

Parallel Lives? Neolithic funerary monuments and the Channel divide

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Funerary monuments of timber, earth and stone are one of those classic features of the west European Neolithic that were somehow carried from the Continent, where they had been present for several centuries, to Britain. The multiplication of radiocarbon dates seen in recent years has demonstrated that monuments of significant scale (such as the classic long barrows) did not, on the whole, characterise the very earliest Neolithic of Britain and Ireland, but in most regions followed after a gap of several generations (Whittle 2007; Whittle *et al.* 2011, 750, 871). If we envisage the Neolithic as having been brought to Britain by voyagers from northern France, as several recent models propose (e.g. Sheridan 2003; Sheridan *et al.* 2008; Paillet & Sheridan 2009; Collard *et al.* 2010; Whittle *et al.* 2011, 853), we must accept either that these first British Neolithic communities carried the germ of the monumental tradition in their memories, seeking to revive and realise it as soon as suitable circumstances arrived; or that cross-Channel contacts persisted for a period of centuries and brought a stream of Continental ideas to these shores including, in due course, the practice of monument construction (see also Anderson-Whymark & Garrow, this volume).

At the broader scale, of course, this particular story is part of a much wider narrative of the monument traditions that became current throughout western and northern Europe during the 5th and 4th millennia BC. Earlier generations interpreted this pattern in terms of a travelling ‘megalithic people’, a construct that goes back at least to the 18th century (Caylus 1766, 386-387), and was widely accepted during the 19th century (e.g. Westendorp 1822; Bertrand 1864; Bonstetten 1865; Fergusson 1872). Diffusionist notions of megalithic origins persisted well into the 20th century, crystallised for example in Childe’s vision of “missionaries or prospectors” whose arrival, from southern France to northern Scotland, was marked by the construction of megalithic collective tombs that “can only have been built or inspired by voyagers arriving by sea” (Childe 1950, 88-89). It is interesting and perhaps instructive to note how human mobility patterns have in recent years returned to take centre stage in many narratives of regional Neolithic origins.

Were specific monument forms of recognisably Continental origin introduced directly to southern Britain? Monuments do not equate with peoples, of course, nor are they to be considered in isolation from other aspects of material culture, subsistence or ritual. Yet they are part of the transformation of social practice that was associated with the earlier Neolithic, and it is pertinent, therefore, to scrutinise the evidence they provide, alongside the ceramic forms or the newly introduced domestic fauna (Sheridan 2007; Tresset 2003; Thomas 2013).

At the same time, however, it is important to look beyond the issue of origins, fascinating as they are, and to review the broader pattern of monument sequences on the two sides of the Channel during the 4th and 3rd millennia BC. Such a review highlights a crucial contrast between the initial period of relative convergence in the early 4th millennium BC, and the following thousand years

during which the British and French monument sequences parted to go their different ways. Thus an early period of contact was followed by a much longer phase, spanning much the greater part of the British Neolithic, when contact appears to have been either much reduced, or to have had much less impact on the currency of monument forms. In this context, concepts of ‘transmission’ and ‘translation’ may provide a useful way of thinking about the changing relationships (Fig. 1).

Northern France in the 5th and 4th millennium BC: standing stones, long mounds and passage tombs

The starting point is the sequence of monuments types current in northern France during the later 5th and 4th millennium, the period relevant to the earliest monuments of southern Britain. This sequence has been the subject of some controversy, partly owing to problems in establishing an absolute chronology, and partly through the variety of assumptions that have guided the modelling of monument sequences. Chronology has been rendered particularly difficult in the key areas of northwestern France by the geology of the Armorican massif with its acid soils. Human skeletal remains do sometimes survive, but many of the available radiocarbon dates are based on charcoal, and in a number of cases it is unclear how the death of the sample relates to the structure or event one is seeking to date.

