



## Book Reviews

### **WILD THINGS 2: FURTHER ADVANCES IN PALAEOLITHIC AND MESOLITHIC RESEARCH EDITED BY JAMES WALKER AND DAVID CLINNICK**

*Oxbow Books, Oxford. 2019. 201pp, 44 B&W figs, 11 tables, pb, ISBN 9781785709463, £38.00*

There has arguably never been a better time in which to study early prehistory, and this book is an excellent illustration of why this is so. Following on from the original *Wild Things* volume (Foulds *et al.* 2014), two of the original editors have come together to produce a second volume of new research on the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic, based on the second Wild Things conference held at Durham University in 2014.

This volume showcases work from a variety of authors on a variety of subjects, all connected in some way to Durham's research interests. The aim of the volume as a whole, according to the editors, is to showcase the diversity of research in Palaeolithic and Mesolithic archaeology, as well as the value of engaging with others and pushing beyond 'traditionally limiting research frameworks' (Walker & Clinnick 2019, 2). The result is a diverse and engaging volume, aimed at anyone interested in prehistoric archaeology.

Occasionally when the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic are discussed together, such as at conferences, the latter can suffer from being pushed to the side in favour of the sheer volume of Palaeolithic research. The editors have done well here to include research ranging from the Lower Palaeolithic through to the early Neolithic in a way that feels balanced. Part of this is due to the structure of the book and the order of the chapters; the chapters are not chronologically ordered, but instead have been grouped into fairly loose themes, which work well to facilitate a sense of cohesiveness between very diverse papers.

The volume begins with three papers using landscape-based approaches, by Drinkall, Slade, and Snape-Kennedy and Church, ranging from the Lower Palaeolithic to the Mesolithic, and covering both Britain and the Americas. Drinkall begins the volume by looking at British sites from the Lower Palaeolithic, combining GIS with artefact analysis to determine whether there are observable links between on-site activities and their location within the landscape. Slade provides an excellent overview of Clovis fluted point technology and the spread of the Clovis culture generally, arguing that Clovis was not the first lithic industry in North America, but was instead a localised fluted form of projectile point that evolved regionally. Snape and Church use

experimental archaeology to consider how magnetic susceptibility can be used to identify hearths in the Mesolithic, a methodology which may be employed within the archaeological record of any time period. These opening three papers demonstrate, as does the rest of the volume, the diversity of methods and approaches that can be used to tackle the same broad area of research.

The book moves on to two papers focused upon human–animal relationships, which emphasize the importance of considering these relationships in prehistory, as part of the broader move in archaeology away from inherently anthropocentric conceptions of prehistoric human life. Elliot contributes a fascinating paper on the relationship between people and deer in the British Mesolithic, focused on the ecology of elk, red deer and roe deer and what this might tell us about human–animal interactions. Borenstein then looks at how changes in human–animal relationships were reflected in mortuary practices between the Natufian and Neolithic, emphasizing significant cultural and symbolic changes that came with the advent of agriculture.

Following this are three papers taking us through much of the Palaeolithic, which are well situated within the recent trend in prehistoric archaeology towards an increased focus on socio-emotional lives. Wilson explores mortuary evidence from the Middle Palaeolithic, interpreting burials through the lens of empathetic ‘postmortemism’ as opposed to the evolution of symbolism or religious belief. Wilson takes a perhaps more essentialist view of cognitive evolution than I myself do, but her paper is fascinating and reminds us of the benefits of pursuing a more emotion-centred archaeology. Sakamoto’s chapter similarly emphasizes the importance of engaging with more phenomenological and multisensorial interpretations of the past, exploring the age-old question – why did Upper Palaeolithic people create art so deep within caves? – through the paradigm of ‘installation art’, a concept from contemporary art theory. Langley then considers the dual roles of barbed antler points as both functional hunting implements and methods of expressing social identity in the Magdalenian.

This is then followed by Tomii’s paper, which takes us back to the Mesolithic, looking at pottery made by the Jomon culture of Japan, focusing on the placement of pots at the time of deposition and what this might tell us about their desire to be seen to be in control of the firing process. I would have liked, if anything, even more discussion of the significance of the choices the Jomon made with regards to deposition; that said, Tomii has published elsewhere on this subject (Tomii 2015; Tomii 2018) and these may provide more detail for the interested reader.

The final two chapters take a more reflexive look on the history of research into Neanderthals. In a particularly entertaining chapter, DeArce skilfully brings to life the 1863 meeting at which William King proposed that *Homo neanderthalensis* was a new species, considering not the

archaeology but rather the politics and drama of the meeting and those attending, and the impact that these factors had on the diffusion of King's ideas. Madison's paper ends the volume, exploring another influential figure, George Busk, and the evolution of Neanderthal research in the late 19th century, situating it among the burgeoning development of palaeoanthropology, a field which did not exist at the time. These two papers are an excellent way to end the volume, as they remind us that our research is not, has never been, and never will be, apolitical.

The major strength of this volume is the diversity of theories and approaches it espouses, from traditional archaeological approaches, to novel techniques, to approaches adopted from other disciplines. Altogether, the book demonstrates prehistoric archaeology's potential for a wealth of research into the deep past. The book is also a particularly promising showcase of the growing move in archaeology away from oversimplistic, dualistic, Cartesian views of the deep past, with many of the papers focusing on the significance of nonhuman agents and/or the sheer complexity involved in interpreting the prehistoric evidence. These papers combine theory and data, and the result is a genuinely interesting and thoughtful collection of papers, in which every chapter is clear and understandable.

It is promising, also, to see the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and even early Neolithic represented so well together in one volume. As the editors themselves note, the artificial boundaries between time periods (and, in many cases, within these time periods) mean that it is not always easy for researchers to share theoretical and methodological developments, and this can come at a cost for prehistoric research.

The volume is also, to an extent, geographically diverse, though perhaps not quite as much as might be hoped. Many of the papers, unsurprisingly, focus on Britain and Europe, with a couple of others looking at eastern and western Asia. However, only one paper covers America and there are none at all on prehistoric Africa. This may be due, as noted by the editors, because of their interest in showcasing research related to the interests of the Department of Archaeology at Durham. In future volumes (which I hope are planned) it would be interesting to see an increased focus in particular on African prehistory, particularly given that the prehistory of this area is sorely underrepresented despite the multitude of fascinating research currently being carried out there.

This volume would also have benefitted from colour illustrations. Some of the graphs and maps lose some of their impact and accessibility as a result of being printed in varying shades of grey. If this could not be avoided it would have been preferable, not to mention more accessible for those with visual impairments, to use patterns, rather than colours, in the illustrations. There are

also spelling and grammatical errors in a few of the chapters, though this is being picky as they do not detract from the overall argument.

Yet when considered against the merits of this volume as a whole, these points are relatively minor. Palaeolithic and Mesolithic research is, at least from my own experience, seeing an increase in popularity among students, and this book is a good indication of why this may be. Together, these are fascinating, diverse papers with a great deal of relevance for both the past and present, and with something to interest any prehistoric archaeologist, or simply anyone with an interest in prehistory. As the editors themselves say, 'they show the field to be in a state of rude health' (Walker & Clinnick 2019, 2).

### References

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