

Teasing out the separate strands of influence that created the Saharan *qusūr* is hardly an easy task, and with the exception of the eleventh-century foundations in the Mzab, firm chronological data are absent. Chekhab-Abudaya rightly sees the expanding concentric circles with radial streets that characterise the plans of many of the *qusūr* as the result of a series of new arrivals, settling outside the walls and then building new ones. She contrasts these concentric plans with those that contain rough grids, which she judges to be later. But none of these is easily dated. No excavations have ever taken place (except in the deserted Ibadī town of Sadrata) and, to my knowledge, no radiocarbon dating has been carried out on a *qsar* outside Libya (although radiocarbon dates for the *qusūr* of the Wadi Draa in Morocco are underway; Corisande Fenwick *pers. comm.*). Chekhab-Abudaya's investigation thus serves the very useful purpose of pulling together all the available information, creating numerous and beautifully clear comparative plans, and asking a series of questions that certainly remain to be answered. New data could, and should, come from future archaeological work on these sites and, indeed, on the whole of the northern Sahara.

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GAVIN GLOVER, PAUL FLINTOFT & RICHARD MOORE (ed.). *A mersshy contree called Holderness: excavations on the route of a national grid pipeline in Holderness, East Yorkshire*. 2016. xii+286 pages, numerous colour and b&w illustrations. Oxford: Archaeopress; 978-1-78491-313-7 paperback £40.

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For archaeology, linear developments such as pipelines, roads and railways provide opportunities to explore transects through the landscape, facilitating a glimpse into wider patterns of activity beyond individual sites.

This volume, edited by Gavin Glover, Paul Flintoft and Richard Moore, presents the results of the archaeological investigations along the route of a 32km pipeline constructed through Holderness, between the coastal village of Easington and the hamlet of Old Ellerby near the village of Ganstead in the East Riding of Yorkshire.

The region of Holderness has received considerable attention from antiquarians and archaeologists, including the notable discovery of the Roos Carr figures in the nineteenth century. Yet far greater attention has been paid to the adjacent chalklands of the Yorkshire Wolds where there is a rich aerial photographic record and a legacy of internationally significant sites, including the Neolithic monumental complex at Rudston, Iron Age square barrow cemeteries and the medieval village of Wharram Percy. In recent decades, however, attention to the wetland and coastal archaeology of Holderness has gained ground, probably as a result of development and various other threats, and a new understanding of the region's archaeology is beginning to emerge.

Against this backdrop, the volume by Glover, Flintoft and Moore provides a significant contribution. At one level, it delivers detailed and highly accessible reports on the 20 sites excavated along the route of the Easington to Ganstead pipeline. At another, building upon the wider body of past research in the region, it begins to explore the significance of these new sites in terms of their spatial distribution through the landscape and the relevance of this in terms of wider factors such as sea-level and environmental change.

The structure of the book is conventional, beginning with a comprehensive introduction to both the region and the project, followed by descriptions of the results from the excavations of each of the 20 sites, from north-west to south-east. One of the great

strengths of the volume is that considerable care has been taken to ensure that all of the numbering and cross-referencing between the text and the figures is clear, so that the artefacts and samples discussed later in the volume can be traced back to locations on the plans.

The largest section of the book, written by a comprehensive range of specialists and richly illustrated, focuses on the artefacts. Here, the level of discussion varies by material and author, with some sections focusing on the description and interpretation of individual objects, while others provide a broader discussion of the material and its significance. In part, this is due to the nature of the objects being discussed, with the more abundant finds types, such as pottery, facilitating deeper investigation.

The following section focuses on the results from a wide range of analyses undertaken on the bone and environmental samples, providing additional detail in support of the descriptions of the site excavations introduced in the first main section. Analyses by the specialists include human bone from a variety of inhumation, cremation and disarticulated contexts, animal bone, plant macrofossils, pollen and molluscs. As with the preceding section on the artefacts, the level of detail provided largely reflects the volume of evidence, but also the levels of preservation. Even though the condition of bone was generally moderate or good, providing larger quantities of evidence, soil conditions meant that organic material and environmental remains were less well preserved.

In the introduction to the book it is explained that, given the quantity of the data that emerged from the project, the two main sections on artefacts and analyses are structured to focus on ‘specialist discussions and conclusions’ with only “sufficient weight of supporting data to allow judgements about the basis of those conclusions” (p. 2); the remaining data are contained within the site archive. Defining what is *sufficient* can be challenging, but, in the case of this volume, the level of information provided is mostly appropriate and, for the majority of readers, will indeed be sufficient. For specialists, the level of detail provided will give a good indication of the potential of the samples and hence whether it is worth accessing the archive for more detail, yet here the project might have benefited from accessible digital archiving.

The discussion and conclusions that complete the book draw together the themes from the preceding sections by period and theme, as well as in terms of significance. While the excavated evidence extends from the earlier Mesolithic through to the medieval period, particularly noteworthy discoveries include an early Mesolithic flint-working site, the possible Bronze Age and Iron Age barrows near Sproatley and the extensive Iron Age settlements. In relation to this later prehistoric landscape, both the density and the spatial distributions of settlement along the route of the pipeline are intriguing and add to our understanding of lowland activity at this time. Similarly, the detailed treatment of certain features, such as the later prehistoric ring gullies, draws attention to some specific challenges of interpretation.

Much of the discussion explores the evidence within its wider regional context, examining how the results from the project have augmented previous research and knowledge. Due caution is expressed in relation to the question of how representative the results from this transect might be of past cultural activity across the wider Holderness landscape. A route that by necessity bypasses modern settlements, for example, probably explains the relative absence of medieval sites. The discussion also relates the material to environmental factors such as wetlands and relative sea-level change, across the wider region including the Wolds and the Vale of York. Given the importance of some of these discoveries, perhaps even more could have been made of their wider national and international significance. Overall, however, this volume is a valuable contribution to our understanding of Holderness, its regional context and of lowland archaeology more generally.

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