Identities overseas? The long barrows in Denmark and Britain

Constanze Rassmann

Abstract

Neolithic scholars have debated the significance of similarities between British and south Scandinavian ceramic styles and burial methods since the 1930s. Close parallels in design and practice between these two geographically distant areas have often been interpreted as the result of both direct and indirect contact and exchange. This paper engages with the central issue of this debate by examining contact and identity through the prism of non-megalithic long barrows. Can these structures be understood as a medium through which interactions were negotiated? Could they have been the means of articulating a shared “overseas” identity? In this paper, the various and sundry criteria associated with non-megalithic long barrows (i.e. barrow construction, grave design, grave goods, ritual practices) are qualitatively and quantitatively analysed. The object is not only to assess the levels of similarity between these various criteria, but also to determine if those selfsame categories can be combined in such a way as to make a British/south Scandinavian collective identity a viable focus for academic pursuit.

Zusammenfassung

Introduction

Non-megalithic long barrows – otherwise known as Earthen Long Barrows – are defined as elongated, artificially raised earthen monuments often used as graves and accompanied by external structures such as rows of posts (MIDGLEY 1985, 1). While the focus of this paper is on the long barrows of South Scandinavia, Germany and Britain, their actual distribution spans out over half of Europe, including both France and Poland (fig. 1). This pattern is highly influenced by the research traditions of the different countries and is, as new discoveries have shown (such as Selchow 24 in Brandenburg (KÖLLNER 2007)), still incomplete. The non-megalithic long barrows in the area under investigation are associated with various Neolithic inventories. In Britain, they are connected both with supra-regional ceramic styles such as Windmill Hill and regional ceramics such as Abingdon (MEGAW/SIMPSON 1979, 89), whereas the northern European monuments are connected with Funnelbeaker ceramic styles and the various regional permutations of that ceramic group.

If one considers the dating of these monuments not only in terms of material culture, but also as per the interpretation of the radiocarbon dates associated with them (which consider the shape of the calibration curve (cf. RAETZEL-FABIAN 2001)) – one can argue for a contemporary construction of these monuments on the Continent and in Britain (RASSMANN 2008). Based on this interpretation, the following model can be designed: The building of French non-megalithic long barrows started in the 45th century calBC and lasted until the 42nd century calBC (CONSTANTIN et al 1997). Dates from Polish Long Barrows around 4000 BC (MIDGLEY 1985) have to be omitted due to doubtful find contexts. Thus, a connection between the French constructions and the northern European monuments can be questioned due to the hiatus following, as the Scanian non-megalithic long barrows
were built around the 38th century calBC (Larsson 2002 b). After an initial phase, the “long barrow idea” spread across Zealand and Jutland towards the west within one century and reached Britain in the 37th century calBC (Rasmann 2008).

If one takes into consideration the early French dates and the later Scandinavian ones, it would seem that the model proposed here appears to be counter-intuitive: a spread from West to East across the British Isles would seem logical, but is – at present – not supported by the data. The main point, however, is the generally contemporaneous habit of building and using non-megalithic long barrows in Scandinavia and Britain. As a familiar burial construction, earthen long barrows were built until the 34th century calBC in both of the areas under investigation.

Long Barrows and Identity

“Identity” describes the ways in which individuals and collectivities are discerned in their relations with other individuals and/or collectivities (JenKins 1996, 18). Every human is part of not only one but several collectivities. Consequently, humans hold not just one but multiple identities, which can work on different levels crosscutting other aspects of “identity”. Furthermore, never static, “identity” is a continual process and has to be constantly constructed and maintained through human interactions. In this context, material culture plays an important role in signifying social “identities” (Diaz-Andreu/Lucy 2005, 9), both in terms of self-identity and inclusion in wider groups. In the course of such considerations, the interpretation of similarities in material culture as expressions of or indications for identities seems justifiable.

