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**Sacred Darkness: a Global Perspective on the Ritual Use of Caves, edited by Holley Moyes. Boulder (CO): University Press of Colorado, 2013. ISBN 978-1-60732-177-4 hardback £62 & US\\$95; xvii + 410 pp., 99 plates, 76 figs., 26 tables**

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Cambridge Archaeological Journal / Volume 24 / Issue 03 / October 2014, pp 547 - 550  
DOI: 10.1017/S0959774314000882, Published online: 03 November 2014

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**How to cite this article:**

Marion Dowd (2014). Cambridge Archaeological Journal, 24, pp 547-550 doi:10.1017/S0959774314000882

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action, showing that materiality is produced in specific contexts through performance. But the key aspect of these acts of re-assembly is iterative performance.

Categorization takes on a particular significance for Jones, since it embodies the repetition and citation essential to cultural continuity. In Jones' terminology, repetition performs the continuity of tradition through an ongoing, embodied process of improvisation, in which the category interacts with the materials, rather than a mechanical process of copying previous examples of the category. Thus, for Jones, the reproduction of pottery categories entails not only working with previous vessels as templates but also the improvisatory recall of existing potting skills, leading to a long-lasting consistency of pottery forms. Here, insofar as categories are performed, they are composed of iterations and refer to past events. Archaeologists are realizing that categories are central to cultural continuity, linking past, present and future events.

The objects which perform their own categories are also not recognizable from traditional conceptualizations. Drawing a parallel with human bodies, Jones asserts that objects are not necessarily defined as having a bounded, fixed identity but are constantly becoming, as a performative arrangement of relationships. This notion is exemplified by the notions of deliberate fragmentation and enchainment which characterizes our own research (Chapman 2000; Chapman & Gaydarska 2007). Here, Jones extends the two concepts by suggesting that, far from relating only to the Balkan Neolithic, they are an essential general constitutive condition of archaeology. Thus, in all performances of things and sites, fragments are situated in enchained networks of practice. This viewpoint is directly opposed to the criticisms of Brittain & Harris (*World Archaeology* 2010) of the unbreakable linkage between deliberate fragmentation and enchainment but, although appealing, requires further theoretical elaboration. But Jones is surely correct to assert that things mediate society rather than represent Danny Miller's (1987) categories of objectification and sublation.

Monuments play a major part in this book, not least the Irish passage tombs and Scottish rock-art sites for which Jones' research is justifiably famous. A rare moment of doubt enters the author's mind (p. 170) when we are told that 'perhaps' monuments are articulations of material performances. There is no need for this hesitation: the notion is well grounded in previously expressed concepts of material agency and the re-assembling of materials. These notions are exemplified in the way that the different lithologies that create the Boyne passage tombs are presencing these remote outcrops. This case is an excellent example of the notion of the 'fragmentation of the landscape', in which the 'resources' of many different places are extracted, transported and utilized in the making of things and other places.

An excellent section on monuments shows how the play of light and shadow is an emergent and dynamic process which intersects with the human experience of materials. The way that the significance of light is revealed at certain times of day on specific parts of monuments has been discussed previously by Diáz-Andreu in the case of Iberian rock-art sites. What Jones adds to this study is the

general observation that the carving of specific rocks makes time itself apparent. Light emerges not so much as a static symbolic device as a tangible substance interacting with human architecture and altering its appearance. The notion of luminosity as created by firelight and sunlight (Jones could have added 'moonlight') emphasizes the relationship to not only diurnal but longer temporalities.

In his demolition of representational thinking, Jones takes few prisoners: the author's friends and colleagues are criticized just as severely as long-term rivals and young fogies. But if archaeology is to move on from the current deeply flawed notion of archaeological theory as a 'toolbox', in which any theoretical strand can be combined and re-combined with any other strand, and any collection of theoretical approaches can be stitched together and 'applied' to a specific research project or doctoral thesis, then Jones is to be congratulated for his advocacy of a strong and coherent theoretical stance. Every archaeologist needs to engage with this volume, even if the results of the experience may be chastening. After all, this book ushers in the era of post-interpretative archaeology. There is no gain without pain!

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*Sacred Darkness: a Global Perspective on the Ritual Use of Caves*, edited by Holley Moyes. Boulder (CO): University Press of Colorado, 2013. ISBN 978-1-60732-177-4 hardback £62 & US\$95; xvii + 410 pp., 99 plates, 76 figs., 26 tables

Marion Dowd

*Sacred Darkness* makes an important contribution to cave archaeology globally and landscape studies regionally. The

editor's stated objective is to explore the ritual use of caves for sacred, religious or cultic pursuits as a generalized cultural phenomenon that transcends temporal and spatial boundaries. As Jean Clottes powerfully reminds us in Chapter 1, the use of caves for ritual activity is the oldest and most enduring religious tradition in the human history of the world. The 29 contributions are divided into five sections - Part I: Old World Ritual Cave Traditions (nine papers); Part II: New World Ritual Cave Traditions (seven papers); Part III: Case Studies in Ritual Cave Use (four papers); Part IV: Ethnographic and Ethnohistoric Studies (six papers); and Part V New Approaches (three papers).

