



Book Reviews

THE ROCK-ART LANDSCAPES OF ROMBALDS MOOR, WEST YORKSHIRE – STANDING ON HOLY GROUND BY VIVIEN DEACON

Archaeopress Archaeology, Oxford. 2020. 228pp, 163 figures, 36 tables, pb, ISBN 9781789694581, £45.00

This volume presents another timely study of the phenomena of British rock art and its connections to prehistoric landscapes. The research is based on the author's recently completed doctoral thesis and provides an in-depth investigation of the viewsheds of rock carvings found within the regions of Rombalds Moor, West Yorkshire. The idea of viewsheds has been known to rock art studies for years now and this publication builds upon this by offering detailed GIS analyses of the entire moor down to clusters of rocks bearing prehistoric designs.

The book falls into two parts. The first introduces the reader to background information, concepts and methodologies while the second deals with analyses and conclusions.

The first chapter immediately identifies the goal of the volume is to expand upon UK research into petroglyphs and the landscape by focusing on their viewsheds. The key argument being much of British rock art was created in relation to topographical positions with the consideration of being viewed from different locales. Moreover, as opposed to a generalised overview of a region, the aim will be to study a greater range of views of the rock art at different scales in a respective study area.

This is followed by a concise review of rock art research in the UK outlining distribution, motifs and chronology in Chapter 2. It provides a selective survey of previous studies that primarily focuses on northern England and southern Scotland. The distribution map of rock art in Britain, however, is problematic and only refers to areas discussed in the text. Regretfully, it does not mention the petroglyph-rich regions of Cumbria, County Durham and Derbyshire, as well as the handful of sites known in counties down south, such as Cornwall, Dorset, Wiltshire, etc. The rock art of Rombalds Moor is only touched upon briefly and lacks a discussion of the history of its discovery and examples of known types of motifs characteristic to the region, which distinguish it from the rest of the UK.

Chapter 3 examines some key concepts in the theorisation of landscape in British studies. The author points out these require a balanced approach that scrutinises the available evidence in the reconstruction of palaeoenvironments and how prehistoric peoples constructed their landscapes from these settings. This, however, needs to be attentive to identifying alterations to the topography over time be it natural or artificial in gathering evidence about past environs. Summaries of northern England environments are then offered relating to the chronological periodisations of rock art in the UK, including the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age. The issue of how prehistoric people understood these environments is approached through belief systems based on models derived from ethnographic studies, in particular the sacred sites of the Sami in Scandinavia.

Following the above wide ranging discussions, Chapter 4 delves into the geological, environmental and archaeological data for Rombalds Moor. The author's review of the palaeoenvironmental evidence also importantly highlights more investigations are required to build up a greater picture in the region. An overview of known archaeological features is provided and Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age sites are plotted on detailed Ordnance Survey mapping. More importantly, the location of all reported rock art find spots are given their own distribution map. The discussion of previous Rombalds Moor petroglyph investigations informing the map is too brief, and really deserves to be expanded in its own chapter. This section also concisely describes percentages of known rock art motifs in a single paragraph and a table outlining the sites making up the percentages would be of valuable assistance here as well.

Chapter 5 examines the practical issues involved in carrying out fieldwork on Rombalds Moor and discusses methodologies in achieving the collection of data with regards to rock art viewsheds. Some of the finer points of problems in classifications of what constitutes a site and rock art typology are covered, and is accompanied by many photographs demonstrating different issues encountered in the field. The strategy of acquiring data on Rombalds Moor decided upon involves examining not only the entire moor but also at lesser scales at large locales, small locales and individual sites of rock art. In turn, Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 present the analyses of these four scales that are fully illustrated with maps and photographs.

At the scale of the entire moor, there seems to be no indication of a coherent pattern for the prehistoric rock art, though there are hints of general connections with water and the uplands. Larger localities were then examined within sight to distinct natural topographic features, such as the Neb Stone, Pancake stone and Haystack boulder. These large locales were arbitrary and more defined by the viewsheds centring upon the natural features; however, a large number of rock art panels could be seen from the features. Moving to smaller localities, clusters of rock

carvings were examined. Interestingly, here the Pancake stone stands out as having the most petroglyphs within its viewshed. The author, though, does admit that the salience of views can be difficult to demonstrate as some rock art panels may have been created with the intention of being deliberately hidden. Viewsheds from individual rock sites were not carried out and instead the relationships of the motifs to the rock surface were considered as well as reasons for why certain stones were chosen were explored. Subsequently, this is all concluded in Chapter 10 that provides final reflections upon the results while attempting to tackle the possible religious dimensions of the rock art in the landscape for peoples of the past.

All in all, this volume presents a wealth of GIS information about the rock art landscapes of Rombalds Moor. The documentation of practical data collection methodologies is detailed and the degree to which fieldwork was conducted is commendable. Suffice to say, this publication makes yet another splendid addition to the already burgeoning bookcase of regional rock art studies in the UK.

Kenneth Lymer
Wessex Archaeology

Review submitted: September 2020

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