Monuments on the horizon : the formation of the barrow landscape throughout the 3rd and the 2nd millennium BCE

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Sidestone Press

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The formation of the barrow landscape throughout the 3rd and 2nd millennium BC

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus prof. mr. P.F. van der Heijden,
volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties
te verdedigen op
donderdag 10 januari 2013
klokke 13.45 uur

door

Quentin Philippe Jean Bourgeois

Geboren te Gent
In 1982

Promotiecommissie

Promotor:	Prof.dr. H. Fokkens
Co-promotor:	Dr. D.R. Fontijn
Overige leden:	Prof.dr. S. Wirth, Université de Bourgogne
	Dr. D.W. Wheatley, University of Southampton
	Dr. M.K. Holst, Aarhus University

Published by Sidestone Press, Leiden
www.sidestone.com
Sidestone registration number: SSP131520001

ISBN 978-90-8890-104-1

Lay-out design: Sidestone Press
Lay-out: M. Kerkhof
Cover design: K. Wentink, Sidestone Press
Cover photograph: Barrows on the Rechte Heide close to the town of Goirle, Noord-Brabant, The Netherlands. Photograph by Quentin Bourgeois

This research project was funded by the Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO).

This publication was financially supported by the Stichting Nederlands Museum voor Anthropologie en Praehistorie (SNMAP) and Leiden University.

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Contents

Preface

Barrows, as burial markers, are ubiquitous throughout North-Western Europe. Tens of thousands of these monuments are still visible in the present day landscape, while probably ten times as many vanished over the centuries since their construction.

It is therefore not surprising that barrows, as of old, are the most researched elements of later prehistory. Early antiquarian interest in these monuments ensured that thousands of them were dug into. Notably England and Denmark saw hundreds of these monuments being excavated – more or less scientifically – in the 19th Century. This interest continued into the 20th Century, when thousands more barrows were investigated.

And it is not surprising as well that several generations of archaeologists have dug their teeth into the topic. Especially within Dutch Archaeology, several of the great household names were 'barrow' archaeologists. Holwerda started excavating barrows in the early 20th Century and in the following decades his assistants Remouchamps and Bursch took over from him. Van Giffen quickly followed in the 1920's and continued excavating barrows for more than three decades, often preceding their imminent destruction. His legacy was succeeded by Glasbergen, Modderman and Waterbolk, particularly in the 1950's. From the 1960's onwards, interest in these monuments decreased considerably and shifted to settlement archaeology. The old excavations nevertheless provided food for generations to follow, and several syntheses were published in the second half of the 20th Century.

So indeed, we know quite a lot of these monuments and many of the artefacts coming from these mounds are central to our image of later prehistory. We know the majority of these mounds was built in the 3rd and 2nd Millennium BC. We know the contents and form of the graves and we think we know who built them and for whom. And when the Faculty of Archaeology at Leiden started excavating barrows anew in 2004, it was often remarked that we knew 'enough' about these barrows and that all there was to be said about them, was already said. Yet the excavations disproved this and several monographs – now published or in press – continue to add to our knowledge of these ancient mounds.

Yet this book is not so much about the barrow itself. Rather, it is more about the role of a barrow within the wider landscape. This difficult subject is often not addressed or dealt with in passing, or – especially in the early days – was not considered of any relevance. It is also an understandable oversight given the difficulty of creating an overview from such a vast dataset. The issue is complicated by the fact that it is not uncommon for hundreds of these barrows to be spread out over several square kilometres, forming veritable *barrow landscapes*. Areas, where everywhere you look you will see these monuments, close by and far off in the distance. In some cases they form up in kilometre long alignments while in others they are dispersed in small groups or are found in apparent isolation. Why is that? It is this fundamental issue which is a the heart of this research, how did this peculiar and vast configuration of mortuary monuments originate and how did it develop?