



Book Reviews

THE CHAMBERED TOMBS OF THE ISLE OF MAN. A STUDY BY AUDREY HENSHALL 1969–1978 EDITED BY FRANCES LYNCH AND PETER DAVEY

Archaeopress, Oxford, 2017. 176pp, 117 B&W and colour illustrations, 11 tables, pb ISBN 9781784914684, £30.00

As the title indicates, this book is the product of research predominantly completed in the 1970s. Audrey Henshall, author of the two seminal surveys of the Scottish chambered tomb series (Henshall 1963; 1972) completed the catalogue in 1974 but it was never published, and so, years later, Peter Davey and Frances Lynch worked to update Henshall's inventory and added short contextual chapters. In addition to this three excavation reports appear in here as appendices, Megaw's 1953 investigations at King Orry's Grave North East, Sheila Cregeen's excavations at Ballaharra and Henshall's exploratory trenches at Meayll Hill in 1971. These latter excavation reports have many new specialist reports with them, including pottery reports by Stephen Burrow. As a result, the bulk of the book is a catalogue of the individual sites but with important excavation details at the end.

Henshall's two volumes on the chambered tombs of Scotland represent one of the most impressive compendiums of megalithic architecture ever published and are still essential reading for people studying Scotland's chambered tombs. Likewise, this volume will be essential reading for anyone wishing to study the small, but important number of megaliths on the Isle of Man. There is a mass of detail provided for each site, from early accounts of the monuments through to detailed architectural assessments and finds from excavations. This book is also lavishly illustrated throughout with a lovely combination of Henshall's plans, old photos and engravings and colour photos. Revisiting these sites via the catalogue entries re-emphasises both the Scottish and Irish influences on many of these sites, potentially with changes in the direction of influence over time. This is something that has seen a resurgence of interest in recent years and will continue to be debated in the future (e.g. Garrow & Sturt 2011). Indeed, the catalogue compares the Isle of Man monuments with similar examples elsewhere, and this is usefully illustrated with plans. Two sites stand out in particular in this regard – Cashtel yn Ard and King Orry's Grave, both with interesting comparable examples in Scotland

and Ireland. So, while the study was completed a while ago, the research will contribute to ongoing research questions.

The book is not without some issues. It is very much a product of the 1970s and chambered tomb studies have moved on in some important ways since then. For example, as already noted the catalogue compares the chambered tombs of the Isle of Man with monuments elsewhere in Britain and Ireland. One of the most significant advances in our understanding of chambered tombs in recent years is that they are a very long-lasting tradition, often with bursts of early construction and deposition activity, followed by sporadic and episodic reworkings and subsequent depositions. Moreover, we have a much stronger chronological framework within which to place chambered tombs (e.g. Whittle *et al.* 2011). This means we have a better understanding of when the Scottish Clyde cairns were constructed as compared to the Irish court cairns which appear to be slightly later (Schulting *et al.* 2011). Recent years have also illustrated the fact that not all chambered tombs are Neolithic – Richard Bradley demonstrating this most notably with the Clava cairns (Bradley 2000). So, for example, when the demonstrably early Neolithic sites of Meayll Hill (Mull Hill) is compared with sites such as Cerrig y Gof (probably early Bronze Age) and Cairnderry (probably late Neolithic or early Bronze Age: Cummings & Fowler 2007), this is problematic. For me, a more fruitful comparison for Meayll Hill would have been with other, unique early Neolithic examples such as Coldrum – perhaps indicative that the earliest form of megalithic construction in different parts of Britain did not conform to set types as clearly later examples did.

The inventory also highlights the fact that many of the chambered tombs on the Isle of Man have suffered over the years – King Orry's Grave is the one that always springs to mind, embedded within modern buildings and with a road running through it. Others have also fared poorly, with the Cloven Stones located in the front garden of a bungalow. It is such a shame that preservational issues may mean we are never able to fully understand these monuments, particularly the nuances of constructional sequence and modification. This is frustrating because the Isle of Man may well have played a crucial role for seafaring communities and a key place in terms of understanding wider connections and interactions in the Neolithic period of the Irish Sea zone. This issue has been repeatedly highlighted by authors working either side of the Irish Sea and is highlighted further here. As Frances Lynch notes in the concluding chapter it may well now be down to material culture studies to explore this issue in more detail, and one can always hope for new discoveries. The discovery of Neolithic houses in both Ireland and Britain has significantly changed our picture of the early Neolithic (Smyth 2014) and this form of evidence on the Isle of Man also has the potential to move debates forward again.

While the broader context chapters could have been more expansive, this is not really an issue because people will be buying the book for the inventory which is indispensable. Moreover, the book is very attractively produced and demonstrates what good production values these Archaeopress books now represent. In sum, this volume is an absolute must for anyone interested in the chambered tombs of the Isle of Man and will stand as the 'go to' volume for the next generation of researchers who wish to investigate this important group of monuments, and to place them within their wider British and Irish context.

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Review submitted: May 2018

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