

Hierarchy and Balance: The Role of Monumentality in European and Indian Landscapes – An Archaeological and Anthropological Perspective*Maria Wunderlich, Tiatoshi Jamir, Johannes Müller***Abstract**

The use of ethnographic analogies for the construction of explanatory patterns and scientific narratives has a long history within archaeological research. While appropriate critique was raised with regard to the way analogies were used, the rise of critical perspectives within recent archaeological debates and discourses clearly highlights the need for a critical and reflective use of comparative analyses which will help us to go beyond a perception of archaeology as a cultural-historical science. The diversity and variability of the meaning of monumentality and megalith building in modern-day India shows the potential of such an approach and the importance of the integration of the perspectives of local communities without a direct link to scientific discourses. Monumentality and megalithic construction, due to the complexity and variance of this specific phenomenon, constitute an appropriate example for the potential benefit and gain of the integration of comparative, ethnoarchaeological perspectives.

Introduction: Reflective perspectives and analogical reasoning

Since the emergence of archaeology as a scientific discipline, attempts have repeatedly been made to construct explanatory patterns or scientific narratives for the archaeological legacy on the basis of ethnographic analogies, at least for times without written records. In these contexts, it was, among others, the Viennese theory of cultural circles at the beginning of the last century that attempted in a very generalizing way to trace back the analogies of megalithic buildings to similar cultural events and interactions worldwide. Even if this generalizing theory from the beginning of the 20th century has led ad absurdum, difficulties remain in archaeological research in dealing with analogies (Bernbeck 1997) and the interpretation of phenomenologically similar archaeological findings. From these connections, the idea of ethnoarchaeology or experimental archaeology developed very fast in order to better secure interpretation approaches. Apart from relatively positivistic approaches, it was the rise of critical perspectives within archaeological research, in particular, that triggered a new awakening of debates during the last years, which had at least partly disappeared from archaeological discourse (e.g. ethnoarchaeological approaches; Hodder 1982, 'The death of archaeological theory?'; Bintliff 2011).

At the same time, a continuation, or even reinforcement of both comparative approaches of different archaeological datasets and case studies (e.g. Glørstad/Melheim 2016), as well as approaches which use a methodology that is implicitly connected to, or explicitly labelled as 'ethnoarchaeological' (compare, e.g., the special issue of World Archaeology; Lane 2017) is traceable. In our understanding, ethnoarchaeological

Article history:

Received 1 September 2019

Reviewed 15 November 2019

Published 6 December 2019

Keywords: Comparative approaches, Ethnoarchaeology, Megaliths and Monumentality, Northeast India, Prehistoric Europe

Cite as: *Maria Wunderlich et al.: Hierarchy and Balance: The Role of Monumentality in European and Indian Landscapes – An Archaeological and Anthropological Perspective.*

In: Maria Wunderlich, Tiatoshi Jamir, Johannes Müller (eds.), Hierarchy and Balance: The Role of Monumentality in European and Indian Landscapes. JNA Special Issue 5. Bonn: R. Habelt 2019, 13–26 [doi 10.12766/jna.2019S.2]

Author's address:

Maria Wunderlich
Institute of Pre- and Protohistoric Archaeology,
Kiel University, D-24098 Kiel
m.wunderlich@ufg.uni-kiel.de

Tiatoshi Jamir
Department of History & Archaeology
Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema,
Kohima-797001, Nagaland, India
tiatoshijamir@rediffmail.com

