

Review

New Book Chronicle

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'Half hidden among the pile of papers is a bulky parcel containing five volumes which his editor has sent with a note suggesting that they 'ought to go well together'. They arrived four days ago, but for forty-eight hours the reviewer was prevented by moral paralysis from opening the parcel. Yesterday in a resolute moment he ripped the string off it and found the five volumes to be Palestine at the Cross Roads, Scientific Dairy Farming, A Short History of European Democracy (this one is 680 pages and weighs four pounds), Tribal Customs in Portuguese East Africa, and a novel, It's Nicer Lying Down, probably included by mistake. His review – 800 words, say – has got to be 'in' by midday tomorrow.'

George Orwell. Confessions of a book reviewer. *Tribune* 3 May 1946.

George Orwell's brilliant essay captures the business of book reviewing perfectly. And Orwell's more serious points – that selection is random, that most reviewers have no real opinions on most books, that books 'that matter' should be reviewed at length and most of the rest not at all – are as valid today as they were in 1946. And yet, here as elsewhere, we will keep plugging away, trying to capture the mood of archaeology from the arbitrary assortment of books that publishers graciously send us. So how shall we package this quarter's selection? A handful of books dealing with histories of archaeology – very much the flavour of the moment –, a few stemming from the practice of archaeology, and a trio considering aspects of prehistoric art. Some of these 'go well together', others less so.

Prehistoric art

PAUL BAHN & PAUL PETTITT. *Britain's oldest art: the Ice Age cave art of Creswell Crags*. viii+118 pages, 70 colour & b&w illustrations, 6 tables. 2009. Swindon: English Heritage; 978-1-84802-025-2 paperback £14.99.

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DAVID S. WHITLEY. *Cave paintings and the human spirit: the origin of creativity and belief*. 322 pages, 24 b&w & colour illustrations. 2009. Amherst (NY): Prometheus Books; 978-1-59102-636-5 hardback \$25.98.

RICHARD BRADLEY. *Image and audience: rethinking prehistoric art*. xv+260 pages, 84 illustrations. 2009. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 978-0-19-953385-5 hardback £50.

After the discovery of the first definite example of engraved parietal art dating to the Upper Palaeolithic period in Britain at Church Hole in the Creswell Crags caves in Derbyshire in 2003 and 2004, many claims have been made as to the exact number and nature of the engravings. So the publication of the definite account of the exposed motifs and their context by PAUL BAHN & PAUL PETTITT is especially welcome, and hailed in the preface by Michel Lorblanchet as an exemplary study. It is indeed, with a full colour photographic atlas and line drawings of the motifs in the central part of the report (pp. 42–86), giving a clear understanding of images which were difficult to make out, illuminate and record. The authors are also showing exemplary restraint in not going beyond what was demonstrably engraved in the Palaeolithic, and refraining from any interpretation of the motifs; the text, however, hints at disagreements between the original discoverers, which included Spanish archaeologists Sergio Ripoll and Francisco Muñoz, and the authors of the final report (p. 42); even the latter two agree to disagree on the interpretation of the bird/female figures (p. 50). The official inventory contains 23 motifs at Church Hole, which include the birds (CH1–4), probably a horse (CH13), an ibis (CH17), a stag (CH19) and a bison (CH23) and two more motifs in nearby caves. The report also sets the scene, reviews the occupation of caves in the Creswell Crags area, with particular emphasis on the Magdalenian period, when 'groups would return at certain times of the year in order to exploit seasonally abundant resources' (p. 33). Church Hole, with less occupation debris, is seen as 'perhaps a place of mystery or spirits rather than a place of the living' (p. 34). The latter part of the report provides all

the independent dating evidence, the geology of the bedrock and concludes with the continuing search for more parietal art in Britain. The authors are hopeful that, since their 'entry into the European club of Ice Age decorated caves' (p. vii), more discoveries will be made. In the meantime this volume provides good and solid foundations upon which discussion and interpretations can be based.

