# The Birth of Architecture

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### SCALES OF ANALYSIS

THIS VOLUME CONTAINS TWO SETS OF papers, one from archaeologists and the other from a wider group of scholars with an interest in sociocultural evolution. The original meeting also included a number of social anthropologists. It may be helpful to locate this chapter in relation to these different fields.

Evolutionary biologists are concerned with the origins of social institutions at a very general level, whilst anthropologists are more interested in the content of specific institutions. Archaeologists occupy a middle ground. On the one hand, they have access to the extended timescale that social anthropologists lack, but they can also provide some of the detail that is not available to the biologist. For that reason they have a choice of two different perspectives.

They have another choice, too. They may use their distinctive data to 'diagnose' the general character of social institutions in the past or, like the anthropologist, they may prefer to study the details of particular situations. Here it is possible to interpret specific practices and the mechanisms by which they were established and maintained. The perspectives of anthropology and evolutionary biology are by no means incompatible, and practitioners of each discipline may study the same phenomena at different scales (Harrison & Morphy 1988). Archaeology is unusual because its distinctive material allows researchers to move between these two approaches or even to apply them to the same subject matter.

### MONUMENTS AND SOCIAL EVOLUTION

Monumental architecture is central to each of these agendas, since it can be studied on either scale of analysis. This chapter attempts to do just that. On a general level there seems little doubt that monument building developed alongside sedentisim and that in most cases it was associated with farming rather than hunting and gathering. At the same time, it is a feature that has often been

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used by archaeologists as a way of studying the emergence and operation of particular institutions.

The title of this chapter, 'The Birth of Architecture', is also that of a poem by W.H. Auden which forms the prologue to the verse sequence that he called 'Thanksgiving for a Habitat' (Auden 1976: 687). In it he refers to a whole series of major buildings, extending from Classical Greece to Victorian England. They include the Acropolis, Chartres Cathedral, Blenheim, and the Albert Memorial, but Auden's account also includes Stonehenge. For him, these constructions represent a single phenomenon.

This suggests several observations which I shall develop in the course of this chapter. There is the title: the poem is about the origins of 'architecture'. Although many animals can build complex structures, they do not invest them with symbolic meanings (Ingold 1983). Yet symbols are very important in the examples quoted here. The buildings mentioned by Auden provide a broad sample of human achievements. Chartres Cathedral is a celebration of the beliefs of medieval Christianity and the Acropolis is the crowning work of the Athenian city-state. Blenheim and the Albert Memorial extol the achievements of two particular individuals, but, like the other examples, they also commemorate the political structures that gave them their authority. All these buildings make statements that can only be understood in relation to particular institutions.

But what of Auden's other examples? He refers to Stonehenge and also to the monuments that he calls 'gallery-graves', a term which is less often used by archaeologists today. How far would a similar interpretation be justified here? In the case of megalithic tombs, which are among the oldest monuments in Europe (Sherratt 1990), what inferences should be drawn from their first appearance?

This discussion follows Auden in regarding prehistoric monuments as kinds of architecture in their own right. They impose an artificial order on the use of space, they are often built on a massive scale, using enormous amounts of human labour, and they seem to have been constructed according to designs that were the expression of particular ideas about the world. They result from the co-ordinated energies of many people working together to achieve a common aim, and in most cases they were made of raw materials that were likely to survive for unusual lengths of time. Yet despite these specific qualities, they have a restricted distribution in the past. None seems to have been built until the advent of the use of domesticated resources, although there are many cases in which there is evidence to suggest they were first constructed before a farming economy was well established (Bradley 1998: Chapters 1–5).

Even so, there is a tension between the general and the particular. Discussing the birth of architecture, Auden says that certain buildings were the work of 'the same Old Man', but, he continues, we can see what the 'old man' did yet may not understand why that happened (Auden 1976: 687): even if we

were to know the builder's own conception of these structures, we would be unable to account for the creation of monuments in the first place. There remains a need for high-level theory.

There have been three main approaches to the significance of monument building as a general phenomenon. The first is that of Bruce Trigger (1990) who uses what he terms a thermodynamic model. This makes use of two principles of general application. He employs the Principle of Least Effort (Zipf 1949) to identify constructions built on an extravagant scale, and at the same time he sees their creation as a form of conspicuous consumption. Taken together, these principles identify a widely occurring phenomenon in the archaeology of prehistoric societies:

> In human societies, the control of energy constitutes the most fundamental and universally recognized measure of political power. The most basic way in which power can be symbolically reinforced is through the conspicuous consumption of energy. Monumental architecture, as a highly visible and enduring form of such consumption, plays an important role in shaping the political and economic behaviour of human beings. (Trigger 1990: 128)

Monument building provides a medium for social display and an arena in which competition for authority is worked out, and, for Trigger, that is why it characterizes a formative stage in the evolution of political structures. This also explains why comparable evidence is found in so many different societies.

A similar approach has been suggested by John Cherry (1978). He describes the distinctive role of monument building in two situations. It accompanies the growth of social complexity and helps to bring people together in the creation of a common project whose symbolism may well provide a supernatural sanction for their activities. It assumes a similar significance if the political structure is threatened, in which case the construction of monuments may be one method by which the integration of society can be renewed. It is a model that Cherry has applied to the Minoan peak sanctuaries of Crete, but the same interpretation has been advanced for the changing scale and labour demands of Egyptian pyramids (Rathje 1975).

There is a certain tension between the title of Auden's poem and that of the sequence of which it forms a part. He talks about the 'birth of architecture', but architecture is a particular form of material culture that is peculiar to our own species. Yet the poem is one of a group entitled 'Thanksgiving for a Habitat'. The word 'habitat' refers to something wider than the built environment, for it describes the natural home of any organism. There is an important difference between something that is common to all animals and a feature which is only present among human beings, yet recently those two characteristics have been brought together in what its proponents call a Darwinian framework.

