

**Richard Bradley and Courtney Nimura, editors, *The Use and Reuse of Stone Circles: Fieldwork at Five Scottish Monuments and its Implications***

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In his new book, *The Use and Reuse of Stone Circles*, Richard Bradley acknowledges the contributions by John Barnatt (1989) and Aubrey Burl (2000) on stone circles but says (p. vii) that Colin Richards' (2013) examination of the great stone circles in Orkney and the Western Isles is the only one which reflects the current state of knowledge. Bradley describes his new work as both its companion and its sequel. This is far too modest an appraisal, because Bradley's latest book explores circles in a completely different way from anything that has gone before; an exploration which he backs up with evidence from his own excavations of Scottish monuments.

The book covers five different projects, each with a chapter of its own; three in close geographical proximity to one another in Aberdeenshire and two further afield, one in Inverness-shire and one in Perth and Kinross. The Aberdeenshire excavations include those of a previously undiscovered recumbent stone circle at Hillhead, the demolished stone circle at Waulkmill which would have been visible from Hillhead and a small stone circle enclosed by a henge at Tuach some 42 km away. The Perthshire site is Croftmoraig stone circle, originally excavated by Piggott and Simpson in 1965, whereas the Inverness-shire site, which dates from the Early Iron Age, is a ring cairn. The immediate question is what do these sites (which would never appear on the same page in a taxonomy of Scottish monuments) have in common? With an instinctive eye for patterning (see for example, Bradley 2012) and with exquisite skill and considerable knowledge, Bradley provides the answer.

Let's have a closer look at the principal characters, though not in the sequence they appear in the book. The newly discovered recumbent stone circle (RSC) at Hillhead is explored in Chapter 2. The Hillhead RSC overlooks both Tomnaverie RSC, which was excavated and later written up by Bradley in *The Moon and the Bonfire* (2005), and the

Waulkmill circle which is included in this book. Both are visible from Hillhead, which is at a height of 345 m. It has extensive views to the south and southwest, common to RSCs, and Bradley (p. 7) claims it is only at this height that the summit of the Mither Tap of Bennachie can be seen. For readers unfamiliar with Bennachie, it has to be said that the Mither Tap represents northeast Scotland's answer to Mount Fuji: you have to climb it before you die. Constructed over six phases, Hillhead's basic structure was a substantial ring cairn with a 2-m wide entrance at the southwest where more quartz boulders were incorporated than on other parts of the site (p. 11). The monument had been built in a series of phases, which suggested reuse. The larger stone wall at the northeast may have acted as a screen and possibly included shallow steps, presumably for access. From here, the view would have been towards the conspicuous outlines of Morven Hill and Lochnagar. The later addition of a stone circle would have included a flanked recumbent stone in the southwest entrance. Dates for these early phases are between 2460 and 2200 BC (p. 19). The court was capped by a layer of round boulders in the period 1500–1300 BC and then finally, between 1210–1000 BC, it was sealed by a continuous scatter of broken quartz (pp.18–20). Quartz has triboluminescent properties and Bradley suggests (p. 22) that the process of smashing the quartz, which would have given off sparks or caused it to glow, was utilised perhaps to create a spectacle, and says that the entire surface of the cairn would have glittered in strong light. However, he doesn't specify whether this could be sunlight or moonlight, nor does he offer an explanation for the southwest direction. Quartz deposits are a common feature at RSCs and have been thought to symbolise and reflect the light of the Moon (Ruggles 1999, 98).

Waulkmill stone circle was mentioned in antiquarian accounts but only one monolith survives. The excavation was carried out to compare it with Tomnaverie RSC just 2 km away. It was close to a Neolithic pit which contained 119 pottery sherds but the circle itself was Bronze Age. Bradley says (p. 37) that the likely reconstruction of the monument was a low circular cairn with an open space in the middle, whereas the outer kerb incorporated a circle of about 15 monoliths. Although not a recumbent circle, the main focus was towards the south and southwest, possibly towards the profile of Mount Keen. Smashed quartz was found in the foundation trench. Close by were two Roman Iron Age burials, one of which contained a penannular brooch. The inclusion of gaming counters as part of the burial rite confirms their Roman origin and those readers interested in the Roman presence in Scotland should read the sections by Hilary Cool, Mark Hall and Frazer Hunter in Chapter 3 on Waulkmill.

The last Aberdeenshire site, explored in Chapter 5, is a small stone circle and henge positioned on the Hill of Tuach. It is located halfway down a southwesterly facing slope, as is Hillhead. There the resemblance ends as this was a small circle that could not have contained more than six monoliths. The excavation of the henge bank showed that it was constructed to fit around the circle. The henge opening in the southwest is in line with one of the interior monoliths. The interior included pits and cremation burials, one of which yielded a Cordoned Urn containing a bronze razor with remains of an animal-skin sheath. The deposits yield dates of between 1900 and 1600 BC, later than the erection of the stone circle itself.

