

New Guinea, Japan and Wales! Although the author makes interesting connections between sacred and spiritual landscapes over space and time, there is a danger that this approach is too ‘scattergun’ and (to paraphrase Nennius) ‘making a heap of all you know’.

Pásztor (Chapter 7) and Devlet (Chapter 8) examine the evidence for shamans in later prehistoric Europe. Pásztor’s contribution is concerned with Bronze Age waterscapes, in the context of structured deposition in the Carpathian Basin. She rightly identifies liminal, unstable watery places, such as tidal shorelines, as potentially significant in terms of spirit-forces. I like her observation that “a sacred area must, in origin, be identified by geography, not buildings” (p. 154). But I was dismayed by the naivety with which she speaks of gender differences in deposition, and of the choice by women and men respectively to deposit gentle or martial/aggressive objects. Devlet’s chapter, on the Northern Asian Bronze Age, deals with factors influencing rock selection for petroglyphs. She identifies ‘core’ sites, associated with important events, and other, peripheral carved rock faces. Her exploration of the fly agaric as a significant psychotrope, and her linkage with ‘mushroom figures’ in rock art, is persuasive. Séfériadès’s work on shamanic landscapes (Chapter 9) explores the identification of shamans in rock art. He attempts to identify trance, altered states of consciousness and shape-shifting within rock art across a vast part of Eurasia, starting with the enigmatic Palaeolithic Trois Frères dancing animal-man. As in some earlier chapters, there is a risk of over-interpretation from a slender, context-poor evidence base.

Enrico Comba and Herman Bender (Chapters 10 & 11) present shamanic myths from the Americas: the Bororo (Brazilian) bird-nester myth and the North American bear myths. Both are shared across several community groups. Comba reinterprets bird-nester stories as hidden chronicles of shamanic initiation trials. Bender’s paper relates ancient bear-shaped mounds to regular lunar events. He relates such structures to the significance of bears to First Nation cultures, and the perceived link between the bear and death-cults associated with the journey of the soul through the night-sky. The author’s observations are persuasive, but he admits the lack of specific evidence to make direct connections between the bear monuments and celestial phenomena.

The final chapter (Colorado & Hurd) offers a powerful statement concerning the need for a marriage between Western archaeological perspectives and the

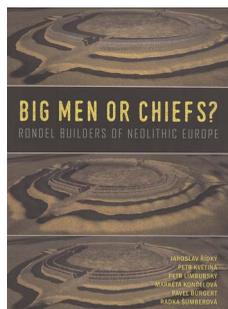
“knowledge system and wisdom traditions of indigenous peoples” (p. 258), a theme touched upon in earlier chapters. The chapter delivers a fitting, thought-provoking polemic that shamanic studies must not ignore. It sets out a framework for new approaches to landscape archaeology, with the requirement to search widely for contexts of imagination: “The ceremonies integral to a shamanic archaeology are iconic bridges between the deep-rooted wisdom of traditional cultures and landscape archaeology” (p. 266). Amen to that!

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JAROSLAV ŘÍDKÝ, PETR KVĚTINA, PETR LIMBURSKÝ, MARKÉTA KONČELOVÁ, PAVEL BURGERT & RADKA ŠUMBEROVÁ. 2018. *Big men or chiefs? Rondel builders of Neolithic Europe*. Oxford: Oxbow; 978-1-789-25026-8 £38.



Over the last 20 years, much fieldwork and research has been undertaken on the so-called *Kreisgrabenanlagen* or rondels, a type of circular monument comprising ditches and post-built rings that appeared and flourished across Europe

in the early fifth millennium BC. In light of the increase in data, the monograph under review is an important contribution to rondel research. The authors have a profound knowledge of the archaeology of this period in Central Europe and in the field of rondel research, having undertaken excavations on numerous sites. As the title suggests, however, the authors’ aim goes beyond *Kreisgrabenanlagen*, and they challenge the traditional view that societies in the Stroke pottery/Lengyel periods were egalitarian.