To some extent this is an elaboration of the position taken by Trigger, but

with a more explicit emphasis on adaptation and reproductive success. An idea that has played a prominent part in archaeological studies of monuments is 'wasteful advertising' (Dunnell 1999). Again this has much in common with Trigger's thesis. The model treats the building of conspicuous structures as a form of display by which elites use human labour to signal their competitive abilities:

> Monumental architecture is 'wasteful' in the Darwinian sense because it represents an expenditure of energy and resources that might otherwise have been directed towards reproduction and maintenance of offspring. However, in [this] model monument construction is also 'smart' advertising since it benefits both the signaller and receiver, whether that receiver is a potential competitor or a potential follower. By paying the extravagant fitness costs of monument construction, an elite person signals his or her ability to compete in political contests which, in turn, determine access to resources and mates. (Aranyosi 1999: 357)

All the approaches that I have summarized share a similar problem. They identify a general phenomenon and explain it in terms of a theory of universal application, but in doing so, they make little use of the available evidence. That is not to say that we should abandon these attempts to link the archaeological record into a wider intellectual framework. Rather, they are *insufficient* because they do not do justice to the sheer diversity of the monuments that they are discussing. There is room for a second level of analysis which might be equally informative. Trigger acknowledges this when he says that he is 'not challenging the observation that in each early civilization temples, palaces, and tombs had highly idiosyncratic meanings, which were either read into, or determined, such features as their shape, orientation, decoration, colour, and the materials out of which they were constructed' (1990: 128–9). Instead of using monuments to document the origins of institutions in general, we could employ the detailed observations that archaeologists have made at these sites to suggest some of the differences between the people who built them.

In fact monument building has also been interpreted as one of the diagnostic features of a particular stage of social evolution. Again this approach depends on a high degree of generalization. Unlike anthropologists, prehistorians work with dead informants. Their only means of communication is through material things, and the dialogue is largely one-sided. For that reason archaeologists have looked for widely occurring features that may be shared with the ethnographic record in the hope of recognizing phenomena that could allow them to diagnose the character of extinct social systems. Thus in the 1960s Elman Service saw monument building as one of the diagnostic features of the societies that he classified as chiefdoms (Service 1962: 142–77). Along with a range of other characteristics, monument building could be recognized in the archaeological record, and this seemed to offer a clue to the nature of social organization in parts of prehistoric Europe. For Colin Renfrew (1974) it

also seemed to identify a significant threshold in the development of particular communities in regions that extended from southern England to the Aegean. Edmund Leach (1973) criticized this approach when it was first suggested in archaeology, but, whatever its merits at the time, thirty years later it is clear that it did inspire a new generation of prehistorians to think more boldly about the past.

Again this is an approach which operates on a general level. In its original formulation the identification of chiefdoms in prehistoric Wessex depended on comparing the archaeological evidence from that region with a list of characteristic features that Service had compiled from ethnographic sources. The difficulty is that not all of these occurred in every case and that the range of societies that Service characterized as chiefdoms was exceptionally diverse. Moreover, his work was linked to an explicitly evolutionary hypothesis in which societies developed in a prescribed sequence and attained progressively greater levels of complexity. More recent work has either avoided discussing chiefdoms or has accepted that the term covers a number of different kinds of community (Earle 1991).

For our purposes one point is particularly important. Renfrew's interpretation of the prehistoric sequence in Wessex (Renfrew 1973) — one which he later applied in modified form to Neolithic Orkney (Renfrew 1979) — was explicitly based on the evidence of the monuments that were built there, and in this respect it anticipated the generalizing models considered so far. It discussed the changing political geography of his study areas in relation to the size and spacing of successive forms of public monument and the amounts of human labour that were required to build them. Some of these labour estimates have been modified in more recent work, and in a few cases fieldwork has even changed the sequence in which particular monuments were built (Bradley 1991), but none of these developments affects the power of the basic argument. In his interpretation the study of monuments plays a central role in the investigation of social institutions.

Such a bold interpretation may be less popular today, but perhaps this is only because generalizing models are less fashionable in archaeology. Through a growing *rapprochement* with social anthropology, archaeologists working in Europe have begun to appreciate the possibilities of a much closer reading of extinct material culture. That is only possible because they have accepted that material culture itself is a medium that can be used strategically. It conveys information in rather the same manner as spoken language and it has the same capacity to be interpreted in different ways. Indeed, it is possible to talk, as Tilley (1999) has recently done, in terms of 'solid metaphors'. This term refers to the complex networks of interconnections that can be identified between different media in the past, such as house plans, the layout of monuments, the places in which artefacts were deposited, and the wider organization of the

landscape. This provides a less rigid framework than the structuralism by which it is influenced (Hodder 1982), but it also requires more evidence than archaeology can often provide. Fortunately, monumental architecture is one of the fields in which that requirement is met. In the right circumstances — where the available material is well preserved and well recorded — it may be possible to consider some of these buildings in their local settings. In doing so, it may also be possible to explore the many different ways in which their creation and use can shed light on the characteristics of early social institutions. We must accept that the greater the detail in which specific monuments are investigated, the more difficult it will become to provide a single, clear-cut interpretation. There is an inevitable subjectivity here, and the best way of assessing these ideas is to consider how many of the observations can be accommodated by a single interpretative scheme and how many others remain outside it.

One further qualification is needed. This chapter considers how early monuments were connected with social institutions in prehistoric Britain and Ireland. It is limited to these areas for two reasons. First, these are among the places in which generalizing approaches have already been employed. The Darwinian 'wasteful advertizing' model has been applied by Aranyosi (1999) to the Irish Neolithic, whilst the same period in both Wessex and Orkney was studied by Colin Renfrew in some of the first applications of the chiefdom model in European archaeology (Renfrew 1973, 1979).

The other reason for limiting this account to British and Irish prehistory is because specialized kinds of monuments are a particular feature of northern and western Europe, rather than areas further to the south and east, where the main focus for symbolic elaboration was on the settlement and the house. Although that evidence has an obvious importance here, the references made by early monuments in Britain and Ireland are altogether wider, and for that reason they are less easy to explain in practical terms. In order to provide a simple narrative, the case studies are considered in chronological order.

## EARLIER NEOLITHIC MONUMENTS

Although this account considers a part of Europe in which settlements and houses were not the main focus of symbolic elaboration, both provide the background to the first of these studies.

This concerns the Neolithic period, the phase in which domesticated resources were adopted in Britain and Ireland. Although it is fashionable to play down the impact of long-distance contacts as the main source of change, in this case it is hard to do so. The main domesticated resources associated with early farming had to be introduced from overseas, and there was little precedent for Neolithic material culture among the existing inhabitants of these

islands (Thomas 1999). Still less was there an indigenous background to the forms of monumental architecture that developed at this time. Not only were they closely related to prototypes on the continent, but it seems as if their distinctive symbolism could only be understood in relation to their history on the European mainland (Bradley 1998: Chapters 3–5). That is because their characteristic forms referred back to settlements and houses of types that had already gone out of use generations earlier. These monuments enshrined the memory of an ancestral way of life that no longer conformed to reality.

