5

THE LOGIC OF MONUMENT BUILDING

The previous lecture showed how monuments and the ideas associated with them could be changed from one area to another. The same process of interpretation can also take place within the local sequence. Using the evidence from Britain and France, this lecture explores the ways in which monuments were adapted and renewed in relation to changing social circumstances. In particular, it focuses on the phenomenon of 'monument complexes' and studies the distinctive manner in which they developed. It consider the recent suggestion that some of these were pilgrimage centres, contending that the use and operation of particular monuments within these complexes was one way in which political relations were played out.

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If monuments operate on a different time scale from everyday affairs, they also pose special problems, for they are encountered by successive generations who see them from different perspectives. As archaeologists we are constantly reminded how our own vision is limited, how our view of the ancient world can never be completely free of the concerns of our own time. We can learn from these limitations. Monuments may stay the same when societies change. Like archaeologists today, people in the past would have been forced to engage in acts of interpretation, and that very process can tell us something of their shifting preconceptions.

We considered one aspect of this problem when we followed the history of Neolithic enclosures, but that was a history in which a single kind of monument was interpreted and reinterpreted from one area to another. No doubt this process of playing off the stereotyped character of those enclosures against the different settings in which they were adopted helped us to identify some of the broader developments in Neolithic Europe, but such an extensive study involved a loss of detail at the local level. I would like to redress this now. Having discussed the way in which monuments embody ideas, we must also consider the process of interpretation that takes place during the history of individual sites.

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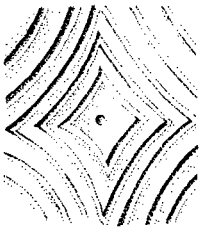
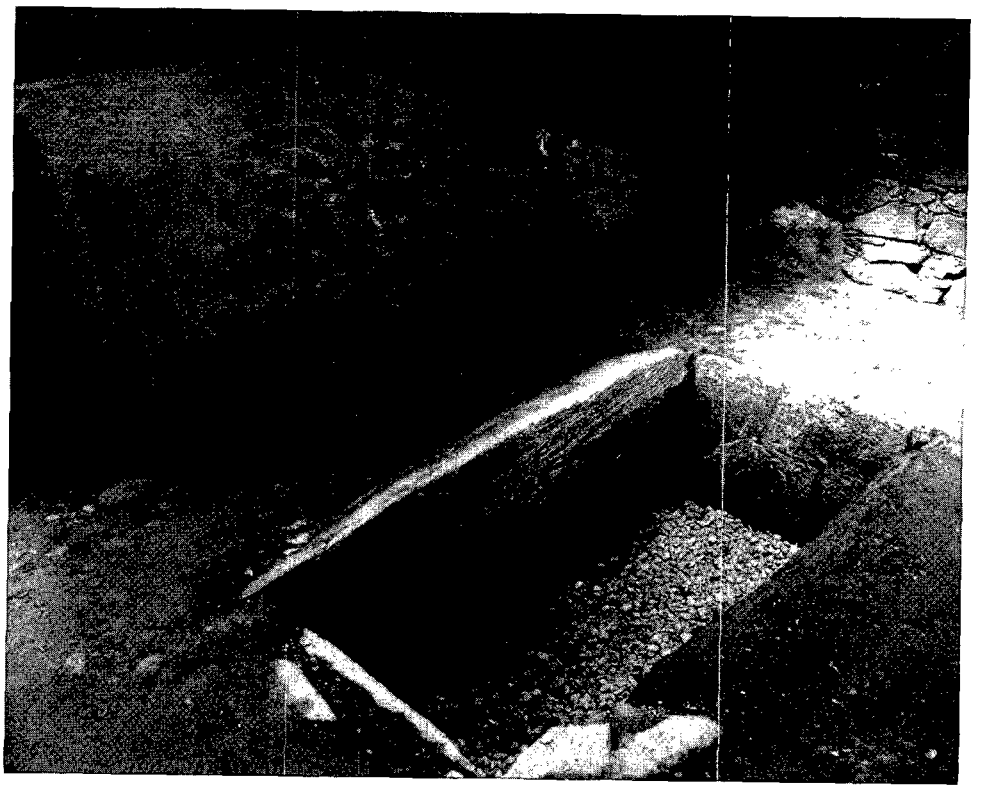
I have referred to the standing stones of the Kilmartin valley, and in the last lecture I mentioned the Temple Wood stone circle. At different times I have also considered the northern British habit of incorporating fragments of carved rock in the structure of burial cairns. I made these observations in passing, but now it is time to bring them together. Why, for instance, is one of the stones at Temple Wood decorated with two concentric circles (Scott 1989, fig 12), whilst a rather similar stone was found only a short distance away beneath one of the Nether Largie cairns (Craw 1931, fig 6)? Why is the capstone covering the central burial on that



site so profusely decorated? And why is it so important that this stone had been carved more than once?

It rained on my visit to Kilmartin, and the cist slab is under cover Like the dead before me, I sheltered below the cairn, and this was why I spent so long looking at the famous capstone (illus 46). From the start I could agree that the carvings were of more than one phase; as others had observed, the depictions of metal axes are superimposed on an array of cup-marks (Shee 1972, 231, note 5). But how would that make sense if the carving was prepared for a specific funeral? Was the ceremony delayed whilst the stoneworkers changed their minds? Was the cover stone retrieved after an interval in the ground and decorated a second time? There is no evidence of this, and in fact the sequence must have been even longer, for one section of the slab seems to have flaked away after the cup-marks were created, yet the newly exposed surface was decorated in the same style. The edge of this fracture also provides the alignment for some of the later axe carvings. That leaves us with three phases rather than two. There is another problem. Towards one end of the stone the cup-marks seem to run out, yet this is precisely the area in which the rock itself is substantially less weathered. How could this have happened? We can make a direct comparison with some of the standing stones in the vicinity (RCAHMS 1988, 126–43). They had been decorated over their entire surface, but, once erected, the basal section of the upright was protected from the elements. The density of cup-marks tends to be lower here, as if further carvings were added after the



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The cist below Nether Largie North cairn, Argyll, together with its decorated cover slab. Photograph: Historic Scotland.

stone was raised. Was the Nether Largie capstone originally a decorated menhir?

If so, where would it have stood? Inadequate as it is, the excavation report gives us certain clues. Under the cairn there were two small upright stones, one of them decorated with circles, and at roughly the same distance in from the edge of the cairn there was a pit, interpreted as a grave but without any associated finds, and two large stones lying flat. The entire arrangement was surrounded by a stone bank, open to the south-east (illus 47). This also pre-dated the final construction of the cairn. Might this have been the site of a stone circle, demolished when the burial mound was built? If so, the early enclosure could have been associated with the first stone setting. It even shares its axis with more than one of the sites at Temple Wood. In that case the cist slab at Nether Largie might have belonged to an earlier monument; it could have formed part of the circle itself, or more likely, it was a massive outlier. It may be no accident that a natural slab covered with cup-marks is found just beyond this monument (RCAHMS 1988, 118).

Now I recognise that the argument is tenuous, and that the site is too badly damaged for these ideas to be put to the test. Even so, it serves to introduce my main point in this lecture. Monuments exhibit more than a structural sequence; they also epitomise a creative process by which the significance of the past was constantly rethought and reinterpreted. Monuments were adapted and altered to conform with changing circumstances. In this way they provide a subtle index of deeper currents in society.

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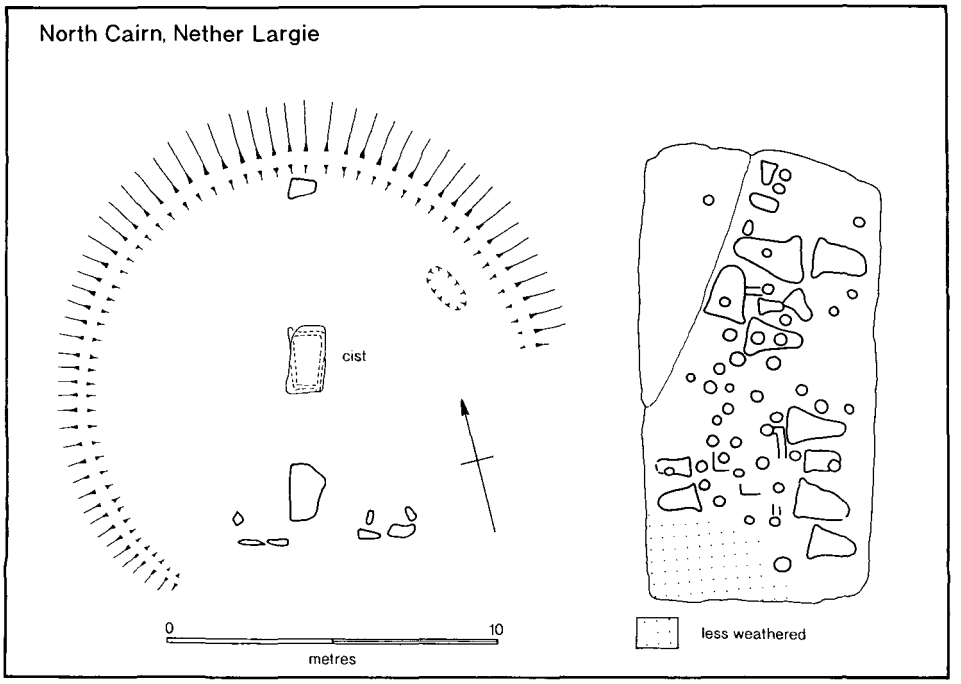

