless, most of the contributors to this book would probably agree on the following:

1. because warfare is difficult to detect in the archaeological record it probably occurred much more frequently than we think;
2. warfare was present at least by Early Preclassic times and became more obtrusive thereafter as populations and polities proliferated, right up to the arrival of the Spaniards;
3. wars had material and territorial motivations, not just ritual ones, and there is no inconsistency among these;
4. although warfare was constrained by norms of customary behaviour, these could break down into very destructive and lethal forms of conflict;
5. outcomes of wars were not necessarily foreseen by the participants;
6. wars restructured polities on the Mesoamerican political landscape, and were also a force in internal dynastic disputes;
7. while some kinds of warfare involved only elites, others depended on large numbers of mobilized commoners;
8. Mesoamericans broadly shared a complex and durable set of symbols, rituals, and ideologies concerning warfare. Distinctive local variants of these sets endured, often in altered forms, for centuries, and were integrated into fundamental worldviews.

Few people would have agreed with this set of propositions 30 years ago, so we have come a long way in understanding Mesoamerican warfare. The larger question of whether there has ever been a peaceful civilization remains debatable. The jury is still out on the Minoans of ancient Crete and the Harappans of the Indus Valley, but don't bet money on either of them. Ancient Mesoamericans, certainly, have long since dropped out as contenders in this unlikely sweepstake.

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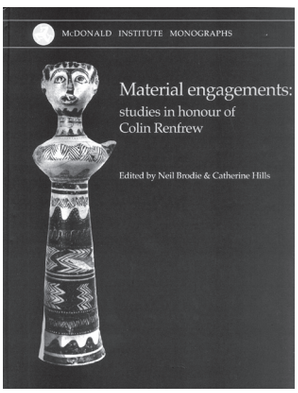
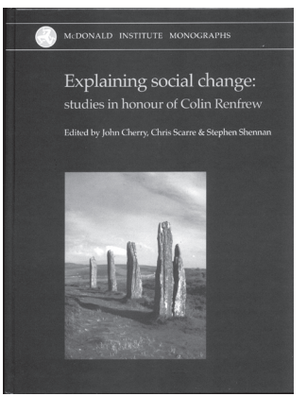
Studies in Honour of Colin Renfrew



Material Engagements

edited by Neil Brodie & Catherine Hills

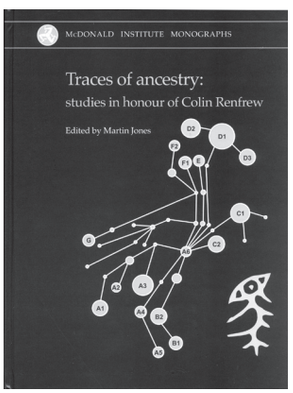
The subject matter of archaeology is the engagement of human beings, now and in the past, with both the natural world and the material world they have created. All aspects of human activity are potentially relevant to archaeological research, and, conversely, the ways in which others, especially artists and anthropologists, have investigated the world are of interest to archaeologists. Archaeological artefacts and sites are also used by groups and nations to establish identity, and for financial gain, both through tourism and trade in antiquities. Colin Renfrew has actively engaged with art, with politics and with the antiquities trade, and has presented his ideas to broad audiences through accessible books and television programmes, as well as championing the cause of archaeology in many public roles. The papers in this volume, which have been written by colleagues and former students on the occasion of his retirement, relate to all of these subject areas, and together give some idea of the complexity of the issues raised by critical engagements with the material world, both past and present. 180 pp., col. figs. (McDonald Institute Monographs, McDonald Institute 2004) ISBN 1-902937-26-0. Hardback. Price GB £35; US$70.



Explaining Social Change

edited by John Cherry, Chris Scarre & Stephen Shennan

Over the past 30 years, social archaeology has become one of the central fields of archaeological research, placing human societies at the heart of our understanding of the human past. Colin Renfrew has been a key champion of social archaeology, and the present volume brings together a series of papers on the occasion of his retirement. They have been written by colleagues and former students, and touch upon many of the themes that he himself has studied and about which he has written so persuasively and engagingly: the development of the human mind, trade and exchange, social change, chiefdoms and states, and the archaeology of island societies. These studies focus not on earlier work, however, but reveal the new directions that have developed in recent years, bringing the study of social archaeology firmly into the twenty-first century. 240 pp., b/w figs. (McDonald Institute Monographs, McDonald Institute 2004) ISBN 1-902937-23-6. Hardback. Price GB £35; US$70.