The agricultural settlement of large parts of central and western Europe is epitomized by the Linear Pottery Culture and its successors (Whittle 1996: Chapter 6). The settlements of these groups maintained a strong uniformity across time and space, extending between about 5300 BC and 4500 BC and maintaining the same basic settlement pattern over an area reaching from Bohemia to Poland and from Austria to northern France, although there is evidence that this cohesive structure was breaking down towards the end of the sequence. Their settlements are typified by massive longhouses. The earliest of these buildings were strictly rectangular, whilst some of the later examples had a tapering ground plan and were broader towards one end. These houses were often found in groups. The individual buildings shared the same alignment, they were widely spaced, and only rarely were they rebuilt in the same positions. Some of the later settlements were associated with ditched enclosures. In some cases these earthworks contained the living area, whilst in others they were not built until the settlement had been abandoned.

After about 4500 BC longhouses went out of use and settlements became more ephemeral, perhaps suggesting a greater emphasis on mobility (Thomas 1999: Chapter 2). Domestic buildings seem to have taken a less massive form. The enormous domestic structures of earlier generations seem to have been replaced by a series of equally massive *monuments*. It is at this stage, towards 4000 BC, that Neolithic material culture first appears in Britain and Ireland, and it is here that we encounter stone and earthwork monuments without any of the domestic buildings that provided their source of inspiration (Bradley 1998: Chapter 1).

It is the symbolism of these early monuments that needs emphasizing now. There are two kinds of structures to consider. There are elongated mounds or cairns, which are associated with the remains of the dead. These features were often the outcome of a prolonged sequence of activity and some may have replaced small buildings or enclosures where human remains underwent a series of transformations before the unfleshed bones were arranged in their final configuration (Barrett 1994: 54–65). It has often been observed that the form of the mounds and cairns is very similar to that of continental longhouses (Bradley 1998: Chapter 3), and this case is greatly strengthened by recent work in northern France which shows that similar structures were created on top of

buildings of this type (Mordant 1997). Although this happened some time after those buildings had gone out of use, the fact that the mounds shared the dimensions and orientations of the longhouses suggests that a memory remained of the original configuration of the settlement. Similar mounds were built over a lengthy period of time, but after that formative period was over their prototypes were no longer constructed. That is the situation that we find in Britain and Ireland, where the size, layout, and even the orientation of these monuments recall the form of domestic buildings, of a type which does not occur in these islands. Where Neolithic houses are found they are smaller and lighter structures (Darvill & Thomas 1996).

The same argument applies to the earthwork enclosures, whose ditches are usually interrupted by a number of causeways, creating the impression of a series of elongated pits. Again they are first found in Britain around 4000 BC, although this kind of monument originated on the continent whilst longhouses were still in use. At first they were associated with groups of domestic buildings and sometimes they enclosed entire villages. Very similar enclosures were still constructed after the settlement pattern had changed, and by this stage very few of them seem to have been used in daily life (Bradley 1998: Chapter 5). Rather, they became ceremonial centres, where the main archaeological evidence is for feasting, animal sacrifice, the deposition of rare and exotic artefacts, and the treatment of the dead. It seems as if the form of the earthwork perimeter evoked the idea of a settlement, but a settlement of a type that no longer existed in reality. Again the earthwork was modelled on a prototype that had been current in the past.

The same interpretation would apply to the British sites (such earthworks are uncommon in Ireland). For the most part these enclosures appear to have been built on the margins of the settled landscape, sometimes in small clearings in the forest, but the mortuary mounds or 'long barrows' were rarely far away and can be found in unusually high numbers near to these monuments (Thomas 1999: Chapter 6). Figure 1 illustrates one such landscape in the Great Ouse Valley, together with outline plans of two excavated monuments on the Fen edge. Nowhere in this landscape is there clear evidence of residential buildings and in most areas (again Ireland is something of an exception) the remains of houses are difficult to find. Those that are known exist in virtual isolation. In many areas all that survive of the settlements are scatters of artefacts, or shallow pits dug into the subsoil. The discovery of specialized monuments contrasts with the evidence of daily life.

So much research has been devoted to investigating the Neolithic landscape that it no longer seems likely that the bias is due to the work of archaeologists. Rather, the elaboration of monuments seems to have taken place at the expense of the settlements of this period. Why was this the case?

It is by no means obvious why Neolithic culture was adopted in Britain and
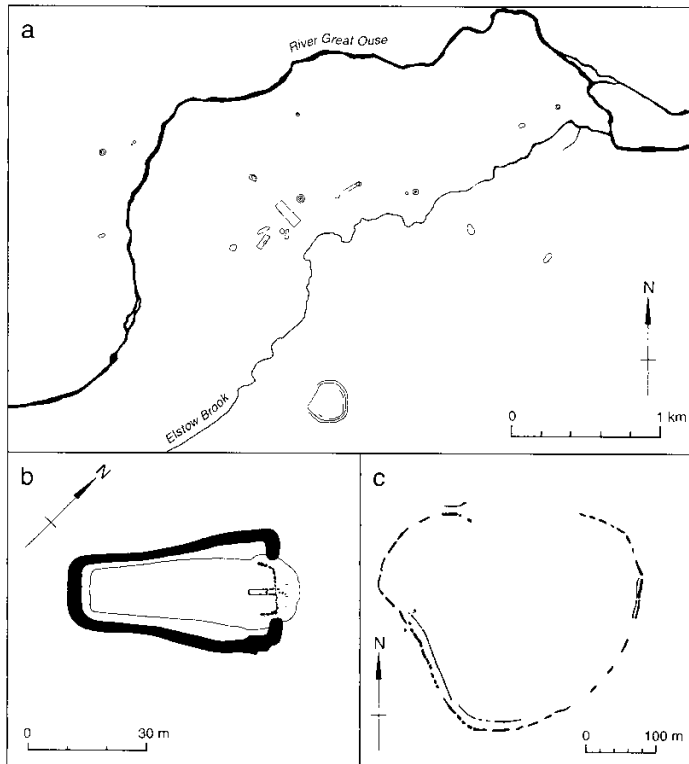
**Figure 1.** a: Earlier Neolithic monuments in the Great Ouse Valley (after Dawson 1996); b: outline plan of the Haddenham long barrow (after Hodder & Shand 1988); c: outline plan of the Haddenham causewayed enclosure (after Hodder 1992). Drawing: Steve Allen.

