Landscape Biographies

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6 Places That Matter

Megalithic Monuments from a Biographical Perspective

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Abstract

This chapter deals with the importance and meaning of places as seen from an archaeological perspective. The concepts of place and place attachment are briefly reviewed and put into archaeological context, followed by a biographical discussion of four megalithic monuments situated on the island of Öland, southeast Sweden. The location as well as the long-term use of the tombs is discussed, and the distinction between primary and secondary use of megaliths is dismissed. It is argued that memory has been a vital factor in the ascription of meaning to these places, and that remembrance in the wide sense constitutes the key to our understanding of monumental location and clusters. Finally, the discussion is brought together in some brief notes on why archaeology matters.

Keywords: landscape biography, place attachment, memory, Neolithic, megalithic tombs, Öland

Introduction

My wife and I recently bought a house. It is not a new one, it is nearly 120 years old and has been inhabited by farmers all of this time. It was built in 1892 on the remains of two older houses that were destroyed in a fire that same year. From people in the neighbourhood we have learned some details about people who resided in the house before we bought it, and through findings within the four walls we have come in close ‘contact’ with specific events in the history of the house, such as the covering of old doors with Masonite on 18 August 1942 (figure 6.1). Slowly and gradually, in the course of renovation, the biography of the house reveals itself and we try to comprehend the history of the building and what it has meant for people passing by during the last 120 years. Time and again it strikes us just how rich this history is, how many joyful and sad events have taken place here and how many life-paths have crossed the site of this particular house.
Figure 6.1  The biography of our house revealing itself

piece of newspaper with handwritten message, found during removal of Masonite covering on the late-19th-century doors. My translation: “Placed here on August 18th by Frank Nelson, Färjestaden. This house is now 50 years old”.

since it was built. The old lady who killed herself in the hen house, the child that was born in the kitchen... Still we are only viewing fragments of the last 120 years of several centuries of occupation at the site, already feeling a bit dizzy at the thought of all events and people involved. To us, the age of the house and the farm itself gives it an authenticity and a ‘soul’ that is not possible to achieve with a newly built house. That is, the meaning of this place for us is made up of its history, as we know it. The more we learn, the richer this meaning becomes.

This rather personal introduction serves to introduce the theme of this chapter, which broadly is on people and places and the way activities and memory combine to make up the meaning of a place. Some general thoughts on place are presented and put into context in a biographical approach to archaeological places. The setting is southeast Sweden in the Neolithic (c. 4000-1800 BC), and the specific archaeological sites that are used to concretize the discussion are four megalithic tombs situated on the island of Öland in the Baltic Sea (Papmehl-Dufay, 2006, 2009, 2011 and 2012). The discussion on biographies and meaning of place is brought together in some brief notes on why archaeology matters.
The Importance of Places

In geography and the social sciences, place is most often understood as a socialized space perceived through human experience. The cognitive and emotional perception by humans of physical space is central to the concept. In contrast to space, place is a social construction (Rodman, 1992; Adams et al., 2001), and the meaning of a place is rendered through complex processes of human behaviour and psychology. Canadian geographer Edward Relph, in his classic *Place and Placelessness*, identified three components that together form the identity of places: physical appearance, activities/functions, and meanings/symbols (Relph, 1976, p. 61). These three, he argued, could combine in innumerable ways and thus the diversity of place is infinite. In a similar vein, the Brazilian architect Lineu Castello identified three types of interactions involved in the social constitution of place (Castello, 2010, p. 10f): The first category refers to the spatial dimension and relates to the objective morphology of places, their ‘aura’. The second involves the temporal dimension, referring to histories evoking people’s collective memory. The third type of interaction is between people, and is referred to by Castello as ‘places of plurality’. All three categories are stimulated by elements of collective imagination (spatial, temporal and social), and essentially the collective experience of this plurality is what turns space into a place (Castello, 2010, p. 11). With Relph as well as Castello, we are presented with a three-part division of the meaning of place involving physical (objective) appearance, (human and non-human) activities and memory. Translated to an archaeological context, it is apparent that not all of these factors are always readily detectable. However, this does not mean we cannot reach a fruitful discussion concerning the meaning of archaeological places (e.g. Bowser & Zedeño, 2009 and papers therein). The objective is not necessarily to establish an understanding of the specific meaning/s of particular places, but an appreciation of their individual importance serves to underline the processes involved in the social construction of place. Hence, the mechanisms involved in the constitution of meaning of place as reviewed above are of great interest to archaeology.