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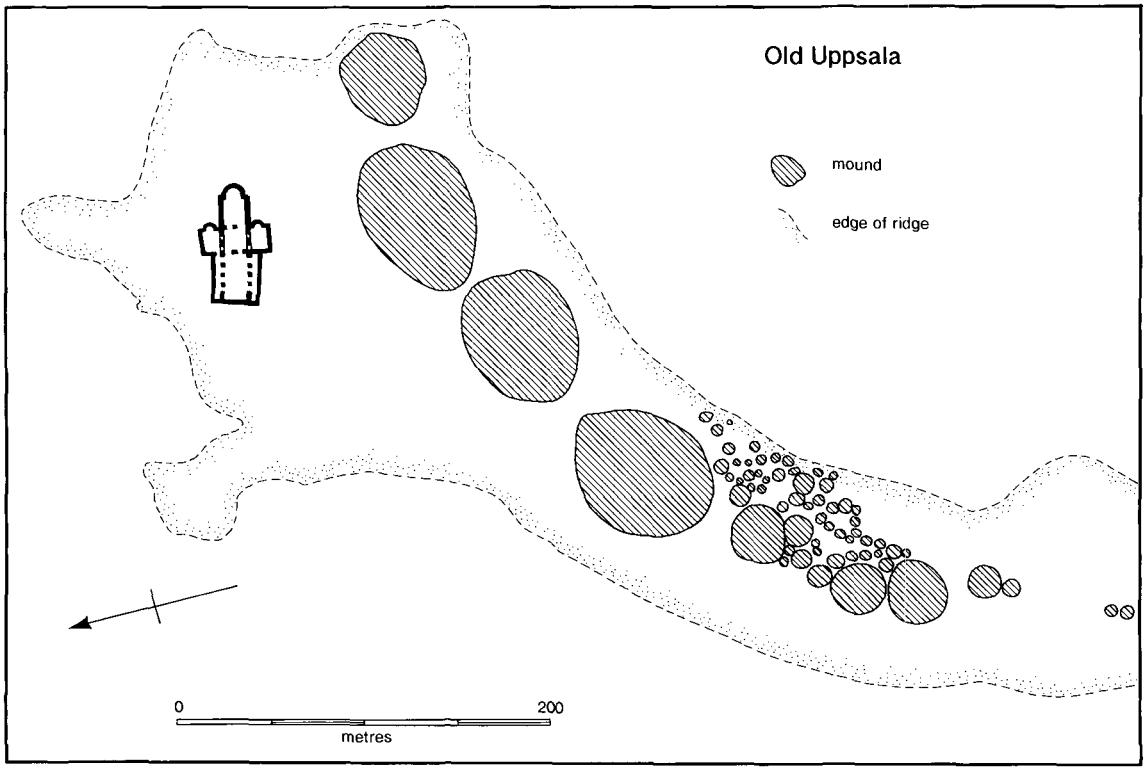
(Left) Outline plan of the excavated features below the North Cairn at Nether Largie (after Craw 1930). (Right) The positions of the carvings on the capstone, showing the line of the early fracture and the part of the stone with less weathering.

But to say that this particular sequence is illustrated at Nether Largie is to rely on a field record of very poor quality. To obtain a clearer illustration of this kind of sequence we must turn to an example from the borderland of history and prehistory. One of the most striking accounts of early Scandinavian society is the description by Adam of Bremen of his visit to the place that we know as Old Uppsala, perhaps the most impressive barrow cemetery in Sweden (Lindqvist 1936; illus 48). As a visitor in the 11th century, he was seeing a great ceremonial centre that had already been established for five hundred years. The mounds constructed at that time covered a series of burials of quite exceptional richness, but the sheer scale of those barrows might well have been influenced by much older constructions in this part of the country, for the surrounding area also contains some of the largest Bronze Age barrows in northern Europe (Jensen 1989, fig 8); the resemblance is so striking that one of these were excavated under the impression that it dated from the Migration Period. Those who created the cemetery at Old Uppsala may have found a source of inspiration in the past, but that is speculation. What is quite clear is that these newly-built mounds formed the focus for considerable activity in later periods, so that the same site was selected for a Viking cemetery. In Adam of Bremen's description the earthworks are no longer the burial places of particular individuals: they are treated as a single phenomenon. There was now a pagan temple on the site, containing images of the gods, and in his account the barrows come together to form a massive amphitheatre from which spectators could watch sacrifices taking place. Close to the temple was a sacred



48 Outline plan of the royal centre at Old Uppsala (after Lindqvist 1936).

tree. Old Uppsala was now a place of public assembly where the gods were worshipped by the Swedish kings. The sequence of interpretation and reinterpretation continued after Adam's time. By 1164 the pagan gods had been abandoned, but not the site, which was now the see of a Christian bishop.

This sequence involved interpretations of several kinds. The royal graves at Old Uppsala were covered by huge mounds that might well have been modelled on far more ancient prototypes: in a later period this is what happened at Jelling (Hvass 1991, fig 2). Long after their creation, Vikings reinstated its role as a cemetery, and yet by the time of Adam's visit the earthworks were no longer seen as the burial places of particular people: they had coalesced to form the stage setting for rituals involving the gods and the Swedish kings. The focus was no longer on the dead and their position in society; activity centred on a temple, on rituals and on sacrifice. Old Uppsala would change its identity again with the coming of Christianity. These are exactly the nuances that are lost when archaeologists treat each class of monument separately, or fail to appreciate the changing character of the sequence as a whole.

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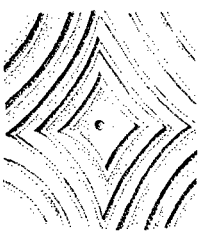
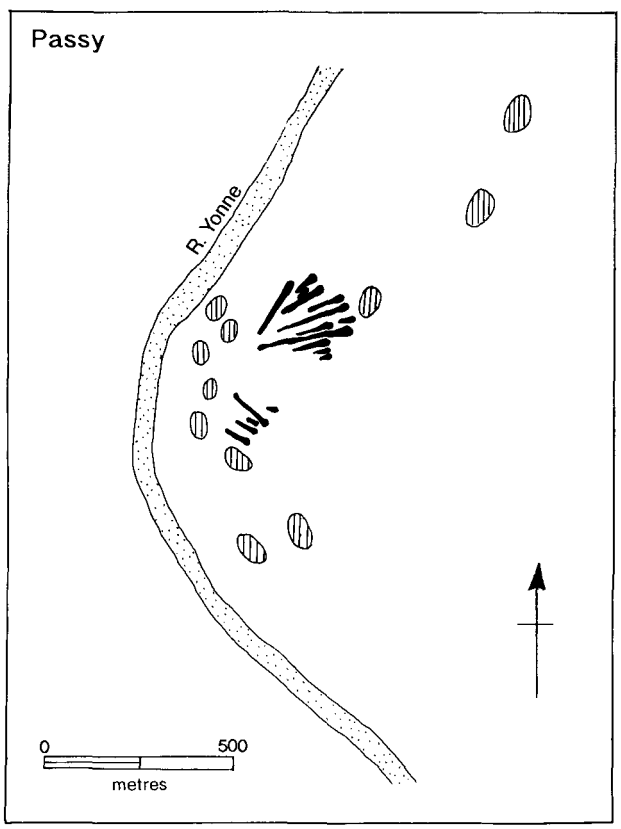
We can distinguish several different ways in which monuments could develop. Let us begin with Neolithic barrows and cairns. Some monuments never changed their character at all and their history was a short one. At Hazleton North it seems as if a chambered cairn was established, used and then sealed off over a few generations (Saville 1990). Although it occupied a place in the landscape that already had a history of its own, the building of this cairn was an event rather than a process, and it had a finite period of use. In other cases, monuments themselves may not seem to change but the deposits formed in and around them were subject to considerable revision. For example, Bakker's study of Dutch hunebedden suggests that some of them formed the focus for offerings over as many as 400 years (Bakker 1979). Ceramic vessels are especially numerous and appear in a restricted range of forms and decorative motifs. Their use remains unknown, although, as Sherratt suggests, they may have formed stereotyped sets of drinking vessels (Sherratt 1991, 56–7). It is particularly revealing that these deposits usually span several phases, while the finds from contemporary settlement sites cover a much shorter time.

