



Book Reviews

BEYOND THE ICE. CRESWELL CRAGS AND ITS PLACE IN A WIDER EUROPEAN CONTEXT BY MATTHEW BERESFORD

Archaeopress, Oxford 2012. 113 pp, 29 B/W plates, 27 illus, 8 tables. ISBN 978 1 905739 509, pb, £14.99

This book's blurb claims that "for the first time the history of the site is brought together in one accessible volume", and the author claims that it summarises "the height of our current knowledge" about Creswell Crags (p. 93). Oh dear. It is dedicated to the memory of Roger Jacobi who, according to the author, encouraged him to collate information "and offer up a new interpretative history of the Crags". We knew Roger well, and why he might have entrusted such a project to Matthew Beresford we do not know; nor can we believe that Roger would have let this terrible book see the light of day without significant improvements.

Nobody seems to have edited this work. Many sentences are poorly and clumsily constructed, and some make little sense. It is let down by poor copy-editing and was clearly not refereed by specialists before publication. There is frequent use of outdated terminology (e.g. calling Doggerland a "land bridge" – p. 50), puzzling non-sequiturs (e.g. p. 57: "there was a clear targeting of the reindeer young.....It is therefore not surprising that the main image within the Creswell art is that of a "red deer stag"), and incorrect accents seem to have been placed on French terms almost at random. The author's small photographs are mostly poor and blurred. The relatively few references cited belong to two periods; general texts of the late 1980s to 1993, and more recent ones pertaining to Creswell itself; we therefore suspect the author is relying on undergraduate reading topped up by selective consultation of work that has appeared in the last decade. Why else would one begin a chapter with a quotation from the (misspelt) Quennells' *Everyday Life in the Stone Age* of 1921? The mistakes are so frequent and elementary that we are led to wonder what is the point of meticulous research and excavation, if they can be ignored or so incorrectly reported?

The text is strewn with repeated errors of simple fact: for example, the Welsh coastal cave at Bacon Hole is said to be in Somerset (p. 36); La Madeleine in the Dordogne, is thought to be a cave (p. 28); it is claimed that the idea was put forward in the Bible that the world was created in 4004 BC (p. 3); the author says that only six depictions of rhino are known within the Palaeolithic world (p. 25) – whereas in fact there are more than a hundred (and the figure of six was not even correct in 1924 when Armstrong thought he had found one at Creswell); interpretation of the Shanidar "flower burial" is upheld (p. 83) although it has now been soundly refuted; lithics from Langwith Cave are claimed to include those of the "Upper Aurignacian" (no such thing exists and they are all Late Glacial) (p. 89); in some places Robin Hood Cave is correctly spelled, in others the author uses the erroneous Robin Hood's Cave; and silliest of all, an incorrect use of the term "anthropomorphic" which does *not* mean "half man half animal" (p. 31), so there is absolutely no excuse for the pointless repeated comparisons of the Pin Hole Cave anthropomorph with the famous therianthrope from Les Trois Frères (e.g. pp. 49, 62).

Indeed, Beresford's ignorance of Ice Age art is so profound that he even presents the long discredited idea that the images represent hunters' prey (p. 85); and he gives credence (p. 102) to the ridiculous and bogus claims for a "mammoth engraving" at Cheddar Gorge and a "reindeer" on the Gower Peninsula (while failing to cite publications for either). From our point of view,

the most negative aspect of his coverage of the subject is the garbled and inaccurate account he presents of the Creswell cave art -- for this he has relied entirely on our early and now outdated preliminary publications instead of the authoritative account (Bahn and Pettitt 2009), although he is well aware of that book's existence (see below). However, many of the errors are his alone and we are unable to fathom where they came from -- for example, we did not find art in Robin Hood Cave on 14 April 2003, but months later, and it only has a single "vulva", not two; the engraving in Mother Grundy's Parlour is not "possibly an animal head" (p. 37). The plan given of Church Hole and its art in 12 panels (p. 38) is completely outdated and should be ignored.

General descriptions of Middle and Upper Palaeolithic behaviour are likewise outdated or incorrect. Instead of intercepting migratory prey "Upper Palaeolithic peoples" are quoted as "following migrating animals" from "areas such as Belgium, Holland and Germany across Doggerland" then "down the Trent" (p.50) and "just passing through" Creswell (p. 56), all questionable concepts: hunter-gatherers cannot keep up with migratory prey but instead place themselves in the landscape to intercept them; our understanding of the movements of reindeer -- which are actually of questionable relevance to the British "Creswellian" -- is that they do not occur on a scale as large as that required to take them from the low countries to Britain, while "down the Trent" misunderstands the role of this river in British annual movements as proposed by one of us (PP). Continental sites which are typologically Creswellian are noted (although in fact there are none in "Holland" as they occur only in the north of The Netherlands). Reindeer is seen as "'integral to the Creswellian period" (p. 56) although this remains to be established as one of us (PP) has repeatedly discussed (Pettitt 2007, 2008; Pettitt and White 2012); and the author puts forward the highly fragmentary reindeer remains from Ossum's Cave in support of reindeer calving in the Peak District without citing any papers on this subject or noting that there is not one anthropogenic mark on these remains. He cites the "Machairoidus" [*sic*] tooth (a term long since abandoned for *Homotherium*) as evidence of a "possession" while apparently assuming that it is clearly associated with the Late Glacial archaeology.