In fields such as environmental psychology and sociology, the concept of ‘place attachment’ is used to describe the emotional and cognitive associations between people and physical locations (Tuan, 1977). Sociologist Melinda Milligan suggested place attachment to be comprised of two components, one directed towards the past and one towards the future: ‘interactional past’ refers to past experiences and memories associated with a location, while ‘interactional potential’ defines expected or hoped
future experiences connected to the place (Milligan, 1998, p. 2). To be attached to places is a central human need (Relph, 1976, p. 38), and thus the meanings of place and place attachment are culturally universal phenomena (Rodman, 1992). This in turn means that the consequences of place attachment, i.e. the tendency of people to stay close to specific places (Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001, p. 247), are something that should be of relevance to investigate concerning past societies as well. So far the concept seems to have been used mainly in modern contexts and at a neighbourhood level, however (Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001), and the exploration of this phenomenon in archaeological contexts is to my knowledge non-existent so far. A potential problem might of course be of methodological concern; studies of place attachment are generally qualitative in nature, with informants and interviews as the main source of data (e.g. Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001; Casakin & Kreitler, 2008). Despite these difficulties, a theoretical framework involving the concept of place attachment could be of great use in discussing issues such as mobile settlement patterns, migration, places of continuity, etc. A concept closely related to place attachment, but one that will not be dealt with further in this context, is material possession attachment, which concerns the relationship between individuals and material objects and which has been widely applied within, for instance, marketing science (Kleine & Baker, 2004). Considering the role of material objects to our discipline, the potential of using this concept in archaeology should perhaps also be evaluated.

**Landscape Biographies in Archaeology**

During the last couple of decades, the life histories of objects and places have been the focus of an increasing number of archaeological studies (e.g. Gillings & Pollard, 1999; Holtorf 2000-2008, 2002; c.f. Appadurai, 1986 and papers therein). Focusing on the social lives of material things, the concept of artefact biographies in archaeology aims at detecting and understanding changes in meaning that emerge from social action around and with the object (Gosden & Marshall, 1999, p. 169). The life history of an object is seen as a key to its social function, which may vary considerably over time and which is vital for an understanding of its practical dimensions. Material objects in this perspective should be regarded as actors, capable of taking active part in communication with other material and human actors (LaMotta & Schiffer, 2001). Larger material objects, such as the individual sarsens in the enormous henge monument at Avebury in southern England, can be
approached in the same way; the monument and all of its parts tell stories that, at least in some cases, can be detected and followed archaeologically right from the late Neolithic through prehistoric, medieval and up to present times (Gillings & Pollard, 1999; see also Pollard & Gillings, this volume). Such a biographical approach highlights a critical aspect of the importance of places, namely their different interpretation and association in different periods and contexts and hence the perception and use of archaeological sites in periods post-dating their original cultural context. A large body of literature exists where this matter is scrutinized (e.g. Burström, 1996; Holtorf, 1998a & 1998b; Karlsson, 2000; Hutton, 2009). At Avebury, although the status as a World Heritage Site is only a couple of decades old, the place has been ascribed special importance for at least 4000 years (Harvey, 2008 p. 23ff).

A biographical approach to landscapes recognizes the temporal dimensions of dwelling in an attempt to understand the dynamic relations between the inhabitants and their world (Ingold, 1993 & 2000). Landscape here constitutes the inhabited world, as the inhabitants know it, and the concept of *taskscape* as defined by anthropologist Tim Ingold represents the activities taking place there (Ingold, 1993, p. 156 and 158). In this view, *landscape* can be seen and *taskscape* is what you can hear; it is the temporal and historical dimension of landscape (Ingold, 1993, p. 157ff). In a biographical perspective of taskscape, remembrance constitutes the crucial factor that preserves activities and builds up a body of ‘pastscape’ of a place, i.e. the remembered and acknowledged stories of past events and activities connected to a place that serves to render that particular place its cultural meaning. In this way narratives are created, stories that connect actors and sceneries in time and space. Cultural geographer David Harvey emphasizes the nature of heritage as a process, historically embedded but always produced in the present (Harvey, 2001). The use of archaeological sites in periods post-dating their original cultural context should be viewed from this perspective; at all times, these places have been experienced and interpreted from the perspective of the present, no matter what present (Harvey, 2001 p. 325).

