The assessment of the Mahastupa’s building history is a major development in the study of this fascinating site, and Shimada's discussion of the wider social contexts of early historic Buddhist practice will certainly help to guide future research and stimulate much further discussion.

REFERENCES CITED

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Reviewed by Christopher Davis, University of Illinois at Chicago

Very little is known internationally about the rock art traditions of Southeast Asia, and even less about the rock art specific to the coastal shores of Hong Kong. The majority of the rock art sites discussed by Meacham are located on the islands of Hong Kong in the South China Sea. However, he also includes other known sites in the surrounding region, including those that have been recorded in Taiwan. The catalogue of regional sites makes this book useful to any researcher of rock art worldwide who would like to compare the archaeological contexts and thematic elements in this region to work that has been done elsewhere on cultural practices of rock art and their expression of ideas about local environments and the supernatural. Dual language texts in English and Chinese are accompanied by beautiful photographs, illustrating nearly every other page.

All of the rock art images are petroglyphs, although some of the walls where they appear also seem to be stained with red, orange, yellow, purple, or brownish hues. Some stains are polychromatic in adjacent vertical or diagonal bands or spots, and at times the stains appear to be strongly weathered. However, no discussion of the stains (e.g., whether they were artificially applied to the surface of the rock, or if they occur naturally as lichen growth on the surface, or if they are natural hues in the rock matrix) is provided. The petroglyphs are typically referred to as carvings, indicating the author’s belief that abrading the surface with a harder engraver material produced them, although “pitting” designs are discussed as having been formed either naturally or through pecking (p. 84). A few motif terms are used, such as “cup-like hollows” to refer to cupules, and “gameboards” to refer to multichambered geometric patterns to which the author applies a functional analogy from a modern cultural practice of drawing a checkerboard on a surface to play a game. Meacham also attempts to assign the petroglyphs to particular chronological styles based on the presence of any combination of three broad motif categories: geometric, zoomorphic, or emblematic motifs. The challenge of categorizing is due in part to several petroglyphs that begin with one design and continue into another (e.g., blending a zoomorphic design into a geometric pattern along a single engraved line). Other general descriptive terms used by Meacham include: curvilinear, rectilinear, pits, grooves, and swirls. The last term does not appear to differentiate between the continuous spirals or the S-shaped spirals that can be visibly distinguished in the photographs. All rock art images are displayed in either black-and-white or color photographs, and one image is a digital artistic rendition.

At the beginning of the book, Meacham informs the reader that the majority of these photos were taken during the 1970s. He does not provide the reader with specific reasons for the delay in publication and impetus for self-publication here, although they may be implied in his remarks in the appendix.
wherein he unleashes frustration with the Antiquities Advisory Board of the Hong Kong and Macau governments for botched attempts to conserve Hong Kong’s rock carvings. He brings attention to the follies of their installed drainage systems, concrete platforms, Perspex encasements, cement blocks, latex molds, and chemical surface treatments, which he suggests were actually detrimental to the preservation of the petroglyphs. These recent conservation efforts also prevent scholars from taking unobstructed photographs of the petroglyphs today. Meacham notes the potential degrading effects these well-meaning but misguided attempts to protect the petroglyphs have not only on the art itself but also on the natural landscape, although he attempts to be even-handed by noting criticisms of his own methods in the 1970s (i.e., highlighting the carvings with chalk to enhance visibility). However, Meacham does not offer any specific alternative methods to preserve the rock art sites, instead suggesting the government should “consult specialists” on the matter.

Written in more of an essay style or public presentation style rather than a scholastic work, the book avoids the use of jargon, making it easy to read for novices or laymen. However, the conversational dialogue offers few reference markers for flipping back and forth in the book to revisit topics, which specialists in the field typically appreciate. Throughout the book, Meacham provides as much archaeological and ethnographic data as is currently known to chronologically narrow the potential age range of the petroglyphs, yet sometimes Meacham refers to time periods without clarifying dates. While the book is clearly aimed at both a broader audience and scholars who might be unfamiliar with the local political history of Hong Kong, at times the reader is presumed to know the chronological framework of the Han dynasty or the Warring States period, without any direct reference to their historical/archaeological chronologies. The lack of specific dates (or perhaps a timeline for quick reference) can be difficult for readers unfamiliar with Chinese history, and might be discouraging for readers who specialize in rock art elsewhere in comparative perspectives. The only period for which Meacham provides a more detailed cultural and historical background and chronology associated with the petroglyphs is the Chinese Bronze Age.

