



## Book Reviews

### **EMBRACING BELL BEAKER: ADOPTING NEW IDEAS AND OBJECTS ACROSS EUROPE DURING THE LATER 3<sup>rd</sup> MILLENNIUM BC (c. 2600–2000 BC) BY JOS KLEIJNE**

*Scales of Transformation in Prehistoric and Archaic Societies, 2, Sidestone Press, Leiden, 2019. 300pp, 97 col & B&W figs, 42 tables, pb, ISBN 978-90-8890-755-5. £50.00*

This is Dr Kleijne's Doctoral thesis from the University of Kiel. It aims, by examining key study areas, to try to determine the mechanisms by which Bell Beakers are adopted by late Neolithic or Chalcolithic groups in different parts of Europe and the timescales of these adoptions. It starts with the premise that Bell Beakers are not pan-European in the sense that there is a universal spread of Beakers in all areas, but rather that there are concentrations of Beakers to a greater or lesser extent in various regions of Europe, particularly coastal regions and the valleys of major rivers, and for this reason the 'Beaker phenomenon', and the ideologies with which it was associated, must have been more attractive to some communities than to others. The study is mainly from a settlement perspective and principally uses domestic assemblages as its main database. The main study areas are the Portuguese Estremadura, Western France, Northern France, the Lower Rhineland, Southern Scandinavia and Northern Germany and the Czech Republic.

After 'Setting the Scene' (Chapter 1) and discussing the various theories for the spread of Beakers, Kleijne concludes that the data are skewed as they rely too heavily on the burial evidence which may or may not be a self-selecting dataset. He argues that the perceived lack of settlements is a misconception and, as a result, have been largely understudied. Not all, indeed few, of these settlements may have been associated with structural elements (houses) but spreads of domestic material and pit sites are more numerous than commonly perceived and, therefore, are worthy of greater attention than they have hitherto been given – an observation with which the present reviewer is in total agreement and has tried, in part, to rectify (Gibson 2019).

Chapters 2–4 describe the methodologies and data used in the analysis and explain the theoretical mechanisms by which innovations are adopted and the trajectories of adoption and adaptation. Kleijne also suggests that there may have been other novelties introduced before or at the same time as Bell Beakers in some areas such as copper and gold metallurgy, horse domestication, increase in hunting, spelt wheat, the role of Beaker contents in commensality

rituals (the beer debate), flint specialisation which, like Beakers, would also be subject to adoption and adaptation. The methods employed involve complex network theories applied to different aspects of innovation such as processes, mechanisms and practices as evidenced in pottery and settlement frequencies, craft industries and ceramic technology. Chapter 4 examines settlements and especially the limitations of their C14 chronologies warning that settlement archaeology and the rigour of data collection for radiocarbon dating have varied over time and across regions. The appendices and data are online and models are presented in Chapter 5.

The analysis is undertaken in Chapters 5–7 starting with ceramic assemblage composition in each of the study areas indicating that Bell Beaker was adopted and used to varying degrees across the region but in the majority of settlements, it was not the only type of ceramic in use and particularly in Northern France, where it was hardly adopted at all. By modelling the chronologies of the settlements on which Beaker is found and in consideration of the relative quantities of Beaker and other associated ceramics, it can be demonstrated that Beaker was more sustainable in areas such as the Portuguese Estremadura and less so in areas such as the Czech Republic where the adoption of Beaker was also comparatively late. In Chapter 6, network models are formulated based on total domestic assemblage similarities and differences in the study areas. Strong ties within the networks suggest common links and bonds in terms of material culture but these strong bonds can be responsible for both accepting change (Western France) or rejecting it (Northern France). In Southern Scandinavia and Northern Germany, weak ties suggest great variability in the way that local groups accepted or rejected Beakers. In this section Kleijne also considers population mobility including the recent aDNA results and points out the case made by the present reviewer that the data are not unequivocal and that, by concentrating on burials, they may be self-selecting. The pottery itself is examined in Chapter 7 looking at skill-sets in manufacture and decoration not just of Beakers but the associated Common Ware (a term with which I have a certain uneasiness) and concluding that where there were already high potting skills, the adoption of Beakers may be more rapid.

Whilst I am admittedly linguistically challenged and totally in awe of European colleagues with multi-language skills, I feel less than gracious to say that this book should really have been proof-read by a native English speaker. There are numerous awkward turns of phrase (see, for example, the captions to Figs 1.1 & 2), the word 'data' is persistently treated as singular and there are other frequent grammatical errors. Nevertheless, Kleijne has undertaken a detailed and highly statistical study of the variability between assemblages, sites and regions supported by considerable online datasets. He has demonstrated that the adoption of Bell Beakers is not unilateral or straightforward but rather there is great variation between, and sometimes within each of the focus areas dependant on social mobility, networking and the readiness of the social groups to embrace new ideas. He suggests that we should abandon the Beaker Phenomenon in

preference to the 'Beaker Phenomena' meaning different things to different groups. Whilst this is interesting, I am not at all certain that it explains the widespread distribution of Beakers, their associated ideologies or their attractiveness. It demonstrates the mechanics by which the phenomenon (phenomena) could have spread but we are still left with the question 'why'.

### **Reference**

Gibson, A.M. (ed.) 2019. *Bell Beaker Settlement of Europe. The Bell Beaker Phenomenon from a Domestic Perspective*. Prehistoric Society Research Paper 9. Oxford: Oxbow Books and the Prehistoric Society

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