

Stonehenge mystery solved?

A new study suggests that Europe's ancient megaliths, including Stonehenge, might have stemmed from a single hunter-gatherer culture in what's now northwestern France.

Stonehenge is just one example – the most famous example – of Europe's tens of thousands of ancient megalithic structures. Early people in what's now Europe built these structures, which date back thousands of years. Many appear to be grave sites. Many – like Stonehenge – feature giant stones in intricate and strange

arrangements. What early culture built these structures? Did the idea originate, as some have believed, in the Near East or the Mediterranean? Could various ancient cultures have invented the idea for the structures independently? A new study published February 11, 2019, in the peer-reviewed journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* sheds light on these mysteries.

The new study was conducted by **Bettina Schulz Paulsson**, a prehistoric archaeologist at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. Her work suggests these European megaliths can be traced back to a single hunter-gatherer culture that originated nearly 7,000 years ago in what's today the Brittany region of northwestern France.

The study also argues for a cultural exchange over sea routes emanating from northwest France, suggesting a more advanced seafaring technology for that ancient time than was previously believed. Stonehenge specialists **Michael Parker Pearson** at University College London, who was not part of the study, supports the new work. He said:

This demonstrates absolutely that Brittany is the origin of the European megalithic phenomenon.

The Dolmen di Sa Coveccada is an archaeological monument – thought to be a gravesite – in Sardinia. The structure, whose massive stones weigh many tons each, is thought to have been built around 3500 – 2900 B.C.

Bettina Schulz Paulsson spent 10 years creating what she called a megalith evolution using radiocarbon dating from thousands of historic sites across Europe. She wrote in her study:

We have thus been able to demonstrate that the earliest megaliths originated in northwest France and spread along the sea routes of the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts in three successive principal phases.

Writing in *Science*, science journalist **Michael Price** explained more about Schulz Paulsson's work:

What she did was sift through radiocarbon dating data from 2,410 ancient sites across Europe to reconstruct a prehistoric archaeological timeline. The radiocarbon dates came mostly from human remains buried within the sites. The study looked not just at megaliths, but also at so-called premegalithic graves that featured elaborate, earthen tombs but no huge stones. Schulz Paulsson also factored in information on the sites' architecture, tool use, and burial customs to further narrow the dates.

Price also pointed out that there's more to be explored here. He wrote:

Karl-Göran Sjögren, a fellow archaeologist at the University of Gothenburg, says he accepts that northwest France was among the first builders. But he isn't fully convinced there aren't still earlier megaliths yet to be uncovered, or more evidence that might push back the dates of some known megaliths. Future studies that include ancient DNA and other bioarchaeological evidence on population movements could clear things up, he says.

AK, with EarthSky and Wikipedia Notes



Stonehenge – on the Salisbury Plain in England