Traces of Ancestry

edited by Martin Jones

In 1987, Colin Renfrew's *Archaeology and Language* challenged many perceptions about how one language family spread across large parts of the world. In doing so he re-invigorated an important exchange between archaeologists and historical linguists. At precisely the same time, a quite separate field, human genetics, was making considerable steps forward in the elucidation of human ancestry. These three parallel lines of enquiry into genes, words, and things have, over the ensuing two decades, entirely transformed our perceptions of the human past. This volume brings together contributors to that transformation from around the world, to honour Colin Renfrew with a series of key papers. They include a number of impressive synthetic statements, as well as case studies at the frontiers of three different branches of research. They range from global accounts of human dispersal through to archaeological, genetic and linguistic studies, illustrating what has been achieved over the past two decades, and the most promising avenues of research for the future. 162 pp., b/w figs. (McDonald Institute Monographs, McDonald Institute 2004) ISBN 1-902937-25-2. Hardback. Price GB £30; US$60.

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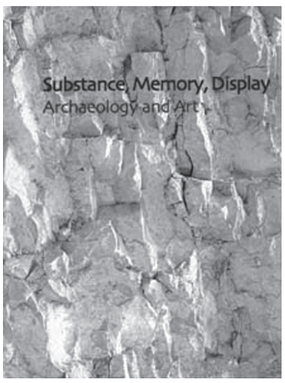

edited by Colin Renfrew, Chris Gosden & Elizabeth DeMarrais

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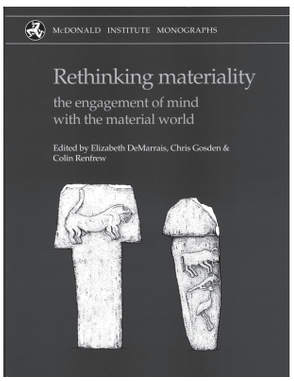

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edited by Elizabeth DeMarrais, Chris Gosden & Colin Renfrew

What is the relationship between mind and ideas on the one hand, and the material things of the world on the other? In recent years, researchers have rejected the old debate about the primacy of the mind or material, and have sought to establish more nuanced understandings of the ways humans interact with their material worlds. In this volume alternative approaches are presented, deriving from a wide variety of theoretical perspectives. Contributors debate the significance of key thresholds in the human past, including sedentism, domestication, and the emergence of social inequality and their impact on changing patterns of human cognition, symbolic expression, and technological innovation. In its global coverage and its broad theoretical scope, this landmark volume offers an innovative and comprehensive assessment of current thinking and future directions.

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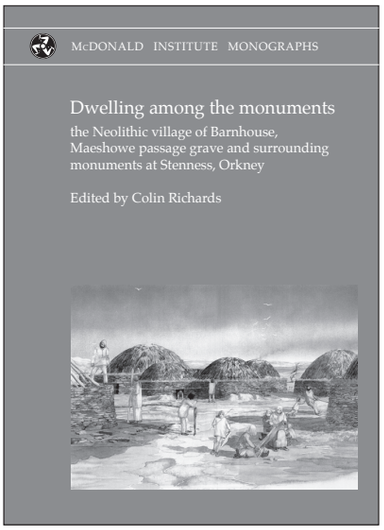

This volume provides an exciting account of the lives of the inhabitants of the village of Barnhouse, a Late Neolithic settlement complex in Orkney. The excavation of Barnhouse between 1986 and 1993 in fact constitutes the largest investigation of a Neolithic settlement in northern Britain since Gordon Childe examined the nearby village of Skara Brae in the 1920s. It consequently provides an ideal opportunity to reconsider architectural representation, the social construction of identity, and social and ritual practices within a Late Neolithic community and beyond. The inhabitants of Barnhouse lived within one of the most spectacular monumental landscapes of the British Neolithic, and this volume also describes smaller-scale excavations at the nearby passage grave of Maeshowe and at the Stone of Odin. The results of these investigations provide the basis for an interpretative account of the habitation and construction of this monumental landscape over a five-hundred-year period of Orcadian prehistory (*c.* 3200–2700 BC). In its form and conception, *Dwelling among the monuments* marks a departure from standard archaeological excavation monographs: while containing the customary descriptive accounts and the full suite of specialist reports, it employs archaeological evidence to capture the social dimensions of life within a village and its associated monuments during the Late Neolithic.

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