



# The Archaeological Journal

## Book Reviews



**VISUALISING THE NEOLITHIC.** Edited by Andrew Cochrane and Andrew Meirion Jones. Pp. x and 300, Illus 113. Oxbow Books (Neolithic Studies Group Seminar Papers, 13), 2012. Price: £35.00. ISBN 978 184217 477 7.

This volume — one of a number of high-quality books to be published recently by the Neolithic Studies Group — deals with what can be loosely termed as artistic endeavour within a Neolithic context. The book is divided into nineteen chapters and includes papers concerned with both portable and static art. The chapter layout is supported by a well-written and informative introduction by the editors. Within their opening gambit, Cochrane and Jones compare rock art and figurines from various areas of Europe. However, there is an imbalance, with only four papers devoted to figurines, with a further two discussing portable art *per se*.

The editors have been cautious, and rightly so, when exploring the term ‘art’; indeed they have opted for ‘visual expression’, which can cover a multitude of concepts. The structure of the book includes nine chapters that are devoted to Neolithic and Bronze Age open air rock art of the British Isles (including papers from Ireland, but none from Wales). Other papers outside the British Isles catchment include studies from the Balkans (Chapman), the Linearbandkeramik area of northern Europe (Hofmann), Spain (Bacelar Alves) and western Russia (Lahelma and Janik). The editors have also carefully crafted several theoretical papers that take a more holistic view of such topics as the materiality of artefacts (Gaydarska) and personhood and visual media (Robinson). The Gaysarska and Robinson papers provide excellent contextual value to the book, especially given that the majority of the papers are site/area focused.

Specifically, there are a number of papers within this volume that stand out and are welcome additions to the rock art library, in particular the ever-expanding research around the White Sea by Janik, the landscape work at Ben Lawers by Bradley and Watson, and the paper by Shee-Twohig that deals with landscapes around Loughcrew. I also draw the reader’s attention to David Robinson’s paper which, in many ways, provides an appropriate theoretical overview.

Individually, each paper contributes to an ever-increasing interest in artistic endeavour within later prehistoric archaeology; however, collectively, one can argue that they are simply a smorgasbord of ideas, periods, themes and geographies that typify the conference volume genre. Despite this book being part of a series of works from the Neolithic Studies Group, there are several chapters where the artistic theme ventures into the Bronze Age (e.g. Chapters 4 and 5). This is not a problem, as I think abstract imagery, such as the assemblages from Cumbria and Scotland, do traverse these

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compartmentalized and sometimes artificially constructed periods that archaeologists are so obsessed by. A similar argument can be said for chapters by Lahelma and Janik who discuss Mesolithic-style hunter-fisher-gatherer rock art from north-western Europe, but are these assemblages Neolithic in terms of ideology and pictorial context?

The book covers much of the British Isles, but, similar to Beckensall's pioneering work on British rock art (*British Prehistoric Rock-art*, 1999), there is no mention of Wales. Surely this omission would have established a clearer discourse for later prehistoric artistic endeavour in the British Isles, especially with rock art from the two passage graves in Anglesey (Bryn Celli Ddu and Barclodiad y Gawes)? This small but significant assemblage should surely not be omitted from a book like this.

One clear visual attribute to the book is the excellent and innovative photography of Ken Williams, especially the cover image, showing an inquisitive bovine pondering over an open-air rock art site. His work is scattered throughout the British chapters and do much to enhance the visual (and saleable) quality of the volume. In conclusion, this volume will be an important addition for those researching artistic endeavour in the northern and western peripheries of Neolithic Europe, even though there are areas that have been omitted.

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