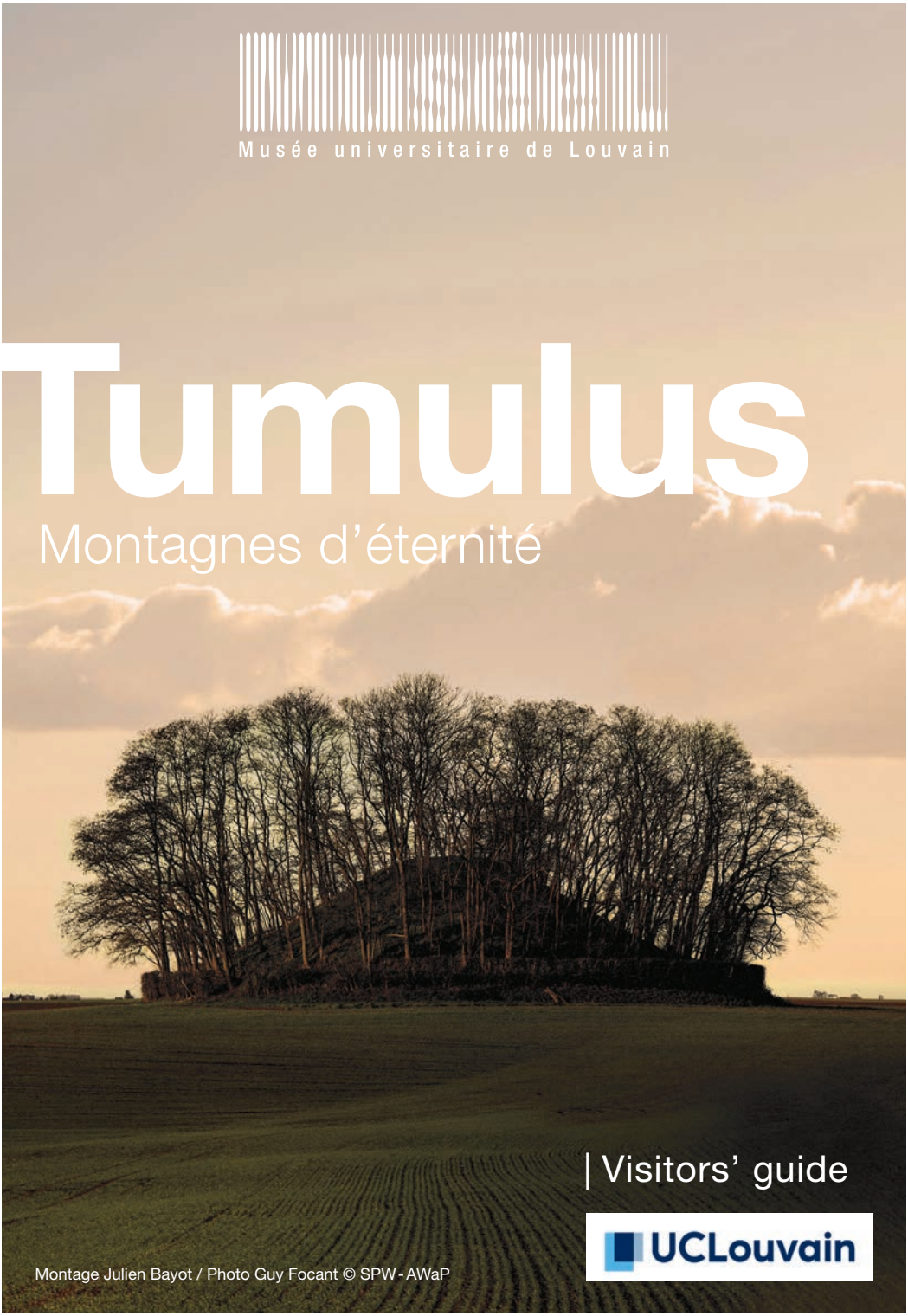
Musée universitaire de Louvain

Tumulus

Montagnes d'éternité



| Visitors' guide

UCLouvain

Montage Julien Bayot / Photo Guy Focant © SPW - AWaP

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Tumulus. Montagnes d'éternité

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Sunset on the Gamla Uppsala Royal Mounds, 6th c. AD, Sweden, in 2017 / Photo Sergey Dzyuba.

