



Book Reviews

THE IDEA OF ORDER. THE CIRCULAR ARCHETYPE IN PREHISTORIC EUROPE BY RICHARD BRADLEY *Oxford University Press*
2012, 242pp, 74 illus, ISBN 978-0-19-960809-6, hb, £60

The question as to why some societies chose circular or rectangular forms of architecture has long puzzled prehistorians. As Bradley clearly points out, the form is not restricted to architecture but pervades material culture and even body ornament and the divisions are not clear cut – rectilinear and circular often co-exist, sometimes in different spheres, sometimes not. *The Idea of Order* is an extremely wide ranging study of great complexity and enormous subjectivity examining prehistoric architecture from the Mediterranean to the Baltic and from the Balkans to the British Isles with sojourns into the Americas and Africa for ethnographic examples. For this reason the book in all its chapters deals with case studies based on the common theme and examines the domestic, the sepulchral and the relationships between. It is by necessity a broad brush ‘top-down’ (p161) approach full of ideas and, as one has come to expect of Bradley, it certainly provides plenty of food for thought.

After an introductory section the various chapters look at geographical areas where circularity is the predominant architectural type and, in turn, at areas where rectangularity tended to persist and especially at the relationship between ritual and funerary monuments, the latter tending to circularity irrespective of domestic preferences. The final section summarises the main findings.

A work such as this cannot be comprehensive but, from a British perspective there are some odd omissions. The generalisation that circularity comes to the fore in the later Neolithic cannot be denied (albeit there are earlier circular monuments as Bradley acknowledges) and these do indeed follow on from the rectangular barrows and houses of the earlier Neolithic. However there are instances where these long mounds (cairns in particular) enclose earlier rotunda so that the rectangle (house) and circle (rotunda) have existed together since the advent of the British Neolithic though the round cairns seem to have gone out of fashion for a while. The circularity of causewayed enclosures within this broadly rectilinear domestic environment is not discussed nor are those absurdities of rectangularity, known as cursus monuments, that in England at least seem to herald this transitional period. Coinciding with the demise of long houses is the increased *geometric* art of ceramics. The herring bone motifs and filled triangles and lozenges of various sorts pervade the ceramic record from 3000 to almost 1000 BC. Circular or sinuous decoration is by no means absent in Britain but is indeed rare.

The treatise of henges and stone circles has a familiar ring (no pun intended) and owes much to Bradley’s earlier works but what of four-posters? These late (according to Burl’s scheme) monuments are clearly rectangles but no-one has suggested that they do not belong to the stone circle class. If this is accepted for stone, then why not also for some of the square post settings in sites such as Ballynahatty, Co Down (where incidentally there are also external rectangular settings ostensibly framing the entrance)? Bradley makes much of the four posts within the North American Navajo hogans but these too (cosmological connections accepted) may also be squaring the circle. Incidentally, many Navajo hogans also have corbelled roofs like passage graves. Indeed the Iron Age respect for Neolithic art in Ireland and Iberia which Bradley later discusses may also have looked to the Navajo of northern Arizona and southern Utah for

ethnographic parallels. There the pre-Navajo *Anasazi* (Ancestral Enemy) art is avoided because it represents the dark unknown past: it is dangerous.

In central Europe too there is no mention of the fact that the *Keisgrabenanlagen* (KGAs), especially but not exclusively in Lower Austria, appear to represent a new population with the Lengyel-associated settlements avoiding areas of earlier LBK occupation. Their locations are also important and while Bradley is correct to point out that in the case of reconstructed examples (Gosseck, Schletz), the outside is obscured from the interior, the reverse is not always strictly true. These enclosures are situated on slopes and often the interiors can be viewed from adjacent hillsides (like Hindwell in Powys, mid Wales). Indeed at the enclosure at Puch in Lower Austria the hill beneath which the enclosure sits provides the site for the modern day (almost aerial) viewing platform (the ditches and palisades are displayed in different coloured vegetation). Puch may be an exception but it is possible to look down upon many KGAs and their hillslope setting must have made them visible from afar. They were clearly symbols, intended to be seen from a respectful distance but closed off when viewed close to (so in effect closed off from near distances).

There are other niggles but in general the book races on and Bradley's enthusiasm comes through. It is a stimulating book whether or not one agrees with the observations. I found it a little repetitive in places and I found that it flitted around Europe like an American package holiday but nonetheless I found it enjoyable.

I think it was Stuart Piggott (though I may be wrong) who said that (and I paraphrase) 'for every set of perceived archaeological phenomena there are several equally viable explanations'. This certainly applies to a complex study such as this and the unknown variable in monument design may be the unknown complexities of human preference albeit within traditional constraints. 'This book is not about a period or a place but is about an idea' begins Bradley's opening paragraph and, after reading the book, few can doubt that statement.

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