

The Lives of Prehistoric Monuments in Iron Age, Roman, and Medieval Europe

Edited by Marta Díaz-Guardamino, Leonardo García Sanjuán and David Wheatley

2015. OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

PBK. XVIII AND 356 PP. 82 B/W ILLUS.

ISBN: 978-019872-460-5

REVIEWED BY PHILIP J. HUGHES

School of Archaeology and Ancient History, University of Leicester

This compendium of 17 papers stems from the nineteenth Annual Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists held at Plzeň, Czech Republic in September 2013. The editors should be commended for the quick publication turnaround. The book is broad in scope both temporally and spatially, analyzing the multivalent uses and meanings of monuments originating in prehistory in later contexts. This *longue durée* inspired approach is advantageous in problematizing how archaeologists critically analyze monumentality, leading to thoughtful ruminations regarding the linearity of time and the intersections of enduring materiality, memory and ideology in past societies.

The work fits well within a wider context concerning *the past in the past* (Bradley and Williams 1998) and relates to the broader milieu of the ‘memory-boom’ influential on archaeological theory (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003). These theoretical underpinnings are evident across all papers and make for a well-rounded discussion, bringing together archaeologists from diverse epistemological traditions. Split into three sections, which are introductory, case-study focused and concluding, the editors’ introduction (Chapter One) outlines the papers whilst intellectually situating the study of prehistoric monuments in later periods. Though the papers are theoretically diverse, the book utilizes a biographical approach to material culture as its main uniting paradigm (page 4). This urges archaeologists to think beyond the perhaps limiting precepts of narrow periodization to consider the social implications of monumental places and landscapes over extended periods. In this respect, its focus on monumentality serves as a

valuable complement to recent work such as Chadwick and Gibson's assessment of long-term landscape inhabitation from memory perspectives (2013).

Particularly cogent is the rejection of the term 'afterlives' in favour of 'lives' (page 13). The former, the authors note, encourages prioritization of the period in which monuments emerged, marginalizing their meanings in later contexts. Regrettably, similar critique is not extended to 'reuse', attested frequently in the literature of the *past in the past*, which implies an ontological continuity with the past rather than addressing the nuanced ways in which past monuments were engaged with to create temporally specific meanings. Perceptively, however, the biographical approach expounded bridges boundaries between prehistoric and historic periods and oral tradition. Further, the introduction rightly asserts the active role of monuments as material agents in processes of continuity and change (page 14).

Chapter Two, the second introductory paper, examines the persistence of religious practices in the Mediterranean and north-west Europe from the Upper Palaeolithic through to the Medieval era. In discussing sanctified landscapes as an influencing factor upon subsequent monumentalization, it rightly critiques dichotomies of 'spiritual' and 'earthly' places as well as natural and cultural environments (page 23). It is not clear, however, how this paper complements the introduction, nor does its broad spatial scope quite fit with the subsequent case-studies which are, in the main, specific to one region.

Indeed, Chapter Three investigates the meanings of the tenth century CE Jelling monuments in Denmark in Viking, Christian and modern contexts in light of excavations from 2006 and 2013. Chapter Four considers Neolithic and Bronze Age monumental landscapes in Ireland, discussing the differential patterns of use of complexes at Tara, Newgrange and Knowth, concluding that continuity, reinvention and even absence of later material culture reflect their enduring influences in later traditions. In Chapter Five, Williams explores the frequently cited example of the Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf*, in which the dragon's lair has often been considered to be analogous with a Neolithic chambered tomb. Williams convincingly asserts that this is overemphasized, showing that seventh to eleventh century subterranean architecture and contemporary serpentine imagery could have been inspirations for the tenth century poem, reflecting the influential intersections between orality, literature and practices of the past in emergent traditions.

Chapters Six through to eight are cohesive, presenting chronological sequences for specific monuments and monumental landscapes. In Chapter Six, Wheatley deftly traces the biography of the Avebury monumental complex in Wiltshire as well as addressing the legacy of Antiquarian interpretations upon how the monuments are perceived in contemporary public and scholarly consciousness. In an interesting discussion, Wheatley adds nuance to the biographical approach of the introduction, conceiving of the monumental landscape as a ‘chain of mementos’ (page 113) in which traces of the past were indelibly marked on the landscape and interpreted in accordance with contemporary understandings of the world, until William Stukeley’s eighteenth century drawings presented an idealized ‘memory’ of Avebury subsequently (page 114). In Chapter Seven, Sebire considers the biographies of two statue-menhirs from Guernsey, while Chapter Eight looks at both Neolithic standing stones and Iron Age stelae in French Brittany, examining the ways the former influenced the latter in a superbly illustrated paper.