" If you heap stuff up over a period of time, always adding to the top of the pile and allowing it to settle of its own accord, it will generally form a mound, roughly circular in plan and conical or bell-shaped in elevation. (…) One could say that the mound builds up precisely because the material of which it is made is continually falling down. The mound has no foundations. Nor is it ever complete. "

T. Ingold, *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, 2013, Routledge, London, pp. 167-168 of the French translated edition.

Tumulus

| What's in a word ?

Whether a tumulus is a prestigious individual tomb or a communal grave, the memory of it has been kept alive by communities throughout history.

Tumuli tell us about the beliefs, knowledge and social structure of a people. They are a symbol of their power and mark off their territory.

The construction and preservation of tumuli differ from region to region and from one period in history to another. Almost everywhere, words exist to refer to these man-made mountains.


Barrow
Gravhög
Курган
坟头
Cairn
Tertre
Grabhügel
Τύμβος
무덤
Tumulo
Tümülüs
古墳
Stupa
Mbanaar
Awellos

Silbury Hill, the tallest man-made mound in Europe, measures 40 m high, 3rd millennium BC, England / Photo Stevekeiretsu.

1. Tales and legends

1.1. Fact or fiction?

| A stone in the shoe… of a giant

According to the folklore of many parts of northern Europe, tumuli and megaliths are said to have come about by giants shaking mud off their shoes or removing a stone from them. Others believe they are formed by fairies – or even the Virgin Mary herself – emptying soil out of their aprons. Other fairly plausible accounts are that tumuli were created by Roman legionaries filling their helmets with earth to cover the remains of a general killed in combat. Or by peasants and pilgrims dropping soil from their baskets, wheelbarrows or hats.

| Whites Ladies and treasures

In the 16th century white ladies referred to both menacing ghosts and dancing fairies. A 17th-century work described their habitats in tumuli, depicted as real houses with the women popping their heads out the windows. Tumuli were also gathering places for demonic beings and witches. Anyone who ventured there to explore risked coming face-to-face with the custodians of the treasures they were thought to contain, with fantastic beasts, trolls or local elves known as *nutons*. In search of imaginary spoils, the golden goat or the golden calf, looters had to sell their souls to the devil.

J. Picardt, *Korte beschryvinge van eenige vergetene en verborgene antiquiteten der provintien en landen gelegen tusschen de Noord-Zee, de Yssel, Emse en Lippe […]*. Chap. IX. *Van de woonplaatsen der Witte Wijven*, Amsterdam, 1660 © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

| Looting a tumulus : quite a saga !

Many Icelandic sagas tell of intrusions of tumuli for a variety of reasons : revenge against a dead chieftain or his family, symbolic re-appropriation or even usurpation of rights over territory, handing over of the insignia of power or legitimation of a marriage to an heiress. The mounds were raised over wooden burial chambers in which the deceased's remains or ashes were placed, together with weapons, horses and sacrificed servants. The most prestigious contain ships with large ghosts crews. Many of the intruders died from the stench and infection released as soon as the tombs were breached.

Oseberg burial mound, views of the ship being excavated in 1904 and transported to the museum in 1926, Norway
Photo Olaf Væring and Neupert

The Saga of Hrolfr with No Land. " My first plea, said the princess, is that a burial mound be raised for my father, a large, well-appointed mound, surrounded by a high palisade. It must be located far away, in a deserted place. Gold and precious valuables must be brought there and placed beside the king. He must be fully armed and girded with his sword. He must be resting on a chair, flanked by those of his champions who have passed away. As for his horse Dulcifal, none of your men may touch him. He will decide for himself where to go. [...] His mound will be so strongly built with bricks and tiles that no-one will be able to open it. [...] A burial mound was made and King Hreggvidor was placed in it. Ingigerdr was the last to leave the mound. She secretly had two suits of armour brought there and placed them on her father's lap. Then the mound was covered over [...]. "

Excerpt from the *Saga de Hrolfr sans Terre*, in *Sagas légendaires islandaises*, translated (into French), presented and annotated by Régis Boyer with the assistance of Jean Renaud, Anacharsis, Toulouse, 2012, p. 151.