Across northern France an early series of monuments appear in the middle centuries of the 5th millennium BC. These include long linear funerary mounds or enclosures, and early (and often decorated) standing stones. The latter are best represented in southern Brittany but are inherently difficult to date. The six C14 dates from the sockets of the Grand Menhir alignment at Locmariaquer, for example, range from 5300-5002 (Ly-2508) to 4344-4053 cal BC (Ly-2509), but half are on charcoal, two on carbonised hazelnut, and one on wheat grain (Cassen *et al.* 2009, 753, table 2). A *terminus ante quem* is provided by the reuse of several of these early decorated stelae in passage tombs, the first of which, as we shall see, may have been built in the period 4300-4200 cal BC. The decorated stelae must hence pre-date the passage tombs in which they were re-incorporated, but by how many centuries it is very difficult to determine. Bayesian modelling of the Grand Menhir sequence indicated only that those standing stones can be placed within the bracket 5315-4050 cal BC at 95% confidence (Cassen *et al.* 2009, 759). There are hints from two other locations in southern Brittany that stone rows may have been standing by 4700 BC (Hoedic: Large & Mens 2009; Belz: Hinguant & Boujot 2009), but that requires confirmation from further field investigations and secure chronological indicators.

Available AMS dates on human bone from four Brittany passage tombs give poor resolution for Bayesian modelling. They are consistent with previous suggestions of an origin around 4300-4200 cal BC (Boujot & Cassen 1992, 1993) although an earlier date cannot be excluded (Fig. 2). The passage tombs of Brittany can be related to the broader family of passage tombs in northwest France, and more specifically to those of immediately adjacent regions of limestone geology to the east and the south. A more secure chronological model is provided by the accumulating corpus of radiocarbon dates on human skeletal material from passage tombs in western Normandy, and from analogies with similar structures

in limestone territory south of the Loire. The latter region has controversial early dates from Bougon in Poitou (Mohen & Scarre 2002), but reliable AMS results from Prissé-la-Charrière indicate the construction of passage tombs from c.4300-4200 cal BC (Scarre *et al.* 2003).

More directly relevant in the present context are the passage tombs of western Normandy, which geography suggests might have provided the closest inspiration for the southern British series. No passage tombs are known to the east of the Caen plain. AMS dates on human remains from passage tombs of western Normandy indicate an origin between 4410-4180 cal BC (at 95% probability) (Fig. 3). These passage tombs form a distinctive group, characterised by a preference for circular chambers and circular cairns (Fig. 4). They were predominantly of dry-stone construction, with corbelled vaults covering the chambers (Ghesquière & Marcigny 2011, 173-175). Occasionally circular chambers are grouped together in pairs or in larger numbers within a single cairn, notably at La Hogue and La Hoguette where as many as twelve circular chambers are found arranged in a radial manner within a sub-rectangular cairn (Coutil 1918; Caillaud & Lagnel 1972).

New passage tombs may have continued to be built in Normandy during the second quarter of the 4th millennium BC, although the latest dates may represent a tail or correspond to the later reuse of earlier chambers. It is most likely that new construction ceased by around 3900 BC or possibly 3800 BC. Bayesian analysis of AMS dates on human remains indicates a boundary end between 3920 and 3710 cal BC (at 95% probability) (Fig. 3). This is an important point for the key theme of this paper, the parallel or divergent trajectories either side of the Channel, since it would suggest that the chronological overlap between the passage tombs of northern France and those of southern Britain was relatively short, indeed perhaps less than a century.

The British sequence: monument traditions of the earlier 4th millennium BC

The chronology of the earliest Neolithic monuments in southern Britain has been considerably clarified by the work of Alex Bayliss and Alasdair Whittle and their team in two successive projects. The first focussed on a group of southern English long mounds (Bayliss & Whittle 2007), the second on causewayed enclosures, but extending to include other categories of evidence (Whittle *et al.* 2011). Broadly speaking the funerary monuments of southern Britain fall into three geographical groups. The largest category are the long mounds of the central sector, some preceded by timber mortuary houses, others containing megalithic chambers (i.e. the Cotswold-Severn group) (Darvill 2004). They bear a superficial resemblance in their form and linearity to some of the 5th millennium long mounds and Passy type structures of northern France, but in construction they are quite distinct, and the chronologies do not support a direct connection. The first long mounds of central southern England were built probably in the 39th century cal BC, with new examples continuing to be added until at least the 35th century cal BC (Whittle *et al.* 2011, 723-724).*

