

## BOOK REVIEW

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### European landscapes of rock-art\*

Editors: G Nash & C Chippindale

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To greater and lesser degrees, the issue of landscape has always been a part of rock-art research, but only in recent years has the subject received rigorous attention from archaeologists and rock-art researchers. Ever-growing interest has culminated in a diversity of approaches and lively debate that are well represented in *European Landscapes of Rock-Art*, edited by George Nash and Christopher Chippindale. Examining the relationship of rock-art to landscape, the case studies are wide-ranging, covering rock-art imagery from several key regions and periods in Europe: from post Palaeolithic Iberian rock-art to World War II graffiti on the German Reichstag.

The first chapter, by Fredrick Baker, is a challenging one that, although seemingly unrelated, is of direct relevance to rock-art studies. Through discussion of the role of symbolism and cultural marking in the elevation of 'spaces' to 'places' and the symbolic evolution involved in the reuse of places, Baker investigates the Red Army's graffiti on the walls of the Reichstag, Berlin. This chapter provides us with a fresh perspective on the issues facing contemporary architects involved in the reuse

of historically symbolic places, these issues being of direct relevance to archaeological enquiries into the reuse of culturally marked places in the past. Through investigation of the graffiti as not only social and political, but also personal statements, Baker replaces the individual within investigation of the social and political changes at the Reichstag. Such evidence is rarely available to rock-art researchers investigating further culturally removed symbolic traditions, but this informed approach to the graffiti and its context within a "layered" landscape, serves to remind archaeologists of the interaction of the individual, the group and the wider landscape in the creation of places through symbolism.

In contrast, the next two chapters, by Stan Beckensall and Avril Purcell, approach the subject of the relationship of rock-art to landscape from a thoroughly archaeological perspective, building on Bradley's (1991) method of discerning distribution patterns and comparing these to trends in the placement of rock-art within the landscape elsewhere. Beckensall provides us with an overview of British rock-art whilst Purcell concentrates on

*\*Much of the content of this book is not strictly relevant to hunter-gatherer research, but the methodological approaches used in these European case studies have wider applicability, making this volume of more general interest - Editor.*

the smaller study area of the Iveragh Peninsula, southwest Ireland. Similarly to Bradley's results, both authors noted the importance of route-ways and viewing-points for the location of the rock-art in their study areas. But, whilst general patterns inform us that landscape affected the placement of rock-art, it is clear that there were no strict rules of placement, each area revealing idiosyncrasies and variations in the ritual significance of different sites. Whilst veering on the more descriptive side these studies do provide a solid foundation for further research. Purcell goes some way in attempting this by discussing the apparent dichotomies in locale revealed by analysis of the five rock-art areas within his study area and the implications of these for the audience size and social role of the rock-art. He also makes a useful comparison of the compositions at these different types of locale and concludes that no general dichotomy is evident at this level.

Angelo Fossati takes a very different approach to the issue of landscape and rock-art. Recognising the fact that not all of one tradition's art had the same purpose or function, his discussion focuses on topographic representations found in the Valcamonica-Valtellina region of northern Italy. He situates these in the wider context of the local rock-art tradition and draws our attention to similar 'maps' in other areas of Europe. By treating these images as pictures of either real or imaginary landscapes, he examines them as expressions of attitudes to landscape and argues that their appearance could signal a new organisation of the land with ritual functions. That he does not expand on these arguments in greater depth is understandable given the relatively limited amount of archaeological excavation within the Valcamonica-Valtellina area. As further evidence comes to light, there may be further opportunities to test this interesting hypothesis. This would greatly enrich our understanding of the cultural changes that occurred in this area.

In chapter 6, Michael Frachetti and Christopher Chippindale examine the Chalcolithic statue-stelae of the Valcamonica region, Italy, for evidence of the effects of seasonality and cyclical and linear

senses of time on human experience and uses of landscape. By recognising that interaction with the spatial landscape also has a temporal dimension and that this is expressed in the art, they attempt to address the issue of 'prehistoric time-reckoning' through rock-art. This theoretical consideration of temporal concepts is ambitious, especially given the relative scarcity of other archaeological evidence for changes in ideology and material culture in Chalcolithic Valcamonica. The authors come some way in approaching the issue although a more thorough investigation of long-term landscape distribution patterns may have added weight to their argument. The rock-art of Alpine Italy has yet to be thoroughly scrutinised for evidence of short, medium and long-term historical processes and the interplay of these temporal scales. Such an endeavour might be very fruitful.

