



## Book Reviews

### **MEMORY, MYTH AND LONG-TERM LANDSCAPE INHABITATION, EDITED BY A M CHADWICK & C GIBSON**

*Celtic Studies Publications XVII, Oxbow Books. 2013. 347 pp, 183 illus, 11 tables, ISBN 978-1-78297-393-5, hb, £38*

*Memory, Myth and Long-term Landscape Inhabitation* consists of a series of detailed landscape studies which explore relationships between sequences of landscape use and transformation, and social memory and myth. Most of the 16 chapters define their key terms well, and investigate specific features of memory or myth. Memory is often presented in the book as a productive act which involves working with the traces of the past (whether those are captured in the brain, mind, or body, and/or in things and places) to create an experience which both consists of those recalled or materially-persisting elements and is also partly something new. In the process, the traces of the past are themselves reworked. The book focusses on the production of memory at places, and ways that places can be instrumental in recalling past memories. Social memory (the focus of many chapters) essentially refers to a collective conception of past events among a certain community, usually based on the experiences of the ancestors of members of that community which have been transmitted over time through various social, cultural and performative means. Social memory is also creative and mutable. Myth is taken to refer to narratives about the past that 'relate to the origins of social groups, the world and other beings, or that concern the sacred and supernatural' (Chadwick & Gibson 2013, 12). Social memory is given more attention than myth in most chapters. Many of the chapters make good use of sequences of radiocarbon dates, stratigraphic records, and other data from very recent excavations in establishing temporal relationships between events securely. Such relationships are presented as a basis from which to develop sound analyses of the interaction between the residues of past activities and the acts of subsequent prehistoric and historic communities. Several chapters also highlight the value of returning to older excavations with an awareness of the 'past in the past' (eg, Bradley 1998; 2002) and approaches to memory in archaeology (e.g. Jones 2007) that have arisen in the last 15 years or so. Studying landscapes as places 'in a perpetual state of becoming' (p12) over the very long term, instead of at a single period in time is set out as a key agenda in the introduction, and most chapters pursue this aim, many presenting studies of 'long-term inhabitation', the final phrase in the book title.

Richard Bradley provides a succinct foreword, which is followed by an introduction by the volume editors. This preliminary chapter provides a historiography of work on social and cultural memory in the social sciences, and presents general reflections on the key concepts of the volume, including various definitions of memory, consideration of different kinds of memory and the many ways memory can operate, as well as a useful discussion of the potential longevity of oral traditions. Daniela Hofmann's chapter on tradition and memory focuses on long-term change in the same architectural practices during the Neolithic across a large geographical area – unlike most other chapters which focus on a single landscape. By adopting this approach Hofmann is able to draw out subtle changes in LBK house design over time, and identify these changes as the result of choices about what to reproduce and commemorate from among the repertoire of then pre-existing house elements. She demonstrates local and regional diversity in which elements were most commonly reproduced, and by doing so moderates the general view that LBK houses were highly conservative across central Europe for around 600 years.

The chapters by Andy M. Jones, John Thomas, Catriona Gibson, and Kirsten Jarrett share a concern with sequences of monument construction and associated activities in British Neolithic and Bronze Age landscapes. Jones' chapter also neatly considers long-term changes in social memory associated with a move from a landscape marked by ceremonial monuments to one laid out for agriculture and long-term settlement. Thomas explores the longer term sequence of activities at and around Early Bronze Age round barrows in Leicestershire. Gibson's chapter examines the long-term sequences of activity revealed by developer-funded excavations at Boscombe Down (Wiltshire) and Springhead (Kent) exploring changing traditions of land use, ceremonial monuments, and burial practices. One of her several important conclusions is that Middle Bronze Age ditches and field boundaries at Springhead appear to shadow clusters of Beaker period pits, suggesting that land divisions and places which emerged in the Beaker period left a legacy that was formalised much later. Jarrett outlines the role of the construction of a Neolithic long mound, and much later short mound at Crickley Hill (Gloucestershire), and interprets the insertion of Roman brooches into these mounds as associated with the active generation of social memory and identity. She argues that each episode of memory generation — from monument construction to the deposition of brooches — reworked past places and revised understandings of the past simultaneously. The chapter by Gareth Chaffey and Alasdair Barclay expertly illustrates how specific interpretations of sequences in land use can form a basis for discussion of memory, persistent remains, and traditions of wider practice. The result of highly-detailed investigations of the landscape at Kingsmead Quarry, Horton (Berkshire), has made it possible for them to suggest which areas were in use and which were left open in specific centuries, and trace shifting or discontinuous uses of place alongside acts that re-engaged with the remains of the past. Chaffey and Barclay build a gradual, layered sense of how the landscape first became settled and later mythologized, as well as inhabited, by successive generations in the early Neolithic. They also highlight the persistence of places for specific activities in the Bronze Age, and explore a range of interpretations for a single event in which an assemblage of artefacts of quite different ages were placed in a Bronze Age pit.

