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Introduction

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Introduction

The concept of a collective synthesis on the megaliths of the world emerged at the beginning of 2010 through exchanges between Luc Laporte and, successively, Chris Scarre, Primitiva Bueno Ramírez, Hamady Bocoum, and also Roger Joussaume, to whom we owe so much. From 2014 onwards, a course on Megaliths in the World, taught consecutively in the universities of Rennes (France), Trujillo (Peru) and Evora (Portugal), enabled us to begin preliminary work. But the idea truly came to fruition during informal discussions between Jean-Paul Cros and Luc Laporte, on a roof terrace and beneath the starry sky of the African night. It finally materialized in two distinct forms. The first was the International Meetings held at L'Historial de Vendée in France, from 9 to 14 September, 2019; the second is this publication. A word of thanks will therefore be addressed first to those colleagues who agreed to share their knowledge with us and to participate in what, at the outset, seemed like a significant challenge. We all have so much to learn and exchange.

The state of knowledge had grown considerably since the publication by Roger Joussaume, in the mid-1980s, of the book entitled *Des dolmens pour les morts* (Dolmens for the dead), which is still a reference on the subject today. This first work was updated in 2003 in the form of a small book entitled *Les charpentiers de la pierre* (Carpenters of stone). It now seemed necessary to add knowledge, to combine points of view, and to bring together – for the first time, apart perhaps from the 2003 Meeting on Megalithic Culture in Nara, Japan – those involved in this archaeological research from each of the continents concerned. Indeed, and particularly over the last 20 years, research in this field has sometimes emerged in previously neglected geographical areas. Elsewhere, it has been totally renewed. But the state of knowledge remains very disparate across the globe. Academic traditions are not the same, each object of study is different, and each is part of a distinct archaeological, historical, cultural, and geographical context. Although the term ‘megalith’ is familiar to everyone, it is not construed in the same way by researchers (or the public) in different places. On a global scale, we now know that megaliths were erected at different times, sometimes in very remote areas and often by people who did not know each other. In a way, this is also true for the various researchers and archaeologists who study them today.

The chosen format for the meetings in September 2019, i.e., halfway between a symposium and a round table, was the one we used with Roger Joussaume and Chris Scarre for the Bougon symposium in 2002, and then with Chris Scarre for the Rennes symposium in 2012, which both dealt exclusively with megaliths in Europe. The 2019 meetings could not have been held without the unfailing investment of Sophie Corson, as well as the entire staff of L'Historial de Vendée, and Jean-Marc Large, as well as his friends from the Groupe Vendéen d'Études Préhistoriques. Jean-Baptiste Barreau, UMR 6566, took charge of the website. During the first preparatory meetings for this event, we also wanted to surround ourselves



Fig. 2 – Members of the Steering Committee together on the stage during the International Meeting, Megaliths of the World at the Historial de Vendée (France), September 9 to 14, 2019 (Photo: J. Oliver).

with young researchers, such as Tara Steimer-Herbet and Laurent Nespoulous, and their enthusiasm was precious given the scale of the task ahead! The Scientific Committee was then enlarged: at each stage, we could always count on each of its members. In addition to the names already mentioned, they were Bruno David, Nicolas Cauwe, Alain Gallay (†), Yoshio Kikuchi, Rabindra Mohanty, Johannes Müller, Isabel Rivera-Collazo and Viktor Trifonov (**Fig. 2**). The organizing committee was composed of Sophie Corson, Jean-Paul Cros, Luc Laporte and Jean-Marc Large. All of this would clearly not have been possible without the partners who supported this event, first and foremost the Vendée Department. The support of the Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles (SRA) and the Pays de la Loire Region was also strategic, as was that of the CNRS, IFRAE, UMR 6566, the University of Rennes 1, the Ethnology and Prehistory team at the Arscan Laboratory, and INRAP.

The International Meetings on Megaliths in the World gave rise to 72 oral presentations, including 51 conference sessions and 21 posters, by some 60 researchers (44 of whom were invited) of 25 different nationalities and from all continents (**Fig. 3**). Three inaugural lectures were given by Richard Bradley (Professor Emeritus at the University of Reading), Alain Gallay (Professor Emeritus at the University of Geneva) and Jean Guilaine (Professor at the Collège de France). These lectures opened four long days of sessions where particularly assiduous, numerous and fruitful scientific exchanges unfolded in a warm atmosphere, in the Historial de la Vendée, which made its museographic space and its staff available. Often for the first time, the participants discovered the quality of work previously unknown to them, thanks also to the simultaneous translation provided by Emmanuel Sombsthay and his colleague. The reception of the participants was greatly facilitated by the Hotel Campanile in La Roche-sur-Yon, the transport company Sauvetours, and the caterer of the Délices de la Forge. However, a shadow loomed over us as our late colleague Gordon McEwan was unable to join us, struck by an illness that sadly carried him away a few months later. The excursion day, which included visits to several large regional megalithic sites, was attended by 80 people (**Fig. 4**). For many of our colleagues, these meetings were an opportunity to become truly aware of the extent of the phenomenon under study: an enthusiasm also widely shared with the public through various activities and a conference organized by the Historial de la Vendée. All of them left with the promise that such encounters should be materialized by the publication of a book on megaliths in the world.

No sooner had the first challenge been met than a second was presented. The deadline for submission of the texts had been set for March 2020, at the time when the terrible Covid-19 pandemic broke out, and which subsequently followed us throughout the preparation of this manuscript. Here again, we must pay tribute to the perseverance of the



Fig. 3 – All the participants the International Meeting, Megaliths of the World, on the steps of Historial de Vendée (Photo: Historial de Vendée).