Remaining in Brittany for Chapter Nine, Vejby discusses the meanings of prehistoric tombs in the Roman period. She sagely suggests that monuments are more than simply ‘reused’, but ‘interacted with’, leading us to question how ideas of the past and notions of time were consciously constructed through engagement with monumental materiality (page 163). Considering a regional practice where so-called Venus figurines were found in a small number of prehistoric tombs, she suggests there may have been an association with the memory of a mythohistorical event where Julius Caesar stood upon the mound at Tumiach to observe a naval battle of 56 BCE. As Caesar claimed divine ancestry from Venus, Vejby postulates that this could be Roman ideological appropriation of the prehistoric landscape or Gaulish re-interpretation of prehistoric place in a changed political milieu (page 177). The theme of ideology is a particular strength of the volume, where appropriation of past events or practices—whether real or imagined—in later periods is mediated through the physical monumental landscape. This is continued in Chapter 11 by Blas Cortina, who discusses the appropriation of dolmens in the context of the Asturian monarchy of northern Spain in the eighth and ninth centuries as a means of ascribing ideological legitimacy (page 217). Chapter Ten comprises an excellent discussion of the biographies of prehistoric monuments in Spain across multiple time-periods but is rather sandwiched between two papers considering ideology. It may have been better placed in the introductory section given its broad scope and summariza-

tion of how later monument engagement can indicate social memory, ideology, identity negotiation and consciousness of the past (page 198). The themes of monumental biography and appropriation are continued in Chapter 12, a fascinating account of statue menhirs in the Italian Alps discussing phases of use, 'reuse', abandonment and rediscovery in light of new radiocarbon calibrations.

Two thought-provoking papers appear in Chapters 13 and 14. Babić (Chapter 13) discusses the continuous use of a hill at Novi Pazar in Serbia, which saw activity in the Bronze and Iron Ages as well as a ninth-century church. Considering object dislocation from temporal stratigraphic dimensions, Babić undertakes an interesting discussion regarding stratigraphic sequencing which can obscure overlapping temporalities and the blurring of past and present (page 261). Similarly, Legarra Herrero (Chapter 14) examines Bronze Age cemeteries in Crete and their pervasive influence on subsequent periods where people engaged with a landscape that was always of the past, but acting in the present in a multiplicity of ways. Finishing the case-studies is Chapter 15 concerning necropoli of the Eastern Maghreb in the Roman period, which does not entirely fit with the geographic scope of the book.

The concluding section contains two useful discussions. Weiss-Krejci dissects western conceptions of chronological time (page 308) before analyzing the appropriation of distant physical pasts in Medieval and modern contexts in Chapter 16. Finally, Bradley rounds up the discussion in Chapter 17 with a useful summary of the book's themes and approaches related to his own fieldwork at stone circles in the north of Scotland.

The book may have benefited from fewer case-studies and more lengthy theoretical discussions in the introductory section, which would have framed the case-studies and their implications more effectively. Memory, of course, is a vast topic and recent approaches centred upon materiality are prompting discussions of the complex dialectic of past and present (Olivier 2011). It would, perhaps, have been useful to have had more discussion focussed on these debates, though it should be noted that the chapters by Wheatley Babić, Legarra Herrero and Weiss-Krejci are excellent engagements with notions of memory, entanglement and time, though the reader is left lamenting that more could have been made of them. Nevertheless, the book is coherently edited and well-illustrated throughout, though some of the GIS images would have been rendered better in colour. Notwithstanding, it is a vital publication in

debates around *the past in the past*, long-term landscape use and biographical approaches to material culture and memory. Its narrow focus on monumentality is a real strength making its contribution to the above debates indispensable.

References

- Bradley, R. and Williams, H. (eds). 1998. The past in the past: the reuse of ancient monuments. *World Archaeology* 30 (1): 1–178.
- Chadwick, A. and Gibson, C.D. (eds). 2013. *Memory, Myth and Long-Term Landscape Inhabitation*. Oxford: Oxbow.
- Oliver, L. 2011. *The Dark Abyss of Time: Archaeology and Memory*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Van Dyke, R.M and Alcock, S.E. (eds). 2003. *Archaeologies of Memory*. Oxford: Blackwell.