In other cases both the monuments and the deposits within them seem to change. We can consider West Kennet long barrow, like Hazleton North a megalithic tomb belonging to the Severn Cotswold group. In this case there are signs of a complicated structural sequence. The mound was approached through a massive forecourt, yet this was filled in during a later phase in the use of the site. The barrow itself was probably built in stages: first, a quite limited earthwork covering the stone chambers, and, later, a massive 'tail' added to the existing mound. More important, the human remains in the chambers were supplemented by a series of formal deposits extending over a period of perhaps a thousand years (Thomas & Whittle 1986). Similar deposits are found elsewhere in the vicinity. One feature that distinguishes this site from the Hazleton cairn is that newer monuments were established near to West Kennet long barrow. Apart from another long cairn, at Hazleton, they are rare.



That forms a link with those cases in which single monuments gradually develop into what we call monument complexes. Again, these come in more than one variety. In some cases they grow by replication, and here we encounter a whole series of constructions of very similar form. A good example is at Passy in eastern France where we find an entire cemetery of long mounds, laid out on two rather similar axes (Thevenot 1985, 199–207; Thevenot *et al* 1988, 58–60). The monument complex is aligned towards some of the areas of contemporary settlement (illus 49), but as so often happens in the Neolithic period, the massive scale of these mounds contrasts sharply with the ephemeral traces of domestic material in their vicinity. The houses of the dead outlasted the dwellings of the living population. This is especially striking in this case as the mounds were built on the site of an older settlement with more substantial domestic buildings.

The alternative is where sites change by diversification, so that monument complexes come into being that bring together a whole variety of different kinds of construction. A good example of this process occurs at Bougon in western France (Rapinot 1986, 458–9; Joussaume & Pautreau 1990, 173–81, 190–5). Here we find five megalithic monuments in the same complex (illus 50). At first sight both the major traditions of mortuary monuments are represented: an Atlantic tradition of building passage tombs with circular cairns, and the more widely distributed tradition of long mounds that we saw at Passy. Recent excavation shows that these monuments were built and rebuilt over more than a thousand years, but the most striking feature of this group is the way in which the forms of different structures were modified and revised. Thus the oldest cairn contains two passage graves, but one of these chambers was converted from a circular to a square ground-plan in order to conform with other developments on the site. At least one similar passage grave, originally contained within a round cairn, was incorporated in the end of a classic long barrow, and it seems quite possible that this mound was actually built to link two passage graves together.



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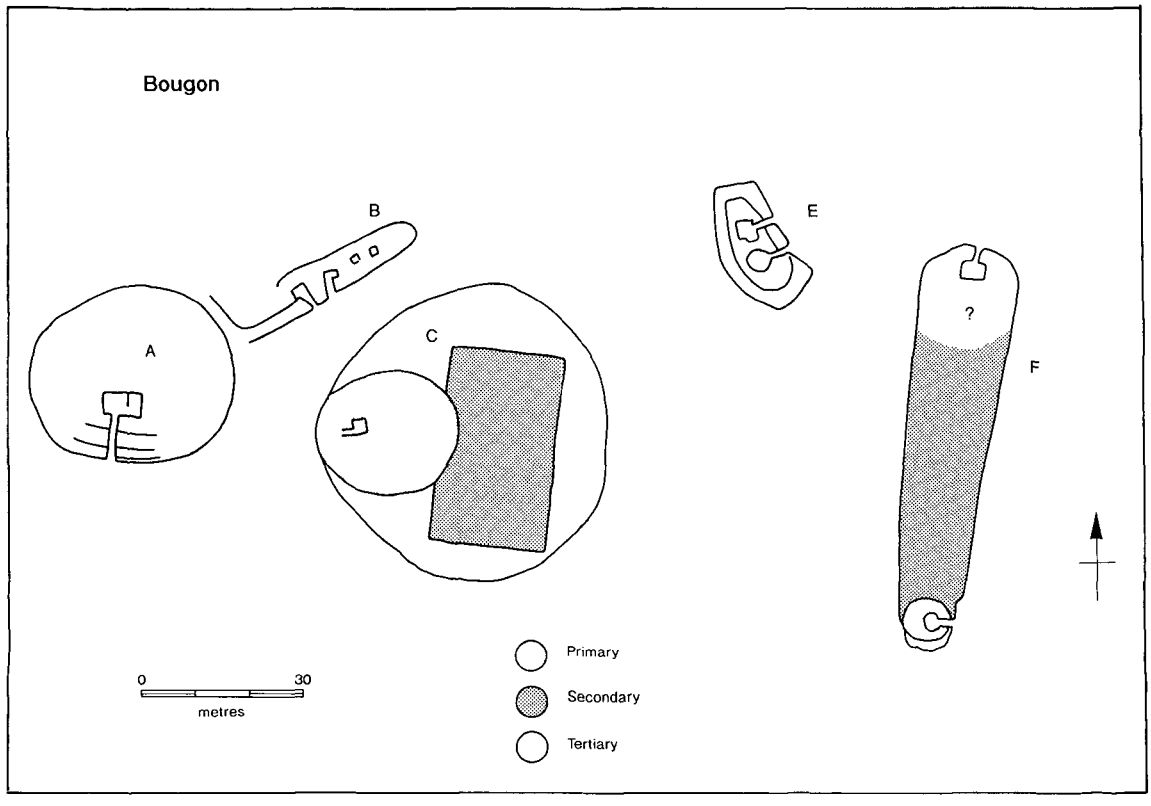
Outline plan of the cemetery of long mounds at Passy (black) in relation to areas of contemporary settlement (hatched). (Data from Thevenot *et al* 1988).

Another long mound contains small cists, but it also includes two rectangular passage tombs; again, it may have developed over a considerable period of time. A round cairn with a small stone chamber was apparently enlarged on at least two occasions, once by a rectangular cairn, yet a rather similar monument retained its original form throughout the use of the site although it included two series of burials belonging to quite different periods. The overall sequence is confusing, but its essential character is very easy to grasp. Individual monuments were reinterpreted and rebuilt to conform to changing conventions. They provide an important structural sequence, but they do more than that. They also illustrate how the changing character of the monuments plays on the associations of the site and how new constructions can take over the attributes of their predecessors.

In each case the process of interpretation and reinterpretation is not infinitely varied. Deposits are augmented or changed, the monuments themselves are altered, and new constructions modify our understanding of older ones. In most cases the process is exemplified by a fairly restricted range of architectural sequences. The history of Old Uppsala offers an important lesson here. It is not enough to document the use of monument complexes over long periods of time. In place of 'continuity' there may be evidence of change and reinterpretation. People take what they need from the past, and every reading is selective. Nevertheless, the development of new monuments alongside older examples provides evidence for this process in a particularly explicit manner. The sequence of construction and



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Outline plan of the megalithic cemetery at Bougon, indicating the possible structural sequence at individual monuments (data from Rapinot 1988 and Joussaume & Pautreau 1990). Note that this diagram summarises the likely phasing at individual monuments and not the sequence on the site as a whole. Sites A, B and E are shown in outline as their pattern of development is not yet clear.

modification embodied in a burial ground or a ceremonial centre offers a kind of narrative that is as close as prehistorians can come to writing a political history.

It may be helpful to work from the simple to the complex, and to begin this analysis with those processes affecting single monuments. With that as background, we can then confront the more intractable problems posed by the interpretation of monument complexes. The restricted distribution of such groups means that we must limit the discussion to sites in Britain and France.

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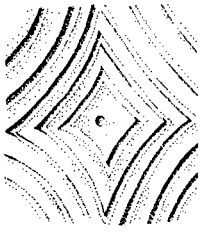
Not all human constructions are directed at posterity. There are ethnographic instances in which the act of creating something was the only significant feature. When that was complete, the structure had no further importance (eg Küchler 1987). We may find prehistoric monuments which were built and immediately levelled or left to decay. This process is difficult to interpret, but it should not be hard to recognise.