Ireland, nor is it clear how far the change was due to settlement from overseas, but this process did not take place in isolation. Something very similar happened at the same time in southern Scandinavia (Whittle 1996: Chapter 7). This raises an important point. Whatever the geographical sources of the local Neolithic, they are likely to have been extremely diverse and we can recognize individual points of resemblance between artefacts or monuments in these islands and those occurring across a vast area extending from Brittany to Denmark. That is not surprising considering the geographical position of Britain and Ireland in relation to the European landmass, but it does mean that links may have existed between particular parts of the study area and regions of the mainland that had fewer contacts among themselves. As a result, the British and Irish Neolithic has a distinctive identity of its own and does not reproduce the material culture of any one area of continental Europe.

Under these circumstances how would it be possible to create a sense of

identity, and how might this have led to the development of new social institutions? Perhaps the creation and use of monuments had an important role to play and both the long mounds and earthwork enclosures were built as part of that process. That is because in their different ways both recalled an ancestral way of life on the European mainland: one which was dominated by a sense of community. They referred to the ancestors who may have lived together in the longhouses and to the separate households who inhabited the domestic enclosures. That no longer reflected reality by the time that Britain and Ireland adopted a Neolithic way of life, but the crucial transformation had already begun before that time. The landscapes of the living — landscapes which contained very few specialized structures — had already been replaced by landscapes of the dead in which that ancestral way of life was represented by monuments of kinds whose symbolism could only be explained by reference to the past. If so, then these were *landscapes of memory*, and it was through sharing in a similar origin myth that the people of the insular Neolithic were able to create their own sense of community. It matters very little how many of them were settlers from overseas and how many belonged to the indigenous population. What is important is that they subscribed to an origin myth and devoted themselves to its promulgation through the work of monument building. In constructing long barrows and enclosures they were, quite literally, helping to construct their own institutions, and they expressed their commitment to those ideas though buildings that would last for generations.

## LATER NEOLITHIC MONUMENTS

If those structures referred back to a continental homeland, real or imagined, the next major group of monuments to be built were more closely integrated into their immediate surroundings. For the most part they were buildings of types that developed within Britain and Ireland. By the Later Neolithic period — that is to say, from about 3000–2500 BC — long barrows and causewayed enclosures had been succeeded by a fresh generation of monuments. There is no continuity between these successive forms of structure, and the new kinds of architecture — passage graves, stone circles, and the earthworks known as 'henges' — may be closely related to developments in the north and west where causewayed enclosures were never common. Later Neolithic monuments were widely distributed across a landscape quite large parts of which had been cleared and settled by this time (Thomas 1999: Chapter 3). The artefacts found at these monuments sometimes originated in distant areas, suggesting a much wider range of contacts within Britain and Ireland than had existed before.

During the earlier part of the Neolithic the main frame of reference of

stone and earthwork monuments seems to have been the houses and settle-ments of an ancestral homeland. Now the dominant symbolism of the larger monuments united the dwellings of the living with the landscapes in which they were built. Instead of a series of rigidly demarcated monument types, there was more of a continuum between domestic buildings and ceremonial sites. This is shown especially clearly by the archaeology of two different areas, Wessex and Orkney. Both are regions which have been studied by Colin Renfrew (1973, 1979). In the case of Orkney this account also draws on the research of Colin Richards (1993).

The situation in Orkney is especially relevant here. This is one of the very few areas in which both tombs and houses are preserved, and archaeologists have tended to treat its evidence as something unique. Its state of preservation is certainly unprecedented, but there is reason to think that the relationships between these different elements are reflected in other regions. So is the setting of the monuments in the landscape.

There are three elements to consider here and, whilst their chronology does pose certain problems, their histories most probably overlapped around 3000 BC. There are the stone-built houses which are best known from Skara Brae and Barnhouse. These are generally found in small villages, and each individual building had a stereotyped layout, with a roughly cruciform interior enclosed by a circular outer wall. The main features of the living space were a stone-built hearth, a 'dresser' against the rear of the structure facing the door, and a series of recesses set into the thickness of the wall (Richards 1993). The tombs of the same period were organized around a rather similar division of space, although the central chambers were buried beneath a considerable mound or cairn and could only be approached by a low entrance passage — hence their description as 'passage graves'. Again there was a main chamber with a series of smaller chambers or cells radiating from it, each of them approached though a narrow entrance of its own (ibid.). Some of the decorated pottery associated with these tombs was of the kind found in the settlements and recent work has shown that both groups of structures were decorated with the same kinds of abstract motifs (Bradley *et al.* 2001) (Figure 2). The passage graves were generally located close to living areas.

Near the greatest tomb in Orkney, Maes Howe, there are two other sites. One is the Later Neolithic settlement of Barnhouse, whilst the other is a ditched enclosure, the Stones of Stenness, which contains a setting of enor-mous monoliths. Again they are likely to have been used over the same period. The stone circle at Stenness employs uprights of exactly the same form as those in the central chamber at Maes Howe, and at the centre of the ring of monoliths there is an enormous slab-lined hearth just like those found in the domestic buildings at Barnhouse (Richards 1993). In short, the enclosure, the settlement, and the tomb conform to the same principles of order and there are
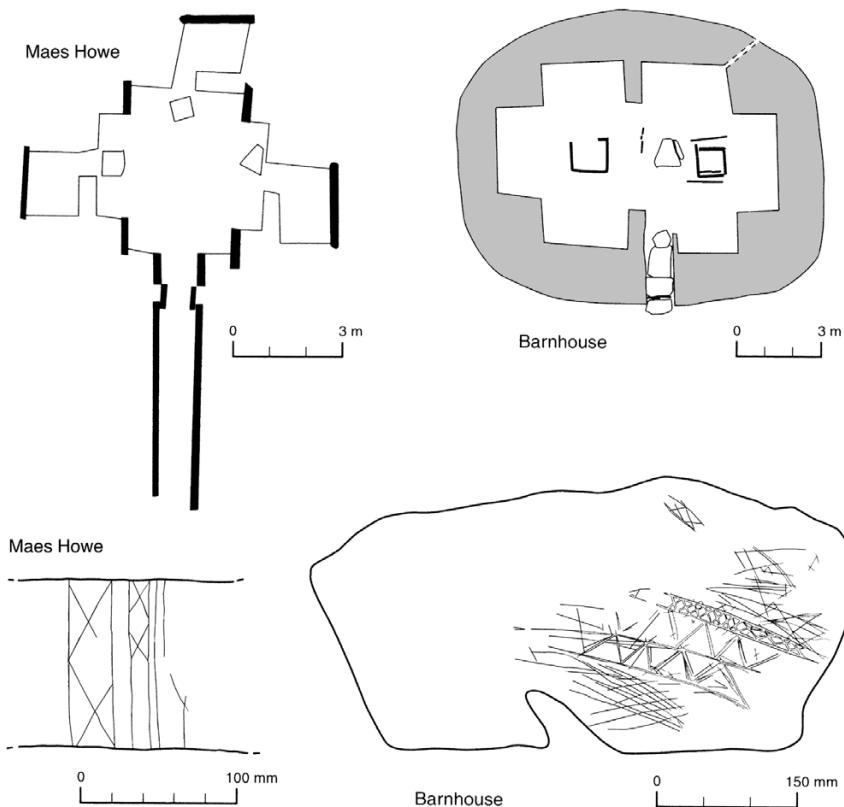
**Figure 2.** Simplified plans of the chamber at Maes Howe and a Grooved Ware house at Barnhouse, together with outline drawings of decorated stones from these two sites (after Bradley *et al.* 2001). Drawing: Steve Allen.