Johannes Müller
Institute of Pre- and Protohistoric Archaeology,
Kiel University, D-24098 Kiel
johannes.mueller@ufg.uni-kiel.de

approaches must encompass both structural-functionalist (quantitative) as well as in-depth, critical-reflective (qualitative) perspectives. The combination of the foremost divided schools of thought can be merged and profitably brought together in an overreaching bottom-up perspective possible in complex systems thinking. While the term 'ethnoarchaeology' and the implications connected to it are without doubt partly problematic, it must also be noted that archaeology should go beyond its self-perception as a cultural-historical subject (cp. Hofmann/Stockhammer 2017) towards a science, which is able to deal with the multi-faceted methodologies and discourses which are integral to modern archaeological research. An important part of the discourses arising in the present and those of the past concerns the question of the role of socio-political viewpoints of researchers and the influence of these on interpretations (cp. Cunningham/MacEachern 2016; Meskell 2002). Post-colonial perspectives and critical reflections play a major role within these discourses (e.g. Chakrabarti 2012; van Dommelen 2011). Thereby, no simple transference of our worldview can be used for the interpretation of complex societies. A solution proposed by A. Gramsch (2000) suggests that we should see traces of archaeologically known societies as 'others' ('Fremde') and accordingly adapt a methodology which would be considerably more oriented towards a cultural anthropological science. This was and is actually the case in different Anglophone countries and this circumstance easily explains why ethnoarchaeology was much more successful in parts of different scientific communities (cp. Sillar/Ramón Joffré 2016).

Another aspect of great importance that is discussed within cultural and social anthropology is the question of engagement and participation, also of non-researchers and persons outside the scientific discourse (cp. Low/Merry 2010). By organizing the course in Northeast India and explicitly bringing together non-European and European perspectives on monumentality and megalithic construction practices, the integration of equal and comparative research perspectives in relation to the above-mentioned discourses will be promoted. These very aspects must be part of a reflective and critical understanding of science, in the context of which the value of analogy conclusions must also be reassessed and expanded.

Monumentality and megalithic monuments: Comparative perspectives

With regard to megalithic building and monumentality, such a broadened view is of special importance. While Europe constitutes a hot-spot of Neolithic and Chalcolithic megalithic construction activities, there is a world-wide distribution of megalithic buildings in different areas and times (Fig. 1). A concentration of intensive (pre)historic and recent megalithic construction activities is to be found in South and South-east Asia (cp. Joussaume 1985). Within this broad spatial framework, one of the most intensively studied areas constitutes the islands of South East Asia, which are not only well-known for diverse and both archaeologically and anthropologically oriented case studies (e.g. Jeunesse 2019; Gunawan 2000) but also for intensive discussions on forms of social organization (among the most famous: Sahlins 1963). Recent projects with an ethnoarchaeological focus introduced these case studies, which cluster in modern-day Indonesia, to a larger audience – also within European discourses about megalithic construction and aspects of monumentality (e.g. Jeunesse 2019; Wunderlich 2019a), thereby influencing our notion of the social implications of this specific phenomenon. Despite its rich tradition of archaeological and anthropological research, which reflects the variability and multifaceted character of different case studies, the research of megalithic building traditions in India

