Labels are useful, since they help us to organise data, but definitions can restrict and imprison. There is a strong feeling in this volume that the time is long overdue to move on from normative categorisation of the spectrum of circular forms of monument in the Late Neolithic of Britain and Ireland to a more fluid sense of a repertoire of ways of doing things. The thrust of this volume is thus to explore, through site-specific and regional reviews of what in old money were known as henges, some of the ways in which this can be achieved. Prominent ideas in this process are that ‘henging’, or enclosing by external bank and internal ditch, often came at the end of site sequences, serving to close things down, and that the circuits thus created may have worked to contain things that were potentially dangerous and needed to be kept in. Wider context for the volume is created by a second half of regional reviews of continental European enclosure practice, though relatively few of the examples are directly contemporary with the probably mainly late fourth–third millennia cal BC henges, or indeed directly comparable. Coming out of a conference in 2012, this is a prompt, timely, and very welcome contribution to the already extensive literature on henges in particular, and enclosures in general. It helps to consolidate new directions for interpretation, even if basic problems of chronology remain and the challenge of classification does not entirely go away.

Alex Gibson leads the way with a thorough and insightful review of the henge story so far. Addressing the diversity of ways of enclosing now evident, he proposes the new term of earth circle. We will see if this catches on, but it could help to underline the range of forms and practices which seems so inadequately held in the term ‘henge’. Yet there is tension here, as he wonders if we should keep the old label for double-entranced earth circles, which ‘share a similar form and grammar regardless of size’ (p. 18), and which ‘may be a class apart’, more restricted in date. At face value, the date range for henges or earth circles is very broad, from the late fourth to the late third millennia cal BC, and even later in the case of some Scottish monuments, as also underlined by Kenny Brophy and Gordon Noble. Gibson gives a very useful sketch of the radiocarbon evidence available, though its presentation on two figures (one for Class I: single-entranced monuments and one for Class II: double-entranced constructions — highlighting again how useful labels can be) is far from pretty. He is alive to dates with age offsets, but there is no table giving all the necessary and desirable details of sample and context. Here is a major new project crying out for attention and action, and I cannot help feeling that some if not many current questions could be put in better perspective if not resolved by a much more robust and precise chronology.

The spirit of the introduction is maintained in reviews of the current evidence from Scotland and Ireland. Kenny Brophy and Gordon Noble neatly set out the state of knowledge for Scotland of henge distribution, diversity and chronology, while Muiris O’Sullivan, Stephen Davis and Geraldine Stout do the same for Ireland. The longevity of the tradition in Scotland, evidently going on into the second millennium cal BC, is striking, while for Ireland, it is important to note the definition — *inter alia* through aerial photography and LiDAR — of henges akin to those of England and Scotland, alongside the embanked but ditchless enclosures previously recognised.
The major case study is Forteviot in Strathearn, Perth and Kinross. Brophy and Noble have already written about this important complex several times elsewhere, and a major final report is in preparation, but the significance of their excavations more than justifies the treatment here. Beyond the details of the individual components of the Forteviot complex, and longevity of use, important ideas of henging, blocking and mounding are developed. The latter two can be seen in the sequences of henges 1 and 2 (pp. 26–9). Brophy and Noble see these practices as ‘associated with putting places beyond use, moments of no return’ (p. 34).

We then come back to England, with summaries and reviews of recent and ongoing work on two sites, Marden, Wiltshire, and Ringlemere, Kent, and on two regions, central Yorkshire and Wessex. The fresh excavations at Marden led by Jim Leary and David Field have served to underline how much there is still to discover, with new details of the Hatfield Barrow, the southern inner enclosure with square building (perhaps a sweat lodge) and midden, and the gravelling at the south-east entrance, all of particular interest, and with clear links to new discoveries at Durrington Walls (cf the Stonehenge Riverside Project). Leary and Field also bring in the notion of ‘containment’ (p. 63), and argue strongly for the significance of river valleys in general as opposed to the surrounding chalk downland, and for the importance of river sources in particular. These could have emphasised ‘ownership, belonging, ancestry, and a right of tenure along the valley, in both metaphysical and practical senses’ (p.64). Keith Parfitt and Stuart Needham demonstrate another long sequence at Ringlemere Farm. Abundant pits and postholes may belong to several phases of activity, with predominantly Grooved Ware associations, and a probable horseshoe ring of pits or postholes may predate the construction of a substantial enclosure ditch with a single entrance. Around the turn of the millennium, a broad but not necessarily very high round barrow transformed the monument, and it was into this barrow that the fine Early Bronze Age gold cup was inserted. This ‘could have been essentially a celebration of the continuing and long-held importance of [the site] in the local social landscape’ (p. 90). It also recalls the longevity seen further north, for example at Forteviot.