In other cases, we encounter the opposite sequence. This time, the ways in which monuments were constructed facilitated their maintenance over a long period. For example, the creation of earthworks with continuous flat-bottomed ditches, such as those on the major henge monuments, makes them relatively easy to maintain. The cellular construction of some long barrows and long cairns may also permit piecemeal repairs, rather like the hillfort ramparts constructed according to a similar principle (Guilbert 1975). There are other monuments where this could never apply, for example those enclosures defined by interrupted ditches or simply by rings of pits. This form of construction might owe something to the ways in which earthwork building was managed, but there are well-attested cases in which such features appear to have been filled in deliberately. On some sites the monument was never used again, but in other instances these pits were carefully reopened. In this case the very design seems to presuppose a pattern of discontinuous activity, and there are even sites at which the kinds of deposit in the fillings of the original features differ radically from those found in later recuts (eg Barrett *et al* 1991, table 3.12). At the same time, it may not be too much to envisage monuments only parts of which were visible at once. In my third lecture I mentioned the excavators' view that the Maxey cursus represents a project achieved over many generations; at any one time only short lengths of its ditch may have been open (Pryor & French 1985, ch 5). Where earthworks were recut after an interval, the process amounts to more than an episode of repair or maintenance. It may be better to think of it as a re-enactment of the original construction. This is especially true when an elaborate formal plan, such as that of a causewayed enclosure, was recreated after the ditches had filled up completely.



In other cases re-enactment may not be the right term to use and we find evidence of a more radical transformation. Sometimes this happens when the reconstructed monument takes a more durable form than its predecessor. An interesting example of this process is where timber-built monuments were replaced in stone. It would be very easy to see this as evidence of an essential continuity, but there are cases in which environmental evidence suggests an interval of disuse between the decay of

the timber uprights and the creation of a later stone setting. This is almost certainly the sequence at Mount Pleasant (Wainwright 1979, ch 2, ch 14), and probably at other sites, and in these cases a number of writers have emphasised how exactly the stone-built monument recreates the layout of a timber setting of which little trace could have remained above ground. These changes could even have been accompanied by a symbolic slighting or stripping of the remains of the older construction. A process of this kind may account for the burning of the timbers and even for a sequence like that at Machrie Moor (illus 51) where there is evidence of some kind of ploughing in between these two phases (Haggarty 1988).

Where the plan of a monument remains substantially unaltered, it is difficult enough to distinguish between repair and re-enactment, but it is still harder to understand sequences in which the monuments also changed their form. There are numerous possibilities, and I shall mention only a few of them here. The original significance of a monument might be enhanced by heightening, extension or expansion, as seems to happen at many individual sites. A few examples serve to illustrate this point. Many of the earthworks that we describe as burial mounds were built up over a considerable period of time, and in cases like Bougon where adequate records exist, it is clear that not every addition to these earthworks coincided with the deposition of burials: some merely affected the scale or appearance of the monument. In the same way, mounds or enclosures could easily be lengthened to create a more striking visual effect. This is perhaps the process that led to the creation of cursuses and bank barrows. But the process involved much more

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Prehistoric stone setting on Machrie Moor, Arran. Photograph: Historic Scotland.

than an increase in the size of such monuments, for in certain cases it also brought changes to their form and symbolic significance.

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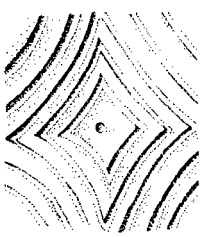
The classic example of this process of enlargement is provided by the Carnac tumuli, for these can be regarded as enormously enhanced versions of the tertres tumulaires found in this region of Brittany, those low mounds marked by menhirs that I considered in my second lecture. But in the process of their development the affinities of the Carnac mounds were modified, and tombs of a quite different kind – passage graves – were built against their flanks (Giot *et al* 1979, 218–25). Their relative chronology is disputed, but here we see both the expansion of one kind of monument and the assimilation of another. In like manner, a number of long barrows on the river gravels in England were rebuilt as circular mounds during the Neolithic sequence, so that their basic affinities were altered from a well-established local form of mortuary monument to a tradition of round barrows with quite different symbolic and geographical references (eg Bradley & Chambers 1988). Similar revisions could be effected through the incorporation of relics, in the way that we have already observed in the case of menhirs.

Sometimes the changes that we can recognise on individual sites had other connotations. One particular example is the way in which a number of monuments seem to have been converted from a lunar to a solar alignment during the Neolithic period in Britain. This can be recognised at several levels. There are instances in which the orientation of particular sites was changed as part of the broader sequence of adaptation and reconstruction. This is clearly documented at Stonehenge (Burl 1987, ch 4). The earliest enclosure on this site shares a lunar axis with the nearby long barrows, but the building of the Greater Cursus overlaid this pattern with an alternative alignment on the equinoctial sunrise. Subsequently the entrance to the henge monument was moved to reflect this newer symbolism, and in time the solar axis was given even greater emphasis by the creation of an avenue leading into the surrounding landscape. A rather similar arrangement is evident with the Dorset Cursus which imposed a massive solar alignment on a pattern of existing long barrows which seem to have been directed towards the rising moon (Barrett *et al* 1991, 56).

This last case introduces yet another process in the history of individual monuments, but one which is found very widely. This is where monuments of quite different types and associations are superimposed on one another, as if to subvert the existing meaning of a particular construction. As with the change from timber to stone circles, this development could be emphasised by destroying the older monument, or even by ploughing the site before rebuilding commenced. The pattern is most obvious in those cases where the successive monuments show no resemblance to one another at all. For example, the Maiden Castle bank barrow cuts straight across an existing causewayed enclosure (Sharples 1991, 255–6), whilst the enclosures at Fornham All Saints stand in the same relationship to a cursus monument (Hedges & Buckley 1981, 8). A henge at Thornborough was built on top of another cursus (*ibid*, 31–2) and forms part of a line of circular monuments



which cut across its axis at ninety degrees. There can be a comparable relationship between enclosures and mounds. At Bryn Celli Ddu it seems as if a small passage tomb was superimposed on a ditched enclosure containing a setting of stones (Lynch 1991, 91–101, 339). Rather the same sequence is found at Callanish (P Ashmore pers comm; illus 52), whereas at Newgrange a massive timber circle was built after the collapse of the passage tomb (Sweetman 1985).

Some monuments reveal several changes of this kind. Consider the evidence from Maxey in Cambridgeshire (Pryor & French 1985, ch 2). Here we find an unusual juxtaposition of monuments of different types: an oval barrow, a cursus, two pit circles, a henge and an outsize round barrow, perhaps of Late Neolithic date. Their precise sequence is a matter for discussion but the broad outlines are clear (illus 53). The cursus is probably later than a nearby causewayed enclosure and it obviously pre-dates one of the pit circles, as well as the massive henge. The other chronological relationships are more tenuous, and my interpretation is not the only possibility.

The cursus may have been intended to include the position of the oval barrow, but it is just as likely that this barrow was erected later, within the path of the cursus itself. At all events two pit circles were created nearby, each of them offset from the long axis of the barrow, and one of them cutting across the earthwork of the cursus. Whilst the long barrow still survived, it was incorporated into the entrance of a henge, and at the centre of that new enclosure a massive round barrow was built. This was not perfectly circular and took its long axis from the oval mound. The ditch of the henge was filled in, whilst the same sequence took place during the first structural phase of the round barrow, a circular enclosure with an internal