Chapter 2 summarises anthropological schemes of social differentiation that classify communities, particularly with respect to hierarchy and the size of the social unit. The problems inherent in studies of demographics and population are emphasised, but unfortunately are not returned to subsequently. The chapter includes a list of archaeologically detectable attributes

of Big Man and chiefdom societies. The application of these criteria is difficult, however, as the authors acknowledge. As the table is considered a central tool for interpretation, it merits a more detailed explanation than it receives, which is limited to how anthropology may be translated into archaeological criteria. Another shortcoming is the lack of alternatives presented, such as rondels as expressions of common social practices rather than leadership.

There is consensus amongst archaeologists that rondels were sacred structures, although they may also have served other purposes and, indeed, have been multifunctional. In Chapter 3, it is concluded that a sacred function for rondels cannot be sustained on the current evidence. Despite increasing discussion in the literature, detailed publications of excavated rondel sites are, with a few exceptions, unavailable. It would therefore have been instructive to consider that similar circular monuments existed until the early first millennium BC in Central Europe. These, particularly Pömmelte, in Germany, point towards a primarily sacred use. This is relevant as the existence of sacred centres as a characteristic of chiefdom societies is a central tenet of the argument for hierarchical society during the early fifth millennium BC.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to rondels with nearby settlements. While the rondels and associated features are considered extensively, nearby settlements are mentioned only briefly, and should have been more thoroughly explored. Furthermore, some of the chosen case studies beyond Bohemia—where the authors' expertise lies—have few publications on nearby settlements. The reasons for the choice of sites are unclear and, regrettably, Hungarian sites are not considered.

The structural analysis of rondels in Chapter 6 begins with the premise that if “a certain rondel prototype, or prototypes, occurs repeatedly throughout a large area [these could be] a shared manifestation of (religious?) activities that transcend [...] archaeological cultures and cultural groups” (p. 67). Equally, however, it can be argued that the very existence of rondels already supports this idea. The observation that slight variations, concerning only a few characteristics of the palisade trenches and ditches, suggest a regional differentiation is disputable. It is more plausible to assume local building traditions with minor differences in the overall distribution area of rondels, as other characteristics fail to show distinct regional variation.

The main question, flagged in the book's title, is addressed in Chapter 6. After considering labour effort and the idea of collaborative construction as important aspects of rondels, the authors suggest that an individual or group with capabilities exceeding those of a Big Man must have planned and organised construction. Although a central authority certainly is a prerequisite, this does not necessarily imply the expression or demonstration of power of a high-status social entity. It is equally conceivable that the will of the community was realised by someone in charge, who perhaps also possessed the required knowledge and the social skills.

Chapter 7 presents, rather briefly, radiocarbon data collected for 15 rondels (representing only one-tenth of all known rondels). The authors focus on the chronology of the ditches. Using Bayesian modelling, they observe that in the western rondel areas (Germany, Czech Republic), infilling started before 4800 BC; in the eastern areas (Lower Austria, Hungary), it was later. This is a controversial conclusion as Hungarian ring enclosures at Sé-Malomi-dűlő and Sormás-Török-földek are supposed to date before 4800 BC. The latter site is interpreted as showing the evolution of a genuinely ritual space in the form of a typical Lengyel rondel and its separation from domestic space, that is, the birth of the rondel phenomenon. That Hungarian rondels have not been considered is therefore a regrettable shortcoming. The authors' proposition of a longer tradition with maintenance (e.g. cleaning or recutting) of the ditches in the (south)east may support a western origin for the rondels.

Chapter 7 goes on to reveal perplexing results from the ditches of four Czech rondels. The results of Bayesian modelling show an inverse stratigraphy, with the lower fills returning a later date than the upper fills. The results are an important contribution to understanding taphonomy and the construction and maintenance of rondels. A more detailed discussion of the infill sequences and their Bayesian chronology, including the modelled dates, would have been a welcome addition. Furthermore, the limited sampling strategy (in almost all cases only one date per level) makes detailed modelling difficult.

