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**Book Review: Richard Bradley, *The Prehistory of Britain and Ireland*.  
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, xvii+321pp., illus., pbk,  
ISBN 978 0 521 61270 8)**

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*Prehistoric Figurines* is a refreshing and original way of considering prehistoric anthropomorphic figurines, without letting oneself be driven astray by the multiple existing interpretative currents, while being, so to speak, involved personally, that is with an individual gaze in their examination. In fact, if the strictly archaeological parts of the book investigate extensively and precisely the available data and the theoretical parts include an impressive array of cases, circumstances, and categories of evidence originating mostly from visual culture, brilliantly and fruitfully transposed to the Neolithic miniatures, both parts also lead to a self-interrogation on the power of representation and the influence that figurines may have on the individual spectator and/or user, ending in incessant questions towards new, promising directions.

It is obvious that such questions as asked by Bailey cannot be answered with definite statements, but this is not his objective anyway. Rather he aims at providing stimulation through questioning: 'it perhaps does not matter what the answer is; it matters more that we are provoked to think about these issues' (p.203). Figurines are stimuli to think with, which leave the spectators with as many (and perhaps more) questions as they had before looking at them. Indeed, one could not agree more with the idea that 'figurines ... are tools for thinking' (p.196).

## REFERENCE

BAILEY, D., 2007. The anti-rhetorical power of representational absence: incomplete figurines from the Balkan Neolithic. In C. Renfrew and I. Morley (eds), *Image and Imagination*: 111–120. Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research.

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Richard Bradley, *The Prehistory of Britain and Ireland*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, xvii+321pp., illus., pbk, ISBN 978 0 521 61270 8)

One of Europe's leading scholars on the Stone and Bronze Ages, Richard Bradley, presents in his new book an interpretative summary of the

prehistory of the British Isles, including the time up to the Roman conquest. Bradley has been very prolific during the last two decades; besides a great number of papers he has at times produced two books a year. Although he has been working in the Iberian Peninsula and in Scandinavia among other places, much of his research has focused on Great Britain and Ireland. Many readers will always look forward to Bradley's new books, and his new and detailed survey of the British Stone and Bronze Age will satisfy their expectations – it is a well-written composition of new interpretations based on his own and other scholars' investigations and recent publications.

Bradley's volume has a chronological outline. After an introductory policy statement, in which he states he will devote the same space to all periods, he starts with the early Stone Age and ends with the pre-Roman Iron Age. Rather than divide his book according to famous discoveries the different millennia have the same amount of pages independent of earlier research. This kind of plan could be seen as leading to a handbook of British archaeology, but that is not Bradley's aim. On the contrary, his aim is to present interpretations within a frame of social archaeology. Besides this theoretical approach he seeks to address two evident problems in contemporary British archaeology. First is the gap between contract archaeology and academic research. Second is the equally evident gap between Ireland and Great Britain, which in previous surveys have been described independently of each other.

The author has a wide circle of readers outside Great Britain, and he has endeavoured to make the book accessible even to those less familiar with its subject matter. Unlike some of his earlier books there are numerous instructive maps, and even though the book is printed in black and white the many illustrations, including both drawings and photographs, make it easy to follow the text, which is not weighed down by esoteric theories. Bradley himself is an eminent theorist but in this volume he lets the archaeological evidence be the starting point of the theoretical analyses, not the other way round.

Bradley's ambition to treat all periods at equal length could have been matched by a similar ambition concerning the chosen objects of study. In the introduction he states that he

will give priority to monuments, landscape and settlement patterns and less attention to objects and chronology. However, there is no even division between monuments, landscape, and settlements either. For a long time Bradley has been a prominent scholar of the interpretation of monuments and landscapes and they are dominant even in the present book.

The ambition to overcome the differences between contract archaeology and academic research is an important aspect of this book. Bradley describes a complex of problems and discussions which – sadly enough – are very familiar to a Swedish reader. I personally have experienced this discussion in Sweden for more than 40 years and its origin is even older than that. Bradley emphasizes several factors that concern countries beyond Great Britain. Although contract archaeologists are the most experienced and skilled in field investigations, they are unable to choose their own areas of investigation. This is an advantage as well as a constraint, as they are able to investigate landscapes and sites that have not been prioritized by university scholars.

In other words, Bradley has a positive view of contract archaeology and its many achievements. What he fails to discuss, however, are the negative scientific consequences of the bidding procedure concerning larger investigations. This aspect is very important for an evaluation of contract archaeology, both in Great Britain and in other countries.

Another aspect of contract archaeology that is missing in Bradley's book as a result of his focus on monuments is a history of ideas concerning archaeological artefacts. Initially over much of northern Europe Bronze Age archaeology was concerned primarily with graves because they were easy to identify in the landscape, while at the same time it was difficult to identify associated settlements. As a result, many pioneering archaeologists conducted analyses and detailed chronologies of the bronze objects found in these graves. In Scandinavia, for instance, knowledge of houses, settlements, and subsistence was more or less non-existent up to the 1970s. For about 100 years archaeologists have investigated mainly graves, often with rich metal finds. Since the 1970s, as a result of tougher heritage legislation, a rapidly increasing number of settlements have been investigated, often containing substantial amounts of ceramic finds

and animal bones but very few metal remains. These facts have several consequences. On one hand, modern contract archaeologists have become very skilled in classifying ceramic, stone, and flint objects as well as in interpreting subsistence practices and in dating houses. On the other hand they are nowhere near as experienced at analysing the bronze objects, which are necessary for understanding cultural and economic contact with foreign areas. Bradley's own familiarity with both those aspects does not diminish the need to attend to this problem amongst today's generation of Bronze Age scholars.