The remembrance of past generations’ associations with the landscape provide a sense of place attachment, be it the acknowledged memory of real events or myths that connected places with events and activities in the past (Edmonds, 1999, p. 26 and 29f). The greater the time-depth in occupation and activities at a site are, the stronger the place-values that are associated with it (Chapman, 1997, p. 37). Although not explicitly stated in the literature on meaning of place and place attachment reviewed above,
it seems clear that for the temporal dimension of the meaning of place and its component of meaning/symbols, memory is absolutely crucial in the sense that it ensures the perceived meaning of the place to be transmitted and experienced through time. Without memory, the meaning of place would be restricted to its physical objective appearance and the activities performed in the immediate and experienced presence of perception (see Relph, 1976, p. 61). With the memory of past activities and stories connected to the location, together with prospective memories of its anticipated future (Holtorf, 1996 & 1997), the meaning of place becomes multifaceted and dynamic in a way not possible in the isolated and memory-less present. This corresponds directly to the ‘interactional past’ and ‘interactional potential’ of place attachment as reviewed above (Milligan, 1998). Memory in this way is the clue to the understanding of the meaning of, and attachment to, places. Furthermore, the spatial aspect of memory has been shown to be of critical importance: ‘Having been in places is a fundamental resource for remembering our being in the world’ (Lillios & Tsamis, 2010; cf. Casey, 1987).

In my view, then, in discussing the meaning or importance of places in the past, history and memory are crucial as are the activities of people using and perceiving these places. In the following, to illustrate these arguments in an archaeological context, Neolithic megalithic tombs in general and on the island of Öland in southeast Sweden in particular will be discussed.

Biographies of Megalithic Monuments

Even though their ‘original’ meaning (if there was ever such a thing) may be long lost, in a biographical sense many prehistoric sites are still active places. Rather than ‘the skeletons of dead places’ (Relph, 1976, p. 32), prehistoric monuments in general are to be seen as living and experiencing actors with a rich and varied past, an active present and an unforeseen future (Holtorf, 1998a & 2000-2008). An excavation of a passage grave in this sense is just another (not necessarily the last) event in the life history of that particular monument. The meaning ascribed to a monument at a given time is dependent on social context and the interpretative horizons of the interpreter, and reflects the monument’s ‘effect-in-history’ (Karlsson, 2000). The social context of a place changes through time, and the ‘status’of a place may change completely based on seemingly minor events or changes in its life path (Papmehl-Dufay, 2012). Since social contexts are dynamic and overlap, the location will have multiple understandings and multiple biographies overlapping and changing over time (Karlson, 2000; Clack & Brittain, 2011, p. 92ff).
Megalithic monuments in the form of passage tombs and dolmens in Scandinavia represent one of the earliest forms of monumental architecture in this part of the world, preceded only by the long mounds of the earliest Neolithic (Larsson, 2002). Within a relatively narrow time frame around 3400-3000 BC, thousands of megalithic tombs were constructed in Denmark and southern Sweden, in many cases in dense clusters resulting in ‘megalithic areas’ such as Falbygden in Västergötland, Sweden (Sjögren, 2011). The passage grave chambers typically contain the disarticulated skeletal remains of tens or even more than a hundred individuals (Ahlström, 2009, p. 81ff). In the Falbygden area, where some 250 passage tombs are concentrated in a restricted area of Cambro-Silurian sediments, the absolute majority of radiocarbon dated human bones from passage graves are of middle Neolithic age, and the construction and use of the tombs thus culturally connected to the TRB culture (see Midgley, 1992). In the mounds surrounding the chambers, however, burials of the Bronze and Iron Age are relatively common (Sjögren, 2004, p. 163f; Wallin, 2010, p. 40ff). In other cases the large buried collective in megalithic chambers is an illusion, and instead the accumulated bones reflect a very extensive period of use stretching over centuries or even millennia (Fornander, 2011, p. 59ff). Although activities post-dating the early and middle Neolithic are by no means controversial in connection to these monuments, and often evidenced in the artefact assemblages recovered, the use of passage graves in the later Neolithic and the Bronze Age has seldom been discussed in depth. In the context of the meaning of places, a number of issues arise that could be of relevance in the discussion. What were the reasons for returning to ancient places such as Neolithic megalithic tombs in, say, the Bronze Age? What kept these places alive, and what constituted their perceived meaning? And for that matter, what kind of significance made the place appropriate for the erection of a megalithic monument in the first place?

