



## Book Reviews

### **THE MEGALITHIC ARCHITECTURE OF EUROPE BY LUC LAPORTE AND CHRIS SCARRE (EDS)**

*Oxbow Books, Oxford. 2015. 240pp, 211 colour and B&W figs, 5 tables, hb, ISBN 978-1-78570-014-9, £55*

Scholars will be aware that the monument architecture of the Neolithic and Bronze Age is extremely diverse, especially within Atlantic Europe where many architectural forms occur; from simple Portal Dolmens and the complex passage graves to simple construction of earthen and stone monuments and (Bronze Age) barrows beyond. The archaeological evidence accompanying such monument types rely on four generic structural themes being incorporated into the overall design: mound shape/size, façade/entrance elaboration, passage elaboration/length/size and chamber shape/size. Orientation and landscape setting also would have played a vital role in the decision-making process. The architectural changes develop over many hundreds of years and are usually the result of establishing regional identity through design. In many areas, one arguably witnesses hybridisation whereby two architectural styles come together and form a hybrid monument. Spatial and temporal changes in monument constructing are just several issues that are covered in this book.

This book, conceived from a conference in France in 2012 features papers from the British Isles, Denmark, France, Ireland, Portugal and Spain, with an *ad hoc* contribution involving the megaliths of Easter Island. However, based upon the book theme, this is very much an Atlantic façade / South-west Scandinavian distribution.

The book, comprising 23 chapters is divided into four themed-sections: The Megalith Builders (1), Cemeteries and Sequences (2), Chronologies and Context (3) and Conclusions (4). Each section covers a number of complex issues concerning the mindset of the later prehistoric architect and builder. The various sections answer many of the problems facing this area of study, but at the same time it also leaves many unanswered questions. This problem is partly caused by the limited geographical coverage of the book. The main geographic focus of the book is the core areas along the Atlantic Façade of Europe. Although this area of Europe boasts a rich and diverse megalithic architecture, it is nevertheless an incomplete record. However, in support of the editors Laporte and Scarre, there is only so much one can do with a conference volume.

Each chapter is summarised by a short but concise entry within the Laporte and Scarre preface. Following this, Leonardo García and José Antonio Lozano Rodríguez commence proceedings with the story of a truly megalithic site – Menga, located in Andalusia (Spain). The paper traces the history of the monument from prehistory until the present. Readers may be interested to know that this site was excavated in 2005 and the finds included Spanish Civil War activity, suggesting that the history of this and many other sites extend way beyond later prehistory. In terms of monument diversity, Chapter 2 by Laporte discusses the architecture of the long monuments of Western France. In this paper, the author focuses on the multi-celled construction of Péré Tumulus C at Prissé-la-Charrière. Within the vicinity of the Péré Tumulus Florian Cousseau in Chapter 4 discusses the construction methodology of Carin III at Prissé-la-Charrière. Within the same region of Western Europe, Noisette Bec Drelon in Chapter 3 covers the excavation of two circular dolmens at Hérault in Languedoc; again focusing on diversity and local and regional architectural traits.

Moving north-westwards, to the Irish Sea Province of South-west Wales, Vicki Cummings and Colin Richards in Chapter 5 postulate the concept of a staged construction for dolmen monuments. They consider the idea of large stones used in the construction process was actually quarried on-site. They use the extreme example of Garn Turne in Pembrokeshire, south-west Wales to illustrate this process. Following on from the previous chapter, Chris Scarre in Chapter 7 discusses the question of whether certain monument types were constructed with or without a covering mound? Chapters 6, 8 and 9 focus on southern Scandinavia; Chapter 6 Torben Dehn explores passage grave construction in Denmark; in Chapters 7 and 8 Palle Eriksen and Niels Andersen discuss Dolmens without mounds and in Chapter 9 Jurgen Westphal describes 25 years of observations on recording architectural traits in and around dolmens.

Chapters 10 to 14 focus on a more difficult and sometimes contentious theme, that of cemeteries and their development and relationship with other contemporary monuments. The papers presented are concentrated on two areas of Europe: the Iberian Peninsula and southern Scandinavia/northern Germany. Chapter 10 by Ramón Fábregas Valcarce and Xosé Ignacio Vilaseco Vázquez and Chapter 11 by José Antonio Linares Catela focus on the megalithic tomb building of the Iberian Peninsula; the former discussing Galicia, the latter the province of Huelva. In contrast, Chapters 12 (Niels Andersen), 13 (Anne Birgitte Gebauer) and 14 (Franziska Hage, Georg Schafferer & Martin Hinz) provide informative discussions on monument distribution and dolmen architecture in Denmark, and the relationship between the distribution of Funnel Beaker ware and megaliths respectively.

The following six papers in Section 3 are largely concerned with chronology and context; limited to megalithic monuments from the Iberian Peninsula (Chapters 15 and 16), western France (Chapters 17, 18 and 19) and an oddly-placed and out-of-context chapter on settlement distribution in northern Europe (Chapter 20). Chapter 15 by Primitiva Bueno Ramírez, Rosa Barroso Bermejo & Rodrigo de Balbín Behrmann provide useful and informative account of the various megalithic architectures that occupy Spain and Portugal, whilst Leonor Rocha in Chapter 16 concentrates on rock-cut burial chambers of central and coastal Portugal; again, a useful paper in terms of understanding distribution and monument morphology.

Turning one's attentions to another megalithic core area – western France, Philippe Gouézin (Chapter 17) looks at the relationship between the surrounding natural landscape and megalithic monuments, whilst in Chapter 18, Jean-Marc Large & Emmanuel Mens discuss stone row alignments in north-western France, with a particular focus on the stone alignments of Hoedic within the Gulf Morbihan. Authors, Primitiva Bueno Ramírez, Rodrigo de Balbín Behrmann, Luc Laporte, Philippe Gouezin, Rosa Barroso Bermejo, Antonio Hernanz Gismero, José M. Gavira-Vallejo and Mercedes Iriarte Cela turn their attentions on the probability of painted rock art occurring in Breton monuments; a phenomenon that is certainly prevalent in the western areas of the Iberian Peninsula.

The final section of the book – conclusions, is formed from three chapters (Chapters 21 to 23). Chapter 21 by Nicolas Cauwe is a well-written account of megaliths with an Easter Island (Rapa Nui) context. I am not sure why this paper is published in a book that covers the Neolithic. Arguably, this study cannot be considered as an ethnographic control, other, more contemporary examples would have been more appropriate. Chapters 22 and 23 by Luc Laporte and Primitiva Bueno Ramírez, and Chris Scarre and Torben Dehn respectively provide the reader with summarized geographic and chronological overviews.

My only criticism is how the term 'Europe' has been used in the title of the book; especially when the focus of the book is limited to a group of monuments that are located along the hinterlands of the Atlantic façade and southern Scandinavia. Readers will be aware that megalithic monuments are also found across most areas of the Mediterranean (including the islands of Corsica, Cyprus, Malta, Sardinia and North Africa), the Channel Islands, Holland, Northern Germany and Sweden (to name but a few core areas). Despite this minor point, overall, the volume is a well-crafted

piece of work. The editors have carefully adhered to the theme in hand. In terms of tangible quality, Oxbow Books have yet again produced a high-quality product.

*Dr George Nash, Department of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Bristol*  
Review submitted: March 2017

*The views expressed in this review are not necessarily those of the Society or the Reviews Editor*