

Karl-Göran Sjögren: "*Mångfaldige uhrminnes grafvar...*". *Megalitgravar och samhälle i Västsverige*. PhD dissertation 2003. GOTARC Series B. Archaeological Theses nr 24. ISSN 0282-5860, ISBN 91-85952-81-8. Coast to coast-books no. 9. ISSN 1404-1251, ISBN 91-973674-8-6. Göteborg 2003. Written in Swedish. Photocopied edition, 396 p.

Abstract

The thesis discusses the social, economic and ideological setting in which megalithic tombs were produced in western Sweden in the time period c. 4700-4500 BP. In this short time, some 80 tombs were built in Bohuslän and more than 250 in Falbygden in Västergötland, while no tombs were built in other areas of western Sweden.

Available evidence, although limited, suggests that the middle Neolithic societies behind the megaliths were fully agrarian, with only marginal importance of hunting, fishing and collecting.

It is argued that the Neolithic lifestyle was of more than just economic importance. It was charged with symbolic and ideological values, something which led the megalithic societies to focus on them in the face of varying environments, sometimes adverse to agrarian practices. This occurs most strikingly in the coastal landscape of Bohuslän, where marine hunting and fishing seems only to have been marginal. This focus on agrarian practices implies that important resources in the environments were left un- or underused. Such a situation can hardly be explained as functional adaptation to the environment, but must be seen as an ideological emphasis on a certain lifestyle, of which domestic resources were an important part. Also, theories of resource pressure or overpopulation as explanations of the megalithic phenomenon are severely weakened.

Based on spatial distribution of tombs and flint axes, compared to numbers of burials and necessary work forces for the construction of tombs, it is argued that megalith building societies were structured on a number of levels. Local groups, presumably lineage based, formed parts of more inclusive social networks, at successively larger scales. Thus, Falbygden is interpreted as a separate ethnicity, comprising a number of clans or other subgroups, each formed by a number of local groups.

Another line of argument concerns the structuring of landscape. It is argued that landscape was structured at a basic, practical level, with daily activities spatially separated, but that it also contains conceptual schemes, series of categorisations and distinctions. Such categories could for instance involve 'domestic' vs. 'wild', 'daily' vs. 'ceremonial', or 'living' vs. 'dead ancestors'. In daily practices, such schemes are experienced and learned as a basis for common sense knowledge. By the construction of monuments for the dead at certain places, these places as well as the surrounding landscape will acquire new and enhanced connotations. It is argued that megalithic tombs were placed at the margins of cultivated land, thus emphasizing the distinction between domestic and non-domestic contexts. The liminality of the tombs as places for connecting with the dead is then paralleled and emphasized by the liminal position in the landscape. It is suggested that ritualisation of social relations involving passage rites is accompanied by increasing ritualisation of spatial passages and spatial distinctions, in a process reaching a high point in the early middle Neolithic.

Keywords: Archaeology, Bohuslän, Falbygden, Passage graves, Megalithic tombs, Neolithic, Society, Sweden.