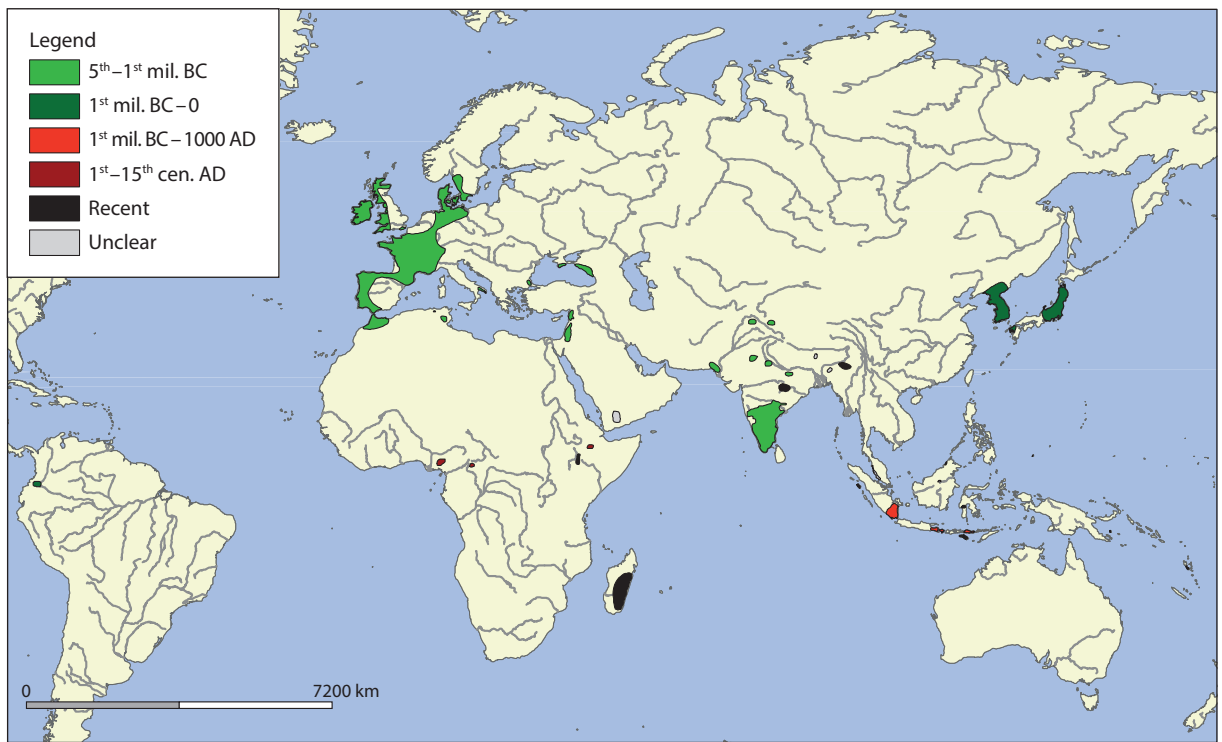


Fig. 1. The global distribution of areas with megalithic building traditions (map based on Jousaume 1985).

still remains less known within the same discourses. Among the large number of diverse examples all over the world, the area of modern-day India stands out due to the frequent occurrence of megalithic building activities in different regions and contexts, which even reach until very recent contexts (see contributions in this volume).

Although comparative approaches and analogical reasoning were integrated into different studies of Neolithic and Chalcolithic megalithic monuments within modern-day Europe (e.g. Veit 1993; Artursson et al. 2016), an explicit consolidation of diverse and especially non-European data sets was rarely attempted. While on a broader scale, case studies of recent and (pre)historic megalithic construction activities share many traits and are a focus of attention (such as the concentration on aspects of collective and social memories or ritual landscapes; e.g. Bradley 2002; Müller 2018), there are many dissimilarities and variations on a closer level of inference.

One of the main aspects here are certain biases within archaeological considerations of monumentality and megalithic building, which tend to generalize broad regions and actually existing local variations under the subsumption of broader narratives (cp. Furholt 2014). While at least partly shared ideologies and ideas among contemporaneously existing communities exhibiting megalithic construction traditions can certainly be assumed, less attention was paid to the variability of these practices (to the contrary: Furholt/Müller 2011; Sherratt 1990). With regard to the social meaning and importance of monumentality, the narrative of architectural features being built and used by elites or persons of high social standing within frameworks of social inequality and hierarchization (at least on the basis of simple chiefdoms; e.g. Artursson et al. 2016) are still influential (Osborne 2014, 5), though contested in terms of alternative approaches. In particular, aspects such as the temporality of construction activities (e.g. Pauketat 2000) or the importance of megalithic monuments for collective and socio-political identities are frequently analysed topics (e.g. Müller 2010; Glatz/Plourde 2011). In principle, a differentiation of different scales of inquiries is much more necessary than expressed until now. The variability of societies, which construct megaliths, has to be expressed within local

and regional analyses, while broader approaches to the phenomenon with general implications have to be expressed on a supra-regional level or a level, where structural comparison is one of the principles.