1.2. Chronicling the past

| A tumulus fit for heroes

Literary narratives have chronicled how tumuli were used and perceived long before they were excavated. The *Iliad* recounts the death of Patroclus, killed by Hector during the siege of Troy, and his funeral, which included libations to the dead and the sacrifice of animals and young Trojan nobles. His ashes, buried under a large tumulus, would soon be joined by those of Achilles, who was himself killed after avenging his friend. Amphorae from the late 6th and early 5th centuries BC illustrate Book 24 of the *Iliad*: Achilles drags Hector's body around Patroclus's grave, represented as a white mound.

| Pyres and turf…

The ancient funeral practices of the Germanic peoples of Thuringia and Saxony (in modern-day Germany) were recorded by Tacitus in 98 AD. His description of cremations, horse sacrifices and turf-covered graves is still reflected in an 18th-century essay by Jodocus Hermann Nunningh on ancient cremation customs in Westphalia.

| Barbarian civilisations and rituals

The Greeks and Arabs, almost ten centuries apart, were amazed to witness the impressive burial scenes of the Scythians and Russians in Central and Eastern Europe. The savage nature, the duration and the complexity of the rituals and also the immense size of the tumuli raised over the burial chambers do not leave us indifferent even today. But that was the intention of our ancestors: to keep the memory alive.

| From the old to the new world

In the 16th century a growing number of explorers travelled to the Americas. Depending on the author's point of view, the accounts of Protestant or Catholic settlers sometimes stress the cruelty of the indigenous peoples, or else present a long-lost Eden. The rituals and superstitions documented, and their fascinating illustrations, are not without elements that were borrowed or invented. Nevertheless, these testimonies still have great ethnohistorical value.

John J. Egan, *Ferguson Group. The landing of General Jackson* / Distemper painting on cotton muslin
Images courtesy Saint Louis Art Museum, Eliza McMillan Trust 34:1953.

| Journey to the land of the mound builders

Montroville W. Dickeson (1810-1882), American physician and amateur archaeologist, is said to have explored more than a thousand Native American burial mounds between 1837 and 1844. This pioneer in the use of stratigraphic cross-sections as a record-keeping method collected tens of thousands of objects, documented by maps, drawings and photographs, and later in a huge panorama painted in 1876.

Panorama of the monumental grandeur of the Mississippi Valley : an exceptional record

The painting by John J. Egan is gigantic : featuring 25 successive scenes, it is 2.28 metres high and 106.07 metres long! Like an early form of cinema, it was unrolled under the spotlight of a travelling theatre, creating the illusion of movement. The spectacle would be accompanied by sounds, music and smoke effects. The panorama is so long that instead of rewinding the cloth after every performance, the matinee show would feature a trip down the river and the evening show would take the audience back upstream. To repair damage sustained during its travels, restoration work on the painting began at the Saint Louis Art Museum in 2011 and is due to be completed by 2020.

John J. Egan, *Huge Mound and the Manner of Opening Them*, and (below) *Circleville Aboriginal Tumuli, Cado Chiefs in Full Costume and Youths at Their War Practice* / Distemper painting on cotton muslin. Images courtesy Saint Louis Art Museum, Eliza McMillan Trust 34:1953.

1.3. The irresistible attraction of burial mounds

| A brief history of exploration techniques

Legends have often prompted the curious, robbers or artefact seekers to explore or loot tumuli. Depending on whether the 'invaders' are interested in history or motivated by greed, the investigations are either summary and destructive or meticulous and well documented.

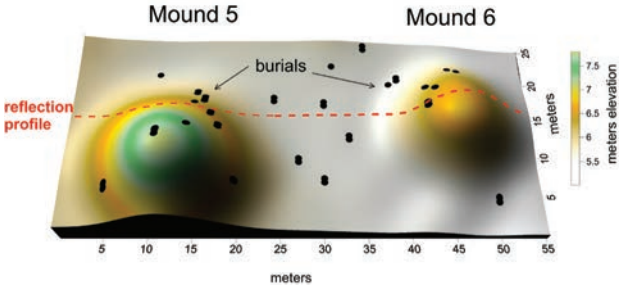
Descriptions of explorations of tumuli go as far back as the 16th century. Naturalists and 'antiquarians' in search of fossils and beautiful objects were soon influenced by the observation practices of geologists. In 1692 Johan Daniel Major analysed the best way to explore tumuli. Two centuries ahead of his time, he compared the advantages of excavating in quadrants or by making a transverse cross-section to observe all the construction strata. In the 19th century the complexity of these structures and their environment were often ignored, with treasure hunters focusing instead on the rich grave goods.