The construction of a megalithic monument in the early Neolithic no doubt signified a major physical alteration of that particular piece of land. In many cases, however, archaeological evidence has indicated the presence of earlier features at the site, making the conceptual alteration of the significance of that place possibly less revolutionary (e.g. Bradley, 1993, p. 22; Richards, 1996). Also, this means that the place where the tomb was constructed in these cases was already loaded with memory: the place already had a meaning and there already was a ‘pastscape’ connected with the place (see above). The megalithic monument was adding to this already existing biography in the same way as any spatially associated events would. Its monumentality ensured a long-lasting imprint in the meaning of the place:
it was built to last for a long time, and although its ideological foundations were eventually lost, its physical appearance persisted (more or less) and new ‘memories’ were, and still are, created concerning its origin and significance, contributing to the development of the meaning of the place at large.

The notion of pre-megalith meaning of megalithic sites may be of great importance to our understanding of the location of Neolithic monuments and possibly also the phenomenon of monument clusters. Looking in the other direction, monuments in general are built to communicate prospective memories (Holtorf, 1996 & 1997). The very acts of constructing a massive monument from enormous erratic boulders and placing the corpses of ancestors in the chamber indicate a perception of time directed towards an eternal future (Holtorf, 1996, p. 121). Megalithic tombs, by their material and monumental appearance, always seem to communicate permanence, and their message, although founded in a past time, is directed towards a future (Holtorf, 1996, p. 123). That is, Neolithic megalith builders probably imagined a long life history for their work, and in most cases this came to be realized in one way or another. The way this history developed, however, was governed by social and cultural factors of later times, and took turns that were not at first intended such as the blocking of the entrances of many tombs in the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age (Persson & Sjögren, 2001, p. 214f) or the placing of cremations in the mound during the Bronze Age and Iron Age (Arne, 1909, p. 90). In Atlantic Scotland, Neolithic monuments have been reused or reinvented in the Bronze and Iron Age as dwellings (Hingley, 1996), and in Portugal, among other places, dolmens were converted into Christian churches in historical times (Holtorf, 1998b). These changes in meaning and practice associated with monuments are usually referred to as ‘secondary use’, although they are probably better understood as meaningful social contexts in their own right. In all these cases, even though the outcomes in our view were radically different, an existing feature has been interpreted by people and integrated into their own cosmology, be it through rebuilding, removing or adding to the original architecture. That is, new memories have been created concerning the history and significance of the monument, and these memories have added to the existing biography of the place. Even more profane reuse of an ancient site, such as the utilization of the southern wall of a dolmen chamber at Resmo, Öland in the construction of a 19th-century stone fence (figure 6.2), represents an interpretation of the existing feature that adds to previous understandings. This case also illustrates the multiple meanings and functions associated with places such as megalithic monuments (see Karlsson, 2000). At this point, on the one hand the Resmo dolmen was perceived as a convenient stone structure that
could save the workers some labour by being incorporated into the fence, and also as a prominent landmark that appropriately marked a border in the landscape. On the other hand, it was still perceived as a significant ancient place (‘the giant stones’). In the 1930s, and probably also earlier, stories were being told of ghastly creatures appearing at the site of the monument: ‘It was in a sunset. Then my mom and my sister saw a rider on a horse over by the grave. They were up in the clouds.’ This story is a memory that contributes in a very distinct way to the perception of meaning of the place; by referring to a specific (real or fictional) past event associated with the place, it is given a specific meaning which in this case involves an interpretation of the site as a grave which is haunted by supernatural creatures.

The discussion above implies that the concepts of ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ uses are in a sense unproductive in this context. The perception, interpretation and use by people of passage graves in periods succeeding their construction should be regarded as parts of the monument’s life history and constituents of the meaning of the place, rather than as a secondary (=less important) phenomenon. In my view, this is in fact one of the great advantages of a
biographical approach, which regards the place and the monument itself as the focus around which a range of activities was performed at different times. Through memory, past landscapes have been reused and renegotiated, and old monuments have taken part in new social contexts in which remembrance and memory played an important role (Holtorf & Williams, 2006).

Öland Today and in the Neolithic

The island of Öland is situated off the Swedish east coast in the Baltic Sea (figure 6.3). The elongated island measures 130 km in length and c. 20 km in width. Topography is generally flat, the island’s highest point reaching c. 58 m above the present sea level. The bedrock consists of Ordovician limestone and, below the western slopes, Cambrian slate. Öland has long been a focus of interest for people of many disciplines and professions. Nowadays the island is a popular summer home for thousands of Swedish and foreign tourists, and the unique flora and fauna is a constant source of attraction for both scholars and laymen. UNESCO declared the southern third of the island a World Heritage Site in 2000, in recognition of its varied and well-preserved historical agrarian landscape.