The aspects of the specific choices made and the variability introduced by communities sharing traditions of megalithic construction can be seen as important connective aspects of research on past and present forms of monumentality. Moreover, the integration of recent examples of megalithic building provides us with important insights in the social dynamics connected to and the general (and recursive) embeddedness of monumentality within the social structures of the communities involved (Wunderlich 2019a). These notions may help us to broaden our understanding about what monumentality actually means. Further, these meanings might go well beyond an understanding of monumentality and megalithic construction either as rather passive and static factors, or as merely outstanding archaeological features (e.g. due to their size, permanence and visibility; for a critical reception of this notion: Hung 1995).

An explicitly comparative approach interconnecting the, on first sight, very different case studies, can lead towards a concentration of structural patterns, which might have played a fundamental role within megalithic building traditions. These include aspects of the role of individual agents, their embeddedness in specific social groups, as well as the intertwined relation between social-political entities, institutions and structures. Although the archaeological frameworks of the different case studies included in this volume are very dissimilar, these structural aspects might help us to broaden our perspectives and include what was recently promoted as bottom-up approaches – in the sense of an understanding of individual and collective choices and behaviours influencing and, in turn, being influenced by monumentality and megalith building.

Megalithic construction traditions in India: Contemporary and (pre)historic perspectives

Megalithic monuments in Indian archaeology: An overview

Studies on stone monuments in the Indian context stemmed from antiquarian interest. The contributions of these antiquarians in the study of megalithic monuments reveal their interest not only in digging up the past but also in reading the past by providing interpretations about different aspects of the megalithic burial tradition (Darsana 2015, 51). In the first two decades of the 19th century, Colin Mackenzie and his assistants found Iron Age burial tombs at places like Amaravati, Coimbatore, Hyderabad and Chittor. In a letter dated 13th Sept, 1819 and addressed to Col. Montgomery at Hyderabad, Mackenzie tells him how to excavate such sites and reach the bottom levels in order to encounter human skeletal material and the cultural appendage associated with it (Paddayya 1997, 62). This was followed by Babington (1823) who took initiatives to examine the burial chambers in Malabar, known as the Pandoo coolies. Similar discoveries were also reported by Meadows Taylor (1862) in the Deccan region, which were later published as 'Description of cairns, cromlechs, kistvaens and other Celtic, Druidical or Scythian monuments in the Dekkan' in Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy followed by his volume 'Megalithic Tombs and other Ancient Remains in the Deccan' (1941). However, Brecks (1873) took a step further and attempted to correlate the megalithic monuments with the modern-day tribal practices of the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu. The work of Logan (1879, 1887) and Walhouse (1882) in Kerala also brought to light the local traditions associated with the burial chambers meant for the dead, referring to them as 'death houses', and the urn burials considered

to be the remains of virgins, who were sacrificed for the welfare of the kingdom by the chieftains and buried on the boundaries of their estates to protect them from incursions and to ratify their engagements with neighbouring chiefs (cited in Darsana 2015, 51–53). Simultaneously, Rivett-Carnac (1879) also carried out work at Junapani, near Nagpur in Maharashtra. Following upon these early studies, Alexander Rea later outlined the distinctive nature of the Indian megalithic culture in his comprehensive volume *Catalogue of the prehistoric antiquities from Adichanallur and Perumbair* (1915).