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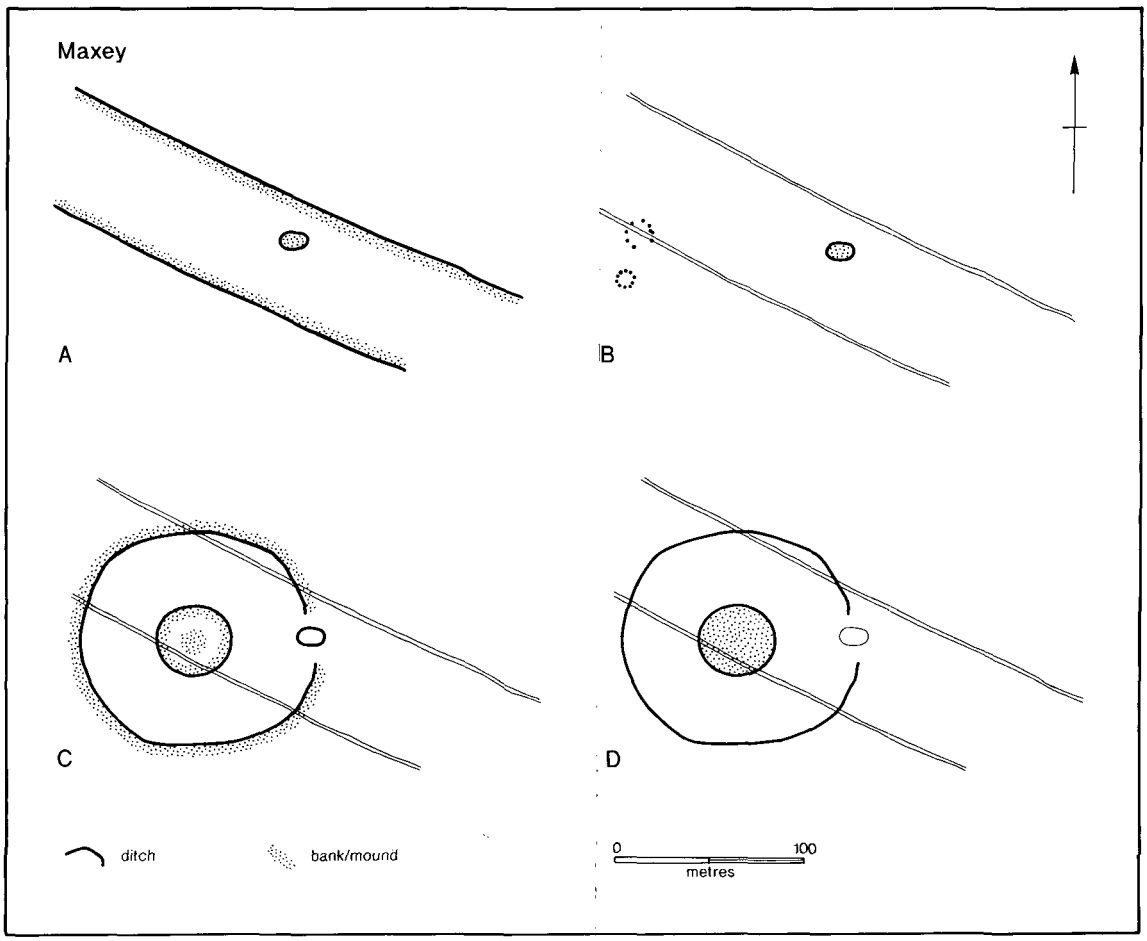
Part of the stone circle at Callanish, Lewis, with the remains of a small passage tomb in the foreground. Photograph: Historic Scotland.

bank and a central mound built of turf. That mound was subsequently enlarged into a massive round barrow filling the entire area inside the older ring ditch.

It is not certain that the henge and the barrow were constructed simultaneously, but the final phase of this mound almost certainly post-dates the levelling of the henge. The juxtaposition of so many monuments cannot be coincidental, since alignments between different earthworks seem to have been important, but the sheer variety of different constructions at this one location suggests that the precise significance of this place underwent radical revision. In the development from causewayed enclosure to cursus, and from cursus to henge, we may claim that we have the orthodox sequence for eastern England, but that misses the point. Most of these monuments were built at exactly the same location and in such a way that each clearly took into account the existence of its predecessor. Rather than thinking of this simply as a stratigraphic sequence, we might consider it as evidence for the ways in which the significance of a single place was reinterpreted over hundreds of years.

So far I have traced the changing history of a number of monuments and the ways in which their meanings may have been modified in successive stages of their history.



53 The likely sequence of monuments on the site of the Maxey henge. (Data from Pryor & French 1985).

The process extends from subtle modifications by accretion to their destruction and replacement. But in one sense this evidence is atypical, for the argument rests on the evidence of individual sites when such changes are more often found extending across a wider landscape. How were changes effected on this larger geographical scale?

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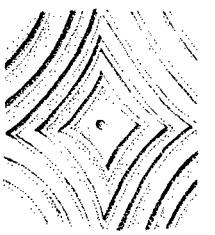
In most areas it seems likely that we can identify one primary 'founder' monument, although that is not to deny that these locations may have achieved their significance at a still earlier date. Founder monuments may undergo a process of change and modification along the lines that I have indicated, but it is just as common for them to provide the focus for a series of offerings without any rebuilding at all. For example, one of the cursus monuments mentioned earlier – the Dorset Cursus – clearly provided the focus for a whole series of earthworks and formal deposits despite the fact that its own earthwork was never modified or maintained. It simply established an axis around which later activity was structured (Barrett *et al* 1991, ch 2-4). That accounts for the paradoxical situation that so much Late Neolithic activity focuses on earthworks whose sequence of building and rebuilding ended centuries before (Pryor in press).

Often the founder monument becomes the central point in a wider distribution of sites. But in other cases their spatial relationship can be rather more distinctive. Newer monuments may be aligned directly on existing structures in the landscape, or in appropriate cases they may echo the alignment of the founder monument itself. Alternatively the first monument in such a complex may be drawn into a quite new setting. Sometimes this happens through the process of structural modification that I have described already, but in other cases there may be more direct signs of incorporation. This happens, for example, where a later monument takes in constructions already present in the landscape. Examples might include the incorporation of Breton long mounds in the course of the Carnac alignments or the similar treatment of barrows and small enclosures by cursuses in the British Isles.

One striking feature of these developments is the way in which monuments seem to multiply. A single founder monument appears to spawn a burgeoning variety of other monuments around it, so, for example, a single cursus may provide the focus for a whole series of barrows or hengiform enclosures. Often these sites are only slightly different from one another, yet, once established, they too experience a complex sequence of refurbishment and modification. Indeed, it is perfectly possible that the process I am describing within monument complexes as a whole also takes place on a smaller scale in relation to their individual components. The effect is of a series of Chinese boxes. Thus the Stonehenge area contains a number of henge monuments, most of them built in relation to the distribution of older earthworks, yet inside the largest of these sites – at Durrington Walls – we find evidence of a number of similar constructions (RCHME 1979, 15–18).



At the same time, we can be misled by the most visible components of these complexes into forgetting that among the integral features of these places are formal deposits of cultural material. These are found not only within the features of specific

monuments, but also in pits across the supposedly empty areas in between them. For example, both Durrington Walls and Woodhenge certainly contain a wide array of deposits of cultural material, but some of the most unusual finds come from the surrounding area. Indeed, at one site it is known that the positions of pit deposits of this kind had been marked by cairns (Stone 1935). In this sense even pits may once have constituted small-scale monuments. The same is suggested by a recently published excavation at Lawford in Essex, where an unusual deposit of pottery and other artefacts seems to have been enclosed by a ditch (Shennan *et al* 1985).

Another striking concentration of henges is found in the Milfield Basin of north Northumberland (Harding 1981; Miket 1985). Here a number of small enclosures are ranged in a line across the lower ground, but appear to be directed towards both cultural and natural features in the surrounding area. Those cultural features include post settings and standing stones, whilst some of the henge monuments are aligned on distant mountaintops. In contrast to some of my earlier examples, there is no evidence that these sites made use of astronomical observations. At the same time, this complex provides so far unparalleled evidence for the subdivision of the areas in between these henges. A number of pit alignments have been discovered, and it seems likely that these are the remains of internal boundaries within the monument complex (Miket 1981).

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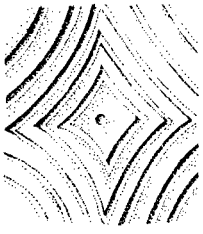
At this point it may be useful to turn our attention to some more sustained archaeological examples. I should make it clear that what follows is my own interpretation of the archaeological sequence of two sites in the Thames valley which are only six kilometres apart: the cemetery at Barrow Hills, Radley and the cursus complex at Dorchester on Thames. Radley is only published in interim form at present (Lambrick 1990, 10–13), whilst my reading of the structural sequence at Dorchester differs in minor ways from the definitive publication of the site, soon to appear (Atkinson *et al* 1951; Bradley & Chambers 1988). Fortunately, in both cases the character of the overall sequence is not in any dispute.

In some respects the two sequences complement one another; most of the monuments at Dorchester on Thames are Neolithic; many of those at Radley are Bronze Age. We begin with Dorchester on Thames (illus 54). Here it is no longer possible to identify a single founder monument; there seem to be several candidates, and more than one earthwork may have been present from the outset. The earliest features that we can trace appear to be two elongated enclosures, each associated with fragmentary human remains. Both share the same alignment and could have been directed towards the rising moon. The smaller enclosure may also have been aligned on two small mounds, one at either end, although this is not known for certain. One was a round barrow and the other has more in common with the last long barrows.



The first major modification happened when the Dorchester on Thames cursus was built. As we saw on other sites, this adopted a solar alignment, and the eastern section of the monument appears to have been directed towards the midwinter sunrise.

Its surviving terminal incorporated one of the existing enclosures, whilst the course of the monument cut through the long axis of the other one, changing the orientation of the complex as a whole. It also abutted one of the existing mounds, and after the cursus had been built, that earthwork was recreated, changing its outward form from an oval barrow to a round mound (cf Thomas, J 1991, 158–62).