With some 13,600 recorded ancient sites and monuments and massive numbers of stray finds of prehistoric artefacts, archaeologically Öland is one of the most productive regions in Sweden. The most eye-catching among the prehistoric remains on Öland are the Iron Age ring forts and the numerous Iron Age cemeteries spread all over the island. Here various types of mounds, stone settings, erected stones and stone circles together with hundreds of old windmills and miles upon miles of old stone fences combine to produce an intriguing image of an immediately present heritage, which has come to serve as a trademark for the region. The wealth of prehistoric remains all over the island contributes to create a notion of a very present past, and the time depth of visible structures in the landscape is considerable, thus the ‘presence of the past’ goes for past times as well. The Neolithic coastline is located some 8-12 m above that of today (see figure 6.3). Stray finds from the period are numerous all over the island, indicating a relatively dense settlement in the central and especially western parts of the island during the early and middle Neolithic (Åberg, 1923). On the southwest part of the island, in the parish of Resmo, a group of four Neolithic megalithic tombs is located (Papmehl-Dufay, 2006 & 2011). Three of the tombs are passage graves located a few hundred m apart in the village of Mysinge, and the fourth is a dolmen situated near Resmo church.
c. 2.5 km to the north of the passage graves. The southernmost of the graves was excavated in 1908 (Arne, 1909), and will be discussed in some detail below. The other three graves remain unexcavated.

Seen in relation to the distribution of megalithic monuments in Northern Europe, the Öland tombs are located in the eastern periphery, some 150 km to the east as the bird flies of the nearest concentration of megaliths on the Swedish mainland (see Papmehl-Dufay, 2011, p. 132). One or possibly two dolmens are located on the island of Gotland to the east (Wallin, 2010), whereas the Öland passage graves represent the easternmost monuments of this type in Europe. The reasons behind their location have not been discussed much, except during the early 20th century when they were seen as evidence for a
demographic migration from southwest Scandinavia in the Neolithic (Arne, 1909, p. 95; Åberg, 1923, p. 25; Stenberger, 1948, p. 307ff). Recent isotope analyses have shown that the majority of the individuals interred in the Mysinge passage grave during the earliest phase in fact originated from Öland, and thus other explanations must be sought (see below; Fornander, 2011, p. 61).

From the perspective of landscape and place biographies, the isolated occurrence of megaliths on Öland is a highly interesting phenomenon. Rather than explaining it as a random phenomenon, we should accept that the Resmo area must have had some form of quality lacking in other neighbouring and more distant areas in which megaliths were not built. Whatever the nature of this quality, it would have been associated in some way with the meaning of place and thus either connected to the physical appearance/objective morphology of the area, to interactions and activities by and between people in the area, and/or to meanings and histories related to the collective memory of the place (Relph, 1976; Castello, 2010). In several cases, it has been argued that megalithic monuments refer to existing architectural or natural features, which would fit into the category of physical appearance (see Thomas, 1996, p. 90; Richards, 1996). At Resmo, the monumental and dramatic landscape setting on the crest of the western escarpment may be one such aspect of physical appearance; another is the rich spring located c. 500 m to the west of the dolmen at Resmo. However, in an objective sense none of these features are unique to this specific locality. In my view, while not excluding aspects of physical appearance altogether, memory and human interaction are likely to be involved in some way. An interesting archaeological find in this context is the rich culture layer and large amounts of high-quality early Neolithic pottery recently recovered at a site c. 250 m to the northwest of the Resmo dolmen (Papmehl-Dufay, 2009). The culture layer pre-dates the dolmen by a few centuries, providing undisputable evidence of intense activities in the immediate area preceding the construction of the megalith. The available evidence is enough to suggest that the place of this megalith, at the time of monument construction, already had a long history of human-environment interaction, memory and meaning. There should be little doubt that this was of some significance for the subsequent development at the site.

The Mysinge Passage Graves

The three passage graves at Mysinge are situated c. 2.5 km to the south of the Resmo dolmen, on the western escarpment at c. 45 m above the present
sea level and some 200 m to the east of the steep slopes towards the sea in the west. Two of the graves are placed less than 100 m apart, and the third is located c. 500 m to the south of the other two. All three have a limited visibility of the sea, and the tomb entrances face away from the sea towards the vast limestone plateau of “the Great Alvar” in the east and southeast.