Although no serious attempt was made to study the typology of Indian megaliths, much is known about the South Indian and Deccan megalithic types principally from the work of Khrishnaswami (1949), Soundara Rajan (1982); Sundara (1970, 1973, 1975), Gururaja Rao (1972), Deo (1969, 1973, 1985), Leshnik (1974), Narasimhaiah (1980), Rajan (1992) and other scholars. Despite these efforts, there was a lack of attention paid to the settlement pattern of megalithic sites until recently. This led many to postulate that the megalithic builders were pastoral nomads or semi-settled agriculturalists (Deo 1985), or that they led a nomadic way of life (Leshnik 1974; Sankalia 1979). But recent investigations from habitation sites, such as Junapani, Mahurjhari, Naikund, Khairwada, Bagimohari and a host of others from Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, brought to light interesting features of these Early Iron Age communities, thus providing conclusive evidence of a settled agriculture-based economy (Mohanty/Walimbe 1993; Kajale 1982, 1989; Thomas 1993). Rajan's (1998, 75–76) excavations at Kodumanal in Perundurai Taluka, Erode District, Tamil Nadu suggest that the megalithic people were involved in an industrial-based economy with the manufacture of steel, iron, cotton fabrics, semi-precious stone beads and also used an archaic form of Tamil-Brahmi script dated to the 3rd century BCE. Shifts in theoretical and methodological approaches on various aspects of the megalithic culture are also apparent in the works of Moorti (1994), Darsana (1998), Mohanty/Walimbe (1993) and Menon et al. (2015). The two voluminous titles *Megalithic Traditions in India: Archaeology and Ethnography* (Vol. 1 and 2), edited by Basa et al. (2015) and the more recent volume 'Megalithic Traditions of North East India' edited by Marak (2019) by far represent the most extensive focus on the study of Indian megaliths.

As far as dating is concerned, there have been several dated megalithic sites across India. Wheeler's (1948) excavation at Brahmagiri (Chitradurga district, Karnataka) placed the beginnings of megalithic culture to the 3rd century BC. Further improvement was made by N.R. Banerjee, who preferred a date bracket from 700 BCE to 200 AD on the basis of the advanced technology of iron objects found in the megalithic graves (Gaur 1969, 107). In addition, a dolmenoid cist type of Megalithic-Neolithic phase (Period-II) with well-developed iron tools and Black-and-Red ware at Hallur in the Dharwar district was dated to 1005±105 BCE (Agrawal/Kusumgar 1966). To the north, sites, such as Burzahom and Gufkral in the Kashmir Valley, have yielded dates of the megalithic phase extending to 2850±100 BP (947–411 BCE) (Agrawal/Kharakwal 2002) in the case of the former and to 3720±110 (2468–1785 BCE), 3790±110 (2562–1930 BCE), and 3660±110 (2431–1744 BCE) (Sharma 2013) in the latter case. Based on current work, a more robust chronology is proposed for the Neolithic and megalithic sequence of the Kashmir Valley: Aceramic (IA) from 2700–2400 BCE, Early Neolithic (IB) from 2400–2000, Late Neolithic from 2000–1700 BCE and Megalithic from 1700–1000 BCE (Betts et al. 2019, 5).

In the Peninsular region, Takalghat, Naikund, Bhagimohari and Khariwada suggest ca. 800 BCE for the megalithic culture of Vidarbha. However, dates available from the habitation deposits at Naikund, Bhagimohari and Khariwada are only from the middle layers. The lower levels of all these sites remain to be dated, thus suggesting

a date range perhaps beyond 800 BCE. Therefore, from the current available dates from a host of sites in the Rayalaseema area, upper Tungabhadra Valley, Cuddapah Basin, Tambraparni Plain, Javadi Hill, upper Cauvery Valley, Krishna-Tungabhadra Doab, Warangal Plateau, upper Krishna Valley and the Kongunad Upland, the beginning of the megalithic culture in the Peninsular region can be pushed back to 1500 BCE (see Mohanty/Thakuria 2014, 362).