Excavations at Taylor's Low Barrow, England, by T. Bateman / Frontispiece engraving by F.W. Lock of Stephen Isaacson's poem *Barrow-Digging, by a Barrow-Knight* © Museums Sheffield.

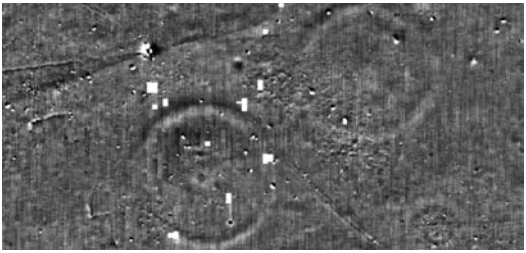
Excavations at Seron, Belgium, in 2018
Photo P.-M. Warnier © SPW-AWaP.

Excavations at Jelling, Denmark, in 1942
Photo J. Kornerup © Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen.

The practice of ‘ stratigraphic excavation ’, i.e. layer by layer, became widespread in the 20th century. Today, before excavation has even begun, aerial photographs, satellite images, geomagnetic and electromagnetic techniques, such as RADAR, and airborne laser measurements (LIDAR) can be used to detect structures that are no longer visible. This makes it possible to direct the search more effectively and to map thousands of previously undiscovered tumuli so they can be better protected. Thanks to developments such as digitised images and miniaturised computer equipment, it is now easier to document, model and display tumuli and their contents.



3D model of mounds 5 et 6 at Mapoon, Queensland, Australia. Radar tracking of graves / 3D modelling Lawrence B. Conyers, Emma St. Pierre and Mary-Jean Sutton © University of Denver, USA & Virtus Heritage, Australia.



Magnetic survey, Mbacké, Madina 3, Senegal / Imaging M. Posselt, PZP GbR, based on research by S. Magnavita © Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, KAAK, Bonn, Germany. DOI : 10.1080/0067270X.2017.1290200.

The point of view of the prehistorian

"Tumulus. This Latin word meaning 'mound' or 'small hill' refers to an earthen or stone monument (in the latter case, cairn is a more appropriate term), round or oval in shape, which is built over a grave or graves. These structures first appeared around the mid-5th millennium BC in connection with the megalithic culture. They can be carefully constructed (facings, edging, etc.) and reach great size, like the tumuli in the Carnac region of Brittany (France), the Island of Jersey (La Hougue Bie) or the United Kingdom (West Kenneth). Some are even enormous, such as Silbury Hill in Wiltshire (UK), which is estimated to have a volume of more than 350,000 m³.

Tumuli are known in various parts of the world, particularly in China. They proliferated in Europe when individual graves became widespread practice in the Bronze Age (Únětice culture, Armorican tumuli and Wessex culture); others were built by some Iron Age groups. They remained in use until after written records began. Sometimes grouped together in large numbers, forming a necropolis, many of these structures have been flattened as a result of farming practices and urbanisation. Aerial archaeological surveys have recently revealed a multitude of circular pits and it is likely that some of these are evidence of the existence of tumuli that have now been completely levelled."

A. Leroi-Gourhan, *Dictionnaire de la préhistoire,* Paris, 1988.

... and of the archaeologist of classical archaeology

"Tumulus. Mound of earth raised over a grave or graves, both to mark it and to protect it by making it less accessible; also known as a burial mound or barrow.

Tumuli could differ greatly in size, ranging from simple heaps of earth, roughly covering the body and measuring only a few dozen centimetres high, to impressively large monuments. They also came in different shapes, in terms of both plan (circular/oval) and elevation (with a pointed/rounded/flattened profile).

The structure of a tumulus was often nothing more than an accumulation of raw materials, earth and stones piled up randomly, but could also consist of carefully built-up layers, each oriented differently to improve overall stability. The tumulus may or may not have been covered with flat stones, slabs, large pebbles, etc. Most importantly, its base could be bounded by a kerb wall - a circle of one or more layers of brick or stone, with or without a foundation course - which both holds back the earth and adds architectural value. This wall could reach a considerable height, and be composed of finished or unfinished elements, joined or combined in one or more layers (...)."

R. Ginouvès, C. Bouras and J.J. Coulton, *Dictionnaire méthodique de l'architecture grecque et romaine.* Vol. III. *Espaces architecturaux, bâtiments et ensembles,* Rome, 1998.