Beresford also seems to misunderstand what the term "Creswellian" means; thus statements like "the Creswellian model is proving less and less relevant for Britain" (p. 53) are meaningless since he appears to think that the term denotes a distinct and regionally isolated population, and at one point he even suggests that Creswellians lived in the caves of the northern side of the gorge and Magdalenians in the caves of the southern side (p. 60)! He believes that "Creswellians" (a term he continues to use throughout) were only present in the UK seasonally, and so is clearly ignorant of existing seasonality information which shows they were present at Gough's Cave in both summer and winter, and of hypothetical annual land use models put forward by one of us (PP). A lack of large Creswellian open sites in Britain, "as opposed to the opposite on the continent" (p. 50) ignores Farndon Fields, Nottinghamshire, (at least 15 ha and only a day's walk from Creswell); and Beresford is apparently ignorant of the fact that continental "Creswellian" sites are hardly larger in scale.

Beresford's chapter on "Neanderthals and Moderns at Creswell" is dated, naive and often incorrect, drawing largely on popular books of the early 1990s in its outmoded view of Neanderthals. Thus, for the Middle Palaeolithic "evidence of camps and long-term habitation...[is]...lacking, as too is the use of hearths" (p. 80). Tell that to the occupants of Amud Cave in Israel and the Abric Romani in Spain! Citing a more recent popular book -- itself making dubious use of the Middle Palaeolithic record -- Beresford sees Neanderthals as "rarely, if ever, travel[ling] beyond the confines of their own river valleys" (p. 80)! This might explain his misunderstanding of the use of a simple quartzite cobble technology documented at Creswell: "instead of travelling to obtain the technologically superior resource of flint for tool manufacture, the Neanderthal inhabitants simply used the pebbles...obtained from the local river bed." (pp. 80-1). This ignores the flint bifaces which have been found at Creswell, as well as

suggestions that the quartzite cobbles were an entirely appropriate material for heavy duty toolkits which may have been necessary for butchering bison, the only taxon one can currently identify with Neanderthals at Creswell and for which continental parallels such as La Borde and Mauran in southern France exist. Beresford also upholds the argument for a very late persistence of Neanderthals on Gibraltar, even though this has been rejected by most scholars (e.g. Zilhão and Pettitt 2008).

Why did Beresford not draw on our 2009 monograph for his facts? It is clear that most of his research on Creswell was completed by 2009, but our book was published in that very year. And not only does it appear in his bibliography, but it also features in a footnote on p. 85, and he has also helped himself to a map from it (p. 51), erroneously ascribed to “Jacobi & Pettitt” instead of “Pettitt & Jacobi” 2009. The “big idea” which Beresford presents in this volume is that the term ‘Creswellian’ should be dropped, and one could be forgiven for thinking this is his original idea. It appears prominently in the book’s advertising blurb, and although he correctly notes that Jacobi raised the question in 1991, one of us (PP) has in several publications made the only explicit arguments for this proposal, but these are ignored here. Later prehistoric discoveries from Creswell are noted selectively and cursorily, including the Merel’s board discovered by one of us (citing an unpublished manuscript and not the formal publication), and which is illustrated without permission; and there is an irrelevant chapter on later prehistoric human remains from the Creswell caves, in one part of which he speculates that “one or more of the Creswell caves may at one time have housed Palaeolithic burials” (p. 74)!

In short, we see absolutely no point to this appalling book, and it is very difficult to understand at what audience it is aimed. Parts of it seem to be written for children; some chapters are a waste of effort (e.g. the study of Ice Age human remains, since Creswell has none, or almost none); while other sections are far too detailed archaeologically for the general public. The excellent official guidebook on sale at Creswell Crags provides a far better coverage of all the main subjects for visitors, while our 2009 monograph presents the latest work on both the art and the archaeology. The author starts by telling us that “I have wanted to write about the site of Creswell Crags for quite some time”, so this was clearly his primary motivation; but we are baffled as to why he bothered, since he presents nothing new, even though he was helping himself liberally to our work. The author would have done better to apply his efforts elsewhere and produce something useful, on a different subject, instead of this redundant and incompetent text which will only spread error and confusion. Alas, its cover illustration of a bison drawing by a child is an apt metaphor for what lies between its covers. If it were an undergraduate dissertation it would be lucky to come away with a third.

Paul G. Bahn

Seminari d’Estudis i Recerques Prehistòriques, Universitat de Barcelona

Paul Pettitt,

University of Sheffield

Review submitted: August 2012

References

Bahn, P. and Pettitt, P. 2009. *Britain’s Oldest Art. The Ice Age cave art of Creswell Crags*. London: English Heritage

Pettitt, P. B. 2007. Cultural context and form of some of the Creswell images: an interpretative model. In Pettitt, P. B., Bahn, P., and Ripoll, S. (eds) *Creswell Palaeolithic Cave Art in European Context*. Oxford: University Press, 112-39

Pettitt, P. B. 2008. The British Upper Palaeolithic. In Pollard, J. (ed) *Prehistoric Britain*. London: Blackwell Studies in Global Archaeology, 18-57

Pettitt, P. B. and White, M. J. 2012. *The British Palaeolithic. Human Societies at the Edge of the Pleistocene World*. Abingdon: Routledge

Zilhão, J. and Pettitt, P.B. 2006. On the new dates for Gorham's Cave and the late survival of Iberian Neanderthals. *Before Farming* 2006/4, 1-9

The views expressed in this review are not necessarily those of the Society or the Reviews Editor