Further down south, recent dating from sites like Porunthal and Kodumanal suggests a dating range between 200 BCE and 408 BCE (Rajan 2013; Rajan et al. 2014) and the culture continued to flourish up to the 2nd or 3rd century AD (Sundara 1979, 332). Evidence from Dhanora, Bartia Bhata, Tengna, Lilar, Sorar and excavations from Karkabhat in the Chhattisgarh region lead the excavator to suggest a first millennium AD date on the basis of similarities of antiquities from other dated sites (Sharma 2015, 304). In the North-Central Vindhya, particularly in the Adwa Valley, the cairn circle and the cist are specific to areas covering the districts of Chandauli, Allahabad, Mirzapur and Karwi in Uttar Pradesh and Rewa, Satna and Sidhi in Madhya Pradesh (see Misra et al. 2015). For excavations from Amahata, Munahi and Magha in the Adwa Valley, a tentative time bracket ranging from the first half of the second millennium BC to the third century BC is assumed (Misra et al. 2015, 341). The megaliths of the Mundas of Jharkhand (Shekhar et al. 2014), Hos of Jharkhand and Orissa (Mohanta 2015), Gadabas and Parajas of Orissa (Basa 2015) and Bondos are a living tradition, while some of the excavated sites, such as Ammuda, and other sites of the middle Mahanadi Valley in Orissa (Behera et al. 2017; Hussain/Mendaly 2018) are thought to be from the Iron Age based on few scientific dates (see Behera et al. 2007). In Bihar, very little work has been done, while in the West Bengal region, there are no reports of megalithic sites so far (personal comm., R.K. Mohanty 2019).

History of research in Northeast India

In many respects, the study of megaliths in Northeast India may assume a prominent position for several reasons. Firstly, colonial ethnographers, posted in the region for various administrative assignments, were intrigued not only by the sheer massive size and the variety of megalithic forms but also because of their striking similarities with those found in Southeast Asia (see Hutton 1928; Fürer-Haimendorf 1939, 1971) and Europe (see Walters 1832; Fergusson 1872). Such observations have also offered a basis for geographers, anthropologists (Perry 1918; Katz 1928), and prehistorians alike (see Heine-Geldern 1935; Schnitger 1939) and served as testing models for their diffusion and migration theories. Secondly, in spite of limited dates emerging from both old and new excavations (see Rao 1977; Nienu 1983; Hurst/Lawn 1984; Jamir et al. 2014 a, b and Mitri et al. 2015), the antiquity of this living tradition in Northeast India continues to linger (on a similar view, see Sarma/Hazarika 2014). Marakdola, a post-Neolithic site in the Khasi Hills, was assigned to 658±93 BP or AD 1292 (Rao 1977, 202), while recent dates from sites like Lawnongthroh have been dated to the 5th century AD. Although the upper most layer from the site of Myrkhan remains undated, dates from the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD are assigned as the beginning of the megalithic culture in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills (see Mitri et al. 2015). If such monument building activity is associated with iron technology, the sites of Nongkrem and Raitkteng in the Khasi Hills yielded dates of 2140±80 BP and 1110±30 BP, respectively (see Prokop/Suliga 2013). Another chronological assessment is suggested for the Kachari megalithic ruins at Rajbari (Dimapur district, Nagaland). Sharma (1998, 11) is sceptical of its assignment to the 15th century AD, which according to the Ahom Buranjis records was a period of turmoil of the Kachari

kingdom. Instead, she reaffirms that the date given by Thaosen (1962) for the beginning of their rule, the 11th century AD, cannot be overlooked and may be relatively assumed as the period when these structures were built. From an early excavation undertaken by Nienu (1983), two ¹⁴C dates obtained from charcoal samples are available for the Rajbari site: 1530±180 (AD 270–660); 1300±180 (AD 570–940) (Hurst/Lawn 1984, 212–240). Scientific dates are now available for newly excavated megalithic sites in Nagaland: the Jotsoma burial site estimated to 200±30 BP (Jamir 2005); Chungliymti – associated with the Ao origin myth of Longtrok – dated to 910±70 BP; 1020±80 BP (Jamir et al. 2014a); the sites of Khezakeno, Movolomi, Khusomi and Phor – found in association with stone monuments – dated to 500±50 BP (cal AD 1320–1350), 410±60 BP (cal AD 1420–1640), 530±40 BP (cal AD 1320–1350) and 230±60 BP (cal AD 1500–1600) (Jamir et al. 2014b), respectively.