At a regional scale, Jan Harding and Joshua Pollard address central Yorkshire and Wessex respectively. There are interesting comparisons and contrasts. Both are interested in the landscape and settlement setting. For Harding, the double-entranced monuments of the Vale of York, laid out in what seems a line or a route, are sacred places of assembly and ritual, points that drew people in from considerable distances, and through which pilgrims and worshippers passed; there is little evidence for much adjacent settlement. For Pollard, there is more but varied evidence for settlement, and ‘history, geology and topography all collided to make the Wessex chalk a special place’ (p. 98). This claim could be set alongside that of Leary and Field for the importance of river valleys; in this view, the chalk downland itself might have had a special quality, and the natural striping which the axis of the Stonehenge Avenue marks could have been given a particular significance (as also argued by Mike Parker Pearson and the Stonehenge Riverside Project). Both ideas are intriguing, but both surely need further arguments to underpin them. What was different about the chalk compared to other southern uplands, or about sarsen (p. 98) compared to other stone? What is the wider pattern of glacial striping in the Stonehenge and indeed other areas?

Harding sees the Yorkshire monuments as ‘places of religious renown’ (p. 73), and suggests that the complementary viewsheds from Cana Barn and Hutton Moor are ‘part of a unified vision’ (p. 73), an element of a ‘narrative around which communities could unite’ (p. 70). There is no discussion of alternatives, nor does Pollard engage here with themes of social relations or leadership. Out of his nicely contexted case studies of Wyke Down, Durrington and Woodhenge, come again the ideas of sacredness and containment. There is intriguing but all too brief reference to Polynesian concepts of mana (efficacy, often linked to figures of authority) and tapu (sacredness), and there is another concluding idea about the temporary containment of finite
danger by wooden palisade enclosures, to be followed by burning and more permanent ancestral markings in stone (p.104), but the specific source of supposed danger is not specified, and the sequence is not followed in any detail here. Harding does underline the considerable (but not absolute) uniformity of construction of the double-entranced Yorkshire monuments, and suggests the possibility of a single surge of construction (p. 73). It would be wonderful if this could be tested by further radiocarbon dating. Apart from rather general reference to Ferrybridge, the regional chronology is not explored in any more detail here. The Ferrybridge dates can be found on Gibson’s figure 12, but without sample or context details. The issues of chronology and form again remain incompletely explored.

All these papers give a very useful snapshot of current site-specific and regional studies across significant parts of both Britain and Ireland, though it would have been good to have a contribution on the far north of Scotland. The rest of the volume provides another helpful freeze-frame of ongoing research on a range of continental European enclosures. These are all authoritative and thoughtful surveys in their own right, though again other regions (such as west-central and northern France; the Rhineland; and northern Germany) could of course have been profitably covered as well. Lars Larsson discusses both ditched and slightly later palisaded enclosures in southern Scandinavia; Fabien Convertini gives an up-to-date picture of both middle and late Neolithic enclosures (some walled in the latter phase) in the south of France; in separate papers, Wolfgang Neubauer and Jan Turek present important aspects, including possible cosmologies, of earlier fifth-millennium Kreisgrabenanlagen or rondels; Turek also provides a useful survey of later enclosures in central Europe; while António Carlos Valera reviews the recent explosion of evidence from southern Portugal, for which he has himself been in major part responsible, including through the discovery and progressive excavation of the stunning, complex site of Perdigões. There is a brief afterword from Richard Bradley.

These continental papers raise a host of other questions and themes to those presented by British and Irish henges. For the purposes of this review, there is not space to do specific issues proper justice, so I want to close by using the European studies as a foil for reflecting on the challenge of henges in Britain and Ireland. Problems of setting, duration, use and meaning are of course shared across all the studies in the volume; this has been a phase of intensive research on enclosures right across western and central Europe. There are phases of both relative diversity and uniformity in the various continental sequences presented here. Generalising, specific repertoires emerge at certain times and places. Some specificity is more pronounced, for example in the striking cases of Kreisgrabenanlagen, and walled, bastioned forms in the late Neolithic of southern France. In this wider perspective, researchers in Britain and Ireland need to go on worrying about form, within the widening and creative interpretive framework which is being currently worked out. They also need to do something collectively about henge chronology. Perhaps, as suggested in this volume, this will indeed be confirmed as a very long story, but that does not exclude the possibility of very particular phases and twists in regional and wider developments. The strong probability of a very tight dating for Kreisgrabenanlagen is a good illustration of the importance of putting enclosures in the right timeframe. The evidence may point to some kind of cult-like explosion of activity, and it should ultimately be possible to give this shape and direction. My own view would be to connect the emergence of rondels with the management of communal tensions in the wake of end-LBK (towards and around 5000 cal BC) difficulties and even local crisis, but this has to be evaluated in the light of whether these monuments emerge at say 4800 cal BC, or 4700 cal BC, or some other specific date. So, in the British and Irish contexts, there is much to work at. How did the circularity of henges and the wider repertoire contrast with the linearity of cursus monuments? When and where were the first henges built? Was this in the far north, and if so, in what specific social context? Do these labour enterprises speak for community or leadership? If there was a specific point of origin, what was shared and what was lost as the practice spread? Is there a discernible and coherent pattern of
expansion in the first part of the third millennium cal BC? Did all the very big monuments, not only in Wessex, belong to a single, tight phase in the middle of the third millennium cal BC? What was the temporal and geographical process by which later constructions became confined to the north?

These and other questions will keep henges at the forefront of research. The editor deserves much credit for bringing out such a thought-provoking volume, so promptly.

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