

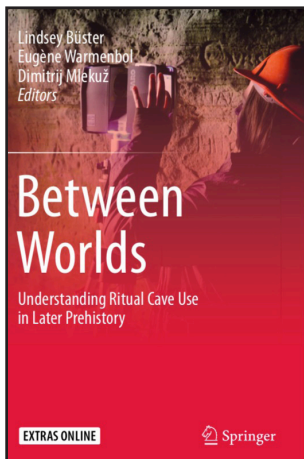
Lindsey Büster, Eugène Warmenbol, and Dimitrij Mlekuž (Eds.)

Between worlds: Understanding ritual cave use in later prehistory

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'Between Worlds' is the second major publication focusing on the ritual use of caves that appears the last few years after Holly Moyes (Ed.) 'Sacred Darkness' in 2012. Generally, the last decade saw a rise on high quality publications on cave archaeology starting with Bergsvik and Skeates 'Caves in Context' (2012) and following by the 'Archaeology of Darkness' in 2016. What all these previous publications have in common is that they acknowledge caves as a distinct archaeological context – as an enclosed landscape with special environmental conditions – that requires a different approach for its study and interpretation comparing to open air or built archaeological sites. What 'Between Worlds' is doing differently – and I much appreciated this – is that in comparison to the previous publications brings the 'cave' as natural formation on the forefront of the discussion.

'Between Words' is structured in two parts that follow a stand-alone introduction from the authors. The introduction summarises really well the current theoretical discussion on cave archaeology and the interpretation of cave use, and presents in a thorough manner the arguments that have been expressed in earlier major publications. Part one has eight chapters that offer strong theoretical discussions and arguments about caves as an anthropological dynamic space entities. In this part, it seems that the discussion that started in 2012 by Mlekuž, that cave is a natural formation, a dynamic enclosed landscape, that offers certain affordances to its visitors reaches a conclusion, particularly with the discussion in the chapters from Peterson, Mlekuž, Prijatelj and Skeates. Generally, the first part of the volume is really robust with a rigorous theoretical discussion in the beginning that leads to four well-presented case studies from Greece, Britain, Italy, and Belgium. I feel that the 'Theoretical Manifesto' chapter 2 and the 'Caves Agency' chapter 3 in particular they will attract attention in the near future mainly because they stand on coherent arguments about the 'physicality' of the caves as both places and spaces that influence – if not shape – human actions.

The second part of the volume has four chapters and 'explores new ways of investigating dynamic cave environments, with particular focus on digital capture technologies' (p. 5). This part is innovative, with interesting case studies from Scotland and France, that showcase an array of digital methodologies for the study of cave rituals, but lacks the theoretical breath and strength of the first part, minus the interesting Waller's chapter on the archaeoacoustic modelling. The volume would be really fascinating if the second part's methodologies and techniques were in a 'dialogue' with the first part's theoretical perceptions, instead being stand-alone presentations of state-of-the-art digital applications in cave archaeological research.

Overall, as also my feelings for the previous H. Moyes 'Sacred Darkness' volume are, I think that ritual cave uses should be studied comparatively with domestic – profane uses of the caves. So as to move in cave use interpretation beyond the Durkheimian sacred/profane dichotomy. It is true to believe that in the symbolically enhanced – with cave decoration, water dripping, mystic air flows etc – cave environments all uses can be ritualised, such as the annual sheep shearing in the Greek cave barns which has perceived almost as a cult by the shepherds. Nevertheless, without acknowledging the diachronic economic – practical – aspects of cave use as animal pens, storage facilities, shelters, and more, I think we undermine their importance as parts of the societies' everyday lives.

I believe 'Between worlds' is the last stretch of a long way towards the understanding of the role of caves as natural environments have in the archaeological discourse. This volume is the epitome of the theoretical discussion that started in 2012 and for this only it is a valuable read and a significant publication for the archaeological study of

caves. I also believe that the weakness of the volume to address decisively the sacred-profane dichotomy on the interpretation of cave use is not something that downgrade its importance. On the contrary, after the publication of 'Between Worlds' cave archaeologists should feel ready to move on to this endeavour and to make it the new frontier.

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