elements of material culture — ceramics and decorated stonework — which are shared between them.

But what of the landscape itself? In a recent paper Richards (1996) has suggested that the siting of the Stones of Stenness, and that of the Ring of Brodgar, a similar monument nearby, was very carefully chosen so that each of these circular enclosures appeared to be at the centre of a more extensive circular landscape, whose outer limit was marked by a horizon of hills: these sites were essentially arenas. The lochs in the foreground were equivalent to the enclosure ditches, which may have held water, whilst the outer bank or wall was the counterpart of the more distant barrier of high ground. Each monument could have epitomized the properties of a much wider area, and the houses, the stone settings, and the tombs could all have referred to this connection.

In other parts of Britain, and especially in Wessex, there is a similar overlap

between domestic and public buildings, although this has hardly been acknowledged (Darvill & Thomas 1996). Again the principal sites included circular earthwork enclosures which in this case contained settings of large upright posts. There was a similar division of space inside the simple roundhouses of this period. These can be compared directly with the timber circles associated with henges and even with the ground plan of the enclosures themselves (Figure 3). The argument can be taken further, as there are henges with stone settings in their centre which seem to represent monumentalized versions of the domestic hearth. The continuum even extends to the situation of these earthworks in the landscape. Thus the enormous henge monument of Durrington Walls is located inside a dry valley so that the impression created by the earthwork boundary is reinforced by the local topography. Other monuments, such as Avebury, occupy the middle of a large natural basin, so that the distant horizon echoes the form of the perimeter earthwork (Bradley 1998: 119–28). The very existence of this continuum suggests that there was no clearcut distinction between the ritual and domestic worlds.

The artefact assemblages recovered from such sites extend along a similar continuum, from quite straightforward deposits to others with a more specialized character, identified by their distinctive composition and the manner in which they had been committed to the ground (Thomas 1999: Chapter 4). Some of the more striking artefacts are found in settlement sites, again suggesting that any rigid division between the ritual and domestic spheres would be inappropriate. Rather, it seems as though there was a continuous range of variation. Structured deposits are most obvious when they are found within specialized monuments, but they also occur across the surrounding landscape. It seems to be true, however, that the most varied assemblages are evidenced near to ceremonial centres.

How can this evidence be understood? Perhaps such places were conceived as 'big houses': as public buildings which symbolized the unity of the social groups who built and used them. This is an idea that has already been suggested in the New World (De Boer 1997). Such structures were enormously enlarged versions of the ordinary dwellings of this period, yet their purely symbolic character is obvious from the way in which some of them were rebuilt as freestanding rings of monoliths; indeed, the lintelled structure at Stonehenge seems to be modelled on just such a prototype (Gibson 1998). On the other hand, that does not account for the choice of a circular ground plan for so many different monuments. Perhaps that developed because those places were also perceived as *microcosms of the landscapes in which they were built*. Where the Earlier Neolithic world had been constructed around an origin myth, during this period domestic and ceremonial spaces were the mirror images of one another.

The recreation of the timber settings in stone is especially revealing here.
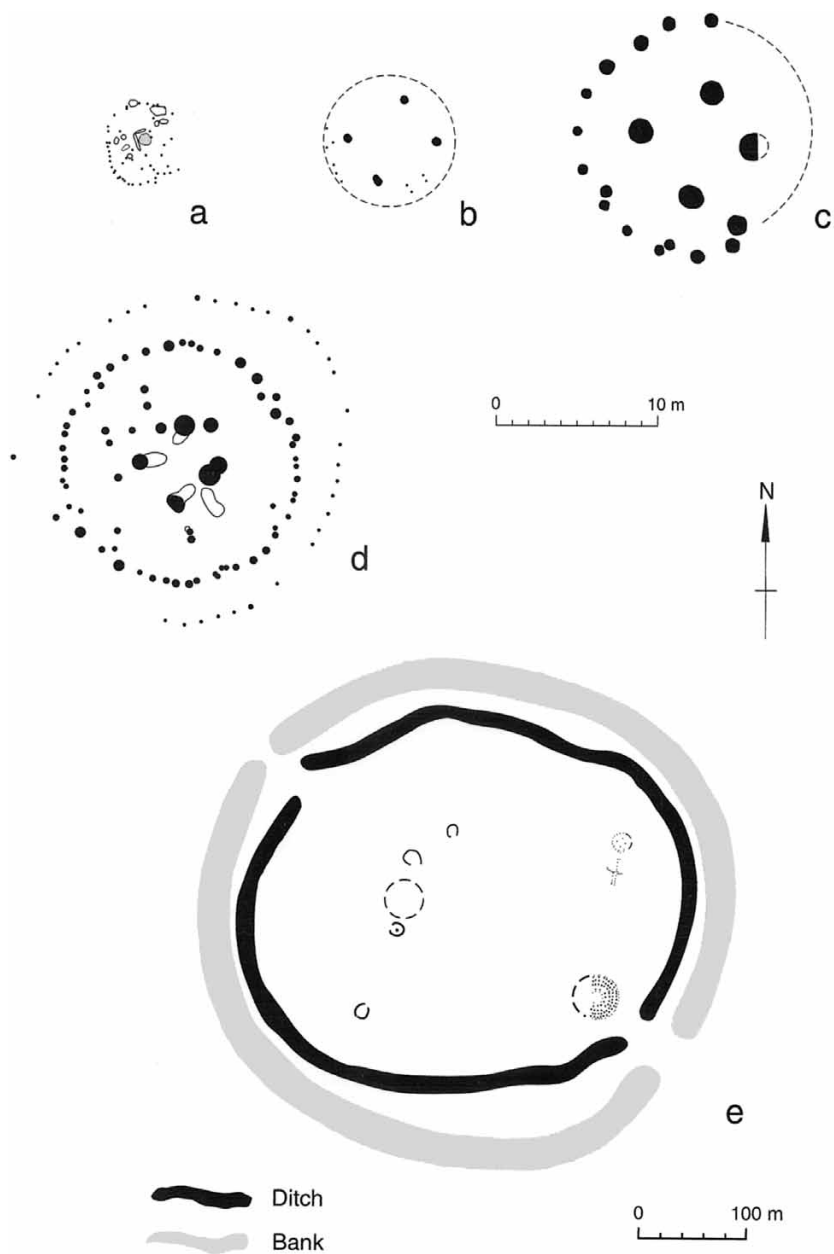
**Figure 3.** Later Neolithic houses and ceremonial monuments. a: Trelystan (after Britnell 1982); b: Wyke Down (after Green 1997); c: Durrington Walls (after Wainwright and Longworth 1971); d: Machrie Moor (after Haggarty 1991); e: the Durrington Walls henge (after Wainwright and Longworth 1971 with additions). Drawing: Steve Allen.

