



Book Reviews

THE BELL BEAKER TRANSITION IN EUROPE. MOBILITY AND LOCAL EVOLUTION DURING THE 3RD MILLENNIUM BC BY MARIA PILAR PRIETO MARTÍNEZ AND LAURE SALANOVA (EDS)

Oxbow Books, Oxford, 2015. 214pp, 116 figs incl 14 col pls, 6 tables, 1 appendix, ISBN 97817 82979272, hb, £38

In light of recent political developments in Britain, the pan-European issues at the heart of debates over the Bell Beaker phenomenon (BBP) have rarely been more topical. Scholars pursuing a cultural phenomenon with such a large-scale geographical distribution are justified in needing to contrast and compare findings and theories with colleagues across Europe on a regular basis (eg, Nicolis 2001; Fokkens & Nicolis 2012; Czebreszuk 2014). *The Bell Beaker Transition in Europe* represents the most comprehensive attempt to do so since Nicolis's two-volume *Bell Beakers Today* (2001). Those volumes contain 37 papers and 30 poster presentations drawn from across Europe but readers must navigate different languages and methodological and theoretical approaches, without a sense of conclusion or synthesis to the body of information. In the book under review, Prieto Martínez & Salanova have assembled 17 papers (based on a conference held in Poio, Spain in 2011) to produce an impressive (and reasonably priced) cross-section of the European BBP evidence. An earlier volume (Prieto Martínez & Salanova 2013) covered new excavations and analysis of artefacts associated with the BBP, with this latest volume serving as a series of regional syntheses. In contrast to *Bell Beakers Today*, the contributors pursue a set of fairly well defined themes (straying only occasionally from their brief): covering issues of mobility, migration and social factors such as the integration of Bell Beaker and indigenous groups, hierarchy and the expression and construction of identities, all of which serve to explore the process of transition and adoption associated with the origins of the BBP. Furthermore, this book is topped and tailed by prefacing and concluding chapters penned by Martínez and Salanova, both (especially the conclusion) serve to pull together patterns in the approaches adopted by the contributing authors. This is essential in pursuing the loftiest goal of any pan-European Bell Beaker study: a sense of what is similar and different through both space and time.

The overall geographical coverage of this volume is a strength, with papers covering Poland (2), Central Europe (1), Germany (1), France (2), Britain (1), Scandinavia (2), Atlantic Europe (1) and Iberia (5). It is ironic (but perhaps fitting) that, given the pan-European nature of this volume, one of its strengths is that it is written entirely in English, allowing access to sites, behaviours and datasets that may otherwise have been inaccessible to (often) stubbornly monolingual, English speaking scholars (your reviewer sadly included). Unfortunately, some clarity, meaning and nuance to the language has been lost in the translation and composition process of some contributions, a feature that is especially regrettable in chapters where complex methodological and theoretical approaches are deployed, causing one or two of the finer points of some contributor's discussion to be difficult to fully grasp.

In the opening chapter, Falileyev provides an overview of complex debates surrounding the possible connection between the BBP and the spread of new language(s). This is particularly useful for those unfamiliar with the thorny issues of relationships between BBP, the Celts (and the Celts from the West theory) and the plausible importance of multi- or bilingualism in the transmission of the new ideas and technologies. Ultimately Falileyev is downbeat about the potential of linguistics and BBP to come together in meaningful and productive fashion, at least in their current guises.

The volume then begins its 16-chapter survey of European regions, commencing with two chapters on Poland. In the first, Haduch compares Corded Ware and Bell Beaker populations through approaches from physical anthropology, identifying evidence for mobility and assimilation of cultural practices, albeit on seemingly small sample sizes. Makarowicz applies mortuary theory of a type that will be familiar to British audiences to evidence from between the Oder and Vistula Rivers, highlighting the role of grave goods and spatial patterning (of bodies in the grave and of graves in relation to one another) in the construction of identities, especially male/female relations.

Turek then broadens the geographical scope to Central Europe as a whole while narrowing in on stone wristguards in a chapter that serves as a useful companion to work already undertaken on other European regions by Fokkens (2008) and Woodward & Hunter (2011). Turek draws some valuable ethnographic parallels between the ceremonial role of wristguards and the social and ritual role of warfare in Papua New Guinea and raises the relatively atypical and elite nature of these objects (present in only 7.5% of Bell Beaker graves in Bavaria). Perhaps most intriguing, given the strictly gendered character of BBP funerary practices, is mention of at least four female graves containing stone wristguards from Bohemia, Moravia and southern Bavaria, described as possible 'Bell Beaker Amazons' (p.38)!

