

Megaliths of the World

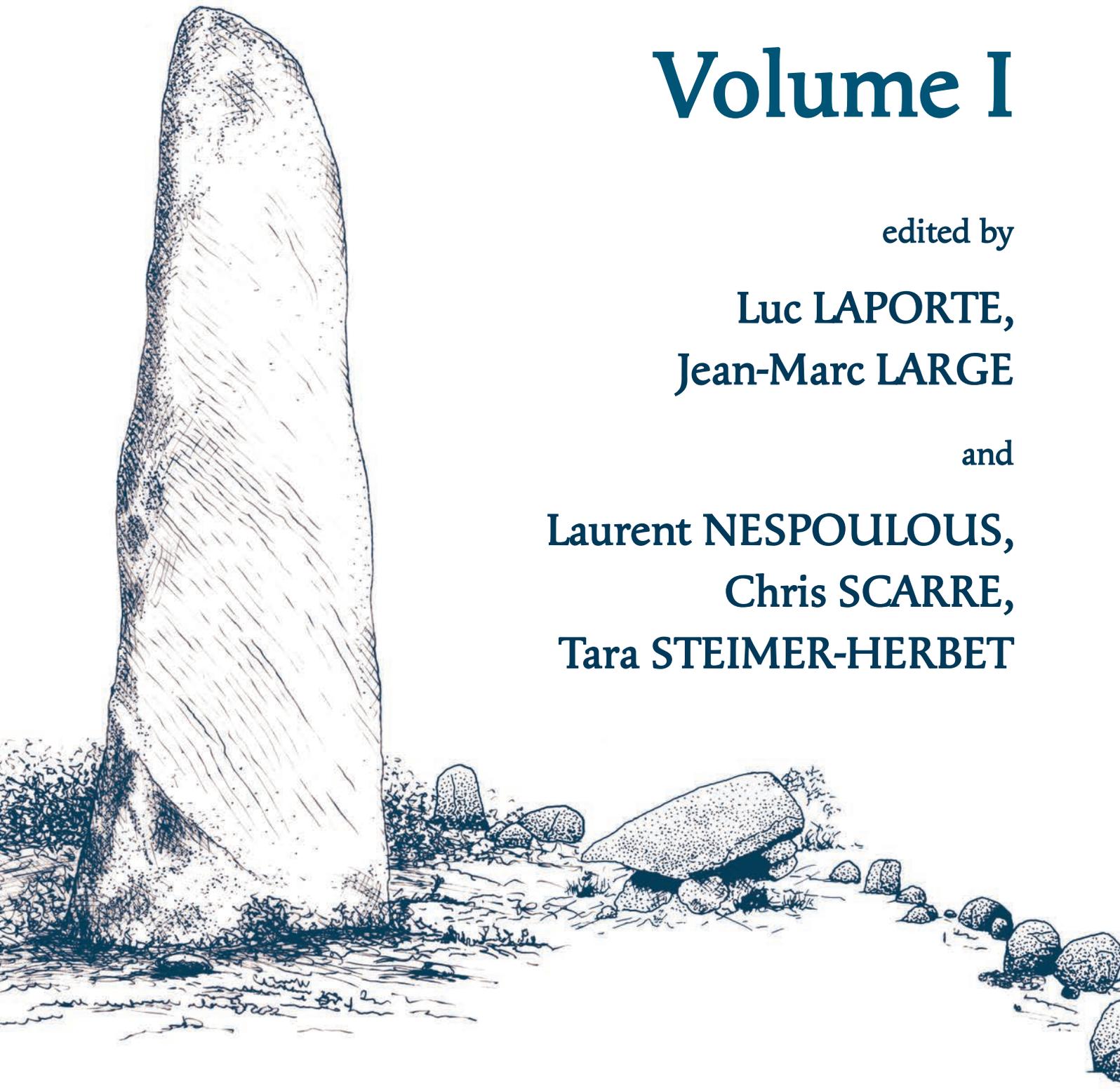
Volume I

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During the preparation of this publication we learned of the death of Alain Gally, Emeritus Professor at the University of Geneva, who has made such a major contribution to the discipline. His participation in the international conference on The Megaliths of the World, and his membership of the Steering Committee, was a great honour for us. The whole of the editorial team pay tribute to him.

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Preface

It was only in the second half of the 19th century of our era that the study of megalithic monuments, that is to say, monuments built with large stones, began throughout the world, although what the weight of these large stones had to be in order for the monuments to be considered megalithic was not specified. At that time, these monuments were of two types:

1 - Standing stones, isolated ‘menhirs’ or groups of these together in straight or curved – sometimes multiple – lines, such as the alignments of Carnac in France, those of Hartashen in Armenia, Doring in Tibet or Mohandid al-Hamli in Yemen; or even in closed lines, as in numerous enclosures in the British Isles, and sometimes erroneously named ‘cromlechs’. The meaning and social role of all these standing stones are not yet fully understood by archaeologists, but many interpretations have been put forward.