In contrast to the Resmo dolmen, there is as yet no distinctive evidence of pre-megalith activities in the immediate Mysinge area, although stray finds of flint indicate Neolithic activities. The roof slabs of one of the passage graves are covered with cup-marks supposedly dating to the Bronze Age, and to the south as well as to the north extensive burial grounds from the Bronze Age and the Iron Age are located. The southernmost of the passage graves (figure 6.4) has been excavated on several occasions, while the other two graves remain unexcavated. The results from the southernmost tomb, however, are revealing in terms of the history and meaning of the place, and some general conclusions can be drawn that are probably valid for all three of the graves.

An excavation in 1908 (Arne, 1909) of the southernmost of the Mysinge tombs concerned the chamber and the area immediately around the
chamber and the passage. The stratigraphy of the chamber consisted of more than 1 m of gravel, sand and soil containing large amounts of unburned human and animal bones as well as a number of artefacts. The bones were mostly found disarticulated, but three human individuals could be identified of which the bones were still in articulated position. In the uppermost part of the stratigraphy, in the gap between two of the large roof boulders, fragments of a ceramic vessel were found together with cremated bones, all covered by a limestone slab. Another small concentration of burned bone was found just outside the chamber wall to the west.

The artefacts recovered from the chamber and the passage include a varied set of objects made of flint, bone, antler, amber and pottery representing a wide chronological sequence from the late early Neolithic/early middle Neolithic and at least into the Bronze Age. The faunal assemblage from Mysinge has not been properly published, but recent analyses indicate the presence of a range of species including dog, fox, hare, cattle, sheep/goat, pig and duck (Ahlström, 2009, p. 166; Eriksson et al., 2008, table 4). Three animal bones from the chamber have been radiocarbon dated: a sheep/goat was dated to the late Neolithic, a cow was dated to the early Iron Age and another sheep/goat was dated to between the 16th and 18th centuries AD (Eriksson et al., 2008, table 5).

Additional excavations in the entrance area and through the mound (Arne, 1937; Alexandersson, 2005) have revealed details in the construction and successive use of the monument. In the uppermost layers of the mound and just outside the southwestern end of the chamber, numerous fragments of burned bone were found in 2004. Investigations in front of the tomb entrance have revealed two large sandstone slabs and a stone-packing (‘entrance cairn’) covering scatters and concentrations of flint, burned bone and pottery (Arne, 1937; Alexandersson, 2005). The pottery amounts to c. 2 kg, while the amounts of flint and burned bone are much more modest. The potsherds were found in several concentrations, possibly corresponding to individual vessels smashed and deposited in front of the tomb in the early Middle Neolithic (Alexandersson, 2005, p. 8ff). Stratigraphic observations show that the entrance cairn was constructed at a later stage in the use-history of the tomb as a grave, possibly in the late Neolithic or the Bronze Age (Wollentz, 2011). This would correspond to observations in Scania as well as in Falbygden, both in Sweden, where the construction of entrance cairns is often interpreted as a symbolic closing of the grave chamber (Persson & Sjögren, 2001, p. 214).

The Mysinge skeletal assemblage has been subjected to a range of laboratory analyses including stable carbon, nitrogen, sulphur and strontium isotope measurements as well as mitochondrial DNA analyses on human
and faunal remains from the chamber (Lidén, 1995&1996; Kanstrup, 2004; Eriksson et al., 2008; Linderholm, 2008; Fornander, 2011). The total number of people buried is difficult to establish, but the minimum number of individuals has been estimated at 56, cremated bones not included (Ahlström, 2009, p. 83). Thirty-four of these have been radiocarbon dated, revealing a period of use for the chamber covering a span of almost 2500 years (c. 3500-1000 BC), seemingly with some distinct hiatuses (Eriksson et al., 2008; Ahlström, 2009). Of the dated individuals, twelve can be chronologically attributed to the late early Neolithic/early middle Neolithic, eleven to the late middle Neolithic, one to the late Neolithic and finally ten individuals to the early and middle Bronze Age. These figures make the Mysinge passage grave unique in that the majority of the 34 dated individuals post-date the Early/Middle Neolithic phase (see Fornander, 2011, p. 58).