Therefore, non-megalithic Long barrows touch different aspects of identity: Firstly, beyond Renfrew’s (1973) interpretation of monuments as territory markers, non-megalithic long barrows can be understood not only as reflections but also as signals of group identities. Secondly, building even a medium-sized long barrow requires an enormous amount of time. Calculations of the duration of the erection of a long barrow grounded in anthropological analogies (cf. Müller 1990), imply that ten people working 6.5 hours per day would need a minimum of 22 days to construct a small barrow and up to 300 days for the assembly of a larger one. On the one hand, these numbers illustrate that constructing tumuli is made possible only due to the fact that a certain group identity has already been established. On the other, the figures intimate that the construction maintains a pre-existing sense of togetherness. Thirdly, features observed during excavations (cf. Evans/Hodder 2006) suggest that barrows were not built during one event but in several stages with recurrent returns to the construction site. Aside from a certain level of organisation, this indicates that the erection of a non-megalithic long barrow is a “happening” created to regenerate collective identities and re-transform individuals into a community (cf. Gramsch 1996, 109).

To summarize, collective or group identities might be denoted by material culture in general and non-megalithic long barrows in particular and often result in similarities in the material.

Data and Methodology

In order to investigate a shared “overseas” identity, this paper analyses the similarities of different aspects connected to non-megalithic long barrows, namely the construction of the monument and the
grave, burial goods and ritual practices. For a quantitative analysis of the construction of the respective barrows, different variables were defined such as the shape of the barrow, the outline of the façade, the arrangement of the ditches etc. The same was done for the constructional details of the grave, i.e. the outline of the postholes and stone frame as well as their positions within the monument (for an overview of all variables used and their codes see list 2). For a comparison of grave goods, the objects were classified according to their structural aspects, as a more formal approach would have made examination impossible. For example, both a funnelbeaker and a Grimston bowl were classified as a “vessel” according to this approach (see list 3). Observations that can be defined as “ritual practices”, such as burning of the façade, deposition of ceramics, were discovered during recent but not older excavations. This lack is probably circumstantial and more a result of different excavation techniques than any archaeological reality. Because of the relatively low frequency of such observed features, a qualitative analysis was chosen. The same approach was favoured in order to assess the deposition of skeletons, as the number is low also due to poor bone preservation.

The dataset chosen for the quantitative and qualitative analyses were non-megalithic long barrows with both precise descriptions and depictions. In the investigation area, such information was available for 71 monuments (31 British, 40 continental barrows), which, when viewed in terms of distribution, represent the overall geographical spread of the area with which this study is concerned.

Analyses and results

Sufficient information about construction details was available for 71 barrows and studied with the help of correspondence analysis (henceforth abbreviated as CA); the data plot of the monuments is depicted in fig. 2. The data plot of the first and second vector space shows a point cloud unevenly spread along the second axis. As data structures of CA are very often results of chronological or geographical factors, information about the absolute chronological dating of the respective monuments was used in this data plot. Using this approach, we can see older dates in the negative part of the first axis and younger ones in the positive segment. It can therefore be suggested that the use of construction variables is influenced by time.

However, this paper deals with the question of “overseas” identity. The next step is therefore to look for geographical patterns and the question of similarities in the construction of British and continental monuments. When examined in terms of construction variables, no clear differences between the northern European and British barrows can be seen. A dominance of British barrows in the upper part is observable, whereas the middle portion is a mixture of south Scandinavian, north German and British monuments. Continental constructions dominate slightly on the left hand side, but even there British monuments also comprise part of that cluster.

