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Richard Bradley. *A Geography of Offerings: Deposits of Valuables in the Landscapes of Europe* (Oxbow Insights in Archaeology. Oxford & Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2017, ix and 222pp., 28 figs, 1 table, pbk, ISBN 978-1-78570-477-2)

This brief but intriguing volume is the latest in the extensive series of publications by Richard Bradley, one of Britain's most productive and imaginative archaeologists. It is an extended essay on topics that he has worked on for many years, at least since *The Passage of Arms* was published in 1990: hoards, 'votive offerings', landscape, and memory.

The two goals of *A Geography of Offerings*, according to Bradley (p. 2), are to (1) bring together the literature on hoards/offerings/valuables/etc. on the one hand, and the discussions of landscape and human use of landscape on the other; and (2) to extend the time frame beyond the stretch from the Neolithic through the pre-Roman Iron Age, which is the traditional period in which hoards are discussed. It is also the case that while he focuses on northern and western Europe, in places he explicitly incorporates discussions across Europe including central, southern, and southeastern Europe. Regarding the first goal, Bradley is quite explicit that he wishes to turn attention away from what he implies is the traditional focus on detailed artefact typology ('minute study of ancient artefacts', p. 2) toward an enriched understanding of landscape. He seems to be fighting an intellectual battle that I sense is no longer very

salient, for many European archaeologists have moved on from the typology-focused scholarship of the mid-twentieth century. Regarding the second goal, Bradley extends his analysis back in time to the Mesolithic and forward through the Roman period up to about AD 1000, with some specific focus on the Viking period (however, the Mesolithic is discussed minimally and in very general terms). He appears to be interested mostly in the symbolic meaning of the deposits and is not at all focused here on how these finds might illuminate or be connected to social, economic, or political structures or organizations in the past.

One of the strengths of this volume is the integration of an enormous and diverse bibliography, including very recent archaeological publications. It is testimony of an energetic and wide-ranging intellect. That intellect ranges beyond archaeology and early historical sources, both classical and Norse, to, for example, incorporate citations of seventeenth century Dutch painting, Auden's poetry, and Wagner's Ring Cycle. This text is wide-ranging, creative, and bold. Bradley starts from a very inclusive point: he mostly discards the contrast, which had held his interest earlier, between deposits in wet settings and those in dry settings (although there is

still more discussion of wet settings). He also includes in the discussion the large number of so-called 'single finds', rather than distinguishing them from hoards which, by definition, include at least two objects. I think he is quite correct that a large proportion of singly-found objects may well have been deposited by similar actions as the hoards, and, thus, should be discussed as a similar cultural phenomenon. Again, his interest in single finds does focus on wet contexts, particularly rivers.

What is the take-home message of this volume? That is a little more difficult to explain, but I think it is fair to say that Bradley believes that (1) hoards/votive deposits/however-you-want-to-label-them must be analysed in light of their landscape settings and with a focus on the distinctiveness of the places involved, not just the artefacts; (2) the tradition of deposits and, thus, the ideology or ideologies behind deposits characterizes a very *longue durée* in Europe; (3) several diverse ideological themes, including memory, identity, distance, gift-giving, spiritual beings, and transitions in time and space are at play here. Yet, it is odd that at no point, even in the final chapter, does he sum up. His final statement is to return to the importance of places and landscape in the analysis of this category of finds. The *meaning* of the finds, however, is apparently extremely diverse across time and space, and he does not provide us with any systematic guidelines on how one might distinguish different symbolic meanings or actions through patterning in the archaeological record.

Big vision, thoughtful exploration, and imaginative reconstruction, grasp of an enormous literature: these are the strengths of this relatively short but distinctive work. Yet, toward the end I found myself frustrated in a number of places. Some of this is based on stylistic choices

that are not my choices (but, of course, I wasn't making the choices). However, I recommend that one avoid phrasing such as 'It cannot be a coincidence...' (p. 92). Of course, it can be a coincidence, especially without any quantitative evidence being presented. Another weakness is the organization. It seems that Bradley meant for a thematic organization, rather than chronological or geographic. But, in fact, the organization is difficult to follow and the text is repetitive in places.

This volume is not meant as a detailed critique of earlier literature, but an opportunity to present and advocate for (p. xiii) one writer's own rich vision. Yet, there are critiques, and some ring rather falsely. For example, one of Bradley's critiques of earlier writers on the subject of deposits is that their work is excessively 'anecdotal' and/or 'circumstantial' (p. 13 and elsewhere). Perhaps these words have different meanings in British English than in American English, but I find that most of what Bradley writes is both anecdotal and/or circumstantial. That is, he emphasizes not just the objects but the *circumstances* of the finds: i.e., the contexts both local and more regional. Stylistically, he is a significant—and effective—user of *anecdotes*, often to introduce a significant point. Thus, he starts Chapter 4 with brief discussion of excavations at two sites, Röekillorna in Sweden and Broadward in England, as jumping-off places for further discussion. Similarly, Chapter 9 starts with a detailed description of the caves at Hansur-Lesse in Belgium as a model for the points he wants to make. Perhaps what Bradley is saying is that earlier authors focused their discussion of circumstances too narrowly or chose examples (anecdotes) without moving outward to the much bigger frame that Bradley clearly is comfortable with.