This was often the last phase of reconstruction at the monuments. The wooden buildings on these sites were often associated with placed deposits of artefacts and with the remains of feasts. The stone settings, on the other hand, are only rarely associated with artefacts and in their later phases they may contain human burials (Parker Pearson & Ramilisonina 1998). This has led to the idea that the use of an organic raw material — wood — was associated with the living population whilst the reconstruction of these monuments using an inorganic material — stone — may have been associated with the timeless qualities of the dead. At all events, many monuments went through a similar cycle, and it resulted in the creation of structures which have been able to resist natural decay for over four thousand years. The erection of these monuments may have brought the population together in structures that were conceived as houses for an entire community and models of the surrounding world. The rebuilding of these constructions in stone could have given them an added authority.

## EARLIER BRONZE AGE MONUMENTS

The last case study comes from the period that archaeologists call the Bronze Age. In fact there is no simple division between this phase and its predecessor, but for present purposes one observation is certainly important. Although older monuments continued to be used, sometimes on a considerable scale, there is little evidence that equally elaborate structures were still being built. Much smaller monuments were created instead, most of them associated with human burials. In place of the large arenas of the Later Neolithic there were circular mounds and cairns.

The next example comes from that transitional period. Towards the end of the Neolithic sequence in Orkney, a rather different development was taking place at a site on the northern mainland of Scotland. At Raigmore, a wooden house associated with the same style of pottery as Barnhouse and Skara Brae was replaced by a massive cairn, with its kerbstones graded in height towards the south-west (Simpson 1996) (Figure 4). This is interesting for two reasons, for not only was the house directly replaced by a stone monument, but in doing so the builders changed its orientation. The house of the living extended from north-west to south-east but the funerary monument that took its place was laid out on a new axis at right angles to the original design. A cremation burial had been placed in the centre of the house, but so many more were associated with the cairn that it is reasonable to describe it as a kind of cemetery. The rebuilding of Raigmore as a monument for the dead inverted the alignment associated with the living.

Between about 2500 and 1500 BC, small circular monuments to the dead
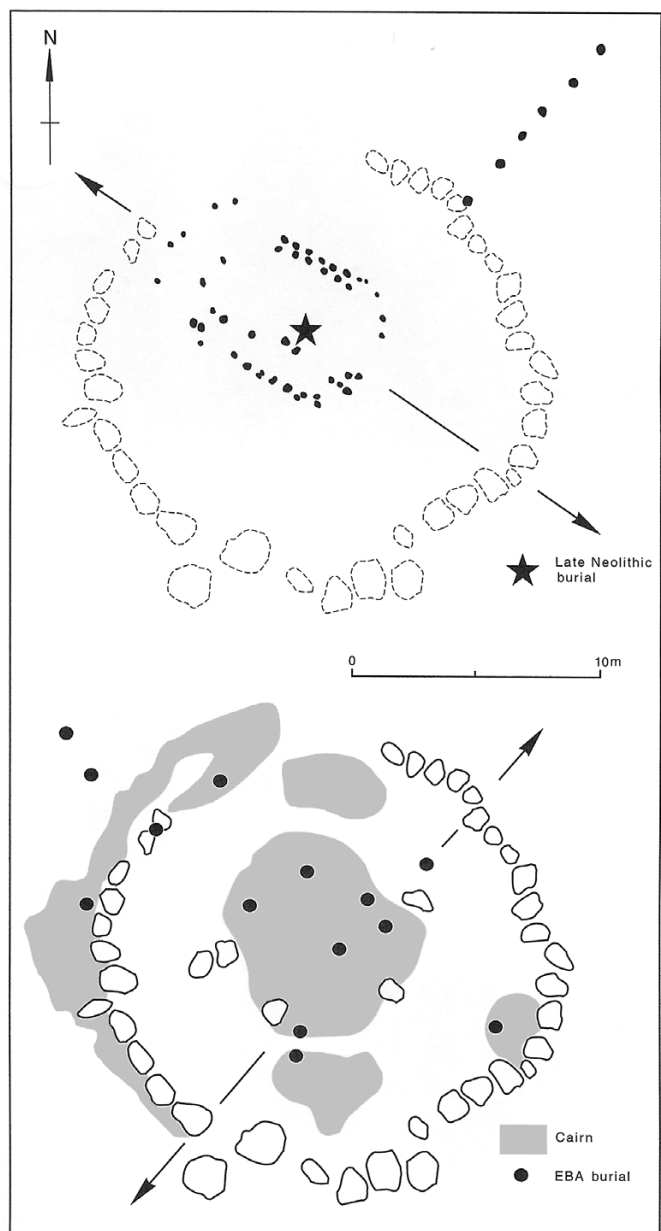
**Figure 4.** An interpretation of the archaeological sequence at Raigmore (after Simpson 1996). In the upper plan the postholes of the timber structures are shown in black and the outer kerb of the later cairn is indicated in broken outline. The lower plan shows the layout of the cairn that replaced the Neolithic house. The bold arrows indicate alignments of the successive buildings on the site. Drawing: Margaret Mathews.

came to dominate the landscape of Britain and Ireland (Barrett 1994: Chapter 5). Although they existed alongside the later use of henges and stone circles, the two sometimes coalesced and it was not unusual for graves to be dug inside earlier structures or even for burial cairns to be built there (Bradley 1998: Chapter 9). Although the mounds and cairns were once associated with the development of a 'single grave' tradition, this is really a misnomer as most well-excavated examples contain a number of separate deposits of human remains (Last 1998; Petersen 1972). Nevertheless it is true that they were often placed there on separate occasions and that each might have been accompanied by an appropriate selection of artefacts. At the same time, such monuments rarely existed in isolation and they frequently formed parts of larger cemeteries.