Once that alignment had been established, it influenced the orientation of newer monuments in this complex. A series of small enclosures were built in and around the cursus, all of which were aligned along its main axis. These enclosures took several forms: they could be defined by continuous ditches, by rings of pits, or by a circle of posts, but all came to form the focus for a similar series of deposits in their upper levels. These included human cremations, burnt animal bones and a small selection of elaborate artefacts. On at least one site an existing monument was modified so as to conform to the new scheme, and a ring of pits or possibly post sockets was cut into the structure of an older round barrow; this enclosure had a single entrance facing into the cursus. The finds from the monument also included

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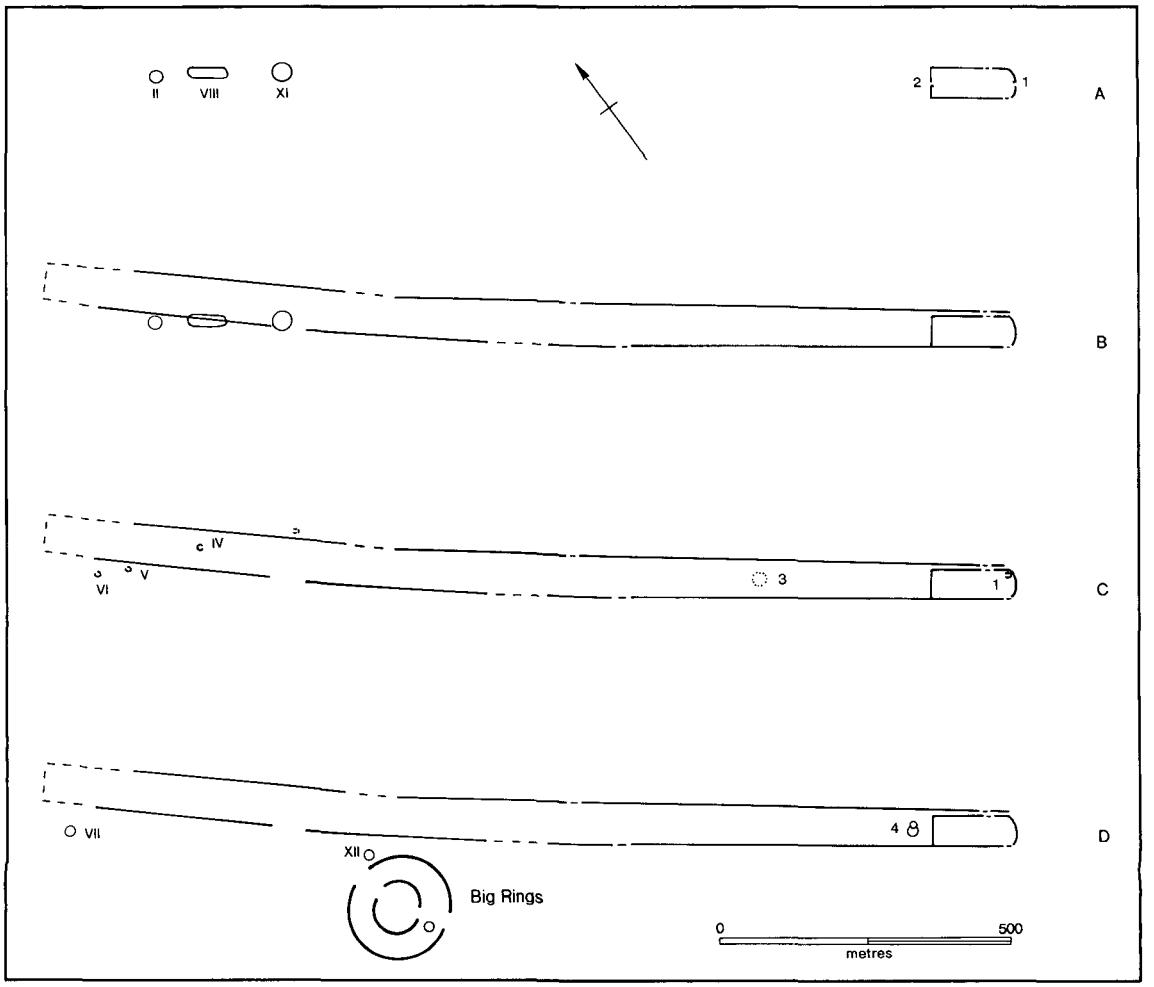
The likely sequence of development in the monument complex at Dorchester on Thames (after Bradley & Chambers 1988).

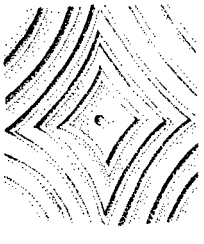


cremated human bone. Although little detail is available, it seems likely that similar deposits were placed in pits in between the monuments.

A common feature of the small enclosures established in and around the cursus was their characteristic sequence of filling and recutting, generally taking place within individual pits; I have discussed similar practices already. This contrasts with the next stage in the sequence when a large henge monument, much like that at Thornborough, was established next to the cursus. Its relationship to earlier monuments is revealing. In contrast to the hengiform enclosures, this had a massive flat-bottomed ditch which could be maintained over a lengthy period, and in this case there is no sign of the characteristic sequence of filling and recutting. In contrast to the other monuments, it contained deposits of Beaker pottery. Its alignment was quite different from the axis established by the cursus, but like the henge monument at Maxey, this site incorporated an existing barrow or circular enclosure in its entrance.

That henge monument then assumed a role as the focus for a barrow cemetery of Beaker and Early Bronze Age date. One mound was built against its entrance and another in the centre of the Neolithic cursus. The remaining barrows extended right across the surrounding area. There is even evidence for the deposition of a human cremation on the site of a nearby post circle several hundred years after the building itself had been destroyed by fire.

This sequence illustrates some of the points that I made earlier. There is a striking difference between the cursus, the large henge and virtually all the other monuments on the site. The largest monuments were clearly built to last and their earthworks were constructed in such a way that they could easily be maintained. This did not apply to most of the smaller enclosures, where the archaeological sequence involved episodes of construction, reconstruction and the careful deposition of cultural material. Secondly, the changes of alignment illustrated by this complex have a much wider resonance. The first monuments seem to have adopted a lunar alignment, but this was entirely changed by the imposition of the cursus which dictated a new axis for the complex as a whole. Similarly, that alignment was finally abandoned when the large henge monument was built. Again, the construction of a major earthwork corresponds with wider changes in the character of this site, and in particular, its development as a barrow cemetery. Lastly, the entire sequence involves a subtle interplay between new developments and modifications to the forms of existing monuments. Thus the change from a solar to a lunar alignment also required the reorientation of older earthworks, which were brought together as component parts of a new design. In just the same way, when the main henge monument was built, its entrance seems to have incorporated a mound or enclosure located alongside the cursus: we saw exactly the same relationship at Maxey. In other cases the same changes were achieved by modifying the form of existing features. That may be why an oval barrow was reconstructed as a round mound, belonging to a quite different tradition of earthwork building, and why in a later phase at least one of the mounds was replaced by a pit or post circle related to the structure of the small henges found on the site. At one level we can talk of modification; at another, of reinterpretation.

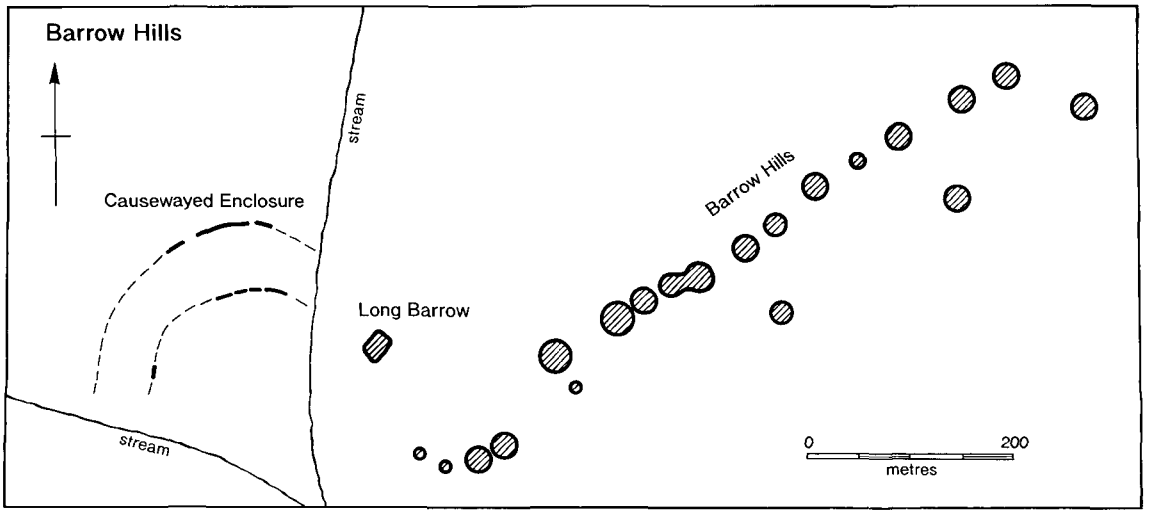


It was as this distinctive sequence came towards its end that the major period of activity began at Barrow Hills, and in this case we encounter a strikingly different pattern. Again a number of monuments were established following a single alignment, but at this site the focal point was a causewayed enclosure (illus 55). This had been accompanied by another late long barrow, as well as a series of mortuary deposits, but the earthwork had experienced no structural changes for several centuries, and Late Neolithic artefacts are rare in its secondary levels.