Thirdly, realizing their archaeological potentials, the post-independence situation in Northeast India witnessed several research dissertations and a few published volumes dedicated to megalithic research of Northeast India (Bareh 1981; Syiemlieh 1981; Devi 2011; Jamir 1997; Mitri 2016; Venuh 2005; Bezbaruah 2003; Choudhury 2014; Jamir 2005; Sarma 2014a, b; Malsawmliana 2016; Meitei 2017; Imchen 2018; Wunderlich 2019a; Marak 2019). These works present us with exhaustive accounts on their typo-morphological variations and fresh directions to the understanding of the complex socio-economic and polity conditions linked to the stone monuments of Northeast India.

Parallel to such developments are the epistemological shifts. With current theoretical and methodological frameworks, new perspectives for the study of stone monuments of the region are evident in the works of Mawlong (2004), Mitri (2009, 2016), Jamir (2005, 2015, 2019), Marak (2012), Khongreiw (2015), Wangjin (2014), Burke (2014), Wouters (2015) and Wunderlich (2019a, b), who not only utilised historical accounts, oral tradition, and family histories, as well as ecological and landscape concepts along with other spatial analyses to stone monuments but also examined the beginning of megalithic culture alongside social formations, territoriality, resource utilisation and the Neolithic-megalithic transition, social memories, notions of ideology, as well as identity and cosmology (Fig. 2, 3).

Megalith-building traditions in Europe: (Pre)historic perspectives

Due to the long-lasting and often impressive material remains, research of megalithic monuments constitutes one of the most prominent and constant topics within Neolithic and Chalcolithic research (Müller et al. 2019). Within modern-day Europe, the rise of wooden, earthen and megalithic monumentality can be traced to as early as 4700 BCE in specific areas such as France (Passy-graves; Chambon/Thomas 2010). Within a large expanse reaching from the Iberian Peninsula to Poland, a horizon of diverse and variable monumentality can be documented between 4500 and 2500 BCE (cp. Schulz Paulsson 2017).

In a European context, the megalithic discoveries of Western, Central and Northern Europe were first derived from the Mediterranean region. Due to the ex oriente lux orientation of European archaeology, which in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century assumed a superiority of Oriental and East Mediterranean societies over Western non-written societies, the megalithic backgrounds of Neolithic societies had to be regarded as derivatives of “advanced civilizations” (cp. Renfrew 1973). Only by the attempts of fascist Nazi ideology to derive the Greek temples for ideological reasons from the Nordic megalithic tombs and due to the scientific dating from the 1960s, the ex oriente lux concept was shaken. In particular, Colin



Fig. 2. Standing stones raised by the footpath to the rice fields, Zapami.



Fig. 3. A pond and a standing stone associated with the highest series of feasting, Khonoma.

Renfrew's early works proved the independence of Western developments from the East Mediterranean region. Since then, megalithic developments in different regions of Europe have mostly been seen as structurally independent developments that should be self-explanatory. Only recent renewed tendencies attribute megalithic phenomena to common roots or common networks through which the idea of the megalith graves would have spread due to interaction.

In fact, we assume that in Europe several core areas of megalithic monuments can be identified whose development can be traced on a regional level more or less independently. In the process, very different local and regional social conditions may have been the trigger for the development. In principle, for example, the megalithic tombs of Northern Germany and Southern Scandinavia played a different role in the reproduction of social conditions than would have been the case in Northwestern France. In our judgement, we assume that the necessity to restructure landscapes due to changed production conditions led to the expression of cooperative buildings, which symbolized the new world view of a cooperative use of the environment.

Megaliths and Landscapes

In many areas of Europe, the construction of megalithic structures was linked to the construction of earliest cultural landscapes, where the social structuring of the environment shaped the reception of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic societies.

