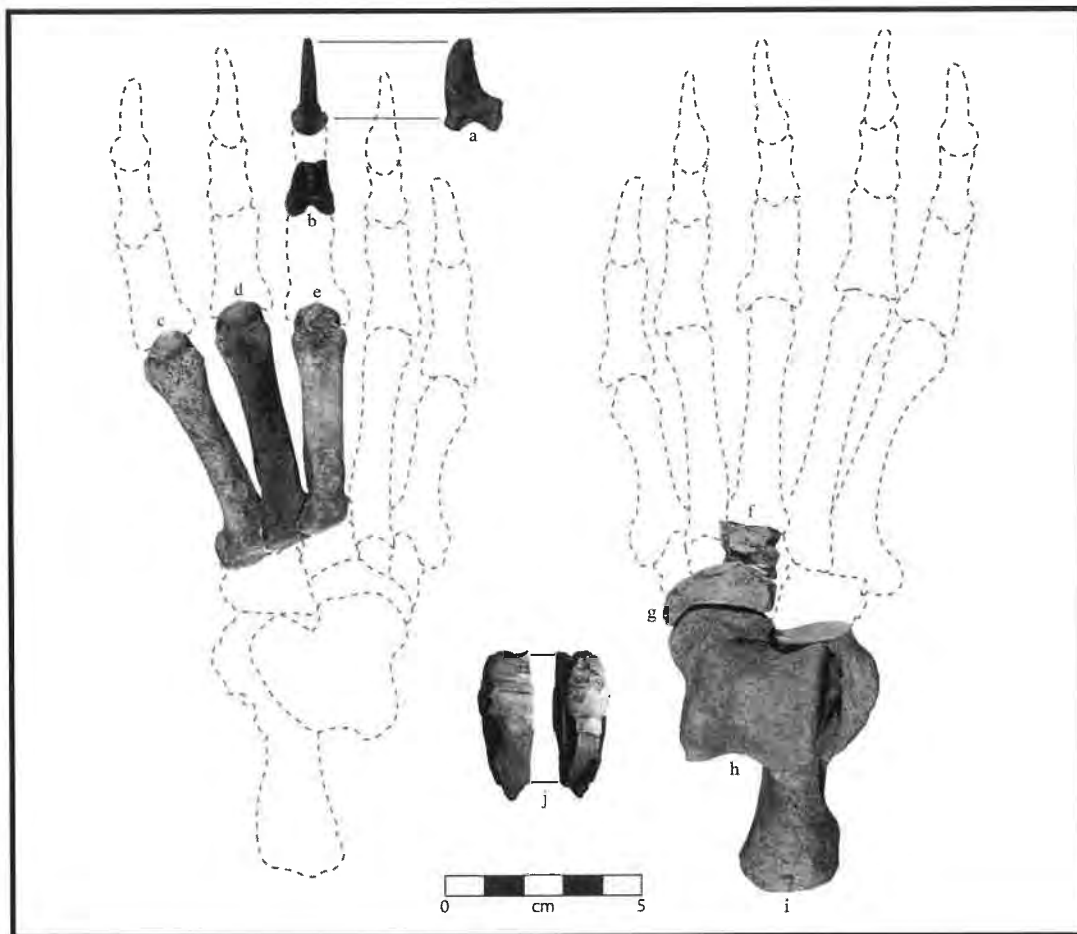


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BOOK REVIEWS

Transforming the Landscape: Rock Art and the Mississippian Cosmos, edited by Carol Diaz-Granados, Jan Simek, George Sabo III, and Mark Wagner. Oxbow Books, Havertown, Pennsylvania, 2018: 240 pages, illustrations, \$34.95 (paperback). ISBN 9781785706288.

Reviewed by Ian W. Brown

I am by no means an expert on rock art. It might seem strange for a reviewer to begin with such an admittance, but it is true. Practically all of the areas that I have worked in are devoid of such features, primarily because they lack the necessary stone, whether standing or as boulders, in order to have supported the activity. Lower Alabama, west-central Mississippi, and coastal Louisiana sadly have little in the way of material suitable for carvings or paintings. Despite my disclaimer as an authority of art as applied to stone, for the past four decades I have been fascinated by the findings of such and have often sat in symposia dedicated to rock art at regional and national archaeological meetings. My interest began in 1980. I had just finished a study of stone box graves found in the Midwest, and especially in the Cumberland region of Middle Tennessee (Brown 1981), when I learned of a find in the southeastern part of the state called Mud Glyph Cave. As the name implies, there was a plethora of designs incised in the mud of the walls, but what was most fascinating to me was their content, as they reproduced images characteristic of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex. I eventually had the good fortune to review Charles H. Faulkner's edited volume on this site, which was published by the University of Tennessee Press in 1986 (Brown 1988). Over the years I have visited rock art sites in California, New Mexico, and Alabama, and have even taught the subject as part of various archaeology classes, but still to this day have not done any work on the subject. With that confession upfront, I nevertheless jumped at the opportunity offered me by Evan Peacock to review *Transforming the Landscape for Mississippi Archaeology*, if only to catch up on the literature. And oh what a "catch up" that has been!

When *Transforming the Landscape* arrived at my home last summer, after a quick glance I immediately

decided to put it to the side. This was a volume that was going to require much more attention than I had at the time and, as predicted, it ended up taking me three full days to peruse it. There is so much in this book that I needed a prolonged period of time to digest the data and think about the findings and what they might mean. Carol Diaz-Granados starts right off by saying that the editor of Oxbow Books was hoping that she would do the book as a single author, and though she could have done so, she wisely reached out to a cadre of scholars to perform the duties, not only to help in editing, but in the production of the various essays. Many people were involved in the creation of this important volume. Fifteen contributors produced seven chapters, two with two co-authors, and all the rest with three. Major collaboration is occurring in rock art research, which is a very good sign as the subject matter is so complex.