The later monuments at Barrow Hills also follow a single alignment, but in this case it consists of two rows of circular mounds and other features directed towards the position of the older enclosure. The first of these were probably built towards the end of the Neolithic period, whilst the others, mainly conventional round barrows, span the Beaker ceramic phase and the full extent of the Early Bronze Age. Many of the mounds underwent substantial modification during their history, accompanied by a wide variety of mortuary deposits. In fact some of the graves contained an unusually varied range of artefacts. In a few cases monuments of different kinds may have replaced one another directly, most obviously a pond barrow which was superimposed on the remains of a Neolithic ring ditch. In turn the outer ditch of a round barrow cut through the filling of this feature.

These prominent monuments were supplemented by specialised deposits. Late Neolithic pits were found near to the early ring ditches and again they seem to have been filled with a certain formality. The basic axis of the cemetery was also echoed by a row of urned cremations. There were a significant number of other deposits of human bone within the apparently empty spaces in between the mounds. The orientation of the cemetery never changed, yet by the time that this complex achieved its fullest extent, the causewayed enclosure had remained unaltered for more than a thousand years.

In this case there is less evidence of change than we saw at Dorchester on Thames. The cemetery retained a single axis throughout its history, and the role of the



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Outline plan of the cemetery at Barrow Hills in relation to the Abingdon causewayed enclosure. (Data from Lambrick 1990 and Bradley in press).

causewayed enclosure as the founder monument never seems to have been challenged. Despite its considerable antiquity, it remained the focus of the barrow cemetery from the Late Neolithic period until the end of the Early Bronze Age. In this case we can supplement the evidence from the excavated monuments by a wide variety of deposits found in the surrounding area. By no means all of these contained human remains, but they still served to emphasise the alignment followed by the monuments of the cemetery.

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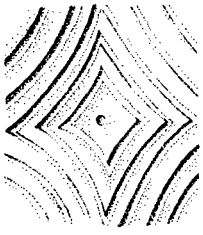
We have now considered the development of individual monuments and the growth of two representative monument complexes. It is when we combine the two that certain broader trends become apparent, and, I suggest, it is these that have most to tell us about the logic of monument building.

Again it will be helpful if we focus on a few well-documented contrasts. First of all, it is worth distinguishing between the multiplication of virtually identical monuments in the same complex and the presence of a greater variety of constructions. Thus the Milfield Basin contains a strikingly uniform range of small henge monuments, spaced across a considerable area of land (Harding 1981; Miket 1985). Those differences that are apparent between them can only be recognised as a result of excavation, and, as we shall see, they owe less to contrasts that were evident from the start than they do to divergent sequences of development. At the other extreme are monument complexes like those known close to Avebury or Mount Pleasant, where the effect of recent fieldwork has been to increase the sheer variety of information that is available. Such areas include the conventional range of long barrows, causewayed enclosures and henges, but they also contain monuments that are very far from standard. There is the enormous pit circle of Maumbury Rings and the palisaded enclosure under the modern town of Dorchester (Bradley 1975; Woodward *et al* 1984); and at Avebury there is Silbury Hill and the array of palisaded enclosures found nearby (Whittle 1991).

Secondly, the similarities that are apparent between monuments in the same complexes should not blind us to the fact that these sites can be associated with material culture or depositional practices of strikingly different types. For example, in the Milfield Basin three monuments apparently of similar form and date have radically different artefact associations: Beaker pottery in one case, and in the other instances two variant forms of Grooved Ware. In south Dorset, large amounts of Grooved Ware and its associated artefacts have been found in the perimeter of Mount Pleasant (Wainwright 1979), but the palisaded enclosure at Greyhound Yard contains very little material (Woodward *et al* 1984). Maumbury Rings, on the other hand, was quite prolific (Bradley 1975), but the deposits on this site have little in common with the practices evidenced at Mount Pleasant and are much more like those in the pit circle henge at Wyke Down thirty kilometres away (Barrett *et al* 1991, 92–106).



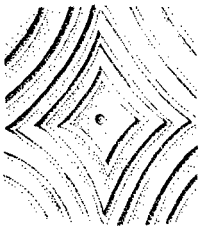
There is a still more important distinction to be made in the developmental sequence at different monuments. In some cases, for example in the Milfield

Basin, the original henges were strikingly uniform and what differences can be recognised arise from contrasting sequences of development on individual sites. Thus some of these sites remained as simple enclosures, whilst others contained settings of timbers and possibly of upright stones. In some cases the original enclosure was also contained inside a wider setting of uprights, whilst the central area of the site could eventually be used for burial. Very much the same sequence could be present at stone circles in northern Britain. In fact, a particularly striking example is provided by Temple Wood.

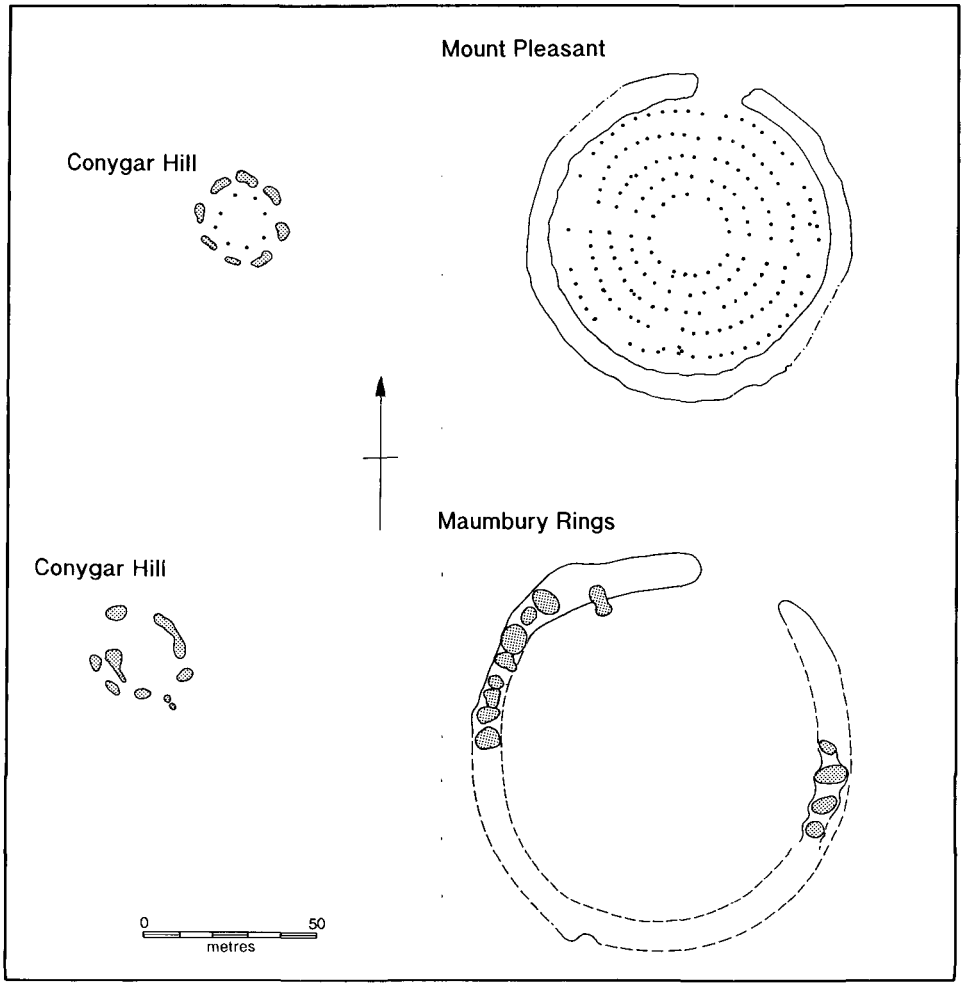
On the other hand, the monuments in the Milfield Basin remain small scale. They exhibit a very limited range of sizes, and in this sense they constitute what John Barnatt calls an 'equal component' monument complex (1989, 153). This is by no means universal, and almost as often we find evidence that one particular monument has been built on a far larger scale than all the others. This might be a henge monument like Avebury, a mound like Silbury Hill or an immense passage grave like that at Knowth, but the contrast is very evident. For example, we need to ask ourselves why south Dorset contains such a remarkable range of Late Neolithic enclosures, entirely dominated by a few sites built on a larger scale than their counterparts in the same area. By contrast at Knowlton, only thirty kilometres away, the range of structures appears to be more limited (RCHME 1975, 113–15). Three of the henges are of the same order of magnitude, whilst only the Great Circle has been built on a larger scale.

