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The freely available volume *Giants in the Landscape* contains a wide range of topics on mid-Holocene monumentality across Europe, though there is only one paper from amongst the seven published which contains a fully developed skyscape theme. The various papers have been drawn from the 17th USIPP conference, held in Burgos, Spain from 1st to 7th September, 2014; specifically, those arising from the session “Monumentality and Territory”. This session had three basic themes. The first looked at the spatial dynamic between enclosures and tombs, and how this varied in different Neolithic contexts across Europe. The second theme considered the different ways domestic, symbolic and economic cultural features shaped the landscapes of prehistory. Lastly, territoriality and the positioning of monuments were explored. As well as this thematic division, the session also divided Europe into three main sectors. Timothy Darvill and Seweryn Rzepecki covered northern and eastern Europe, with their papers on the development in the architectural design of monuments and the close links between enclosures and tombs in both Britain and Poland. Claire Lietar’s work in the Paris Basin and Luc Jallot’s study in the Lower Languedoc were located in western continental Europe, where sites emerged in a non-synchronic fashion and may have been used to establish territoriality. Lastly, southern Europe was represented with research from Spain by Víctor Jiménez-Jáimez and José Enrique Márquez-Romero, and from Portugal by António Carlos Valera and Natalia Salazar Ortiz, who investigated symbolic and spatial relationships across complex sites.
Turning first to the only paper which contains a fully realised skyscape analysis, Valera’s “Ditched Enclosures and the Ideologies of Death” looks at sites from both the Late Neolithic and the Chalcolithic in southern Portugal. Valera (ERA Arqueologia S.A. Lisbon) contends that ditched enclosures played as important a role in the mortuary practices of the time as more obvious monuments such as megalithic graves. He points to our traditional acceptance that a dichotomy existed in prehistory between the domestic sphere, which dealt with the living, and ritual places, which dealt with the dead. But, in his view, there was a fusion between the two, with enclosures in particular creating an “inter-contextual” relationship (p. 69) between “profane ground versus […] sacred ground” (p. 81), not least because of the amount of funeral deposition found within them, similar in many ways to deposits found in tombs (p. 82). Enclosures, he writes, were as important in the shaping of “cosmogony” as were mortuary monuments (p. 69). Crucially, Valera makes note of the different relationships to the sky found at the five sites studied. He points out that a number of orientations were in place, either to the solstices, the equinoxes or the major lunar standstill (p. 70). These sites include Perdigões, Xancra, Santa Vitoria, Outeiro Alto 2 and Bela Vista 5, and according to Valera, the “cosmological order” of the communities who built them is informed by these connections with the rise and set of Sun and Moon on the local horizons involved (p. 70). In conclusion, Valera argues for a reassessment of the way we assume the domestic and sacred interwove in prehistory. He suggests there was a fusion between the two and that this indicates “a certain way of being in world” (p. 81). Given that Valera has championed the manner in which the Portuguese material record engaged with skyscape, this would be a world-view informed, in his view, by sky lore.

The rest of the papers in Giants in the Landscape do not include skyscape assessments, but are of more general interest. Darvill (Bournemouth) looks at “Megalithic Tombs, Barrows and Enclosures in Fourth Millennium BC Britain”. His paper concentrates on western England between 3800 and 3300 BC, which was when hill-top villages, barrows and causewayed enclosures first appeared on the landscape. This region displayed a different kind of funerary practice from that discovered by Valera in Portugal. Darvill suggests a clear divide existed between domestic space and the more distant burial mounds or barrows of the communities who built them. The dead were placed at some distance from the living. Areas of human habitation would witness essential domestic, life-sustaining tasks, whereas mortuary areas would require “participation [in] less mundane activities” (p. 23). Darvill’s study is interesting because of his exploration of scale. He suggests people lived within a definable territory, with enclosures at their notional centre, but placed on or near the critical junctions between different taskscapes. Residential settlements, industrial areas or funerary barrows were juxtaposed in a way which “reflected sensitivity to the landscape, the local environment, and the extent of the cleared land” (p. 23). Darvill calculates that in terms of the numbers of structures built, barrows were about four times as common as enclosures. This is a useful benchmark which adds depth to the author’s model of landscape organisation, a model which considers the symbolic nature of the various taskscapes identified during the earliest appearance of monumental architecture in this region, which in turn allows us to decode
“information about identity, ownership, and control” (p. 22). Darvill concludes that it is of central importance to continue to explore both the formal and informal relationships between archaeologically visible monuments and the social construction of space which surrounded them (p. 24).

Rzepecki (Lódź) investigates the origin of the Niedźwiedź-type of tombs in his paper “House and Megalith: Some Remarks on the Niedzwiedz Type Tombs in the Eastern Group of the TRB Culture”. This looks at the characteristics of structures built between 5450 and 4400 BC and 4400 to 3650 BC on the Polish lowlands (p. 19). The structures had foundation trenches surrounding wooden palisade or wattle-work structures. There is little trace of the dead in these tombs, as bones have been destroyed or removed. But in terms of locating their origins, Rzepecki disagrees with a long line of archaeologists starting with Gordon Childe (1949, 129–135) who believe these tombs were built by the same communities that were based around the Danube. Rzepecki argues instead that they are “a fragment of the phenomenon of the Cerny cultures patterns”, which he claims would have penetrated eastwards (p. 25). He points to pottery traditions at the Polish sites which display a vernacular similar to those found in monuments in Cerny, and concludes that their designs must have been drawn from western traditions originating in the area of the Paris Basin.