The introductory chapter by Holley Moyes provides an overview of core themes and issues that feature in subsequent chapters: caves as neglected areas of archaeological research; the deeply ingrained association between caves and prehistoric 'cavemen'; problems distinguishing between 'ritual' and 'domestic' activities at caves; and poor or unpublished excavation records. We are told the book is considered a success if it encourages critical evaluation of cave deposits, and that the chapters challenge early assumptions about the nature of cave use that lulled generations into interpretative complacency. In reality, those old assumptions have been challenged for over two decades now and there has been a steadily increasing stream of publications that recognize the role of caves in religious life, even if more geographically or chronologically restricted than the present volume (e.g. Whitehouse 1992; Barnatt & Edmonds 2002; Lewis-Williams 2002; Brady & Prufer 2005; Ustinova 2009; Skeates 2010; Orschiedt 2012). That *An Archaeology of Natural Places* (Bradley 2000) is referenced with frequency throughout the book demonstrates its influential role in cave archaeology studies worldwide.

The book claims to be the first to explore ritual cave use from a cross-cultural global perspective. However, of the 47 contributors to 29 chapters, over half are based in the USA and almost a quarter in the UK. While it would be near impossible to achieve a truly representative global spread, this volume displays a geographical (USA and Europe) and Anglophone bias and does not include karst landscapes with ritually significant caves in eastern Europe, Scandinavia, Russia, Israel and Palestine, Africa (excepting Egypt and Zimbabwe) or Saudi Arabia.

As with all edited volumes, some chapters are stronger than others, particularly those written by scholars with lengthy experience surveying or excavating caves, and who spend long periods underground. In my opinion, the most insightful regional studies include Jean Clottes' exploration of Palaeolithic caves in Europe; Mark Aldenderfer's discussion of sacred caves in Tibet; Paul Taçon *et al.*'s paper on ritual caves and rockshelters in Australia; and the exploration of caves as sacred spaces in Mesoamerica by H. Moyes and James Brady. Certain other papers tend towards summary descriptions of particular cave sites with less attention given to analysis and interpretation, such as Rowan and Ilan's account of caves in the Chalcolithic of the southern Levant. A summary of all the contributors' experience in cave archae-

ology would have been welcome, particularly where this was not reflected in the respective bibliographies.

McCafferty's chapter on Irish caves is the one I am most competent to review, and I found it weak and quite disappointing. It is largely a compilation of various references to caves with little critique or analysis, and features a number of factual and interpretative errors. For instance, some of the sites listed as containing human bones have not yet produced such evidence (e.g. Knocknarea Cave 1–4). The chapter states that 'caves were not homes for the living' — yet there is increasing evidence for Bronze Age, early medieval and post-medieval occupation of caves. It also claims that 'the Neolithic period appears to be the most significant period for cave burial' — yet formal burials of this date have only been recovered from two sites; Bronze Age burial in caves is more common (Dowd 2004; forthcoming).

The four chapters devoted to three case studies in Part III illustrate many of the general patterns and features observed in earlier chapters and highlight the value of revisiting previously investigated sites. However, with scores of well-excavated caves across the globe, it is unclear why these three sites were singled out for detailed treatment and why Nakovana Cave, Croatia was afforded two chapters.

Part IV: Ethnographic and Ethnohistoric Studies was particularly thought-provoking with impressive studies ranging from Zimbabwe to the Andes Mountain range to Malaysia. Despite Simek *et al.*'s well-argued reservations about the use of ethnographic data in archaeological inference, the papers in this section serve as a reminder of the complexity and multiplicity of cave usage in modern times, and the wealth of information that would be archaeologically invisible. As Hobbs outlines for West Malaysia, Hindu pilgrimages to caves, or the use of caves by Muslims to divine national lottery numbers, leave little or no physical trace. Using the Zimbabwean evidence, Terence Ranger illustrates the power of caves to serve as contested spaces and political metaphors, metaphors that change as political power changes. The emotions that caves evoke — arguably an essential aspect of understanding ritual caves in the archaeological record — are also demonstrated throughout this section. Pannell and O'Connor present a valuable analysis of the reverence held for particular natural places, including caves, in Timor-Leste. Two deaths in the local community were seen as related to the disturbance of spirit beings by archaeological excavations in a cave. They argue that this 'living' aspect of caves needs to be accommodated rather than marginalized in cultural heritage management.