General view of the A'ali cemetery in the Bahrain desert, circa 1960 / Photo P.V. Glob © Moesgaard Museum.

2. Timelessness and universality

2.1. Tumuli… a world of their own

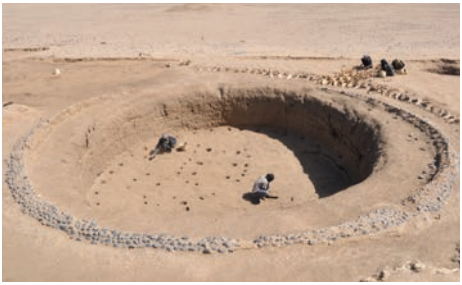
Although simple in appearance - depending on whether they were built by individuals, families or even entire communities - tumuli often conceal one or more graves. These may have been added to over the generations, but some are fairly modern. Communal mass graves have also been found.

The first monumental constructions in the history of humanity, tumuli appeared and multiplied wherever people tended to settle. They were either stand-alone structures or grouped together in huge necropolises. These mounds also, however, served to mark out the territory covered by nomadic peoples. Their size and structure depended on the ability to harness vast knowledge and considerable manpower.

On several continents, modern-day communities, in their role as custodians of ancient traditions, have taken cultural ownership of tumuli, thus ensuring their preservation. In some cases recognised as true national symbols, they are protected under royal, imperial or government decree.

Nemrut Dag, Turkey, 69-34 BC / Photo Klearchos Kapoutsis.

Daisenryo Kofun, Japan, 5th c. AD / Photo Sakai City Government.



Royal tomb at Kerma, Sudan, 3rd millennium BC
Photo Matthieu Honegger, Swiss archaeological mission to Kerma.

Ramabhar Stupa, India, 3rd century BC – 5th century AD
Photo Daniel Dispain.

2.2. Showing, hiding… building a tumulus

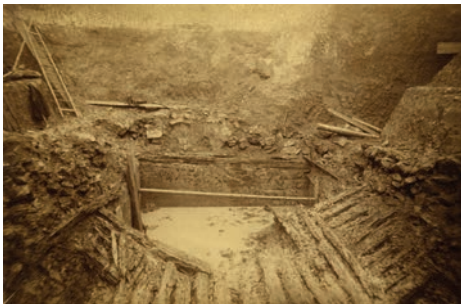
| The building materials

Regional building traditions relied on a hugely variable supply of local materials and the ability to import those that were not readily available. Earth, sand, stones and aggregates of all kinds, shells and corals, mud bricks and peat were found the world over. Depending on the size and complexity of the tumulus, drystone walls, upright stones, wooden posts or ditches were used to mark off the area or the burial mound itself.

| The building methods

- The hole was dug then propped up by stones or slabs
- The layers were stabilised to prevent the sides from eroding
- The base was marked out and supported by a substructure (sometimes in dry stones), contiguous orthostats (large upright stone slabs) or peristaliths (rings of raised stone pillars), or wooden posts
- The vaults and ceilings were shored up with wood, dry stones or monolithic slabs to prevent the passages, corridors and chambers (sometimes several of them superimposed) from collapsing
- The facings were installed at the entrances or on each level of multi-tiered mounds

Monolithe pillars dividing a large chamber into two aisles, Menga, Spain, 4th millennium BC / Photo Olaf Tausch.



Wooden burial chamber, 1890 excavations, Magdalenenberg, Germany / Photo Michelis.

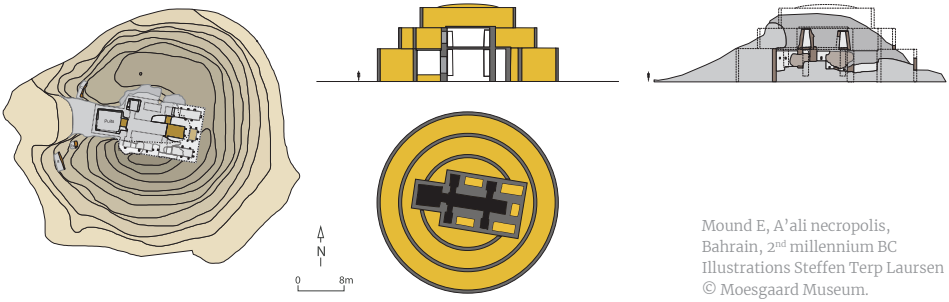
| Internal structure

The superimposed layers of a tumulus reveal how it was constructed or how it was used and enhanced over time. As soon as the burials were completed, the pits and burial chambers were sealed to prevent access. Some communal vaults, such as dolmens, were not covered over until they were no longer used above ground. The ashes of the recently deceased were then often buried in the sides of the mound. Tumuli with passages had one or more chambers (with or without alcoves) and, as a result, were used by many generations over long periods of time before being sealed off.