In Fitzpatrick's well-rounded chapter on the British evidence (especially the Chalcolithic period), the message is also one of life beyond bowmen, whether from Amesbury or Boscombe. Fitzpatrick sets those famous individuals in their fuller British and Continental context, reasonably suggesting that early British Beakers had no single origin and that they were instead influenced by a range of Continental styles and took hold not in one region (traditionally held to be Wessex) but across the country, a point also forwarded by Alison Sheridan in recent years (eg, 2007). Fitzpatrick also adds his support to the case for Atlantic links between Ireland and Iberia and identifies the role of apprenticed children with residencies in foreign households as a key mechanism in the development and spread of the BBP across Europe. In a chapter that further demonstrates how far we've moved from dry and traditional typological Beaker studies, Müller *et al.* quantify differences in ceramic design as a proxy for the rate of innovation among BB societies in southern Germany. A full appreciation of their method requires an evaluation of the statistics they deploy (not available to this reviewer) but it certainly raises important and intriguing points about the potential of studying stylistic change through time and space (in a semi- or fully quantified way) and of how those changes may relate to ancient communication structures.

Two chapters on the Scandinavian evidence follow, in the first Artursson explores the relationship and dynamics between Late Neolithic societies organised around long houses and the introduction of the BBP in Southern Scandinavian and, in the second, Prescott and Glørstad examine the impact of BBP on indigenous communities in Norway, a region often overlooked in Bell Beaker surveys and considered to be marginal. Cauliez also considers the processes of BBP influence and integration for SE France, an area of considerable interest given that it is close to both Central European and Iberia. Cauliez argues that when we consider transition associated with the BPP we often give it agency over indigenous people, who are generally considered passive receivers rather than autonomous agents of negotiation and compromise. Successful integration was not synonymous with the weakness of indigenous groups but, rather, whether their character meshed well with the values and practices of the BBP. The point is very well made and could be extended for other areas of Europe.

The chapter by Ihué *et al.* on Grand Pressigny flint daggers also problematizes overly simple readings of the BBP by drawing our attention to the fact that while objects of this material were traded over large distances they did not reach as far and wide as the BBP *per se*. Indeed, it is notable that only certain Pressignian objects and production techniques are associated with BBP and are largely found only in early funerary contexts. A complementary piece by Rodríguez-Rellán *et al.* details emerging evidence for long-distance trade routes involving Turón flint from Andalusia (Málaga) and deposited at funerary contexts in Galicia (Pontevedra). Although this is currently limited to a single (demonstrable) instance other circumstantial evidence from flint tools and rock art is used to support their case. Continuing the focus on materials and artefact production, the chapter by Armbruster and Comendador Rey

examines the evidence for gold technology and its association with the BBP across Atlantic Europe, highlighting the widespread similarities not just in the morphologies of objects but also in the detailed technological details through which they were produced and the social and ritual significance of gold for BBP elites.

The final five chapters examine the evidence from Iberia. Costa-Casais *et al.* review the evidence for environmental changes in north-west Iberia during the BB period (c.2800 – 1400 BC) and suggest the 3rd millennium BC was a key 'turning point' in terms of the intensity of human impact on the environment, with deforestation caused by agricultural intensification. Pérez Díaz and López-Sáez examine the archaeobotanical (especially palynological) record in the Ebro Valley (in the southern Basque Country) and identify evidence for both cultivation (of cereal crops) and livestock practices associated with the BBP, which they connect to increasing socioeconomic complexity. Guerra Doce *et al.* look at the interesting relationship between Bell Beaker deposition and salt production at Molino Sanchón in Zamora, suggesting sherds were deposited as markers of property and exploitation rights, a point they extend to copper and salt production sites more broadly. Garcia Puchol *et al.* review the exciting new discoveries of funerary, domestic and metallurgical contexts associated with the BBP at the site of La Vital in Valencia, using a contextual and network-based approach to draw conclusions on craft specialisation and social interactions and hierarchy. Finally, Vázquez Liz *et al.* provide a detailed and excellently illustrated study of funerary practices in Galicia and northern Portugal, considering the role and impact of the BBP across different types of funerary context and monument, including the re-use of pre-existing monuments, noting several patterns in space, time and contextually specific use of Bell Beakers.

In their concluding remarks, Prieto Martínez and Salanova claim that the BBP 'marks the end of the European Neolithic, with stable social structures and a genuine turning point towards urban and stratified civilisations' (p.214). Do the contributions to this book support such an impressive claim? In the main part yes, but readers may reasonably hope for more high-level synthesis and overarching commentary than this short concluding chapter can offer. Nevertheless, this volume represents an important step in that direction, for which the editors and contributors should be warmly congratulated.

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