These clusters in the CA may be interpreted as a function of the similarities between the construction habits of the respective barrows, their values of the first two axes of the CA thus represents a distinct scale of similarity. These “similarity” values on the basis of the construction variables were then used for a network-analysis. The results were added up for all barrows within one region and combined with geographical coordinates to depict the spatial relations of the different regions. Similarities in the construction of barrows are displayed by means of lines connecting the respective regions repre-
sented by nodal points. Furthermore, the thickness of lines reflects the intensity of similarities calculated by Ucinet 6 (Borgatti et al. 2002) using Pearson correlation. This means, that the thicker the line between two nodal points the more similar the barrows in the two regions. For more clarity the results stemming from this approach are represented in two steps. The first figure (fig. 3) shows connections between regions with similarity values greater or equal to four with a maximum value of six, whereas the second figure (fig. 4) displays connections with similarity values greater or equal to three.

On fig. 3 we can observe similarities in the construction of long barrows of middle and southern Jutland (DK 14 and 13) whereas the Limfjord (DK 12) region seems to be less similar to the rest of Jutland. The Scanian (S 17) monuments find their counterparts on Zealand (DK 16) and north Germany (D 18), where they mostly resemble the barrows of Zealand. In Great Britain, similarities can be observed in the constructions of the barrows in regions UK 5, 6 and 9 as well as between the regions UK 7, 10 and 11. Furthermore, the monuments of the regions UK 1, 3 and 4 are very similar. The monuments of UK 2 are constructed in a similar fashion to the monuments from UK 8, 9 and 6. Using a strict criterion with a similarity value greater or equal to four, it is principally the similarities between barrows in neighbouring regions that can be observed.

On the other hand, the depiction of similarity values greater or equal to three (fig. 4) shows the existence of similarities between regions that are geographically distant from each other. Both the mon-
A network analysis was used in order to assess the spatial spread of similarly-constructed monuments. This approach, again applied in two steps for clarity, showed that geographically close monuments are usually but not exclusively similar to one another. However, similarities exist between monuments of Britain and the Continent as well. To be more precise, in terms of monument construction, barrows from Zealand and Jutland are in the construction of their monument as similar to one another as are the barrows from Britain and Jutland.

After having seen such similarities in monument construction, the question which arises is whether such parallels can be observed in the construction of graves as well. The first difference can be seen through a comparison of the percentages of long barrows with and
without graves (fig. 5). Whereas the majority of continental barrows contain graves, evidence of graves was found in just two-thirds of the British barrows; it is quite unlikely that this picture is circumstantial, as general conditions for bone preservation are better in Britain. Because of this difference in the quantity of usable data, the two regions were analysed separately. The constructions of the grave were again divided into different variables such as post settings, design of the stone setting and/or the position of the grave in the barrow (list 2).

The CA of the continental barrows is displayed in fig. 6, whereas fig. 7 shows the British monuments. The following section shall highlight some constructional aspects in order to discuss similarities or differences in terms of the areas of study. Perhaps the most striking difference between Britain and Continent is the lack of certain construction variables known on the latter but missing in the former at this point of time. Among this category are different post settings such as Pf c (one post at one narrow side) and Pf d (two posts at one narrow side) as well as stone settings St a (stone settings on the narrow sides) and St e (u-shaped stone settings). Other examples of the differences in grave construction between the two regions would be the dissimilarities in the correlations of structural aspects. For example, post setting Pf b (one post per narrow side and one in the middle) are found together with stone setting St c (in which the whole grave is framed with stones) in Britain, whereas on the Continent, post setting Pf b is connected to stone setting St b (stones settings on the long sides). Simple earth graves are small in size and near to the narrow side of the barrow in Britain, while they are bigger and placed at a distance from the narrow side of the barrow on the Continent.

In contrast to the construction of the monuments, differences can be observed on the level of the grave between Britain and the Continent. First of all, the Neolithic artificially-raised barrows of Britain are – unlike the ones from the Continent – not exclusively connected to burials. The constructional units used differ as well, as some constructions are not in use in Britain and others combined in different ways.