Notably early dates have been suggested for two specific sites to the east and west of this distribution: Coldrum in Kent and Broadsands in Devon (Fig.5). The Coldrum site, one of the Medway tombs, consists of a small box-like chamber

surrounded by a rectangular cairn edged by a discontinuous monolithic kerb (Bennett 1913; Keith 1913; Ashbee 2005) (Fig.6). Within the chamber, disarticulated human skeletal remains were present, reportedly in two separate layers. Bayesian analysis of the 27 available radiocarbon dates indicates that the earlier deposit dates probably to between 3980/3800 cal BC and 3930/3750 cal BC (95% probability) (Wysocki *et al.* 2013, 13). That would make Coldrum contemporary with the latest megalithic tombs of Normandy, but morphologically the Medway tombs are unlike any of those in northern France. Indeed, as recent reviews observe, “[t]he stone box at Coldrum is not easily paralleled” and earlier proposals for Scandinavian or north European parallels are now unlikely on chronological grounds (Whittle *et al.* 2011, 872; Wysocki *et al.* 2013, 3). Geographically the Medway, and Kent more generally, is relatively distant from the passage tombs of Normandy whose distribution, as we have noted, does not extend further east than the Caen plain. The absence of Continental parallels that are close either morphologically or geographically suggests that the builders of Coldrum may have espoused, or brought with them, the concept of collective burial in a megalithic structure, but had no specific model near to hand. It is really a rather remarkable indication of shared traditions widely held by early farming communities on both sides of the Channel.

A better candidate for direct Continental ancestry may be the chambered tomb of Broadsands in Devon (Figure 7). This was excavated rather poorly in the 1950s and the report is not at all points clear or reliable (Ralegh Radford 1958). The tomb survives as a small heavily disturbed megalithic chamber within a hedge line overlooking Torbay. Remains of a cairn were found around the foot of the chamber, and disturbed paving and human remains within the chamber. The argument for an early date rests on a combination of chronology and morphology. Four dates on human bone give the range 3894-3708 cal BC, and Bayesian modelling suggested tomb construction between 4121-3712 cal BC (95% probability) (Sheridan *et al.* 2008). The presence of carinated bowl pottery also fits comfortably with an early 4th millennium BC date. As at Coldrum, the dates overlap with the Normandy passage tomb sequence and the isolated character of Broadsands – it currently has no close regional parallels within southwest Britain – would be consistent with direct contact from Normandy. Indeed, “the fact that Broadsands stands alone in the south-west peninsula as an isolated example of a French-style passage tomb could be taken to indicate that we are dealing with a small-scale, one-off episode of settlement” (Sheridan *et al.* 2008, 19).

This is an interesting argument but there are a number of uncertainties that merit further investigation. The quality of the excavation of the Broadsands tomb was poor, and ambiguities and errors are present in the recording of the human bone material. It is at least possible that some of the human remains were buried beneath the chamber rather than within it. One sherd of carinated bowl and several of the human bones were trampled into the ground below the paving slab (Sheridan *et al.* 2008, 15). It is not certain that the construction of the chamber was the first activity at this location.

The shape of the cairn also demands confirmation. Was it really circular, like the passage tombs of western Normandy? We are told that on the northern side the cairn had been truncated by the construction of a road, and on the south it had

been undermined by the formation of a negative lynchet. On the west the mound had originally extended more than the 6ft beyond the chamber that was preserved (Ralegh Radford 1958, 157-158). The excavators report “no trace of a kerb” on the southeast and that “further search for the southern limit of the mound would be fruitless” (Ralegh Radford 1958, 157). On the northern side, [t]he edge of the mound was established only for a short distance north of the entrance [to the passage]” (Ralegh Radford 1958, 158). The limited evidence and poor preservation did not however deter Radford from concluding that “The mound . . . was probably round, some 40 ft. in diameter” (Ralegh Radford 1958, 163). Whether indeed it was originally circular in form, and whether Broadsands can be considered a French style tomb on the Devon coast, remain open to question.