The same area in France also features in the paper by Lietar (Nanterre). She looks at “The Role of Enclosures in Territorial Organisation in the Paris Basin between 4500 and 3800 BC”, investigating the way enclosures played a role in structuring the organisation of territorial boundaries in the region and also whether the enclosures played a part in flint distribution. Lietar concludes that these earthworks were sited in a way which was possibly instrumental in establishing territoriality, but the level of control exerted probably varied depending on whether the enclosures were situated along flint routeways. These were routes used by communities involved in the “socio-economic exchange networks” which controlled the diffusion of axes made from Alpine rock (p. 41). Once she has her broad model in place, Lietar deploys a finer-grained approach and suggests “socio-cultural dynamics unique to each territory” may have been in place. She argues that separate, “highly individualized” cultural groups shaped their own “various forms of territorial organization” within the region as a whole (p. 41). These bounded spaces did not always include enclosures, and this variation indicates that there were in her view often highly localised responses to the territorial imperative.

Luc Jallot (Montpellier) explores a more southern landscape in “Late Neolithic Graves and Enclosure in Lower Languedoc: A Phenomenon of Alternation, 3200-2200 cal. BC”. This paper looks at the way social order and historical development can be tracked by exploring mortuary practices in a landscape where the material record has changed substantially across eras. Originally, “small mobile communities of agro-pastoralists” left few visible traces of habitation other than their megalithic monumental tombs (p. 52). In later millennia larger communities appear to have left their trace on the landscape, but though there is clear evidence of sedented habitation in the form of large villages and enclosures, these later communities leave more diverse funeral depositions (p. 52). This evolution, Jallot concludes, “expresses the valorization of lands and an extension of
commons exploited by the agro-pastoralists” (p. 52). The balance between necropolis and enclosure serves to represent the socialisation of the landscape.

Víctor Jiménez-Jáimez (Southampton) and José Enrique Márquez-Romero (Malaga) establish “a diachronic overview” of monuments and fortified villages in their chapter “Prehistoric Ditched Enclosures and Necropolises in Southern Iberia”. The authors compare the way late Neolithic tombs (end of fourth millennium BC) and Copper Age enclosures (third Millennium BC) were sited both in relation to each other and independently (p. 57). They found that the link between the two changed over time, and their chapter argues for a more nuanced interpretation of the record than is traditionally applied. Their contention is that though the sacred and profane are usually considered opposites, this polarisation does not apply in this region: during the Neolithic the tombs and enclosures were “very rarely” in close proximity (p. 65), but later mega-sites built during the Chalcolithic saw a reversal, with the two being found in the same locale. Even though a domestic, hence profane, function is usually ascribed to enclosures, the Copper Age sites showed clear evidence of funerary depositions. Thus places apparently to do with the living show evidence of mortuary practice, even though enclosures are considered “non-monumental, and non-dedicated […] funerary areas” (p. 65). Lack of dates makes fine-grained chronologies impossible to establish, but nevertheless, even if the process was sequential, Jiménez-Jáimez and Márquez-Romero found that as time progressed, the living and dead grew closer.

Natalia Salazar Ortiz (Lleida) titled her study “Towards a Definition of the Prehistoric Landscape in the Plateau of Sigarra”. Her paper explores intervisibility between monuments, using GIS and its Cumulative Viewshed Analysis to identify links between both Middle Neolithic and Bronze Age sites in Spain. Though the monuments at her sites were of the same type, a distinct difference emerged between eras. She found that Neolithic tombs, often situated in high places, were not intervisible, whereas tombs built in the more socially complex Bronze Age showed a clearly identifiable pattern of spatial organisation between them. This leads her to conclude that the lack of intervisibility between Neolithic tombs shows a concomitant “lack of political-territorial hierarchy” during that era (p. 94), though she does also note that the siting of Neolithic monuments seemed to establish “control of the main entrances to the plateau […] probably to protect or prevent both the living and dead of possible foreign intrusions” (p. 89). She concludes that the complex patterns of intervisibility found between Bronze Age monuments were calculated to exert “territorial control” (p. 92). In her view, the “political and territorial” imperatives were enshrined within their very monumentalism (p. 85).

All the papers in Giants in the Landscape will be of value to those who are exploring the relationship between the living and the dead in prehistory. But as mentioned, only one paper specifically uses a skyscape approach; António Carlos Valera’s “Ditched Enclosures and the Ideologies of Death”. Valera explores what he describes as “the ways human communities organized themselves in space and in time […] and the spatial materialization of categories such as life and dea[th] or sacred and profane” (p. 82). He claims there was a transition from the “more fluid perceptions” of the Neolithic to the more structured and “demarcated” ways of organising the world that appears to usher
in the Chalcolithic (p. 82). Given he then reports that the monuments and structures in his study orient to the Sun and Moon, this would suggest those social processes may have been informed by ideologies linked to the celestial sphere. This is skyscape practice as its best, where a broad overview of the material record is used to amplify interpretation, which in this case includes reference to that most elusive of concepts, a society’s cosmologies. The other papers are also useful for those interested in that first layer of information provided by the basic material record, though none of them step into their respondents’ skyscapes.

References