

### III. Book Reviews

**Jan Albert Bakker 2010 *Megalithic Research in the Netherlands, 1547-1911: From 'Giant's Beds' and 'Pillars of Hercules' to Accurate Investigations*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Sidestone Press. ISBN 978-90-8890-034-1.**

Reviewed by Matthew R. Goodrum

Scholars over the last several decades have greatly expanded our knowledge of antiquarianism and the early history of archaeology, illuminating how antiquarian research was transformed into a science of archaeology during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One part of that story is the rise of prehistoric archaeology, which has a long history and one that varies significantly from one region of Europe to another. While many historians have examined the major developments in the history of archaeology, they have tended to emphasize certain periods or the contributions of particular regions, usually Britain, France, Germany, or Scandinavia. Historians of science in recent years have discussed the benefits of investigating science in its national context, recognizing that while scientific knowledge does spread beyond linguistic and political borders there are also important ways in which research traditions, problems, and methods often vary from region to region and culture to culture.

From many perspectives, Jan Bakker's new book on megalithic research in the Netherlands is a valuable contribution to the history of archaeology. Bakker investigates a very specific subject, the archaeological study of hunebeds, or prehistoric megalithic tombs, in the Netherlands from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century. After providing an introductory chapter that presents the reader with a useful primer on what hunebeds are and an overview of changing archaeological opinions about them during the twentieth century, Bakker proceeds to trace the history of hunebed excavations, how they were interpreted, and their place in Dutch culture. The book is not written as a traditional narrative history, but consists of a chronological discussion of major researchers, with episodes from Dutch social or intellectual history injected where relevant, that sketch the general outline of theories and discoveries made by Dutch researchers.

Bakker begins by discussing those Renaissance geographers and historians who discussed hunebeds and the few antiquaries who conducted the first excavations. He is careful to distinguish "antiquarian" research from "modern archaeological research" but he does not draw upon recent scholarship to give a clear conception of what antiquarianism was during the early modern period and what distinguishes it from modern archaeology. This is an important question that his study could have more explicitly helped to clarify. Ranging from early scholars such as Johan Picardt and Johannes van Lier to the works of Nicolaus Westendorp and L.J.F. Janssen in the nineteenth century, Bakker describes the theories these investigators

proposed to explain the origin of the hunebeds. He demonstrates the growing importance of excavations and the changing nature of archaeological publications, as well as the significance of the assembling of artefacts into public and private museum collections.

Yet Bakker does not merely present a history of archaeological research and discoveries. He also discusses events in Dutch social and political history that encouraged hunebed research. Particularly interesting are his references to the periodic efforts by researchers and government officials to preserve prehistoric monuments in the Netherlands, which led to laws in the eighteenth and nineteenth century protecting hunebeds from destruction.

There are other features of this work that stand out as worthy models for historians of archaeology to emulate. The book is filled with a large number of illustrations of hunebeds made at different times. They are not merely included to illustrate the book, but rather serve as primary source materials that instruct modern scholars about early archaeology as much as written documents do. Bakker discusses the techniques used to record hunebeds, culminating in the introduction of photography in the late nineteenth century. Yet he does not fully explore the ways in which new methods of visually recording hunebeds changed research methods or how these new techniques changed the way megalithic tombs were depicted.

Bakker, who was a professor of prehistoric archaeology at the University of Amsterdam, is aware of the dangers of an archaeologist writing a history of archaeology, namely presentism or approaching past archaeological research and ideas from the perspective of current practice and theory. In his "General Remarks", Bakker informs the reader that when he uses modern archaeological terms or concepts anachronistically he will designate such usages with an asterisk (\*). This is very useful for the novice reader. However, for historians who are familiar with early archaeological research, Bakker may not have sufficiently freed himself from modern archaeology in his understanding and presentation of earlier antiquarian theories of hunebeds and how they fit within a particular historical and cultural worldview. The frequent use of modern terms and concepts, even with an asterisk, can distort the way early archaeologists conceived of their subject and the meaning of their work. Another mark of Bakker's allegiance to modern archaeology is the occasional criticisms he makes of the restorations of hunebeds made by archaeologists in the late nineteenth century.

This book offers a tremendously useful examination of people, discoveries, and ideas that are not discussed in other histories of archaeology and allows scholars to situate Dutch hunebed research into the context of prehistoric archaeology in Europe. It integrates textual and visual source material into a intellectual and social history of Dutch antiquarianism that should serve as a model for future historians of archaeology.