Although there are many variations, the common element is that the dead were buried within round mounds or cairns. Although these were enlarged as new burials were added, in their earlier phases they were often the same size and shape as the houses built during the same period, a connection that was only emphasized by embellishing some of these structures with rings of wooden posts (Ashbee 1960: Chapter 5). This is rather revealing, for there are further cases where burial mounds were built over the remains of domestic buildings (Lane 1984). The sequence seen at Raigmore is paralleled at other sites and raises the possibility that what archaeologists have thought of as burial mounds were conceived as houses for the dead.

There is a need for caution, as the domestic buildings of this period were never substantial structures and their remains are difficult to find. At the same time, there seems little doubt that the barrows and cairns might be built near to settlements. Underneath them there is often domestic refuse and some sites provide environmental evidence that they were constructed in farmland. That seems to be particularly true of the smaller burial mounds, whereas some of the most elaborate and richly furnished graves were covered by monuments built on higher ground (Peters 2000).

Many of these points can be illustrated by a cemetery at the Brenig, in North Wales (Lynch 1993) (Figure 5). This was on the spring line, in an area that had already been occupied during the Later Neolithic, but it is clear from environmental evidence that the main settled area was on lower ground some distance beyond the site itself. That was where cereals were being grown and it was from that area that people brought some of the turf used to construct the mounds. The land around the monuments, however, was mainly pasture. One of the Bronze Age cairns was built over the position of a wooden house, whilst there is evidence of another building and a group of domestic artefacts from the immediate area.

This example is among many sites where burial mounds were constructed in groups. Sometimes their layout was organized in formal patterns. They were
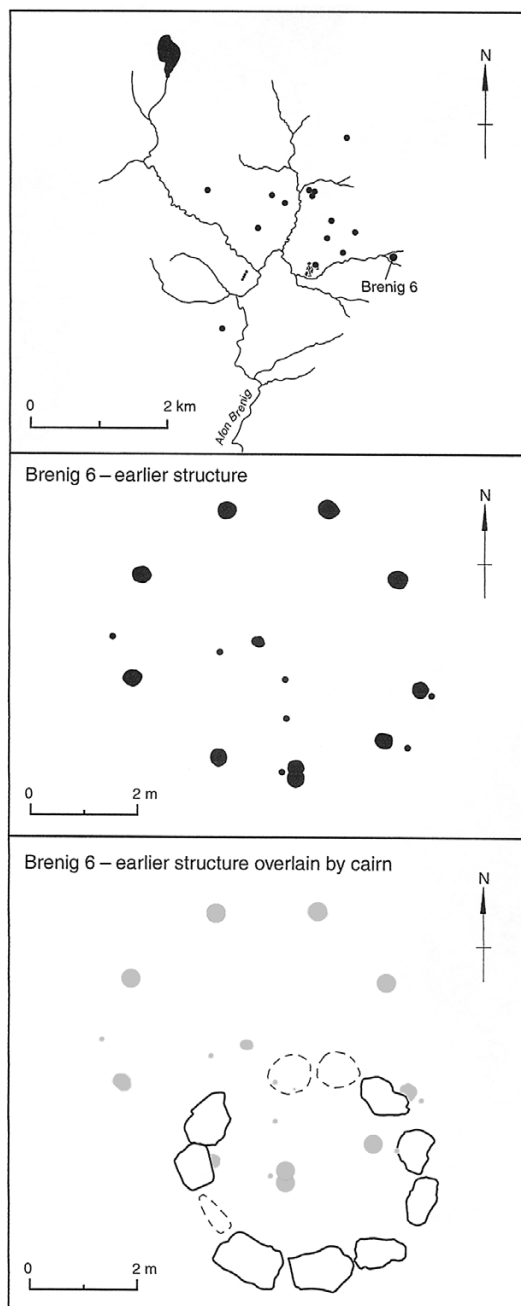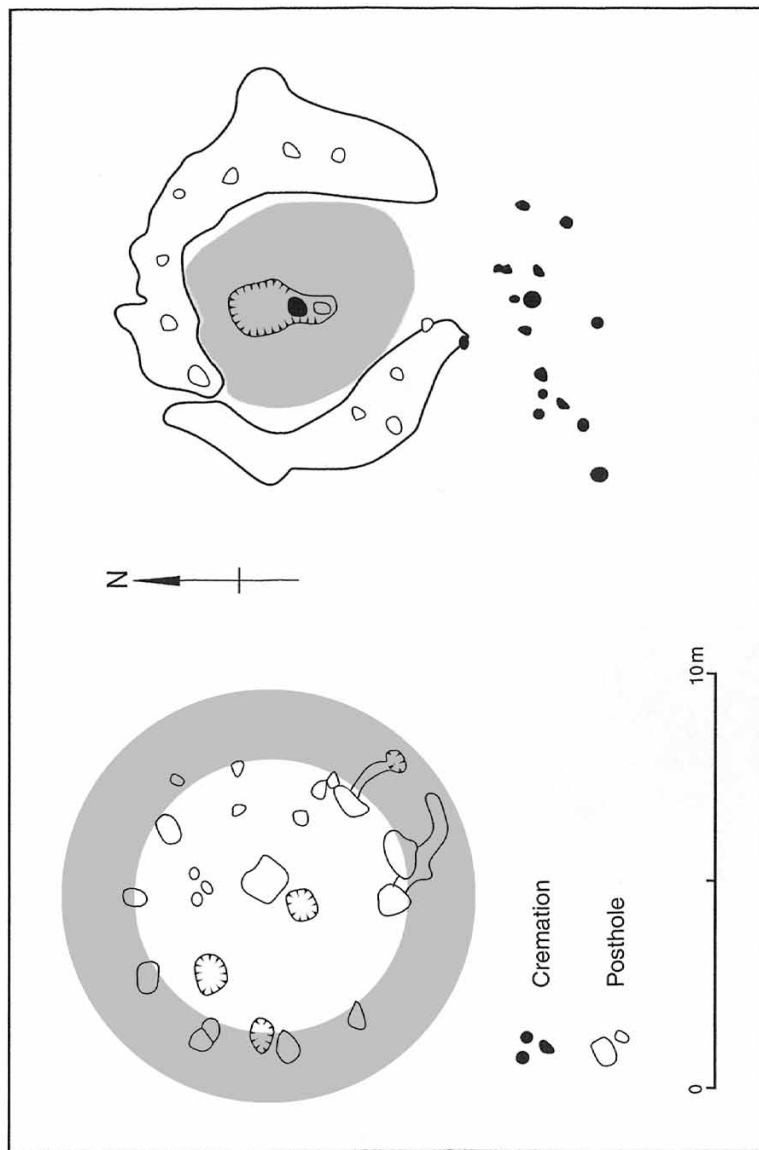
**Figure 5.** Outline plan of the Bronze Age cemetery at the Brenig (after Lynch 1993) with details of the timber building on Site 6 and the cairn overlying it. Drawing: Steve Allen.