Chapters by Gary Robinson, Adrian Chadwick, Louise Martin & Jane Richardson, Chadwick, and Chris Fenton-Thomas emphasise the memory work involved in later prehistoric settlements in Britain, from the complete replacement of round houses on the same spot to different encounters with discarded or decommissioned artefacts and other traces of past action. Interactions with ancient barrows, including their re-use as later burial grounds, and the placement of the dead along track ways with deep histories also feature. These chapters include some evocative discussions of living with change and reflecting on the past. Fenton-Thomas' interpretation of a late Iron Age pit cut into the site of an abandoned round house at Melton (East Yorkshire) provides an interesting example. The sheep bones found in this pit were, he argues, curated by a family over several generations as a memento of a funeral. Sheep haunches were buried with the dead in a funerary tradition that had ended over a hundred years before this pit was dug, and Fenton-Thomas contends that the bones in this pit were the remains of a funerary feast in which the leg joints were given to the dead; leg bones were missing from one of the two disarticulated sheep skeletons. Sometime after the family house was abandoned, he suggests, a grandchild buried those family relics at 'granny's house'. Around the same period, a woman was buried just to the south-west of the abandoned house, although Fenton-Thomas says less about this. Chadwick's interpretation of an Iron Age burial and covering mound at Ferry Fryston moving from social memory to a locus of myth is similarly effective. Hoan and Loney's piece concentrates on upland British Bronze Age land use, clearance cairns and field boundaries, linking the long-term investment of labour in the landscape with personal memories, collective memory, and the generation of myth. All of these, they argue, were embedded in heterarchical social relations in which those working the land benefited from the products of their own labour as well as that of their ancestors, and curated historical, mythic and practical knowledge about that land.

Anna Garnett's chapter argues for approaching Egyptian Predynastic and Dynastic landscapes as tapestries that are repeatedly rewoven. Lucy Shipley's paper draws out connections between zones of the Etruscan landscape, kinds of activity, and memory, touching a little on the role of myth in discussing depictions of Charon at necropoli, which were located near rivers and away from settlements. Vejby and Ahlers' evocative study of the relationship between language, place and cultural understanding in northern California is extremely insightful about the value of oral tradition and particularly myth in understanding landscape and its inhabitation. A few other chapters make good arguments for the long-term persistence of memory through oral tradition (eg, those by Jarrett, and Chaffey & Barclay), which seem particularly relevant where cultural traditions seem to have changed incrementally. Only a few other chapters explicitly discuss myth (notably those by Hoan and Loney, and Gibson). Arguably, the processes of myth-making, and relationships between oral tradition and traditions of practice still require further attention from archaeologists; Vejby and Ahlers' chapter certainly suggest there is more to be learnt from studies of contemporary and recent communities. For instance, their discussion of Native Californian communities' dislocation from, and struggles to reclaim language, myth and land, compelled me to think about the impact of the loss of access to places in British prehistory and history and the potential knock-on effect on mythic knowledge and understandings of local landscapes. Disruption as well as continuity requires exploration, then, and a few chapters do address this theme.

As well as traumatic and relatively sudden disruption, connections with place and the past can erode through incremental changes in inhabitation. Vieira's chapter on the 20<sup>th</sup> century rediscovery of two archaeological sites in Portugal explains that current local knowledge about places originally abandoned over a millennia earlier, but frequented into the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century (eg, as a source of stone), took the form of myths of a generic kind shared over a large area combined with personal memories of visiting the sites, but bore little relation to the nature of activity at those locales when they were originally built and occupied. In the Portuguese case study a myth about site abandonment due to swarms of ants became attached to archaeological sites, but beyond suggesting the presence of an ancient place, that myth seemingly has little relevance to understanding the archaeological past. It seems clear that a place can be rediscovered as a place (ie, having features that make it somewhere identifiable, somewhere that can be named) without the new knowledge(s) and social memories of that place retaining any memory or knowledge about the distant past. Places may move from personal memory to collective memory, to myth, which may become largely forgotten or transformed, to being 'rediscovered' and associated with new personal memories, myths, and so on. Jarrett's study of Romano-British activity at Crickley Hill is particularly interesting from this point of view, and the topic is covered at other places in the volume. Different contemporary experiences of memory and knowledge are considered by some authors (e.g. Chadwick, Shipley), and there are hints at identifying contemporary and potentially divergent strategies in memory work (eg, in Gibson's chapter), but this largely remains a challenge for future work.

The interplay between generic interpretative statements about memory and specific case studies in the book as a whole is thought-provoking. The theoretical frameworks are clearly explained and used effectively, and some approaches to memory are reflected on critically. Care is taken to avoid creating generic typologies of memory or memory work, while distinguishing the effects of distinct past activities. Some chapters deploy some useful comparative techniques (eg, Gibson 2013, 117-19), and change and continuity in memory work is explored throughout. Some chapters consider the scale and transformation of memory in interesting and convincing ways, by thinking, for example, about the evanescence of personal memory and the undercurrent of social memory in that, and the way that some personal memories become integrated into social memory (e.g. Chadwick's chapter). There were only a few rare instances in the volume where I thought the case for knowledgeable memory, oral tradition or myth seemed stretched or over-stated. To randomly select one, a sunken grave reused after 1600 years may be accurately interpreted as a

grave at that time, and nearby mounds understood as burial mounds, without necessarily meaning that '[a]lthough re-worked and re-interpreted, the memories, meanings and myths surrounding these features, even knowledge of the burials in the pits, potentially persisted...' (Chadwick 2013, 302). But this is not to say that Chadwick is necessarily wrong, and the vast majority of interpretations in the book are made clearly and convincingly. The book would arguably benefit from a little more counter-point discussion on the long-term impact of past sequences of activity which might alter the affordances of place and landscape in ways that made certain later uses more likely – but with no knowledge or social memory of the events that took place there centuries earlier.

As a whole the chapters in the book present important research and would also serve as strong examples for students learning to produce detailed studies of prehistoric landscapes. The care taken in the detailed study of each landscape is admirable, starting with clear evidence for the repeated reworking of distinctive places. All of the chapters present clear cases for their arguments, and inspire the reader to think hard and critically about the concepts of myth and memory and their relation to the development of landscapes.

A minor puzzle, not explained within, is why the volume was published in a Celtic Studies series.

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