Nonetheless, Coldrum and Broadsands taken together suggest that cross-Channel connections within the first two or three centuries of the 4th millennium introduced the concept, and perhaps the practice, of megalithic funerary architecture to southern Britain. There are no close Continental parallels for Coldrum, and the claimed parallels for Broadsands remain to be confirmed, so that neither in itself lends any weight to variant proposals for the point and direction of contact. One persuasive scenario envisages “a small founder pool, operating say over only one or two generations, making a planned Channel crossing over its narrowest point and into the Greater Thames estuary” (Whittle *et al.* 2011, 861). An alternative view posits multiple axes of connection, some of them linking Brittany to the Irish Sea and beyond (Pailler & Sheridan 2009). Yet another recent proposal suggests “the earliest Neolithic monuments in Britain drew their inspiration from diverse sources, and mixed structural elements together creatively in order to achieve effects that were appropriate in the insular context.” (Thomas 2013, 320). We may accept, at all events, a period of contact in the first three centuries of the 4th millennium BC, when passage tombs were still being built in northern France. But what happened to cross-Channel connections in the centuries that followed?

Northern France in the late 4th millennium BC: the second cycle of megalithic monuments

The last passage tombs of northern France are followed by an apparent gap of several centuries before the next major category of tomb appears. The latter consist of chambered tombs that would earlier have been classified as ‘galleries’ or ‘gallery graves’ (Forde 1929; Daniel 1941), with elongated, parallel-sided chambers opening from either one of the ends or from an entrance in one of the sides. Some of the structures are of stone (megalithic blocks in many cases); others (notably in Picardy) are of timber.

The north French tombs fall mostly into the category known today as *allées sépulcrales* but they also include *sépultures à entrée latérale* (lateral entry graves) and other types with elongated chambers such as angled passage tombs and V-shaped tombs (cf. L’Helgouach 1965; Scarre 2011). In Brittany, as usual, direct dating evidence is scarce. In the Paris basin, the chalk and limestone geology has preserved large quantities of human skeletal material, and a number of radiocarbon dates are available. The majority probably date to the late 4th millennium and perhaps the early 3rd millennium. A recent review of the evidence, however, places the beginning of the Late Neolithic in the Paris basin and the

area up to the Channel coast at 3600 BC, and suggests that the earliest of the collective tombs belong within the same timeframe (Salanova *et al.* 2011). This is based on new dates from the rock-cut hypogée II du Mont-Aimé à Valdes-Marais, along with early dates from Vignély-La Porte aux Bergers and Bury (*ibid.* 78-80). Only a multiplication of further dates will resolve the chronology with confidence, but it raises the possibility that the first of the gallery graves followed the last of the passage tombs directly.

Were they then both parts of a single continuous tradition? The issue is complicated by the fact that the distribution of gallery graves in northern France overlaps with passage tombs only at its western end (in Brittany and western Normandy); and that it is here, in the area of overlap, that the evidence for dating gallery graves is most limited.

Rather than deriving gallery graves from passage tombs, we might alternatively consider a domestic parallel in the large timber halls of the same late 4th millennium period (Tinévez 2004; Praud *et al.* 2007; Joseph *et al.* 2011) (Fig. 8). Some have been dated by dendrochronology, and it is interesting to note the contemporaneity between the date for the timber allée sépulcrale of La Croix-Saint-Ouen (wiggle-matched to 3010-2952 BC) and the long timber hall of Houplin-Ancoisne in northeastern France (wiggle-matched to 3111-2930 BC) (Bernard *et al.* 1998; Praud *et al.* 2007) (Fig. 9). The dating of the Houplin-Ancoisne structure has, however, been disputed, since AMS dates for thirteen houses in northern France, on a variety of materials (charcoal, animal bone, charred cereals) fall within the range 2883-2349 BC (Joseph *et al.* 2011, 267). Furthermore the long timber halls of Pléchâtel in central Brittany, which may form part of the same series, have been securely dated to the 28th and 27th centuries BC (Tinévez 2004, 134-139). Hence it is unlikely, on current evidence, that the long timber houses provided models for the gallery graves of northern France; if anything, rather the reverse.