In Chapter 4, moving south to Perth and Kinross, Bradley examines Croftmoraig stone circle, which was excavated in 1965 by Stuart Piggott and Derek Simpson (1971). Bradley and Sheridan (2005) examined the sequence originally proposed by Piggott and came up with a new theory that the inner stone circle was aligned to the east-southeast but that the axis was redirected to the south-southwest when the outer circle and enclosure were built. A new excavation was undertaken in 2012 to address criticisms of the 2005 findings and to put forward a new chronology of the site which suggests (p. 73) that it was one of the last monuments of its kind. Bradley's review (p. 57) shows five distinct elements: a rounded glacial mound, a ring of nine monoliths, a pair of "portal" stones outside the circle, an inner setting of eight stones and a perimeter of stone blocks, interpreted as the remains of a rubble bank.

The Inverness-shire site at Laikenbuie, detailed in Chapter 6, is an Early Iron Age ring cairn located in a landscape that includes 82 small circular cairns, all positioned on a south-facing slope. The cairn in question is a circular monument with a hollowed interior, bounded by a kerb of 33 estimated orthostats. There was the presence of quartz pebbles, three placed together just outside the kerb on the east side. It was oblong rather than circular with its focal point, a setting of orthostats flanked by taller uprights, directed towards the south. Bradley (p. 110) finds a parallel in the patterning of red and white stones to that found in the kerb cairn at Balnuaran of Clava, directed towards the southwest. The view from the centre of the Laikenbuie cairn seems to be directed towards a conspicuous notch on the horizon, though Bradley points out (p. 109) that it was not necessarily an exact celestial alignment and could have been towards a pass between two river valleys.

In Chapter 7, having explored the archaeology of these seemingly unconnected monuments, Bradley sets them in the wider context of the large stone circles such as the Stones of Stenness and Calanais dated to around 3000–2900 BC, the recumbent stone circles and the Clava Cairns of the Early Bronze Age. These later types share the common characteristic of being oriented towards the south, "especially, to the southwest" (p. 113). This deliberate setting seems to have been the final development, though many of the monuments were later reused. While there are many similarities between the Clava Cairns and the RSCs, at Clava the focal point was the entrance to the tomb whereas at the RSCs it was the view between the flankers. Bradley considers the setting Sun or the position of the Moon but points out that "it is unlikely that one interpretation can account for every example" (p. 115). To illustrate this, he says that both Hillhead and Tomnaverie are directed towards the summit of Lochnagar and underlines the importance of this by saying that, whilst Tomnaverie is at the middle of a circular basin (implying that there was a choice of hills), it is clearly directed towards Lochnagar. Yet he adds (p. 117) that there is an emphasis on southern or southwestern alignments, found at monuments not contemporary with one another, saying that "[c]ertain ideas lasted a particularly long time". The monoliths of Croftmoraig stone circle were similarly graded towards the southwest towards a prominent mountain. Like the stone circle at Tuach, their dates cover the period towards the Middle Bronze Age. The coloured stonework of the Laikenbuie Early Iron Age site mimics an earlier tradition. All are characterised by entrances which seem to have been blocked in some way. Bradley explains this by saying that "[t]hey were associated with those who

had died, and the boundary between life and death was expressed by constructing a blocked entrance facing southwest... the dark side of the sky" (p. 121). It is this expression which seems to link all five monuments covered in the book.

Nevertheless, Bradley says in Chapter 7 (p. 121) that there was never a complete rupture with the past as these monuments were reused later. Consideration of the reuse of monuments is given in Chapter 8. Renewed activity took place in four different phases: "the later Bronze Age, the Early Iron Age, the Roman Iron Age and the Pictish period" (p. 122). The reuse took at least two forms; the construction of new structures and the deposition of cremated bone. Some of them were sealed by a deposit of quartz at the end of their use, as at Hillhead and Croftmoraig. The motifs on some of the Pictish symbol stones were superimposed on previously cup-marked stones. Bradley cites David Clarke (2007, 33) as saying "we are seeing more the use of the imagery of the past than the re-use of the actual monuments" (p. 133), a point that I made elsewhere (Henty 2015). Bradley suggests (p. 133) that at other times of rapid change, such as the later Bronze Age or Early Iron Age, there may have been an accommodation with the wider world by not explicitly contesting its values.

Chapter 9, which is almost an addendum to the analysis above, looks at the extent of variation between four stone circles within an area of  $4 \times 10$  km: Tomnaverie, Hillhead, Waulkmill and the Blue Cairn at Ladieswell. Their height above sea level varies significantly, as does their location in the landscape. Tomnaverie and Hillhead, as mentioned earlier, are both aligned to the conspicuous mountain of Lochnagar (at Hillhead, the Mither Tap was in the reverse direction), but although Bradley does not say that there might have been a dual purpose at these particular RSCs he does say "they could have been [places] where people stood to observe the distant horizon and the sky" (p. 138). Similarly, Waulkmill faced Mount Keen and the Blue Cairn faced Roar Hill. However, there were many archaeological differences and Bradley (p. 140) warns against patterning through surface evidence alone. Excavations demonstrate the sheer diversity of structures grouped in the same category.