Similarly, Bradley makes a legitimate point that we should not impose modern

conceptions of human motivations or values on our understanding of the past (e.g., pp. 36, 147). Yet, a significant part of his analysis depends on the recognition of 'distinctive' or 'odd' places on the landscape (pp. 49, 55, 160, and elsewhere). He is very confident that he recognizes such places; indeed he emphasizes the need to visit the specific landscapes in order to understand the practice of deposition (p. 26), which is a valuable methodological suggestion. Yet, how can we know what was 'distinctive' to ancient people unless we assume their views were similar to ours (or, minimally, similar to values expressed in classical and early medieval literature)? And, given the long and diverse list of purportedly distinctive places, I perhaps would have been more convinced if there had been some discussion of where the deposit of valuables did *not* take place. For example, on pages 171–3, he mentions a range of (mostly) wet places that allegedly attracted past peoples' attention as distinctive locales: major river channels, raised ground near springs (no indication of how near is 'near'), bogs, marshes, dry ground close to rivers, coastlines, margins of lakes and pools, islands, ponds, wells; also, promontories, prominent boulders, hills, and places with dramatic views. In northern Europe, it could be that this list encompasses pretty much everywhere.

Bradley legitimately notes that the same meanings and motivations should not be imputed to these deposits over a stretch of at least 5000 years (p. 192). Yet, in his repeated desire to avoid the narrow focus he claims for past scholars and the stated goal of seeing the big picture, he leaves us without a sense of how the variability of past cultures and the agency of past people were connected to these processes. Because he has chosen to say almost nothing about social/political/economic factors and variability, the meaning of the

finds becomes difficult to link to human action. The advantage of the *longue durée* approach is to synthesize masses of information and get past the weeds of research focused on individual sites or periods (or artefact types). The disadvantage is that the author ends up with too many statements like 'It may be no accident that all these locations were associated with the dead' (p. 121) or 'It follows that where undamaged artefacts were taken out of circulation, they may have been destined for use in another world' (p. 139) or 'Certain places may have attracted attention over time, and they may have done so because they possessed qualities that were not found elsewhere' (p. 192). Or not. A repeated use of 'may have', 'could have', 'might have', 'sometimes', 'often' (with no indication of how often is often) eventually weakens the argument that Bradley is advocating, at least for this reader.

As it turns out, twenty-five years ago, I reviewed Bradley's earlier book, *The Passage of Arms* (1990). What strikes me is the growth of a distinctive scholar who has invested many years of both vigorous fieldwork and intellectual energy to a series of consistently challenging questions. I would like to close by quoting from my earlier review (with a minor deletion of a statement only relevant to the earlier volume), which I think still sums up my reaction to this work.

'It is dense and discursive, imaginative and bold, but somewhat rambling and repetitive. Some sections are more convincing than others [...] Bradley seeks—and finds—meaning in multifarious patterns within the archeological material. More than once, he oversteps what some will think are the limits of the data, but he is never dull and he never runs out of challenging ideas.' (Levy 1992: 207)

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David Anthony, Dorcas Brown, Aleksandr Khokhlov, Pavel Kuznetsov and Oleg Mochalov, eds. *A Bronze Age Landscape in the Russian Steppes. The Samara Valley Project* (Monumenta Archaeologica 37. UCLA Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, 2016, 511pp., 198 figs, 152 tables, hbk, ISBN 978-1-938770-05-0)

The programme of fieldwork and excavation reported in detail in this volume took place from 1995–2002 in the valley of the Samara river, an east flowing tributary of the Volga. Its principal aim was to elucidate the complex social and economic changes that occurred in the middle Volga region at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age between 1900 and 1700 BC. Before this crucial transition period, the Early and Middle Bronze Age communities of the region were mobile steppe pastoralists who probably lived in wagons or tent camps and buried their elite in funerary mounds (kurgans). But from c.1900 BC the appearance of large numbers of permanent settlements implied that a new sedentary life style was being widely adopted. From the Samara oblast the figures are impressive. Some 150 settlements of Late Bronze Age date have been identified compared with only ten pottery scatters representing camps in the preceding Middle Bronze Age. While this could be interpreted simply as an increase in population, the fact that the number of kurgans remained more or less the same (fifty in the Early and Middle Bronze Age and sixty in the Late Bronze Age) suggests that the sudden appearance of permanent

settlements was due to major changes in life style.

The Samara valley was well chosen as the focus for survey. It lies at the eastern limit of the Pontic-Caspian steppe, where the steppe narrows between the northern edge of the deserts of the Caspian Depression and the southern end of the Urals, providing a convenient west-east route linking the western steppe and the eastern steppe of Central Asia. It also lies more or less along the boundary between the steppe proper to the south and the forest steppe to the north. This crucial position, on two divides, greatly enhances the significance of the region for research. The Samara oblast has another attraction—it inherits a strong tradition of detailed archaeological research inspired by I.B. Vasiliev of the Samara State Pedological Institute. By choosing the Samara valley as their study area, David Anthony and his team were able to build on a sound archaeological database and to work in close collaboration with Russian colleagues who had a deep knowledge and understanding of the local archaeology.

The programme of work, spread over seven seasons, involved extensive fieldwork involving the collection of pollen cores