For example, within an environmental background with immense land openings and an economic background with the introduction of the animal-pulled plough, the boom in megalithic architecture on the Northern European Plain around 3400 BCE changed the landscape (Müller 2019). Impressive monuments were not only erected but they were also used for centuries with the integration of different social and ritual practices. Highly relevant is the observation that some passages and chambers were held open for hundreds of years, although the deposited offerings never were touched or destroyed. In our interpretation, the sites signify institutionalised ancestor worship and, in addition, the creation and deliberate change of memories. Around 3100 BC, the incorporation of individual burials describes the beginning of a new ideological practice at the sites. Ritual practices and ancestor worship at the sites enabled the creation of ritual places with changed memories even after elements of deconstruction or disintegration.

Both the environmental/economic background information and the history of the first monumentalisation of the Nordic landscape could be put into a general picture of the development of local and regional Neolithic societies. Limited differences in access to resources, common property rights in contrast to individual properties and participation in common ritualised activities were vehicles to maintain the household mode of production and a kind of reciprocity (in the sense of Sahlins 1972) for centuries.

Conclusion

Overarching topics, such as the meaning and role of monumentality and megalithic construction in prehistoric and historic societies, will remain deeply inscribed in the archaeological discourses of forms of social organization and the rise of social inequality or the rejection of unequal developments. As they are one of the most enduring form of archaeological material remains, these aspects will continue to play

an important role in archaeological interpretation. The variability and variations that are visible in the archaeological record and the environmental conditions will, in consequence, remain open to different interpretations and models. Therefore, an overarching answer to the question, what monumentality and megalith building means in different societies, cannot be reached on a general scale. The social mechanisms and courses of action lying behind these material expressions are deeply rooted in and connected with different societal spheres, which must be independently evaluated within each and every case study. This does not only apply to societies and examples being parted in time and their spatial contexts, but also to overarching categories we assume for the past. Megalithic construction in, for example, Funnel Beaker communities might be an idea translated and expressed differently in communities, which are in close spatial proximity.

Bearing all these factors in mind, a comparative perspective on complex phenomena, such as monumentality, is not only potentially fruitful within the broader archaeological discourse, but something essentially necessary for a broadened and open discussion. Within recent examples, of which a diverse range of case studies is presented within this volume, we are able to understand the reasons, mechanisms, and interconnectedness of megalithic building practices in different contexts. These case studies clearly show that, while there are principles and ideas which are shared among megalithic building communities, in Northeast India there are unique characteristics and societal translations in the different communities involved. These perspectives can be used to broaden our assumptions and ideas connected to the meaning of monumentality and megalithic construction traditions – also for prehistoric contexts.

One aspect, which in our understanding needs to be re-evaluated, concerns the broader forms of economic strategies and labour organization. While archaeologists still very much emphasize the role of efficiency and the rise of surplus productions in some cases, anthropological studies clearly show the important role of, for example, sharing strategies (as opposed to reciprocity; cp. Widlok 2017) and solidarity. These perspectives highlight the fact that we should try to move away from partly pre-assumptive, top-down approaches, focusing partly too much on elites and the role of power relations, towards an analysis, which tries to focus on aspects of collective action and bottom-up principles of social organization (cp. Furholt et al. 2019). Such a bottom-up approach should encompass both a focus on behavioural choices rooted within the majority of a community and the integration of non-European perspectives and, as is demonstrated by many of the contributions within this book, the knowledge and perspectives of local communities and people without a scientific background. By this, archaeological interpretations may achieve a deeper understanding on past human behaviour and the role of monumentality and megalithic studies in their importance to every member of a given society.

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Imprint

ISSN 2197-649X

Layout draft: Holger Dieterich,
 Ines Reese
 Technical edition: Ralf Opitz
 Language revision: Eileen Küçükcaraca
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 Jamir, Johannes Müller/UFG CAU Kiel
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 Prehistoric and Protohistoric
 Archaeology, Kiel University;
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