To end the book Bradley goes back to the history of Croftmoraig to show how the themes developed in his book came together at this circle. He says that excavation reports are necessarily products of their time, mentioning that, though Piggott was aware of the work of Alexander Thom, he was not influenced by those ideas in his interpretation of Croftmoraig, nor "the less tangible features" discussed in recent times (pp. 141–142). Croftmoraig is in the region where three other circles are associated with Loch Tay, where above its northern shore are many examples of rock carvings along the section which extends from northeast to southwest, the directions of midsummer sunrise and midwinter sunset. This axis seems to have influenced all the monuments discussed in the book. Croftmoraig was constructed on a glacial mound and the further evidence of the use of stones, Bradley says, undermines the 1960s distinction between nature and culture (p. 142). The flaked and broken quartz that sparkled in the sunshine was placed towards the south and west of the circle and he suggests (p. 145) that the surface of the rock may have been refreshed at intervals to make it sparkle. Schiehallion rises to the west of the circle and to the southwest there is a shallow pass leading between

Loch Tay and Strath Ban. The midsummer Sun rolls along the skyline before it disappears behind the mountain, “which glows like an active volcano” (p. 146). Bradley theorises (p. 146) that as the winter solstice sunset was also visible travelling down the side of a hill to the southwest, the turning points of the year could be observed at Croftmoraig and that maybe this phenomenon influenced the choice of site. That, he says, coupled with the exposure of a banded rock in the central glacial mound, notable for its orange tinge in sunlight, could not have been contrived, but “discovered” (p. 147). Croftmoraig’s grading of monoliths follows the pattern evidenced elsewhere and two of the stones are cup-marked. Bradley suggests (p. 148) that it represents a compromise between the conventional features of this kind of monument and its relationship with a prominent mountain and the midsummer solstice, which might explain the siting of the “portal stones” outside and to the east-southeast of the circle. The later phase of the monument showed a greater emphasis on midwinter solstice.

The book is amply illustrated with detailed plans often shown alongside drawings of the other monuments, making it easy for the reader to compare. There are beautiful colour photographs, particularly the sequence showing the position of the midsummer Sun setting behind Schiehallion seen from the high ground above Croftmoraig (p. 146). This is shown in diagrammatic form as viewed from the circle itself (p. 147) but, at this location, it grazes along the horizon before disappearing from view before it reaches Schiehallion. Helpful to skyscape archaeologists particularly is that the latest excavation plans show both true north and the direction of magnetic north at the time of the excavation. Elevation, longitude and latitude can be discovered by using the National Grid coordinates given in the book. Now all we need are some accurate azimuths taken during excavation.

As its subtitle suggests, this book is a mixture of fieldwork and interpretation. The excavation accounts are amply supported by the usual analysis from experts on radio-carbon dating, geology, bone analysis, lithics, pottery, and so on. Historical evidence was used, where appropriate, to fill in some of the gaps in our present knowledge: gaps caused by the destruction and robbing of these monuments. Although each chapter has its own discussion section, I read the reports with a growing anticipation for the synthesis in Part Two, “The Excavated Monuments in Their Wider Contexts”.

Bradley has had a long fascination with the idea that monument building involved a careful choice of location (1993, 43) and that “circular constructions reflect a perception of space that extends outwards from the individual and upwards into the sky” (1998, 109). His strongest case for this was the idea (2005, 31) that behind the recumbent at Tomnaverie RSC, the shaping of Lochnagar with two subsidiary peaks on either side was reminiscent of the recumbent and its flankers. I have been researching these circles for over eight years and I don’t always agree that circles were definitely oriented to a particular mountain. My research at Tomnaverie found that from a position outside the circle, between Stones 8 and 9 (where the most artefacts were found, according to Bradley’s [2005] excavation report), directly opposite the recumbent arrangement window, it is too low to see Lochnagar and only the sky can be seen (Henty, 2014, 50). As the Mither Tap of Bennachie is in full view of many of the RSCs researched by Welfare (2011), we might expect those circles to recognise it in a similar way, but Welfare says it is appar-

ently not referenced in the circles' orientations (2011, 70). He understandably missed the view of the Mither Tap opposite the recumbent at Tomnagorn (Henty 2016, 76), as it can only be seen on an exceptionally clear day. In an area defined by the Grampians, the Cairngorms and their foothills, where mountain views are unavoidable, I tend to think of orientations to prominent hills as fortuitous, rather than being necessarily by choice. It gives rise to locations which create an amphitheatre in which ritual can be played out. Bradley's final conclusion (p.151) is that Croftmoraig "draws together the land and the sky, and its unusual synthesis of geological and structural elements accounts for its distinctive architecture". Who could argue with that?

For this book and many others, particularly *The Moon and the Bonfire* (2005) and *Stages and Screens* (2011), it is appropriate to call Richard Bradley an honorary skyscape archaeologist. I cannot end this review without firstly, thanking him and secondly, quoting in full the final two sentences of the book (p.151): "Few of these elements were unique, yet some of them have still to be considered by archaeologists working in other parts of Britain. And that is the principal lesson of this book".

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