The next step in comparing the Continent and Britain in terms of long barrows is to engage in an analysis of the grave goods associated with those constructions. In fig. 8 the percentages of furnished graves in Britain are contrasted with furnished graves in Northern Europe. At over 90%, nearly all continental graves are furnished, whereas just 36% of the British graves contain grave goods. Already at this early investigative stage, differences can be observed.
In order to continue the examination of this divergence, these two regions and grave goods are explored with the help of CA. Grave goods were therefore classified according to structural aspects so that two different regions with different formal typologies are comparable; to give an example: both a funnelbeaker and a Grimston bowl were categorized as a vessel. The result of this approach is a scatter of the grave data along the second axis (fig. 9). The grave of Haddenham (GB 11) lies distinctly separated in the positive part of the first axis. All the other British graves are positioned in the positive part of the second axis, as are some continental graves. A plot of
Fig. 9. Correspondence analyses of the grave goods found in graves from non-megalithic long barrows, depicted are the units (graves) in their scattering in the 1st and 2nd vector space. The codes refer to the monuments in which the graves were found (list 1).

Abb. 9. Korrespondenzanalyse der Grabbeigaben, die in Gräbern aus nicht-megalithischen Langhügeln gefunden wurden; Darstellung der Einheiten (Gräber) im 1. und 2. Vektorraum. Die verwendeten Kodierungen verweisen auf die Monumente, in welchen die Gräber gefunden wurden (aufgeschlüsselt in „list 1“).

Fig. 10. Correspondence analyses of the grave goods found in graves from non-megalithic long barrows, depicted are the variables (grave goods) in their scattering in the 1st and 2nd vector space. The codes refer to the grave goods (list 3).

Abb. 10. Korrespondenzanalyse der Grabbeigaben, die in Gräbern aus nicht-megalithischen Langhügeln gefunden wurden; Darstellung der Variablen (Beigabe) im 1. und 2. Vektorraum. Die verwendeten Kodierungen verweisen auf die Grabbeigen (aufgeschlüsselt in „list 3“).
the objects (fig. 10) shows that small flint tools and vessels are to be found in the positive area, whereas ornaments, arrowheads and axes lie in the negative part of the second axis. The core and flake variables dominate the separated grave of Haddenham. British and continental graves are furnished with vessels, arrowheads and small flint tools, whereas ornaments and axes are exclusively found in Northern European graves.

To summarize, differences between Britain and the Continent exist in the practice of furnishing graves, as only a select few British burials were actually equipped with artefacts. Furthermore, the combination and variety of grave goods shows differences as well.

A statistical comparison of the body positions in the respective regions is not possible as the preservation of skeletons is, as has been previously stated, not ideal. Nonetheless, a general trend might be indicated in that Continental graves with preserved skeletons show the bodies to have been interred in a supine position. In Britain, by contrast, skeletons from non-megalithic long barrows are mainly found in a crouched position (five graves) or disarticulated (two graves).

Two other observations should be mentioned which have to do with non-megalithic monuments. Both on the continent and in Britain, burning or the destruction of the façade was detected. Likewise, in both regions traces were found showing that in some cases ceramics were deposited in the area in front of the façade.

Overseas identities

Amongst archaeological material, non-megalithic long barrows are the one phenomenon showing the most similarities between northern Europe and Britain. Construction parallels exist especially between Scania, Zealand and northern Germany. British barrows resemble most closely the Jutish monuments. The rituals that were observed in connection with the long barrows (i.e. the re-cutting of ditches, the burning the façade or the deposition of ceramics in the entrance area) are also supra-regional. Nevertheless, the construction of monuments has many inter- and intra-regional variants.

On the contrary, the grave constructions, grave goods and burial positions of the various regions reveal quite clear differences. These results suggest that the whole complex of non-megalithic long barrows involves different and multiple layers of identity. Whereas the exterior of the monument and its layout displays an identity embracing both northern Europe and Britain, the interior components, such as the grave construction, grave goods and burial positions, communicates the identity of a smaller community.