Front of the Cairn of Barnenez, 4th millennium BC, France, showing the entrances to the passages of the many tombs
Photo Xavier Care.

| Restructuring, extending

Vaults and passages could be enlarged and more added by opening up and building in a pre-existing tumulus. Using earth or stone, they were enlarged by raising or covering one or more older structures and were sometimes elongated or joined together. Primary or displaced graves, human remains that have been tampered with and emptied burial pits illustrate in various ways the complex social and cultural motives of the users.



Mound E, A'ali necropolis, Bahrain, 2nd millennium BC
Illustrations Steffen Terp Laursen
© Moesgaard Museum.

| Terrestrial and celestial landscapes

Sometimes entire communities located sites according to their own traditions. Conversely, the choice of geographical location may have been a demonstration of the power of a particular member of the elite. Selecting a natural, sometimes sacred or consecrated, site could have spiritual meaning or a more pragmatic political purpose.

Observing the sky, particularly the sun and moon, and calculating the annual and seasonal cycles were important in the design, construction and siting in the landscape of many megalithic and tumulus complexes. This reveals the need to transfer knowledge within communities, as well as the impact this know-how had on practices that are sometimes still part of oral and intangible heritage today.

Simulation of the winter solstice, Newgrange, Ireland / Photo Seán Doran © Centre for Archaeology and Innovation Ireland.

Royal tomb 8, A'ali necropolis, Bahrain, 2nd millennium BC / Photo Karl Hjalte Maack Raun © Moesgaard Museum.

3. Chronology of European burial mounds

The first tumuli in Europe

Nicolas Cauwe

Neolithic (6000-2200 BC)
Bronze Age (2200-800 BC)

Tumuli began to appear in the Paris basin in the 5th millennium BC, raised over individual burials, and are the oldest-known funeral monuments in north-west Europe. A short while later, and with no apparent connection with these first mounds, great stone structures, known as 'dolmens', were built from Ireland to Portugal, including Brittany. In this case, they contained collective remains. Tumuli were often built over these vaults to indicate that they had ceased to be in use. As early as the 4th millennium BC in the Mediterranean, though a little later in north-west Europe, society underwent some profound changes due to, among other things, the emergence of a warrior class. Funeral practices also changed at the same time: individual burials replaced communal graves and were often topped by a tumulus. Aerial surveys can now reveal traces of these. In Flanders, for example, dozens of Bronze Age mounds have been detected using this method. There are also several necropolises with tumuli in southern Belgium.

Front of Mound F at Bougon, 5th millennium BC, France. This 72 m long structure includes two dolmens from different time periods / Photo Nicolas Cauwe.

Tumuli for princes and warlords

Early Iron Age, Hallstatt period (800-450 BC)
Late Iron Age, La Tène period (450-30 BC)

During the Early Iron Age (Hallstatt period), dozens of very high-ranking individuals were buried, either alone or with their partners, under great tumuli, along with four-wheeled ceremonial funeral wagons, parts of harnesses and yokes. These burial chambers also contained tableware and drinking sets in bronze and painted pottery, a custom that was borrowed from the Greeks and arrived via the Etruscans. Goldware and sumptuous textiles are evidence of the elite's ability to acquire extremely rare items. At the end of the Hallstatt period, monuments such as these were constructed throughout Celtic Europe. They were located close to fortified strongholds and reflected the changes in society. During the Late Iron Age (La Tène period), the expansion of Celtic culture led to profound changes in the socio-political system and the emergence of a large number of local power centres. Two-wheeled battle chariots were typically included in the graves built under tumuli. Gradually it became less common to place signs of wealth in the grave and cremation became increasingly widespread.