Nathan Craig's revealing statistical analysis of literary references to caves in literature pertaining to nine indigenous Andean societies is a model that should receive more widespread application. His results indicated that 81% of uses or perceptions of caves entailed elements of spiritual practice. One finding worth exploring in other karst landscapes is that agropastoralists used and perceived caves in a wider variety of ways than did hunter-foragers. This echoes the European evidence which displays scant evidence for ritual use of caves in the Mesolithic but a sharp increase

with the onset of farming in the Neolithic, as illustrated by Robin Skeates for southeast Italy and Andrew Chamberlain for Britain.

A principal merit of this book is that it highlights recurring patterns that appear in widely disparate regions at widely disparate times. For instance, the symbolic significance of light and dark zones in caves and the sense of liminality is a pervasive theme, whether in the Old Kingdom Egyptian temples or the British Neolithic. Also evident cross-culturally is the drive to repeatedly seek out the deepest and darkest parts of caves for ritual activities. Caves were active places in landscapes that people engaged with, but sometimes complete avoidance of a cave illustrated its potency and power. The question of gendered cave rituals is also addressed. Kaiser and Forenbaher present a compelling argument that Iron Age rituals at Nakovana Cave were associated with masculinity, while Claassen has identified rockshelters that she believes Native American women retreated to during menstruation.

The recurrent discussion in several chapters about the definitions of *cave* and *ritual* is somewhat tedious. The geological or standard dictionary definition of a cave is not satisfactory for some authors who feel the presence of a dark zone is an essential criterion (though not so from a geological perspective). Associated with this is the frequency with which past and present populations have created artificial caves in regions where natural caves occur, with examples in this book from Malta, Crete, the Levant, Tibet, the Mayan world and Egypt. *Sacred Darkness* raises the need for a more consistent use of terminology around caves and artificial subterranean spaces.

Several papers display a somewhat limited exploration of the nature of the rituals that took place inside caves. Disarticulated human bones are all too frequently referred to as 'burials' when in fact they are more likely to represent multi-phase and multi-locational activities including excavation and token deposition. Tomkins raises this issue in his study of caves in prehistoric Crete and contends that archaeologists tend to oversimplify a more complex range of ritual behaviours. Moyes and Brady refer to isolated human bones in Mesoamerican caves as 'problematic deposits', yet this is the most usual way in which human bones occur in caves in northwest Europe.

Patty Jo Watson makes the important point that cave archaeologists can overlook aboveground archaeology and its relation to the subterranean. This book does not make that mistake, however, with various chapters examining the relationship between caves and monuments, such as Stoddart and Malone's valuable exploration of the relationship between caves, artificial caves and monuments in prehistoric Malta. As Andrew Chamberlain points out, however, we have to prove that particular caves were of ritual significance, something that is not required for monuments.

A notable weakness in terms of the production of *Sacred Darkness* is the absence of colour images. All 99 plates are in black and white though clearly the majority were taken in colour and are not suited for reproduction in monochrome. This failure is almost certainly a product of financial con-

straints, but the book would have been better if many of the plates were omitted altogether. A number of photographs are entirely indecipherable (e.g. Figs. 1.5, 2.2, 8.2, 13.6, 15.5, 16.2, 17.6), many are of low resolution, and few do justice to their respective chapters. Mapping was also less than satisfactory: an overall map in the introductory chapter illustrating the geographical spread of the individual studies would have been insightful, and I would have expected location maps in all (rather than just some) chapters. In particular, the lack of adequate location maps in Chapters 11, 12, 13 and 25 was unfortunate.

Andrea Stone's paper neatly encapsulates the value of all 29 contributions to this book and would have made an excellent final chapter. She notes that cave rituals have made sporadic appearances throughout human history in many types of societies and on every continent. Cave rituals emerge independently at different times and in different places because they serve a purpose in religious life that is re-imagined over and over again. Cave rituals contribute not only to our understanding of religious experience but also to social, political and economic affairs. Caves transcend ethnic, temporal and subsistence based contingencies, and as ritual theatres were as important to hunter-gatherers as they were to agriculturalists. Stone continues that the permanency and stable architecture of caves are favourable to repeat ritual, while the sensory experiences are ideal for heightening the emotional and psychological content. This last aspect, a recurring feature of cave archaeology research in Europe over the past decade, was touched on in several chapters of *Sacred Darkness* but not to the extent that one might expect.