Luc Laporte has highlighted the parallel in plan between these long rectangular halls and the contemporary chambered tombs (Laporte 2012; Laporte & Tinevez 2005). Thus the Pléchâtel houses with their long side corridors fit fairly neatly over the plan of the megalithic tomb of Goërem in the southern Morbihan. Laporte has even suggested that the Pléchâtel ‘houses’ might in reality be timber funerary structures, the acid soils destroying any human remains that had been deposited within them (Laporte 2012, 125). The elongated chamber, however, is not only found in northern France at this period, but also in northern Europe. From Drenthe to the Polish frontier, there are large numbers of T-shaped passage tombs, along with gallery graves in the Halle region of Germany. Dating of birch bark within the dry-stonework of a number of Danish tombs indicates that these were built in the period of a century or two between 3200 BC and 3000 BC (Dehn & Hansen 2006; Scarre 2010). This would make them approximately contemporary with the north French gallery graves.

Parallels between late 4th millennium elongated chamber tombs of northern France and those of northern Europe have previously been proposed and are still occasionally entertained (L’Helgouach 1966; Briard *et al.* 1985; Laporte 2012, 129). Just as the French gallery graves may relate (and possibly derive from) contemporary long houses, so too might those of northern Europe. There is the

potential for parallel, convergent development between these regions. One other feature, however, is consistent with a link between northern France and northern Europe: the distribution of the collared flasks known as ‘bouteilles à collerette’ or ‘Kragenflaschen’. The earliest of these have been found in central Poland, but also cluster around the Dutch/German frontier, with a few outliers in Brittany, where they occur in gallery graves (notably, but not exclusively, lateral entry graves) and in reused passage tombs (L’Helgouach 1966; Huysecom 1976). The examples from Breton gallery graves have been assigned to Group 1 horizon C, with a chronology in the range 3400-3100 BC, continuing perhaps to 2800 BC (Huysecom 1976, 206-207). Do they testify to maritime connections down the North Sea coasts and English Channel in the late 4th or early 3rd millennium BC? If so, then they conspicuously avoid southern Britain and, like the tradition of long megalithic chambers, remain a purely continental phenomenon.

Southern Britain in the late 4th and 3rd millennium BC: splendid isolation?

Looking northwards across the Channel, the monument traditions of southern Britain in the late 4th and 3rd millennium BC are diverse in form and content, but entirely different from those of the continental mainland. In the Irish Sea province and in northern Britain, passage tombs of various kinds were built during the later 4th millennium: chronologies are now relatively well established for Irish court cairns and passage tombs, the smaller but perhaps related passage tombs of Wales, and the Orkney tombs (Burrow 2010; O’Sullivan & Bayliss 2013; Schulting *et al.* 2010, 2011). These do not find close analogies on the continent at this period, but must refer back to continental forms of earlier centuries. The character of that ancestral reference has yet to be explored in detail.

Other features of the British monument tradition that find few parallels in adjacent areas of northern France are the great stone circles. None of the stone ‘enclosures’ of Brittany, such as those at the end of some of the Carnac avenues, are circular in form (and indeed many of them appear to be horseshoes rather than complete circuits). Furthermore the Carnac examples, such as Er Lannic, had probably been standing for more than a millennium by this period (Scarre 2011, 117). There is nothing to parallel Stonehenge or Avebury in northern France; although interestingly, the stone circle tradition does extend into northern and western Britain, and is not simply (or even perhaps predominantly) a southern phenomenon. Thus Britain from 3500 BC, if not before, presents an increasingly insular image. Indeed, already by the middle of the 4th millennium there were already striking differences in the way monumental landscapes were composed on opposite sides of the Channel.