The *Transforming the Landscape* chapters include a major portion of the Southeast and a small portion of the Midwest. The book starts with a section by George Sabo and Jan F. Simek that examines "Materiality and Cultural Landscapes in Native America." This sets the stage for all that follows, at least in terms of presenting the spiritual trajectories of numerous groups and the basic tripartite world view of upper, middle, and lower that is manifested in southeastern rock art. From there the various authors examine the petroglyph, pictograph, and mud glyph sites of the West Mississippi River Valley in Missouri (James R. Duncan and Carol Diaz-Granados), the Ozark Escarpment in Arkansas (George Sabo III, Jerry E. Hilliard, Jami J. Lockhart, and Leslie C. Walker), the East Mississippi River Valley in Illinois (Mark J. Wagner, Kayeleigh Sharp, and Jonathan Remo), the Appalachian Plateau in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama (Jan F. Simek, Alan Cressler, and B. Bart Henson), and the Appalachian Mountains (Johannes Loubser, Scott Ashcraft, and James Wetts-taed).

There is a great deal of data presented in each of the regions and, as might be expected, there is also a lot of diversity. The one thing that all of the scholars tend to agree on is that rock art did not happen simply by chance. It is first detected on Late Archaic sites, the earliest so far being from a cave in Kentucky, and it con-

tinued up to and including historic and even modern times. There is also a certain level of predictability as to where rock art occurs. Prominent features on the landscape like Tower Rock and Fountain Bluff in southern Illinois are but two examples of such features. Springs, waterfalls, and rapids are other places where one might expect to find examples, and of course rock shelters and caves that served as portals to the underworld are rich in the art. There is a clear correlation between rock art and waterways in most of the regions involved, but there are exceptions to this as well. In Tennessee, for example, the rock art is manifested mostly in the Cumberland Plateau, but with only a few representations along the two main river courses, the Tennessee and Cumberland. And despite a general predictability as to the location of rock art, Diaz-Granados reminds us that we must not stop looking for it in other areas, because the actual placement of ancient imagery is not easily understood.

To me, the main contribution of *Transforming the Landscape* is the compilation of rock art images, both in terms of drawings and photography. There are many color pictures in addition to those in black and white. With that said, this is not simply a volume of good images. The various authors are well versed in ethnohistory, ethnography, and the current belief systems of various native groups and draw heavily from this knowledge in arriving at meanings for the myriad of motifs and their arrangements. Most authors in the respective regions agree that tableaus were the intent; that the images were laid down in a logical order that made sense to the populations responsible. With some exceptions, there is very little in the way of overlapping of images. Petroglyphs applied to boulders on Georgia and North Carolina sites have produced some fascinating chronology as a result of the overlapping that occurred, but overall it seems that the practitioners, whoever they may have been, tended to respect previous constructions and add their own contributions to the spaces in between. If the figures were applied all at once, a convincing argument for tableaus can indeed be made, but if the artists were different people who came to these sacred sites (as that is what most probably were) over prolonged periods, the argument is less convincing, at least to me. I think

it can be safely said that all of the authors do believe in the reality of tableaus, and yet they all also recognize the problems that emanates from prolonged periods of application. With few exceptions, rock art just cannot be dated effectively.

The problem of dating is, I believe, the main reason why rock art studies have had such a hard birth in the Southeast, or anywhere for that matter. All of the authors address this issue to varying extents in their chapters. I agree that despite some very early studies, or at least some early references, to rock art, dating back to colonial times, archaeologists have tended to avoid such studies, at least until the late twentieth century. The reasons for why more archaeologists have gotten involved of late is two-fold: first, a greater appreciation of the concept of landscape, and second, an increased acceptance that the myths, legends, and lore of descendent Native American populations have an important role in comprehension. Robert Hall (1997) pointed the way in his *Archaeology of the Soul* book, and all of the authors of *Transforming the Landscape* have continued to follow the course, some more cautiously than others.

As concerns landscape itself, one thing I would like to point out is the importance of preservation. For rock art to have meaning, it must remain in place. Once it is removed it takes on new meanings. For most of the examples presented in this book the sites do remain, as does the rock art. There have been damages done to the latter by nature or vandalism, but the bulk of the rock art has stayed in place so that students of such can appreciate the images where they were created. This is not so for many of the sites in Georgia and North Carolina, however, and that is because of the nature of the material. As so much of the art there was applied to boulders of various sizes, the boulders were moved for protection. The argument usually runs, "If we don't take it, others will." As a person who has been involved in museum work for most of his life, I do get the argument. At the same time, something is lost when this happens, akin to what results when gravestones are shifted indoors in order to protect them. Context is lost as a result. Nature itself is rough on rock art, especially when it is exposed to the elements, but humans also have been responsible for great destruction.

Edward J. Lenik's 2009 volume, *Making Pictures in Stone: American Indian Rock Art of the Northeast*, offers many examples of the so-called "saving" of rock art that occurred in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries when dams were made along the Potomac and Susquehanna rivers. The argument at the time was that the creation of lakes would remove rock art from sight and study, and that certainly has been the case. I would wager a bet, however, that petroglyphs buried between lakes formed by dams have a far better chance of survival than do either museums, dams, or even the civilization of the people who strangled the rivers for hydroelectric energy and recreation. The rivers will certainly flow again someday, and the images of the past will appear once more, if only they are left alone.

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