Overall, this book offers a wealth of stimulating papers, new ideas and previously unpublished data. It is a particularly significant contribution to international research in cave archaeology and *has achieved its ambitions in demonstrating the universal association between caves, ritual and religious life*. Holley Moyes is to be commended for capturing diverse voices from diverse places all speaking about the special world of caves.

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*The Ancient Maya of Mexico: Reinterpreting the Past of the Northern Maya Lowlands*, edited by Geoffrey E. Braswell, 2012. Sheffield: Equinox; ISBN 978-1-908049-31-5 hardback £85 & \$140; xiv +386 pp., 134 figs., 10 tables

Antonia E. Foias

This volume is a welcome addition to recent publications on the archaeology of the Yucatan Peninsula. It is dedicated to E. Wyllis Andrews V, who trained many of the volume's authors, and who devoted his life to Maya research. The northern Maya lowlands are often triumphed as the stronghold of Maya civilization during the Terminal Classic and Postclassic periods after most of the southern Maya states had disintegrated. Following this perspective, beautiful cities such as Uxmal, Chichen Itza and Mayapan are celebrated, but as examples of Maya culture that had declined since the peak of the Classic period in the southern Maya lowlands. The contributors to this volume overturn this view by showing how varied and deep Yucatan archaeology is. Rather than being the 'backwaters' of the southern Maya lowlands, this volume highlights that Yucatan was a vibrant cultural region from early times on. To emphasize the antiquity of northern Maya society, the chapters in the volume are arranged chronologically, with an introduction by Braswell and a conclusion by Marcus. Each chapter is well written, generally data-rich and processualist in its vision.

In the introductory chapter, Braswell excels in providing an overview of the cultural history of northern Yucatan from the Palaeoindian epoch through the Colonial period, touching on major recent discoveries and points of contention. For example, contrary to views of the Maya lowlands as passive receivers of Olmec ideas and artefacts, Braswell writes that 'Middle Preclassic early Nabanche ceramics [from northern Yucatan] have been found at La

Venta, [and] Tres Zapotes' (p. 9). He touches on the influence of Teotihuacan at multiple large and small Early Classic centres in Yucatan. He mentions the possible role of droughts and migrations in the southern collapse. He also broaches the topic of the relationship between Chichen Itza and Tula, including Ringle *et al.*'s proposal of a new religion centred on the feathered serpent, as well as the ongoing debate on the nature of political leadership at Chichen.

The three chapters on the Preclassic are also important. The first, by Anderson, describes discoveries that not only was the northwest Yucatan densely occupied during the Middle and Late Preclassic but that it also shows early signs of sociopolitical complexity. First, this zone had already developed a three-tier settlement hierarchy, with the top tier exhibiting monumental architecture. Second, it had the largest density of Middle Preclassic ballcourts in all of Mesoamerica. Surprisingly, these ballcourts were generally found in smaller centres rather than at the largest ones. The second chapter, by Peniche May, focuses on the excavations of one structure (Structure 1714-Asub) at a second-rank Middle Preclassic site, Xaman Susula. This building was a throne room, dating to c. 300 BC, and probably the earliest throne room known in Mesoamerica. This gives another insight into the early sociopolitical complexity of the northern Maya lowlands. Based on this evidence, Peniche May concludes that 'Xaman Susula was part of an individualizing chiefdom that participated in exclusionary ... strategies' (p. 82). I would agree with the author, but would not dismiss the possibility that incipient states may have already be in place at the larger and possibly paramount centre of Xtobó. The third chapter in this section, by Marcus, provides an overview of the complex chronology of another densely populated zone during the Middle and Late Preclassic, the El Mirador Basin, where arguably the first Maya states evolved in the last centuries BC. This zone is also witness to the beginning of the complex story of three cities, El Mirador, Calakmul and Dzibanche, all seemingly using the same emblem glyph of the Snake Head during the later Classic period. Marcus concludes that the evidence from the El Mirador–Calakmul zone argues for the alternating rises and falls of these centres of power, a dynamic found in many ancient civilizations.

The section on the Classic period begins with a contribution by Hutson on Early Classic urbanism in the northern Maya lowlands. He summarizes recent work at two mega-cities in northern Yucatan, the site of Izamal and Chunchucmil, both of which flourished in the Early Classic. The scale, density and complexity of these two cities not only match the southern cities, but may even surpass some of them. Izamal extended over 53 square kilometres, while Chunchucmil boasted as many as 43,000 inhabitants over 20–25 square kilometres. The research at Chunchucmil also broadens our definition of Classic Maya urbanism in that it lacked a central pyramid, it had an extremely high population density of 950 structures per square kilometre, and it sustained itself through mercantile activities. The second chapter in this section, by Ek, presents results of the recent Rio Champoton regional settlement survey in