Bradley starts the book with an analysis of the geographical conditions of the British Isles, which are on the one hand a peripheral part of Europe (and once the Roman Empire) and on the other hand an island region that by necessity will have its own development in relationship to the nearest mainland and to more distant trade partners. By stating these specific qualities, Bradley provides several 'aha!' moments for non-British readers, who otherwise might regard the British Isles as central to European prehistory on the basis of their abundant monuments. Bradley also offers a good analysis of the relationship between those parts of Britain that were situated within the Roman Empire and those which were beyond the *Limes*. He describes the way the Romans and the ancient world regarded this part of Europe, though it is unclear why Bradley calls Agricola an 'emperor', which he certainly was not even if he was awarded several other glorious titles.

The abundant natural resources, especially metals, were an important aspect of the prehistory of the British Isles. Bradley states that domestic metals are significant for explaining the Beaker culture and the Early Bronze Age, when Britain was a part of a European network. Bradley focuses on bronze through the end of the Bronze Age and into the transition to the Iron Age. Just as he explains the rise of the early metal age by rich natural resources, he describes the end of the Bronze Age as an indication that both British and central European copper mining collapsed. He connects the diminishing amount of copper to over-exploitation and excessive funeral rites, which together lead to the collapse of the Bronze Age. This line of argument reminded me of earlier analyses of systems theory, especially since

Bradley several times uses the word 'collapse'. This also evokes earlier descriptions of the fall of the palace cultures in the eastern Mediterranean area. It would have been an advantage if Bradley had defined the term collapse explicitly in relation to the British Isles.

I was surprised also by Bradley's preference for the passive voice. Very often he states that Neolithic monuments 'were constructed', that houses 'were built' and that metals 'were imported'. Given the current ubiquity of the concept of agency these phrases seem to be vague and one wonders who actually carried out all these things. I absolutely do not mean that all scholars must surrender to the theoretical fashion of the day, but to the extent that Bradley deliberately chose to work in a different way it would be valuable for the reader if he had indicated his reasons for doing so, given his deep knowledge of theories of science.

Having said that, Bradley's book contains an excellent analysis of how individuals, groups, and societies performed common labour in agriculture, the result of which is still preserved (e.g. the large systems of tilled fields in the Dartmoor district). This is an exquisite discussion of the relationship between people, landscape, and subsistence from the middle part of the Bronze Age to the Roman period.

In his previous research Richard Bradley has treated the problem of the circle as a basic idea in the British conception of monuments, sites, and landscapes. In this new book he makes use of the term 'archetype' and, although he previously avoided it, the term seems very reasonable in the context of this discussion. The circular houses constitute one of the circular motifs during the Bronze Age and Bradley gives an exhaustive analysis of this phenomenon. It is regrettable that the generous illustrations do not show any profiles/ section plans of these houses, making it difficult to compare them with structural settlement evidence from beyond the British Isles.

Bradley is both an eminent scientist and an elegant writer. On account of the latter all his books are fascinating to read, and such is the case with this new survey of the Stone and Bronze Age in Great Britain and Ireland. It is very rich in details of archaeological sites while possessing a fluent and pleasant style. Those who have followed Bradley's research over previous decades might recognize his arguments

but the book still opens many new aspects of British archaeology, not least concerning the ambition to demonstrate the importance of contract archaeology for academic research. And for all those who want an actual scientific analysis of the enormous development of British Stone and Bronze Age research of the last decades this book is indispensable.

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Geraldine Stout and Matthew Stout,  
*Newgrange*. (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008,  
vi+122 pp., 70 illus, pbk, ISBN 978 185918 431 8)

Our relationship with Newgrange started as tourist-archaeologists during the 6th World Archaeology Congress, held in Dublin. After the visit, we were invited to write a review of this book, which we accepted immediately, since we were very impressed at having seen the most famous Neolithic passage tomb not only in Ireland but also in western Europe.

The book is intended to be a helpful guide to the visitors of the site and that is the reason why the authors have organized the chapters of the book in such a way as to replicate a visit to Newgrange. The four first chapters describe the architectural and artistic features of the passage tomb, followed by two other chapters on the ritual and social life around the site. Chapter 7 explores the artistic origins of Newgrange in its continental counterparts, and the final chapters deal with the more recent historical and archaeological story of the monument.

The first view we had of Newgrange when we visited was of the huge quartz white wall. The first chapter of the book is dedicated to its controversial reconstruction, the origin and transporting of the raw materials used to build the wall and the stone circle around the mound, and the significance of the tomb in its environment. Nevertheless, as soon as we approached the mound, our attention was immediately directed to the profusely decorated kerbstones around it. In the second chapter the authors present, both through descriptions and illustrations, the megalithic art on the passage tomb exterior, which is unique in Ireland, with a special focus on the decoration of the magnificent entrance kerbstone.