2 - Funerary chambers, or ‘dolmens’ with circular or polygonal layouts, or even with multiple cells, entirely or partially built with large stone blocks, and covered with an earthen tumulus or stone mound (cairn) with a variable circular, rectangular, or trapezoidal base, which can

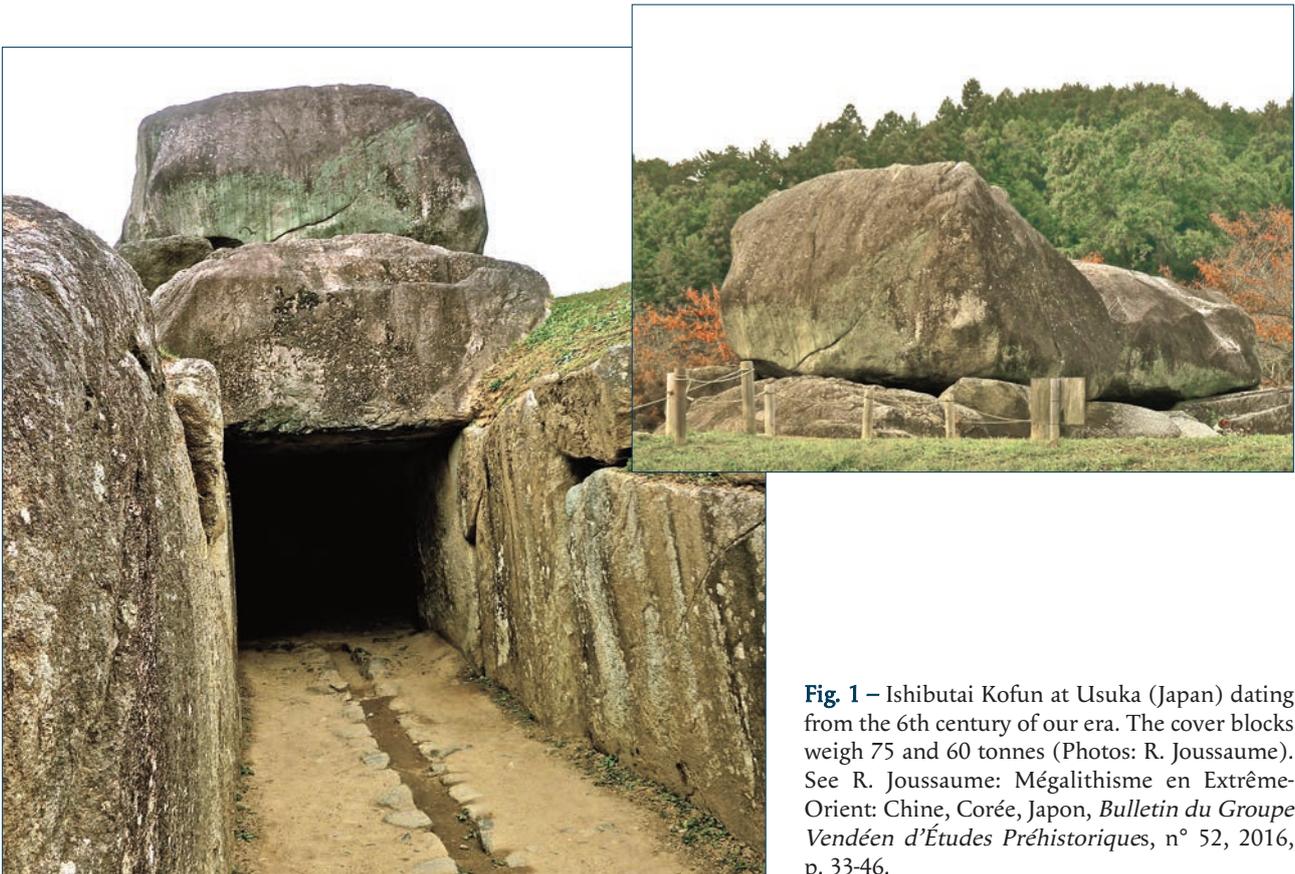


Fig. 1 – Ishibutai Kofun at Usuka (Japan) dating from the 6th century of our era. The cover blocks weigh 75 and 60 tonnes (Photos: R. Joussaume). See R. Joussaume: *Mégalithisme en Extrême-Orient: Chine, Corée, Japon*, *Bulletin du Groupe Vendéen d'Études Préhistoriques*, n° 52, 2016, p. 33-46.

be more or less elongated, sometimes even disproportionately so, and with a domed, pyramidal or even a flat roof. These chambers were accessed by moving a side slab which was removable when it was a low wall or by a corridor of variable length. The dolmen-corridor ensemble was therefore invisible from the outside before the deterioration of the enveloping tumulus, a notion that has rarely been taken into account in the description of the appearance of these architectures at the time of their use.