frequently located in relation to older, Neolithic monuments, but in this partic-ular case that does not seem to have happened. The cemetery contains a whole array of small circular monuments, from complex burial mounds to stone enclosures.

If single monuments were understood as representations of the house and as lasting memorials to its occupants, then cemeteries of this kind must surely be viewed as *the settlements of the dead.* That is why the spatial relationship between these separate monuments could be so important (Mizoguchi 1992). If the structural sequence at individual monuments reflected the changing history of one social group, the linkages between different structures in the same ceme-tery — their juxtaposition, alignment, or even their avoidance — might also provide some indications of the wider networks of alliance and obligation in which those people were involved. It is not a new idea to claim that in the struc-ture of such cemeteries we may be seeing the three-dimensional representation of a genealogy (Barrett 1994: Chapter 5), but it is important to appreciate the distinctive medium through which it was expressed. It may not be too much to suggest that over the generations the relatively insubstantial dwellings of the living were supplanted by the more massive structures of the dead.

It was only at the very end of this period that these priorities seem to have changed and the nature of that change is revealing in itself. It represented some-thing of a retreat from monument building, and it came at a time when we find the first widespread evidence of productive mixed farming in Great Britain. At just the point when one might have expected economic surpluses to be invested in the creation of great public works, human energies seem to have been redi-rected into the creation of more lasting settlements, land boundaries, and field systems. The houses of the dead were replaced by the houses of the living (Bradley 1998: Chapter 10).

It is from that period of change that the final illustration is taken. The last burial mounds were built at the same time as field systems and land divisions were becoming established. More substantial houses were also built at this time and, in contrast to earlier practice, their positions seem to have been respected by later generations so that their remains were not destroyed. The small burial mounds of this phase were generally located close to the living area, and there are cases in which their ground plans can be compared with one another. Figure 6 shows one of the houses in the settlement at Itford Hill in Sussex and compares it with the organization of the small cremation cemetery that served that site (Holden 1972). There are many similarities. Both were circular and both were about the same size. The house had a porch facing towards the south-east and this arrangement is mirrored by a causeway in the ditch enclosing the mound. It was on that side of the monument that most of the burials were located. The resemblance even extends to the setting of wooden posts around the edge of the mound. If there is any doubt about the closeness of this

**Figure 6.** (Left) Outline plan of one of the Bronze Age houses at Itford Hill. The shaded area would have been under the eaves. (Right) Plan of the small barrow serving the settlement. The position of the mound is shaded and the extent of the enclosing ditch is shown in bold outline. Both structures share a rather similar organization of space. After Bradley (1998). Drawing: Margaret Mathews.

relationship, it is surely dispelled when we realize that one of the cremations in the cemetery was deposited in a broken pot, another fragment of which was discovered in the settlement.

## SUMMING UP

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that monument building was both a clue that archaeologists can use to the character of ancient social institutions and part of the process through which those institutions acquired and maintained their power. I have tried to illustrate that contention using three case studies from successive phases of British and Irish prehistory. In the first, I argued that the earliest farmers in Britain created a new sense of community by building monuments that were directly related to a mythical source of origin on the continent. By tracing the gradual development of those architectural forms from their invention some generations earlier, it was possible to suggest the meanings that they were intended to convey.

My second example came from a period when greater amounts of energy were devoted to monument construction and combined the results of research in Orkney with work in other parts of Britain. In each case it seemed as if the form of the largest monuments could only be understood in relation to a wider conceptual scheme. This extended from the layout of the individual house, though the configuration of a series of ceremonial centres, to the organization and perception of the landscape as a whole. The metaphor of the 'big house', as Warren De Boer (1997) has called it, seemed to permeate the archaeology of the Later Neolithic period and may have been one of the ways in which larger political structures were established and displayed. That is not to say that such monuments arose haphazardly — no doubt their development required both planning and direction — but it would be wrong to overlook their other aspect as projects that involved a considerable workforce in the execution of a common task.

Lastly, I considered how the burial mounds of the Earlier Bronze Age could be reinterpreted. So much research has been concerned with the contents of the various graves that it is hard to remember that any display of portable wealth would have been short-lived. After the funeral was over, it would survive only as a memory. The mounds that commemorated the dead, on the other hand, provided a tangible statement of the social order and a history of the local community. That may be why the houses of the dead had a longer currency than the dwellings of the living population.

All these interpretations, tentative as they are, could be subsumed within the general theories of monument building described in the first part of this chapter. They certainly do not contradict them, and for some researchers that

may be enough. The disadvantage is that the same theories account for obser-
vations that are so very different from one another when we study them in
detail, and it is those points of difference that are one of the strengths of the
archaeological record — as they are of ethnographic writing. But with this
predilection for a rather more fine-grained analysis there come inevitable dan-
gers. There is more scope for differences of opinion, and an increased risk of
pure subjectivity. But I believe that both kinds of interpretation can be pursued
in tandem and that there is scope for profitable exchanges between them. It is
for individual scholars to decide on what seems to be the most appropriate scale
of analysis, and that may be partly a matter of personal inclination and partly
a response to the character of the data being studied. The doctrinal quarrels
that have characterized the study of prehistory for the past twenty years seem
to be largely over and it is time to move away from the introspection that they
engendered. There are many ways of studying the past and archaeology is only
one of them. Dispute is always less congenial than dialogue and it is in this
spirit that this chapter has been written.

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