**Conclusion: Places That Matter**

The Öland megaliths illustrate some key problems related to the discussion on the meaning and importance of place above. At one level, the very location of four tombs to such a restricted area in the far eastern periphery of the megalith tradition presents us with questions regarding place and landscape: why here, and why more than one within such a limited area? At another level, the excavated material from the southernmost of the graves emphasizes issues on different phases of use as well as change and continuity of meaning at a particular place in the landscape. And thirdly, the discussion at large connects to issues of collective memory and the use of archaeological sites in periods post-dating their original cultural context (Holtorf, 1996, p. 125ff; Harvey, 2001). Through the biographical approach adopted above, these places can be viewed from the perspective of meaningful places in the present, at every individual occasion of cultural interaction. Accordingly, the separation of primary and secondary use is left in favour of an appreciation of the meaning and importance of the place at each particular time of use.

As discussed above, the Resmo/Mysinge area probably possessed some form of quality that triggered the exceptional development of monument building in the late Early Neolithic. The manifest expression involved in megalith building arguably emphasized aspects of permanence, making visible and concretizing people’s sense of belonging to a particular area (Bradley, 1998, p. 63ff). Through their permanence and visibility, as well as
through the practice of physical remains of dead people being placed and kept within the chambers, megalithic tombs can be viewed as embodiments of the concept of place attachment. The same can be argued about their often long use-history as sites for burial: by returning to the manifest monuments of old and performing rituals there connected to death and the ancestors, a sense of rootedness was established and maintained among the living that connected to that place and area. The prominence and visibility of the megalithic tombs provided fuel for this attachment and may have contributed to a sense of geographically connected cultural identity. A cluster of monuments in this sense can be understood not primarily as territorial markers for separate families but rather as an expression of a particularly strong attachment to place.

Among the 34 dated individuals from the Mysinge passage grave, twelve can be chronologically connected to the late early Neolithic/early middle Neolithic covering a period of c. 500 years around 3400-2900 cal. BC. The available data thus suggest that less than one individual per generation was being buried in the tomb during this phase. Roughly the same appears to be the case during the following phase of use, during the late middle Neolithic at around 2800-2300 cal. BC to which period eleven individuals are dated. The ten individuals dated to the Late Neolithic or the Bronze Age are spread over a period of c. 1200 years (c. 2200-1000 BC), i.e. less than one individual interred per century. It should be recalled, though, that the calibrations are not all statistically separable and thus many of the individuals could be more or less contemporary, and also that at least 22 individuals and probably many more remain undated (Ahlström, 2009). Still it seems quite possible that the buried collective in this case is an illusion created by the extremely long period of use. The act of interring in all probability was connected to individuals, not the collective in the first place. The time elapsing between individual interments may sometimes have been considerable, and thus memory and remembrance are critical factors in understanding the long-term development at the site.

This is further illustrated by the way human remains were treated. The majority of the human bones were found in the lowermost part of the stratigraphy, while animal bones were concentrated to the densely compacted uppermost part (Arne, 1909, p. 90). That this in fact reflects a chronological sequence is strengthened by radiocarbon dates of human and animal bones: while the humans date from the early Neolithic to the middle Bronze Age, the three dated animals span from the late Neolithic to historical times (Eriksson et al., 2008; see above). Thus, the c. 2500-year-long practice of placing human bodies in the chamber seems
to have been overlapped by a lengthy practice of placing animal carcasses there. The disarticulated human bones were concentrated to the short sides of the chamber, and only three skeletons were found in partly articulated positions, one of which was found crouching with hands in front of the face (Arne, 1909, p. 91). A recent re-evaluation convincingly showed that this body was originally placed in the chamber in a squatting position (Ahlström, 2009, p. 69). It could therefore be argued that the seemingly chaotic arrangement of bones in the chamber is the result of taphonomic processes and that at least some of the bodies were placed sitting in the chamber in a complete state and left to slowly decay. The concentration of disarticulated human remains at the short ends of the chamber would fit this interpretation, representing repeated clearing away of ‘old’ bodies to make place for new ones. Unfortunately, there is no information from the excavation about where in the stratigraphy the more complete individuals were found.

If this scenario is accepted, we are faced with a situation where the handling of corpses at Mysinge was not radically different in the middle Neolithic and the early Bronze Age respectively, despite the chronological difference of more than two millennia. Apart from being remarkable in the purely chronological sense, this would also stand in sharp contrast to the general burial customs of the later periods concerned. Again, the critical factor must be memory: if several generations passed between each interment during some periods, but the treatment of human remains nonetheless remained more or less the same for some 100 generations, what were the underlying mechanisms? What were the reasons for people to return to the grave again and again, treating the bodies of particular deceased individuals in the way people did in the distant past?