Reconstruction of the Hochdorf burial chamber / Photo Simone Stork © Keltenmuseum Hochdorf/Enz

Hottomont, Belgium, 1st-3rd c. AD / Photo Guy Focant © SPW-AWaP.

| Roman period (30 BC-450 AD)

From the first few centuries AD, in the north of the Roman Empire, there was a clear resurgence in the practice of covering the graves of high-ranking individuals with a monumental earthen mound. Several dozen still mark the landscape near the city of Tongeren. From these tumuli, which contained evidence of cremation and the scattering of the ashes, as well as relics of the funeral banquet in the form of tableware, we get a clear picture of the funeral rituals of the time.

The grave goods include personal effects, such as lamps, seats, boxes, grooming utensils, hunting weapons, game tokens and writing implements. Symbolic objects thought to have magical powers, such as coins and items made of amber, jade and rock crystal, tell us more about the beliefs and superstitions of the time. Remains of the harness and chariot from the funeral cortege have been found in some graves dating back to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. The stereotypical layout and monumental size of the grave confirm the deceased's socio-economic status, privileges and power. The tumuli found at the borders of the Roman Empire illustrate the more conservative customs of a society seeking its own identity.

Haillot, Belgium, Tomb 1 with a circular pit, 7th c. AD / Photo Raphaël Vanmechelen © Archeolo-J.

| Early Middle Ages (450-960/990 AD)

In the latter years of the Roman period, burial became common practice and the most extreme examples of monumental graves were no longer constructed. In what were known as the barbarian kingdoms of the 5th century AD, royal mounds were erected, influenced mainly by the nomadic peoples from Central and Eastern Europe, the Huns being the most iconic example. Like the tomb of Childeric I in Tournai, garments, weapons and other grave goods were characteristic and demonstrated the relationships between the elite across Europe and with the Eastern Roman Empire. During the 6th century AD, the graves of local aristocrats covered with small mounds, and sometimes surrounded by posts or ditches, sat alongside these quite exceptional monuments. In the 7th century AD, when this part of the world was being converted to Christianity, mounds and necropolises with tumuli contained grave goods with symbolic meaning, fewer in number but stereotypical. The re-use of prehistoric and protohistoric tumuli was not uncommon, particularly in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian regions, where the number of truly spectacular ship-burial mounds increased between the 7th and 10th centuries. Tumuli were then banned by the Christian Church.

Guns in position on two of the three burial mounds of Grimde during the siege of Tienen in 1604. *Anno 1604 den 27en Appriel menden die muetineerders met secours vandie gueusen Tienen te overvallen (...)* © KBR, Manuscrits, 22089, fol. 243.

4. Perception and use of tumuli

| Continued use and re-use for burial purposes

In many cultures, tumuli were used by generation after generation, some of them housing up to several dozen graves after their construction. Others, long after having been abandoned, were intentionally or coincidentally re-used for burials.

| The prohibition of pagan tumuli

When Christianity arrived in Europe the practice of burying under tumuli went into decline. However, tumuli were not abandoned everywhere or simultaneously. In the early Middle Ages, during a period of major social and political upheaval, old tumuli were re-used and new ones built by people as a protest against Christianity.

| Tumuli and holiness

There are medieval accounts of the remains of revered individuals buried under tumuli being transferred to a church or a consecrated cemetery. Sometimes, however, the aim was posthumous Christianisation of pagan ancestors.

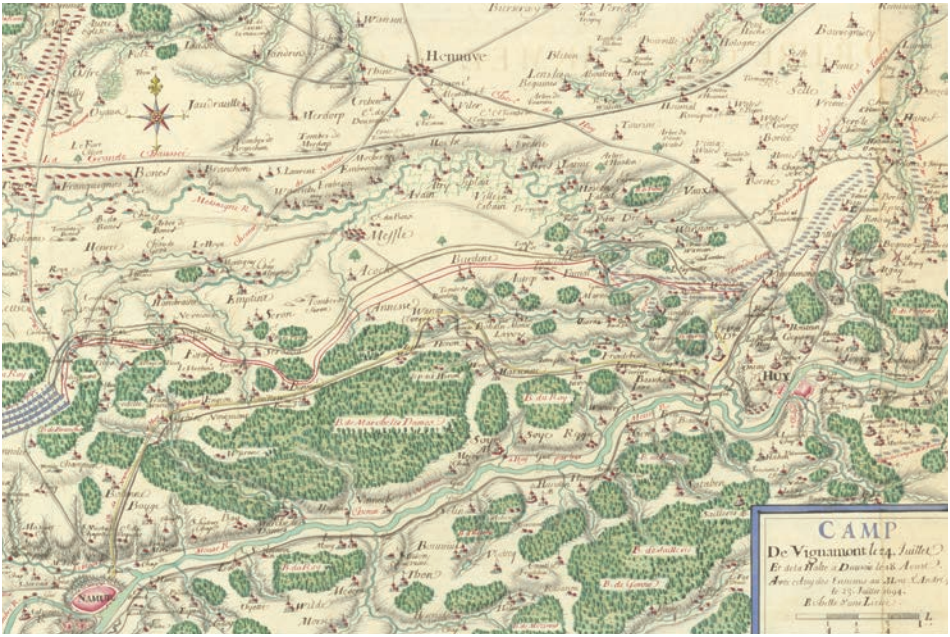
View of Jelling
J. Kornerup, *Kongehøiene i Jellinge og deres Undersøgelse efter Kong Frederik VII's Befaling i 1861*, Kjøbenhavn, 1875.