In chapter 7 Per Ramqvist follows recent interest in the ritual landscape by investigating the rock-art of the *taiga* region of Fenno-Scandinavia, for evidence of the genetic relationship between rock-art and dwellings and the differing (inter- and intra-group) ritualising of the landscape. Ramqvist recognises that differences in the undoubtedly religious rock-art imagery of this area are partially due to environmental differences and he focuses his investigation at a regional level, discerning differences in style (looking for correlations between subject matter [elk] and the availability and use of such resources) and technique (comparing distributions of paintings and carvings) in the different areas. In central Norrland, distinct differences were evident between the techniques of paintings and carvings regarding the complexity of panels, their location on vertical or horizontal panels, inland or coastally and their association with water resources. He suggests that these patterns might be useful for targeting areas to search for undiscovered sites. Next, he focuses in on the pictorial content of the painted sites in Ångermanälven to discuss their role as settlement indicators. He compares the modes of elk decoration ('outlined' and 'filled') and the imagery repertoire at different sites and suggests that the emergent patterns might indicate the spatial

distribution of different tribal units in the region. Next he looks at the relationship of the Ångermanälven River tribe rock-art sites in relation to their settlement sites. He concludes that the spatial separation of the different site types might indicate their different ritual roles: painted rock-art sites being located in what was considered to be a 'holy area' and being oriented more towards the religious needs of the different groups during more difficult seasons compared with carved rock-art sites being located near dwelling sites, thereby indicating that these images might have resulted from the cosmology of the whole community. The distribution and temporal elements thus combine to explain why the painted sites are often smaller and less varied than the carved sites.

Similarly to Purcell, Margarita Díaz-Andreu is concerned with the ritualising of landscape. She investigates the ways in which the ritual aspect of the landscape has been analysed in rock-art studies and criticises previous overstatements of the role of rock-art in ritualising the landscape. Whilst some scholars have tried to integrate secular aspects into their studies they have done so in a generalised way by simply equating secular and sacred aspects of the landscape in prehistoric cultures. In order to overcome this Díaz-Andreu proposes the idea of uneven ritual depth in the level of sacredness versus secularity accorded to sites. She also draws attention to the fact that the multiple identities of audiences will affect an individual's perception of a space and thus their experience of it. Through application of the concepts of ritual depth of the landscape and of the identity of individuals who lived through rock-art landscapes to the post-Palaeolithic paintings of Villar del Humo, Spain, she provides a deeper understanding of how this rock-art was used to ritualise the landscape. Analysis of the distribution and themes of various rock-art sites reveals that different degrees of sacredness were accorded to the sites and a variable ritual topography at Villar del Humo.

In chapter 9, George Nash re-examines the painted site of Tumlhed in Göteborg, Sweden, discussing the site's location, the phenomenology of the landscape and the interplay between the

position of particular animal species imagery on the panel and within the contemporary (utilising shoreline displacement curves) landscape. According to Nash, the separation of the 'wet' and 'dry' imagery by a natural central vertical fissure on the panel suggests that the complete design could represent a structurally opposed cultural 'map' that had social and political bases. Although this theory is difficult to prove, that such panels may have been visual statements using an economic and symbolic code does seem to be supported by the additional division of above and below water-line imagery. Similarly to Angelo Fossati's approach to the Valcamonica 'maps', Nash examines the panel as an expression of the outside landscape and theorises that such 'maps' could signify a change in the socio-economic concept of controlling the landscape and the socio-ritual division of space that came with the movement to farming during the Bronze Age. Such readings of individual rock-art panels should be considered as possibilities only until a more contextual examination of such panels within the wider rock-art tradition and in conjunction with other sources of evidence is made.

Kalle Sognnes provides a final cautionary chapter for this volume, highlighting the fact that rock-art and landscape studies are still in their infancy and that study of the relationship of these must be conducted at several levels: inter-regional and regional, local and site, and at panel levels. Sognnes stresses that, instead of northern Europe being studied as one entity, there is a network of several rock-art regions, the geographical distribution patterns of which have been discerned, but at the local and site levels we must remember that our cognitive map-imposed image of the landscape is different from that of prehistoric peoples: landscape is a cultural process. He also highlights that water erosion has resulted in topographical and archaeological 'black holes' which hinder investigations of prehistoric landscapes: although shoreline displacement and land uplift data have been considered, the geological processes have been mostly overlooked in central and northern Scandinavia. Nevertheless, Sognnes

provides us with a general analysis of the subject matter and distribution of rock-art sites in Stone Age central Scandinavia, showing that the two correlate: near the sea there is a 'sea of whales' and inland there is a 'land of elks'. Whilst rock-art sites are often located at conspicuous topographical features, we cannot predict the location of some sites based on topographic features alone: we must be aware of the fact that sound also played a part in the location of rock-art in this area. Sognnes thus reminds us of the importance of our sensual involvement with rock-art and encourages a more experiential understanding of rock-art in the landscape.

The unifying premise of this volume is based on the phenomenological approach to landscape, which stresses human experience of, and interaction with, rock-art as monuments that existed, and continue to exist, within socially constructed landscapes. Instead of investigating rock-art in isolation from its natural and cultural

environments, its situational and physical contexts are brought to the forefront of research. The aim is to provide a more experiential and humanised understanding of the phenomenon that will aid enquiry into the society that made it. This approach releases the potential of rock-art as a source that can inform us about prehistoric experience, thus centralising rock-art research within European archaeological research: an essential endeavour if we are to understand anomalies within the archaeological record. Whilst the study of the relationship of rock-art and landscape is indeed in its infancy, this volume has made an important addition to literature on the topic, revealing landscape to be a rewarding field of archaeological enquiry. The relationship of the images with each other, the landscape and other archaeological contexts are approached in the case studies in this volume, which will be of interest to both rock-art researchers and archaeologists.

## References

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