This impression of isolation is reinforced by the evidence of houses, ceramic styles and axehead flows. Grooved Ware, for example, is found throughout Britain from Orkney to Wessex, and is present in Ireland, but does not appear to have crossed the Channel. The house types represented at Orkney sites such as Skara Brae and echoed in the recent discoveries at Durrington Walls seem also to have been an exclusively insular tradition (Thomas 2010). It has even been proposed that Grooved Ware and small rectangular houses can be grouped with the construction and elaboration of Stonehenge to argue for “unification, bringing together groups with different ancestries in a coalition that encompassed the entirety of southern Britain, if not the entire island” (Parker Pearson 2012, 328).

There are no long houses of the kind built during the 3rd millennium BC in northern and western France. The large-scale production of dolerite axeheads at Plussulien in Brittany made little impact in southern Britain (Fig. 10). Only half a dozen examples have been identified (Group X: “[e]xtremely abundant in NW France but exceedingly rare in Britain”: Clough & Cummins 1988, 8). They represent only 0.2% of the 2381 axes examined by the Implement Petrology Group up to 1988 (Le Roux 1999, 186). Axe production at Plussulien began in the late 5th millennium BC and continued into the 3rd millennium BC, and at least one of the examples from southern Britain is of the relatively late ‘hache à bouton’ type (Le Roux 1999, 146; 2002, 111). This scarcity of Plussulien material can be contrasted with the 103 axes of Alpine greenstone known from Britain (Sheridan *et al.* 2011) (Fig. 11). These were probably produced in the late 5th millennium BC and although some attribute them to Mesolithic interactions (Thomas 2013, 276-283) others argue that they came to Britain around the time of the Neolithic transition (Pétrequin *et al.* 2011; Sheridan *et al.* 2011, 415; Anderson-Whymark & Garrow, this volume). If that is the correct reading of the evidence, then the axes, like the monuments, suggest an early period of contact followed by several centuries of relative isolation.

Conclusion: transmission and translation

We are left, then, with more points of divergence than of convergence. The earliest Neolithic of Brittany with its decorated menhirs, its long mounds, and its stone rows had come and gone before the first Neolithic appeared in southern Britain, if we place the latter in the 41st century BC as recently proposed (Whittle *et al.* 2011, 800). There may be some overlap in time between the passage tomb tradition of northern France and that of southern Britain, but if so I suggest it was of relatively short duration. Most of the British passage tombs (including in that category the chambered long cairns) fall in the period after the last of the Normandy passage tombs, indeed at a time that may have coincided with a temporary hiatus in the construction of major monuments in northern France. That gap might be filled, if the results of further dating programmes prolong the construction of passage tombs in Normandy into the 36th century, and confirm the suggested early origin in that same century of *allées sépulcrales* and related gallery graves in central northern France (Salanova *et al.* 2011, 77). The two ‘cycles’ of megalithic funerary monuments in northern France – passage tombs and gallery graves – might then become chronologically successive, the second derived from the first. The broader perspective, however, opens up interesting potential connections with northern Europe, and the morphological similarities between the long megalithic chambers and the long houses of the North French Late Neolithic are also suggestive.

It is particularly striking that Britain does not appear to participate in the ‘second cycle’ of long megalithic chambers that became widespread in adjacent parts of the Continent in the late 4th millennium. In Britain, by contrast, this is a period when large stone circles come to be built which in turn have no analogies on the near Continent. That is not to deny the likelihood of contacts across the Channel throughout this period. Yet the differences in the trajectories suggest that the early stage contacts that presumably brought the Neolithic and, perhaps at a slightly later stage, chambered tombs and ditched enclosures to southern Britain were only transitory in character.

There is, however, a more fundamental issue to consider. That is the contrast between processes that could be termed ‘transmission’ and others that might be described as ‘translation’. By transmission I mean the specific contacts that carried new artefacts, traditions and perhaps people from one region to another. For this process archaeology can provide material evidence, whether it be through the movement of materials or individual objects, or through techniques of manufacture (e.g. methods of pottery production). At some stage in the future, cross-Channel displacement of people at this period may be documented through stable isotope analysis, in the manner illustrated by the later 3rd millennium ‘Amesbury Archer’ (Fitzpatrick 2011, 234). There can also be morphological parallels so close as to be consistent with direct contact or transfer. So for example, the presence of Alpine jadeitite axes in Britain indicates cross Channel contact (though it does not resolve the rather perplexing chronology).