Personal and engaging, DAVID WHITLEY'S *Cave paintings and the human spirit* grapples with the ideas that underlie the florescence of prehistoric art in Upper Palaeolithic Western Europe, in the cave paintings of south-western France – mainly Chauvet, Niaux, les Trois Frères and the extraordinary clay models of the Tuc d'Audoubert – and the rock engravings of the Côa valley in Portugal; it is also informed by his study of North American petroglyphs in the Cosos range in California, which leads to a long excursus on the problems of dating rock and parietal art. The author's 'mental voyage' summarises earlier thinking about prehistoric art and follows David Lewis-Williams' revolutionary work, which so firmly put shamanism and altered states of consciousness into the discourse. Whitley's contention (exposed in 'The Myth of Ecstasy') is that 'religious belief is the product of normal thought, not altered states of consciousness' (p. 196). It is about the human mind's capacity to see supernatural agency, make extraordinary uses of ordinary mental processes; further, that shamans (who prompt the author to consider the subject of mental health, at times from personal experience) were reifying the fact (or belief) that there were spirits around. Put very simply, religion came first, shamans next. The thesis, and the book, is attractive, honest and very readable, though I suspect that the author set up a false dichotomy to advance his arguments; after all the wonderful 'Envoi' in Lewis-Williams' *Mind in the cave* (2002, p. 290) is no different, telling us that the essential elements of religion are wired into our brain.

RICHARD BRADLEY has never been afraid to tackle big subjects and he does not disappoint here with *Image and audience*, his thoughts on artistic manifestations in later prehistory, roughly between the fifth and first millennia BC in western and northern Europe, but with characteristic forays into other periods and topics. In the opening two chapters which introduce notions of aesthetics, structuralism and agency in art, Bradley chooses, amongst other examples, Celtic art to come to grips with what art might mean; he is

somewhat disingenuous when he claims that 'there is no consensus about the *contents* (my emphasis) of Celtic art' – that is certainly worth a debate; but his analysis (p.18) just shows the diversity in *supports* of Celtic art – or when choosing amongst his examples, the much debated Gundestrup cauldron as an example of art dissociated from context. But of course it is a neat rhetorical device. Part 2 of the book deals with megalithic and figurative art, taking as its starting point Lewis-Williams' & Pearce's *Inside the Neolithic mind*, and leads to the subject of the title, image and audience. Bradley investigates the wider relationship between the decorated tombs and the world outside, in the open air of the Iberian peninsula and in Britain and Ireland. Part 3 is concerned with prehistoric art in Scandinavia, depicted on metalwork and rock carvings; it also considers stone settings in the shape of boats. The question here is whether the intended audience and the myths expressed are discernable, which is what Bradley sets out to do in the latter part of the section, presenting work, inspired by Flemming Kaul, on ships and celestial movement; it suggests that a system of beliefs in Bronze Age Scandinavia centred on the natural world required the active participation of an audience within the landscape. Part 4, entitled 'Losses in translation' and which uses as a springboard Renfrew's *Figuring it out*, examines the relationship between past and present, ideas of process and performance and the role of art in this dialogue. It concludes that context and interrelationships were the driving force in prehistoric art and that contemporary artists might be closer to the ideas of the past than they would themselves suspect. In sum, Bradley's book is stimulating and his arguments clearly exposed. This journey through later prehistoric art which Bradley invites fellow travellers to join may produce different reactions, but it is certainly a voyage worth undertaking.

Histories of archaeology

MARC-ANTOINE KAESER, SONIA LÉVIN, SABINE DE RIECKHOFF & NATHAN SCHLANGER (ed.) *The making of European archaeology/Początki archeologii Europejskiej*. 62 pages, 32 b&w & colour illustrations. 2008. Paris: Culture Lab; 978-2-9600527-8-7 paperback (AREA exhibition catalogue in French/Spanish, English/Polish or German/Czech).

N. DE HAAN, M. EICKHOFF & M. SCHWEGMAN (ed.) *Archaeology and national identity in Italy and Europe 1800–1950 (Fragmenta 2, Journal of the*