In Chapters 8 and 9, rondels are seen in the context of regional settlement systems in order to search for evidence of a settlement hierarchy, interrelation and social ranking. Notably, the only evidence demonstrating this comes from the Great Hungarian Plain—the only time this region is considered—whereas little or no evidence exists from rondels in other regions, although a certain ‘centralisation’ can

be observed in all regions. These conclusions are verified with detailed studies of Bohemia, emphasising the distinction between rondel settlements and settlements without rondels. Again, there are no, or at best slight, indicators of a difference between them. The suggestion of a general trend for large settlements or settlement agglomerations in Middle Neolithic Bohemia is compromised by the simple chronology applied. The fact that several areas, with and without rondels, with a much higher site density are available for study relativises these conclusions.

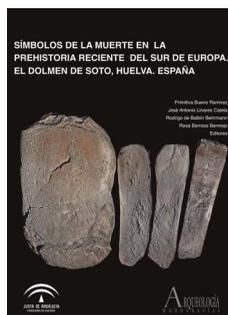
The synthesis in Chapter 10 reconsiders arguments to interpret rondels as the architecture of power. The conclusion that rondel settlements were particularly important is, however, not supported by the data presented throughout the book. It rather demonstrates the contrary (with the exception of the Hungarian Plain), that rondel settlements do not differ from other settlements. Nevertheless, the authors believe that rondels imply some sort of leadership, particularly of a chiefdom society. As archaeology alone cannot answer this question, among the presented anthropological models that of ‘group-oriented chiefdoms’ is favoured. Finally, the authors propose a narrative of the rondel builders in the fifth millennium BC, suggesting that ‘mini-systems’, connected by a mutual spirituality, stimulated the emergence of hierarchical clan structures, and that the emancipation of formerly subsidiary clans led to the spread of the rondel phenomenon. This is a plausible explanation but difficult to prove. The interpretation demonstrates the limits of archaeology and the need to turn to other disciplines such as sociology and anthropology, as the authors do in an exemplary way in this book. Limitations notwithstanding, this book offers an integrative approach focusing on Bohemia and combining data on a distinctive form of communal architecture, with evidence from settlements and burials to understand rondels within micro-regional settlement systems and wider social organisation.

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PRIMITIVA BUENO RAMÍREZ, JOSÉ ANTONIO LINARES CATELA, RODRIGO DE BALBÍN BEHRMANN & ROSA BARROSO BERMEJO (ed.). 2019. *Símbolos de la muerte en la Prehistoria Reciente del sur de Europa. El*

Dolmen de Soto, Huelva. España. Sevilla: Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Cultura: Arqueología Monografías; 978-84-9959-316-6 €20.



important heritage (Fernández *et al.* 2016). The application of innovative technologies and multidisciplinary approaches to long-known impressive monuments such as those of Menga (Antequera, Málaga) (García-Sanjuán & Mora 2018) and Soto (Huelva) is revealing amazing insights.

This monograph, prefaced by Jean Guilaine, presents the much-anticipated results of the most recent (2012–2013) archaeological intervention at the ‘dolmen’ of Soto, conducted within the framework—and limitations—of consolidation and conservation works. The monument, a 21m-long ‘covered gallery’ enclosed within an impressive 60m-diameter tumulus, was excavated in 1923 by Armando de Soto. The monument appeared early on the international stage as a result of the involvement of Hugo Obermaier (1924) in its study and dissemination. The excavations produced insights into the funerary use of the monument during the Chalcolithic, including the inhumations of eight individuals (featuring one adult male, two adult females and a child among those numbered), whose bodies were flexed and resting on selected decorated slabs of the gallery. Grave goods include stone dagger blades and axe heads, long flint blades and pottery vessels (a few Beaker fragments), but, apparently, no metal artefacts. Obermaier noted that several of the slabs featured carved motifs (also depicting weapons), and that at least one, with its decoration upside down, seemed to be a reused menhir. This opened intriguing questions about the art and temporality of this great monument that subsequent investigations were unable to answer because of their limited scope or resources.

The 2012–2013 intervention aimed to gather high-resolution data on the construction techniques

Research on the megalithic tombs of southern Iberia is experiencing an important upswing. Great discoveries, such as the *tholos* of Montelirio (Seville), have been coupled with huge efforts on the part of researchers to study and disseminate this