Perhaps the most distressing issue when consulting this publication is the lack of clear and descriptive labels for the photographs. Although the author has captions for many of these, he does not label them or include in-text reference markers to direct the reader to the correct accompanying photographs. In addition to the lack of caption citations, the author does not include many bibliographic citations that could lead interested scholars to additional sources. Neither does he support many of the interesting statements he makes comparing the Hong Kong petroglyphs with various forms of rock art elsewhere in the world. For example, on pages 74–75 the author relates Hong Kong’s cup-like patterns to similar petroglyphs in China, Europe, and Hawaii, but no references are offered. Meacham further notes that the petroglyphs are “reported to have a ritual significance relating to childbirth,” but he does not mention from where and whom this specific interpretation came.

The research methods utilized by Meacham in this book reflect methods that were considered innovative in the 1970s. His photographs retain their research potential despite the passage of several decades, today needing only a larger, more visible scale. The chalk infills that Meacham made to enhance the details of many of the rock carvings are very effective and photograph well. However, through his own admission, the infilling of petroglyphs with chalk to photograph them potentially skews future analysis (due to obscuring some features or overemphasizing particular elements of the design) and will particularly affect methods of surface chemical dating on trace amounts of organic materials.

Meacham’s analyses of the rock art designs and meanings draw inferences from the archaeological record of pottery design in the region. Although Meacham upholds this method of examining analogous themes in other forms of material culture in the region as being better grounded than the haphazard and less scientific earlier studies, even to the point where he admonishes alternative inter-
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pretations, the cultural history of this area is still poorly known. Meacham opens himself up to the criticism that the local pottery might actually reflect a revival of the rock art styles, a phenomenon of cultural appropriation or attempt to construct an historical connection to the landscape by later peoples that is common in long-occupied regions with this type of prominent artistic imprint on the landscape. Petroglyphs, even in remote areas, are visual and easily could have been duplicated by later pottery artisans, even as tourism today often includes such ancient designs on T-shirts, cups, and souvenirs. Attributing the petroglyphs to the pottery traditions might be founded on grounds just as shaky as the alternative explanations he admonishes in the text, until a firm chronological framework is established for the rock art production.

Meacham opens an intriguing alternative avenue of analysis in Section IV, where he conjoins the art’s location to those of more recent Tin Hau shrines, used by fisherfolk to offer tribute for good fishing areas or safe voyages. However, an even more detailed examination of the relationship of the rock art to its local landscape could prove more fruitful. As Meacham himself suggests, the location chosen to display the petroglyphs can be as important as the image engraved. Therefore, there may have been local resources or peculiarities specific to the area that inspired ancient artists to mark that location. While Meacham partially addresses this idea when he discusses the fact that many recent shrines are located near petroglyphs, and that nearly all of them are near the coastal spheres of fishing activities, he does not further explore other landscape connections. The petroglyphs almost certainly predate most of the Tin Hau shrines, and might have inspired their locations. So, Meacham could delve deeper into the local characteristics or activities specific to the landscape that predate the shrines to discover the source of inspiration for the art.

Reasons for inspiration might include special areas for tool procurement or production, food manufacture, lookout platforms, astronomical and navigational observation areas, fire beacons functioning as ancient light-houses, or areas of refuge from typhoons, all requiring a more detailed knowledge of the confluence of regional resources, landscape features, and archaeological phenomena of various kinds.

Finally, a discussion on the composition of the rock that was etched and the amount of effort required to engrave an image can aid in understanding some of the petroglyphs. For example, the Zhu Hai carvings (pp. 83–84) are too intricate and detailed to be random meanders. They could possibly depict a mythical story or heroic scene. This is even more likely to be the case if the stone is a hard limestone that required finding an engraving stone hard enough to scratch the surface and took a good deal of effort to carve. The effort required to produce carvings at these sites speaks to the predetermination of the artists to mark the location. If any pebble in the area can easily scratch the surface, then perhaps less premeditation was required.

Despite the shortcomings in terms of contextual information on the rock art sites and consideration of a broader range of interpretational frameworks, this book offers a rare compilation of information and photographs of the petroglyphs of Hong Kong that, due to some perhaps misguided efforts at preserving these sites, are not reproducible if one were to visit these locations today. It also offers very valuable information to researchers interested in comparison of rock art styles worldwide, and it lays the groundwork for future rock art research in the region. Although the Hong Kong Antiquities Board might frown on Meacham’s criticism of their preservation efforts, perhaps this book will also urge them to reevaluate their efforts and encourage other researchers to expand on Meacham’s work.