But the danger here is that we end up chasing narratives of origin and ignore the more interesting and more obvious issue of differences, of the changes that take place once the new ideas or artefacts (or people) have arrived: of their ‘translation’ within the new context.

In the case of the monuments discussed above, the issue of translation may briefly be reviewed under three headings. First, there is morphology. How closely do the tomb morphologies match on either side of the Channel? One feature that is missing from southern Britain is the circular chamber with corbel vault that is a specific feature of the passage tombs of western Normandy. Furthermore, leaving aside the questionable evidence of Broadsands, none of the early passage tombs of southern Britain are encased within circular mounds or cairns like those of Normandy. Still more puzzling, the British monument with the very earliest dates, Coldrum, has no close continental parallels in either a morphological or a geographical sense.

Second, there is the arrangement of tombs within the landscape. The pattern of dispersed individual long mounds found for example in the Avebury area (Gillings *et al.* 2008, 186), or the Wylke valley of northern Wiltshire (Field 2006, 119) does not seem to have been present in northern France. In western Normandy, by contrast, many of the passage tombs are clustered in small groups or cemeteries: six cairns at Condé-sur-Ifs, seven at Bellengreville-Chicheboville, five at La Hoguette (Ghesquière & Marcigny 2011, 173). This does not emerge as a common characteristic of southern British chambered cairns. Long mounds frequently occur in groups, arranged for example along a ridge as at Skendleby in Lincolnshire (Field 2006, 107), but not tightly clustered as at Condé-sur-Ifs in Normandy nor as at Bougon in Poitou-Charentes.

Third, there is the issue of numbers. We need to exercise caution in comparing present distribution and frequency with past distribution and frequency, but it is interesting nonetheless to note the relatively high densities of chambered cairns in (particularly) central southern Britain compared to those in Normandy. Even Brittany has fewer sites than one might suppose, and those are very much clustered in the coastal zone. Contrasts can be drawn between tomb frequencies on the Channel Islands and on the Normandy mainland. On Guernsey, for example, place name evidence indicates 68 megalithic sites and 39 menhirs, and it has been suggested that Jersey and Guernsey each lost some 40-50 sites in the

period from the late 18th up to the end of the 19th century. That compares with the 30 or so monuments that survive on each of the islands today (Hibbs 1986). Of those, fifteen are passage tombs. By contrast, the whole of Normandy has fewer than 30 passage tombs. That much thinner distribution is given added weight by the complete absence of such monuments in the eastern half of the region, and is difficult to explain by differential processes of destruction or discovery.

Britain, on the other hand, has rather larger numbers of monuments. In England alone one recent count gave some 538 definite and probable long barrows plus 102 mortuary enclosures and 14 bank barrows (Field 2006, 22). Scotland offers a similar number of recorded tombs (444 sites listed in Henshall 1972; 625 sites classified as ‘chambered cairn’ by Canmore, but not all of those of Neolithic date). But these numbers are modest compared with the enormous numbers of megalithic chambered tombs built in northern Europe during the second half of the 4th millennium BC: an estimated 25,000 in Denmark alone with over 7000 sites recorded or extant, and probably more than 40,000 in northern Europe as a whole (Midgley 2008, 29-31). The substantial differences in monument numbers must surely indicate that the monuments played very different roles in the different Neolithic societies.

The extension of the Neolithic monument tradition to Britain is thus to be understood as part of a more widespread phenomenon, and not simply in terms of a short cross-Channel hop. Furthermore, whatever the argument about the timing and nature of the initial moment of contact – the ‘transmission’ of the tradition to southern Britain – subsequent histories on the opposite sides of the Channel were widely divergent. Focusing too much on origins risks obscuring that. There may very well have been continuing contacts in the centuries following the introduction of farming, but what is most striking is the insularity of the British tradition from the middle of the 4th millennium onwards. It is the ‘translation’ of these initial ideas as much as their inception that we should be seeking to follow, and that means exploring the British and French developments in the perspective of their respective counterparts.

