This ambitious book attempts to cover stone querns, mills, and flour production in Europe from the Neolithic to the post-Roman/early medieval periods, and is clearly the product of a lifetime’s interest by the author, Emeritus Professor at the University of Southampton.

After an introduction, in Chapter 2 Peacock examines saddle querns and rock mortars, aided by ethno-historical examples. The author develops a morphological approach based on previous work, but he does not cover much of the British evidence, and he controversially suggests that prehistoric cup and ring ‘rock art’ may have been rock mortars (pp. 33–34), though this reviewer remains unconvinced.

Chapter 3 is an excellent summary of Olynthus mills in Greece and the Mediterranean, and Chapter 4 discusses rotary querns. Peacock links their appearance in Britain with the widespread introduction of iron tools, population pressure, and the appearance of hillforts, following traditional models (Iron Age Communities in Britain, Cunliffe 2005). He cites older excavations such as Danebury, Gussage All Saints, and Thorpe Thewles, but does not appear familiar with recent evidence (e.g. Wattle Syke; see below). He again takes a morphological and typological approach and, following Ingle (Characterisation and Distribution of Beehive Querns in Eastern England, 1989), sensibly suggests that lithology should be considered. He outlines some principal English regional lithologies and production zones, though most of Wales and Scotland are not covered. Broad European regional groups are also defined.

Chapter 5 examines Pompeian-style mills from the Mediterranean, whilst Chapter 6 explores mills powered by water or animals. In Chapter 7, Peacock covers grain and its preparation, though with little reference to the literature on Roman food and recipes, and he focuses on wheat, not barley or other grains, seeds or pulses, or ale or beer production. In Chapter 8, which explores quern production, He uses several British and Continental quarries as case studies, drawing on useful ethnographies of quern quarrying and exchange. In Chapter 9, he considers some social and symbolic meanings of querns, again drawing on ethno-historic evidence, linked to all too-brief discussion of querns in Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age contexts in Britain. The book concludes with an assessment of current identification and recording methodologies, and useful new techniques.

Disappointingly, the author uses older examples of published excavations but rarely referencing more recent assemblages as from the Iron Age and Roman settlement at Wattle Syke, which despite being only partially excavated, yielded one hundred and twenty eight saddle querns and rubbers, beehive and flat hand querns, and millstone fragments (J. Richardson and I. Roberts, Iron Age and Roman Settlements at Wattle Syke, 2012), including one beehive quern base of 100 kg, among the heaviest ever recorded. Buckley’s seminal article is not mentioned (Querns in ritual contexts, 1983), and Peacock does not really engage with the arguments of Brück (Body metaphors and technologies of transformation in the English Middle and Later Bronze Age, 2001) or Chapman (Fragmentation in Archaeology: People, Places, and Broken Objects, 2000) concerning fragmentation. There is only one brief paragraph (p. 176) on Iron Age quern deposition in Britain, and the book ignores saddle querns and rubbers incorporated within stone roundhouse walls.
Similarly, Peacock does not utilise the extensive work by Ingle, Heslop and Watts on querns in eastern, northern and south-western England, but he may not have wished to reiterate these more detailed studies. There are no plans of structures/buildings associated with milling. It might also have been interesting to consider links between querns, other artefacts and realms of human practice, such as the evidence for metalworking and pigment production on querns, or the use of ground-up querns in some Iron Age pottery tempers.

There is a rather concise bibliography, and a very basic index. The volume is very well-presented, with many colour and black and white photographs, colour maps and black and white line, three-dimensional reconstructions, many produced by Chris Green. Despite this, the hardback price is a relatively affordable £45.00. Overall, it is a well-written, attractive and highly informative book, although in places slightly dated, and would have been enhanced by further discussion of quern distributions, deposition and fragmentation, and the potential social significance of this. As a more general source, however, this book is very welcome.

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