The concept of the 'megalithic monument' was later extended to other types of architecture across the world. In addition to aniconic menhirs, some standing stones bear engraved or painted symbols and are therefore known as 'stelae', which are numerous in southern Ethiopia for example. They frequently accompany single, double or even multiple burials.

The oldest megalithic monuments date from the Neolithic period at the beginning of the 5th millennium BCE, and even earlier for the site of Göbekli Tepe in Turkey, which is considered to be a temple dating from the 10th millennium BCE; they are still erected today in certain regions of the world, particularly in East Africa. Large stones were sculpted to form the Easter Island statues, which are neither menhirs nor dolmens, but also the much smaller menhir statues in the South of France, as well as many other stelae with human (anthropomorphic) forms throughout the world.

To these must be added monuments specific to certain regions, such as the Giants' Tombs of Sardinia: genuine megalithic gallery graves headed by a large, sculpted stone erected in the entrance, in the middle of two curved antennae of joined slabs outlining a forecourt. And many more...

In addition to these megalithic monuments, there are many others that are often assimilated but which would be better grouped together in a separate category, since their architecture does not comprise any truly megalithic elements. These include many structures built with small stones, particularly in the northern half of Africa. Some form imposing tumuli but we know nothing about what they cover; a few may contain a dolmen that remains invisible without excavation. Other assemblages of stones on the ground form circular or crescent-shaped platforms, some with antennae. These are limited to a few levels of small, superimposed stones covering burials. There are also, particularly in the Arabian Peninsula, tower tombs, associated with a row of small stone mounds, which it would be preferable to classify



Fig. 2 – Funerary monument of Nefas Mawcha at Axum (Ethiopia) dated to the 3rd century of our era. The cover slab measures 17.30 m long, 6.50 m wide and 1.30 m thick for a weight of about 300 tonnes (Photo: R. Joussaume). See S.C. Munro-Hay: *Excavations at Aksum, an account of research at the ancient Ethiopian capital directed in 1972-4 by the late Dr Neville Chittick*. London: The British Institute in Eastern Africa, 1989, p. 116-120.

with many others as 'paramegalithic monuments' to dissociate them from authentic megalithic monuments as we have defined them.

I am grateful to the organizers of this international meeting on megalithism in the world for asking me to write a short preface to this important book which takes stock of recent works by the scientific community involved in research. There is still a lot of progress to be made on this subject and especially on the occupants of the dolmens, who are beginning to be revealed thanks to very promising work, particularly that on ancient DNA. It will become easier to approach the social role of all these structures when we have enhanced our knowledge of those who were deposited in such well protected places.

Some publications by R. Jousaume

Des dolmens pour les morts. Les mégalithismes à travers le monde. Paris : Hachette, 1985, 398 p.

Dolmens for the Dead. Megalithic Building throughout the World. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1988, 320 p., 26 photos (translation of the French edition).

Les charpentiers de la pierre. Monuments mégalithiques dans le monde. Paris : La Maison des Roches, 2003, 128 p.

Palets et minches de Gargantua. Mégalithisme dans le Centre-Ouest de la France. Chauvigny : Association des Publications Chauvinoises (*Memoria momenti*, 39), 2016, 388 p.



Fig. 1 – Poster of the International Meeting on Megalithisms in the World (RIMM). The logo was created by © Florent Large.

Jean-Paul CROS, Sophie CORSON,
Jean-Marc LARGE, Luc LAPORTE

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).

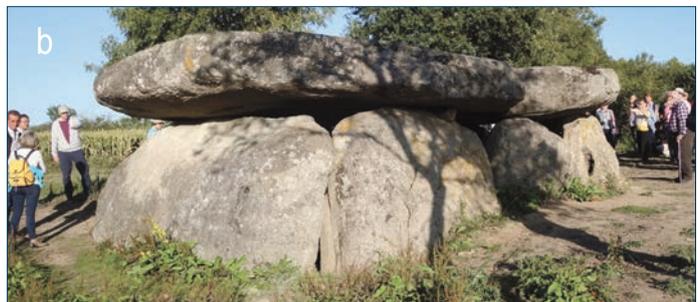


Fig. 4 – Visit to one of the menhirs from Le Plessis (a) and the dolmen of La Frébouchère (b), Vendée (Photos: S. Labroche).

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!