*Note: The early AMS dates from the Cotswold-Severn long cairn of Burn Ground overlap (with one exception) in the 39th/38th century BC and are consistent with this conclusion; the single outlier requires confirmation and may be on curated bone reburied here from another context (Whittle *et al.* 2011, 468; Smith & Brickley 2006; but see also Thomas 2013, 318).

Acknowledgements: I am grateful to Duncan Garrow and Fraser Sturt for inviting me to the conference at which a preliminary version of this paper was delivered; to Kate Sharpe for assistance with bibliography, for preparing the diagrams and for the Bayesian analyses; to Cyril Marcigny for permission to cite unpublished radiocarbon dates for Normandy passage tombs; and to Andrew Millard for helpful comments on an earlier version of this text.

Figure captions

Figure 1: Transmission and translation of megalithic architectures in Britain and France 4500-2500 BC.

Figure 2: Bayesian analysis of radiocarbon dates from four passage tombs in Brittany: data from Giot *et al.* 1994 and Schulting 2005. All dates on human skeletal material deposited within the passages or chambers. The two dates from Port-Blanc are for the lower layer of inhumations; the single date from the later upper layer has been excluded from this analysis. Results indicate a boundary start at 4780-4000 cal BC and a boundary end at 3950-3370 cal BC (95% probability). The poor level of precision reflects the small numbers of dates and the large standard errors associated with them. At this coarse level of analysis they are consistent with the evidence from Normandy (see Fig. 3). (Calibration and Bayesian analysis using OxCal 4.2 and IntCal09: Bronk Ramsey 2009 and Reimer *et al.* 2009).

Figure 3: Bayesian analysis of radiocarbon dates from passage tombs in Lower Normandy and the Channel Islands: data from Verron 2000; Schulting *et al.* 2010; Marcigny *et al.* 2007; Ghesquière & Marcigny 2011; and Marcigny pers.comm. All dates on human skeletal material deposited within the passages or chambers. An earlier date of OxA 11395 5690±45 BP is considered unreliable and has been excluded from the analysis (Cyril Marcigny, pers.comm.); as has Gif Tan 90046: 4840±150 BP for the burial of a dwarf in the chamber of the passage tomb of Derrière-les-Près at Ernes. The latter is approximately contemporary with Gif 8798: 4880±70 BP for two bovid vertebrae in the external massif which represents a later addition to the chamber (San Juan & Dron 1997, 211), and may hence not be a primary interment. Analysis indicates a boundary start for this group of passage tomb burials at 4410-4180 cal BC and a boundary end at 3920-3710 cal BC (both at 95% probability). (Calibration and Bayesian analysis using OxCal 4.2 and IntCal09: Bronk Ramsey 2009 and Reimer *et al.* 2009).

Figure 4: Passage tombs of Lower Normandy (after Ghesquière & Marcigny 2011).

Figure 5: Location of chambered tombs at Broadsands (Devon) and Coldrum (Kent).

Figure 6: Plan of chambered tomb at Coldrum (Kent) (after Bennett 1913).

Figure 7: Plan of chambered tomb at Broadsands (Devon) (after Raleigh Radford 1958).

Figure 8: Distribution and plans of Late and Final Neolithic long houses in France (after Praud *et al.* 2007, and Joseph *et al.* 2011).

Figure 9: Comparison of the long house at Houplin-Ancoisne (3111-2930 BC; after Praud *et al.* 2007) and the timber *allée sépulcrale* at La Croix-Saint-Ouen (3010-2952 BC; after Bernard *et al.* 1998). Note the difference in scale between the two structures.

Figure 10: Distribution of Plussulien (Type A dolerite) polished stone axeheads (after Le Roux 1999). Approximate locations are circled.

Figure 11: Distribution of polished stone axeheads of Alpine greenstone (after Sheridan *et al.* 2011).

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