Fig. 4 – Visit to one of the menhirs from Le Plessis (a) and the dolmen of La Frébouchère (b), Vendée (Photos: S. Labroche).

authors who all produced the promised articles, despite sometimes difficult conditions. Some were not always able to access the University or remained stranded far from home for a long time, and others underwent the harsh ordeal of this illness. A small team formed around Luc Laporte and Jean-Marc Large, supported by the wise counsel of Chris Scarre and the dynamism of Tara Steimer-Herbet and Laurent Nespoulous. Of course, first we had to make sure that the required financial means were available. Once again, we could count on the Vendée department, as well as the DRAC of the Pays-de-la-Loire. The support of Inalco and GVEP was also invaluable and the support of the CNRS UMR 6566 went way beyond the financial aspect alone. After some contact, it was decided that Editions Chauvinoises (Association des Publications Chauvinoises - APC) would take charge of the design and layout of a volume in two languages, to be published in French by Editions Chauvinoises and in English by Archaeopress.

At each stage, we were able to count on the advice of the Scientific Committee which had presided over the international meetings, enhanced by the arrival of José Oliver. At the same time, an even wider reading committee was set up to ensure that each contribution was peer-reviewed by two other colleagues independently. Their constructive and generous remarks also contributed to the quality of some of the manuscripts. Primitiva Bueno Ramírez, Nicolas Cauwe, Jean-Paul Cros, Anke Hein, Christian Jeunesse, Roger Joussaume, Luc Laporte, Jean-Marc Large, Carl Langebaek Rueda, Miguel Molist, Laurent Nespoulous, Chris Scarre and Tara Steimer-Herbet took on this task. Many of the texts were only available in English, and had to be translated. This was the work of Jean-Marc Large with help from Luc Laporte, Roger Joussaume, Jean-Paul Cros, Christian Jeunesse, Noémie Vergote, Michel Riffé, Tara Steimer-Herbet and Jacques Robin. Jean-Pierre Tortuyaux, who had been so involved in the organization of the meetings as President of GVEP, was not able to intervene much, as he departed too soon. About 15 articles were received only in French, and were translated into English by Louise Byrne, or by Elsa Chanez for yet another article. We wish to particularly thank the authors who submitted their articles in both languages, sometimes with the help of other translators. Finally, some texts were translated from Japanese into French by Laurent Nespoulous. Kate Sharpe then reviewed all the English texts, especially when they were written by speakers of such different mother tongues. Again, Chris Scarre's experience was invaluable. For the Association des Publications Chauvinoises, the same operation was carried out on the French texts by Sylvie Clément-Gillet, who also worked on the layout, under the guidance of Max Aubrun. We are very grateful to D. Davison for the English edition.

Rather than publishing the proceedings of the meetings, we collectively chose to write a state of our knowledge about megaliths in the world. This work comprises 62 chapters. It is divided into eight parts. The first part deals with megaliths in general and comprises five chapters. The following parts present what is generally understood by the term megalith over very far-reaching geographical areas. All the continents are included. Each part begins with a few, often very instructive, pages of introduction. We have endeavoured to maintain a certain balance in the number of contributions on the most up-to-date developments in archaeological research in this field for each geographical area. We deemed it useful to place each of these studies in the broader context of their own research history, with an extensive bibliography compiled at the end of each section. However, the resulting volumes are not intended to be completely exhaustive, either in terms of the studied phenomenon or the type of studies carried out. We nonetheless hope that, considering the high quality of the contributions, they will be of interest both to leading specialists and to those wishing to learn more about the data available on geographical areas with which they are perhaps less familiar. There is no doubt that this book is also accessible to an even wider public, as for the first time it presents a general framework for reflection in a form that did not previously exist.

Introduction

For this world tour, we wanted to avoid starting with Europe, where this type of study was initiated more than two centuries ago. The second part therefore focuses on the American continent where, for a long time, megaliths were considered practically non-existent; four of the chapters presented here will certainly change many people's minds. The third part then takes us on a journey across the Pacific Ocean, from Easter Island to Indonesia. It comprises eight chapters, from island to island, without forgetting the Australian continent. The ten chapters of the fourth part deal with South and Southeast Asia, where India has sometimes been presented as a megalithic continent par excellence. The fifth part presents an even larger geographical area, ranging from the Japanese archipelago to Central Asia, including China and Korea. It contains eight chapters presenting an incredible diversity of megaliths, sometimes from very different periods. The sixth part begins on the shores of the Black Sea, and extends to the confines of the Arabian Peninsula, via the Levant. It is here that writing appeared, along with the first traces of agriculture and animal husbandry, and the oldest megaliths known to date. This part includes seven chapters. The seventh part deals with megaliths in Africa. Certainly, but which Africa? There are so many. Nine chapters are devoted to these African megaliths. Enriched by so much remarkable information, it is now time to return to Europe where these meetings were held. This is the eighth and final part, consisting of ten chapters. It is difficult to reach a conclusion after bringing together so much knowledge, diversity and wonder. Indeed, in the world of scientists and archaeologists alike, hardly any conclusion is truly definitive – if only to ensure the opportunity and pleasure of meeting again.

Roger Joussaume, who is owed so much, has honoured us by prefacing a volume that brings together a genuine forest of knowledge, for a field of investigation where some have sometimes considered that everything had already been said. To those, and to the everyone else, we wish you pleasant reading!