Non-megalithic long barrows can be understood as symbols whose meaning is a convention and cannot be deduced. As has been shown above, non-megalithic long barrows are dressed in meaning which goes beyond the “code” of their construction, and extends to their import as places for ritual activities. The fact that this connection is observable in the entire area investigated suggests that the sign “non-megalithic long barrow” was a complex of meaning and communicated as such. Marginal differences in the construction of barrows can both be a result of intentional choice or due to spatial or chronological information loss. Nonetheless, differences in the construction of graves as well as the differences in the concepts associated with the inclusion or lack of grave goods cannot be explained away by a lack of communication or a faulty decoding of signs, but must be interpreted as an intentional re-interpretation of these aspects. As far as early Neolithic burial costumes are concerned, connections to traditions dating back to the Mesolithic have often been
mentioned in academic discussions of the same. The burial and aspects of grave construction and grave goods connected to the burial could therefore be part of a traditional pattern. The supine burial position practiced during the northern European Mesolithic and as seen in the continental long barrows could be an indication of this. On the other hand, the custom of building a barrow and monumentalizing a place was new. Therefore, the adaption and execution was quite elementary. Non-megalithic long barrows and the aspects connected to them are therefore hybrids of innovation and tradition, of overseas and local identity.

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List 1. Monuments used in the analyses. Listed here is the code used in RASSMANN (2008), their name and the reference where additional information can be found.

**United Kingdom**

GB 1 Abingdon (Radley), Oxfordshire; *Bradley* 1992
GB 2 Alfriston, East Sussex; *Drewett* 1975
GB 3 Beckhampton Road, Wiltshire; *Ashbee / Smith / Evans* 1979
GB 4 Dalladies, Kirkcudbright; *Piggott 1971/1972
GB 5 East Heslerton, Yorkshire; *Kinnes* 1992
GB 6 Easton Down, Wiltshire *Whittle / Rouse / Evans* 1993
GB 7 Fussell’s Lodge, Wiltshire; *Ashbee* 1966
GB 8 Garton Slack, Yorkshire; *Kinnes* 1992
GB 9 Giants Hill 1, Lincolnshire; *Phillips* 1935
GB 10 Giants’ Hill 2 (Skendleby), Lincolnshire; *Evans / Simpson* 1991
GB 11 Haddenham, Cambridgeshire; *Evans / Hodder* 2006
GB 12 Holdenhurst, Dorset; *Piggott* 1937
GB 13 Horslip, Wiltshire (TAFEL 13); *Ashbee u. a.* 1979
GB 14 Kilham, Yorkshire; *Manby* 1976
GB 15 Kingston Deverill G1, Wiltshire; *Harding / Gilling* 1986
GB 16 Lambourn, Berkshire; *Kinnes* 1992
GB 17 Lochhill, Dumfries und Galloway; *Masters* 1973
GB 18 Long Stone, Isle of Wight; *Hawkes* 1957
GB 19 Maxey, East Midlands; *Prior / French / Crowther / Gurney / Simpson / Taylor* 1985
GB 20 North Marden, West Sussex; *Drewett* 1986
GB 21 Nutbene, Hampshire; *Morgan* 1959
GB 22 Raisthorpe, Yorkshire; *Kinnes* 1992
GB 24 South Street, Wiltshire; *Ashbee u. a.* 1979
GB 24 South Street, Wiltshire; *Ashbee u. a.* 1979
GB  25 Street House, Yorkshire; Vyner 1984
GB  26 Thickthorn (Down), Dorset; Drew/Pigott 1936
GB  27 Uplowman Road, Devon; Smith 1990
GB  28 Wayland’s Smithy, Oxfordshire; Atkinson 1965
GB  30 Willerby Wold, Yorkshire; Manby 1963
GB  31 Woodford G2, Wiltshire; Harding/Gingell 1986
GB  32 Wor Barrow, Dorset; Kinnis 1992.