To make sense of this, we have to consider events other than interments taking place at the tomb. The place was never neutral between the possibly rare occasions of burial; instead the extremely long tradition of activities at the site indicates that many different events took place here that kept the meaning of the place alive (cf. Edmonds, 1999, p. 60ff). The evidence for offerings in front of the entrance in the early middle Neolithic (Alexandersson, 2005) reflects a common phenomenon noted at many passage tombs in southern Sweden. Of course, this was probably but one of countless activities taking place in connection to the monument, not all connected directly to interments. If memory is one key to the understanding of how and why the tomb was used over such extensive periods of time, the great variety of activities performed at the site is another. The passage grave at Mysinge was not just a place where dead
ancestors were placed and kept. The place and its biographical history are central to the significance of the tomb; placing certain individuals in the chamber in the early Bronze Age makes a very clear reference both back in time and towards an eternal future, just because it is an ancient megalithic monument loaded with retrospective and prospective memory (Holtorf, 1996). Also, it illustrates very clearly a sense of rootedness and attachment to this particular place and area among the people involved in using the monument.

The attitude towards the place and its social significance has varied over time, and its biography continued after it ceased to be used as a burial chamber for humans. In fact, to date we are dealing with a period of c. 5400 years (!) during which the Mysinge tomb has existed and people in the area have had some form of relationship to it. To this should be added the unknown period preceding the construction of the monument during which the place was loaded with meaning. The range of events and actions that have been performed in connection to the place, and the number of people that have passed by, are just beyond comprehension. Cornelius Holtorf (2008, see this volume) even argued that the shifting character and identity of monuments over time is so extensive that we cannot even speak of it as one place, but rather as many places, and hence that the biographic approach is misleading in the sense that it depends too much on the assumption of ‘an assumed unchanging essence of the object’ (Holtorf, 2008, p. 423). This certainly is an interesting and valid point of discussion. However, even though the physical appearance of, as well as the cognitive associations with, the place may change completely and numerous times during a monument’s lifetime, I would argue that it is precisely by regarding it as one and the same place that we can understand the development of meaning at the site. If we were to regard the monument as it was perceived during each phase as separate places, we would lose one of the most important aspects of meaning of place, namely memory. It is through place-specific references back (and forward) in time that each phase perceives and ascribes meaning to the monument: the ghost stories connected to the Resmo dolmen in the early 20th century are clearly connected to a memory concerning the meaning of the place in the past, i.e. its nature as an ancient grave. This connection is very specifically place-bound, and would be difficult to comprehend if the continuity of place was dismissed. To write up a complete biographic history of a monument such as the Mysinge passage grave is neither necessary nor possible, but to discard the biographical approach altogether is to deny the role of memory in connection to the meaning of place. Needless to say, this I think would be a mistake.
Epilogue: The Meaning of Archaeology

From what has been said above, the meaning of a place consists of its physical properties together with what has taken place there and the events that are celebrated and remembered by people. Without memory in the broad sense, places would lose much of their meaning. Place attachment always involves a portion of memory; of events, actors and emotions associated with the place, and memories in terms of knowledge concerning the anticipated history and nature of the place. In short, ‘dead’ places and objects do not mean much if there is no ‘memory’ connected to them. An old painting that has been lying in the attic for decades may be regarded as worthless, until the day the antiques expert provides a memory: it is actually a long-lost and extremely valuable Renoir! The painting instantly turns from being worthless into a veritable treasure, simply by being (re-)connected to a memory (in this case in the form of knowledge). The same goes for all kinds of objects, as well as for places: a particular patch of ground beside the road in Ljungby, southern Sweden, is today an important memorial for thousands of thrash metal fans around the globe, simply through the memory of a bus accident on 27 September 1986 during which Cliff Burton, bass player of Metallica, tragically died. This is one of countless examples where the biographical history of a place, and the memory of specific events, is absolutely critical to the development of meaning of the place. I argue that this is precisely what archaeology does: through excavation and interpretation, archaeologists create additional memories that bring new meaning to past objects and places. This is not to say that other memories, such as folktales or ghost stories, are less valid: instead, all contribute to create and maintain a meaning of the place, archaeology included.

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