The comparison becomes even more revealing when we recognise two other features of these groups. There seems to be evidence for a process by which each complex is dominated by only one outsize monument of any single kind; this is essentially a much more massive version of the features found elsewhere in the same complex. Thus Maumbury Rings is a massive version of the simple pit circles found nearby on Conygar Hill (Woodward & Smith 1987, 84–6; illus 56), whilst Mount Pleasant illustrates the same process as it affects timber circles. I also mentioned the cemetery at Knowth. Here the stratigraphic sequence is particularly revealing (Eogan 1986, ch 2, ch 3). A ring of small passage tombs of uniform size were built facing into what seems to have been an empty area. That space was later appropriated by a gigantic circular mound, which clearly overlay two of the existing constructions. It is as if certain complexes are distinguished by containing one enormous example of a particular kind of monument. In most areas its construction seems to close off further development.

It may be no accident that complexes with one dominant monument of this kind often occur in a similar setting. One effect of systematic field survey has been to show that some of the largest monuments were located in areas with quite a low density of surface finds. Much the same amount of material occurs elsewhere in the surrounding region. But if these monument complexes do not seem to have been at the heart of the settlement pattern, they certainly occupied locations that were readily accessible; for example, the small groups of monuments in the Upper Thames valley are nearly always located at the confluence of the river and its tributaries (Thomas, J 1991, figs 7.3, 7.4). On a national level it has been suggested that important monuments were built in such places in order to command the major



routes by which exotic artefacts were distributed. I would propose an amendment to this argument. In general terms it is the largest monument complexes, and those with the widest range of structures, that seem to form the focus for concentrations of non-local objects. These sites may also include a range of structural elements that are unusual or absent in the surrounding area. In each case we can make rather similar observations: these complexes were located for ready accessibility; they could have drawn on a particularly large catchment; and they contain an abnormally wide range of references to distant places and practices, both through the character of the associated artefacts and through the occasional echo of exotic building traditions. All these elements tend to be found together, so that the Avebury complex, for example, includes an usually wide range of non-local axes but also contains an outsize mound whose likely prototypes may be in Ireland or northern England. In the same way, the enormous monuments around Carnac are closely linked with a concentration of imported artefacts or raw materials. At one level we can recognise a contrast between monument complexes like those in Northumberland, which seem



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The range of sizes shown by monuments of the same kind at Dorchester, Dorset. (After Bradley 1975, Wainwright 1979 and Woodward & Smith 1987).

to emphasise the importance of place, and others where the form and associations of these sites suggest a greater emphasis on networks. In this case the range of monument types is echoed by the range of exotic references.

In his study of Neolithic Orkney, Colin Renfrew accounts for this paradoxical situation by suggesting that social networks were established through the use of certain places for pilgrimage (1985, 255–6). There may be something in the idea. But that interpretation would account for only some of these observations. He is surely right to identify the the importance of non-local elements, but in itself his argument is not sufficient to explain the distinctive way in which these complexes developed through time.

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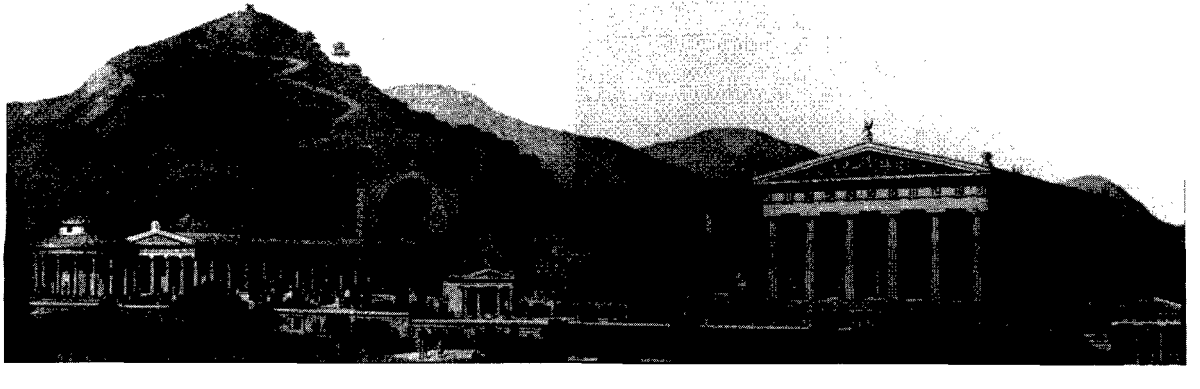
I began with an analogy from the historical period. I would like to end by comparing the development of monument complexes with some evidence from the Classical world. The so-called inter-polity sanctuaries such as Delphi and Olympia have certain characteristics in common with these monument complexes (illus 57). Again the major constructions never appear in isolation. These sites contain a whole series of temples and treasuries operated by different *poleis* (Morgan 1990). The sanctuaries are outside the ambit of normal settlement and form a focus not only for dealings with the gods but also for highly formalised competition between the constituent groups. This is most evident from the famous institution of the games, but it is also illustrated by the practice of erecting conspicuous statues to the victors, statues which could be identified with the polities from which they came (Raschke 1988). There may be further evidence of competitive emulation in other media. The provision of votive offerings is a major feature of the sanctuary sites and the emphasis on the deposition of arms and armour suggests that this process could amount to a kind of surrogate conflict. Moreover, Anthony Snodgrass (1986) has argued that the building of temples and treasuries was yet another example of a process of political competition played out through ritual and ceremonial. Temples or treasuries in widely separated areas were built to copy, and



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A 19th century reconstruction of the sanctuary at Olympia. (From Gardner 1925.)

even to trump, one another's distinctive architecture. Nearly all these interpretations are controversial, but it is certainly true that these kinds of display and competition are found away from the core areas of the contending parties and at a time when Greek society was undergoing a dramatic change.

Of course it would quite wrong to suppose that the Greek sanctuaries provide a close analogy for the monument complexes that we find in Britain and north-west France. What they do provide is a graphic example of two much wider principles: the subdivision of the ritual arena between different groups who were not ordinarily resident in the area; and a process by which strains between those communities might be played out through the media of ritual and monument building. It is at this level that our discussion is best conducted.

I have argued that a process of interpretation and reinterpretation was fundamental to the development of prehistoric monuments and monument complexes. It accounts for a whole series of distinctive patterns in the way in which these sites developed over time, but the grouping of superficially similar constructions in the same location has always posed special problems, and these are not addressed by treating the complex as a whole as some kind of 'central place'. This does not take into account enough of the available evidence (cf Bonnanno *et al* 1990). Monuments that were very similar in form in fact developed side by side, accompanied by deposits containing non-local artefacts or items of material culture that referred to connections with distant areas. Some of the monuments also incorporated structural devices that were best matched in remote parts of the country, as if to reinforce the message provided by the consumption of exotica. There seems to be a relationship between the sheer scale of different monument complexes and their siting at particularly accessible positions in the landscape, as if labour might have been contributed by people coming from a considerable area. Most important of all, certain of these sites witness the growth of one dominant monument at the expense of all the others, as if contests over the right interpretation of the world were to be settled by the sheer scale of the construction project.

All these elements appear to be related to one another, and they form the culmination of a process of interpretation and reinterpretation that in some areas had been going on for hundreds of years. However different the emphases shown by local developments, the end of the sequence often looks the same, for the construction of one enormous monument served both to fix what had previously been a partial view of the world and to bring this entire process to an end. It is followed by the adoption of new practices and a new material culture, both of which demonstrate even more explicitly the role of powerful groups. It may be no coincidence that the areas which saw the most energetic competition in the construction and operation of monuments also saw the precocious adoption of new forms of display in life and death. The sequences treated in such detail in the closing section of this lecture entered a new phase with the adoption of Beaker pottery and metalwork. It is my contention that this should not be seen as the advent of a new system, sweeping away the traditions that had served the population for a millennium. For the parties involved it was nothing less than the logical culmination of that process.