**Denmark**

DK  1 Asnæs Forskov, Holbæk; Gæbauer 1988
DK  2 Barkær I/Süd, Randers; Liversage 1992
DK  2 Barkær I/Süd, Randers; Liversage 1992
DK  3 Barkær II/Nord, Randers; Liversage 1992
DK  4 Bjørnsholm, Aalborg; Andersen/Johansen 1990
DK  4 Bjørnsholm, Aalborg; Andersen/Johansen 1990
DK  5 Brøndum; Andersen/Johansen 1990
DK  6 Bygholm Nørremark, Vejle; Rønne 1979
DK  7 Forum, Ribe; Johansen 1917
DK  8 Harreby IV, Südjylland; Jørgensen 2006
DK  9 Hejring, Viborg; Madsen 1979.
DK  10 Konens Høj; Sturup 1965 (1966)
DK  13 Rude, Aarhus; Madsen 1979
DK  14 Rustrup I, Skanderborg; Fischer 1975
DK  15 Raegaardar, Ringkøbing; Skov 1972 – 73
DK  16 Salten Langhøj, Skanderborg; Becker 1947
DK  17 Sjørup Plantage, Viborg; Madsen 1979
DK  18 Skibshøj, Viborg; Jørgensen 1977
DK  19 Stengade I, Svendborg; Madsen 1979
DK  20 Storgaard IV, Viborg; Kær Kristensen 1989
DK  21 Surløkke, Sønderborg; Sterum 1983
DK  22 Søgard; Sterum 1980
DK  23 Tegleværkgården, Ribe; Madsen/Petersen 1982 – 83
DK  24 Toftlund, Øster Skerringe; Thomsen 1984 (1985)
DK  25 Toftum (Mosegaard); Madsen/Petersen 1982 – 83
DK  26 Tolstrup, Aalborg; Madsen 1973/74 (1975)
DK  27 Tostrup (Troelstrup), Vester; Jær 1977
DK  28 Vedsted, Haderslev; Madsen 1971 (1972)
DK  29 Østergårds I, Viborg; Madsen 1979
DK  30 Østergårds II, Viborg; Madsen 1979

**Sweden**

S  1 Jättegraven, Schonen; Larsson 2002 a
S  2 Kristineberg, Schonen; Rudebeck 2002
S  3 Kraangeltofta N, Schonen; Jansen 2002
S  4 Kraangeltofta S, Schonen; Jansen 2002
S  5 Örnakulla, Schonen; Sjöström/Pihl 2002

**Germany**

D  1 Dölauer Heide, Sachsen-Anhalt; Behrens 1957
D  2 Gnewitz, Parchim; Schuldt 1966
D  3 Rothenmoor, Sternberg; Schuldt 1967
D  5 Stralendorf, Schwerin; Schuldt 1965

List 2. Coding for the different variables in grave constructions.

**Post settings**

Pf a   one post per narrow side
Pf b   one post per narrow side plus one in the middle
Pf c   just one post at one narrow side
Pf d  two post at one narrow side

**Stone settings**
- St a  stone settings at the narrow sides
- St b  stone setting at the long sides
- St c  whole grave framed with stone settings
- St d  pavement of stones
- St e  u-shaped stone setting

**Embankment**
- Da  embankement at long sides
- Db  embankement at narrow sides

**Grabgröße**
- Grab_gro  sizable grave, more than 10 m²
- Grab_mit  middle sized grave, 3 to 10 m²
- Grab_kl  small grave, up to 3 m²

**Position of grave in barrow**
- Grab_dir  directly placed at the narrow side of the monument
- Grab_nah  placed near to the narrow side of the monument, up to 10m
- Grab_weg  placed afar to the narrow side of the monument, more than 10m

List 3. Codes for the different grave goods.

- Flint_be  flake or core of flint
- Flint_kG  small flint tool
- Gefaess  ceramic vessel
- Holzbear  axe
- Pfeilspi  arrowhead
- Schmuck  ornament
Literature


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