| Tumuli as a political instrument

In Gamla Uppsala, a spectacular row of tumuli is attributed to the legendary kings who founded Sweden in the 6th century AD. During the 19th century, however, the authenticity of these burial mounds was questioned and the future King Charles XV had the site excavated, in 1846 with a view to reinstating it as a symbol of national identity. The dig confirmed that the tumuli did indeed contain the remains of Svear chieftains dating back to the period in question.

In more recent times, lengthy diplomatic negotiations between Greece and North Macedonia culminated in the national flag of the new State being changed. The old flag incorporated a sun, based on the one depicted on the *larnax* of Philip II of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great, which was discovered while excavating his burial mound. As a symbol of an ancient heritage claimed by the Macedonians, it was disputed by the Greeks.

Charles XIV at Gamla Uppsala in 1834, Sweden / Oil on canvas by Johan Way © Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.



Vignamont camp on 24 July and camp during stop in Dausois on 18 August (…) in Pennier, *Camps et ordres de marches de l'armée du Roy, en Flandres (…) en l'année 1694: levez sur les lieux et dessinez par le Sr. Pennier géographe et ingenieur du Roy*, S.l.: s.n. [1694-]

5. Tumuli in the modern landscape

Olivier Latteur

Most tumuli were originally designed to catch the eye of passers-by and travellers. Intended to honour the memory of the deceased and demonstrate the wealth and prestige of his or her family, they were usually erected in places where they could be seen by the greatest number of people. So it is no coincidence that Roman tumuli in both Belgium and Britain often lie along ancient roads and that the sites selected by those who built them ensure that they are highly visible.

Saventhem tumulus, Belgium. *Relatio de antiquitatibus 1509 apud Bruxellam inventis*, Sammlung von Handschriften und alten Drucken, Cod. 3324, Fol. 8v°
© Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.

Saint Michel Chapel on the Carnac tumulus, France. Photo Jean Englebert.

The impact of these burial mounds on the landscape was particularly apparent during the Early modern period (16th-18th century), which saw a proliferation of written and cartographic sources showing them alongside forests, rivers, roads and relief features. Since urbanisation was less dense than it would be from the 19th century onwards, this meant that the phenomenon could be documented better than ever before.

In the 17th century military mapmakers recorded many tumuli that have since disappeared. These mounds were not only used as landmarks during movements of troops in the area, but most likely also served as useful observation posts for keeping an eye on the surrounding countryside.

The characteristics and height of tumuli and the imposing trees planted on their summit have attracted the attention of several travellers, such as the antiquarians Abraham Ortelius and Jean Vivien (1575) and the Tournai bourgeois Philippe de Hurges (1615).

While travelling through Hesbaye in 1615, the latter wrote: *" Les tumulus servent encore à ceux du voisinage, (…) qui (…) perduz ou esgarez en leur chemin (…), les voiant,(…) se recognoissent aussitost et voient où ils doibvent tirer, si bien que si l'on n'est sot, yvre ou aveugle, on ne peut se perdre ny fourvoyer, de jour ou au clair de la lune, en ces cartiers. "*

| Religion and justice

Churches or chapels, and sometimes gallows (a direct route from death to grave!), were erected on the top of some mounds. The former warded off any form of superstition, the latter demonstrated that judiciary power held sway over ancestral sites, and both spectacularly exploited what had become a simple elevation in the landscape.

| Commemorate, display, hide

The American Civil War and the First and Second World Wars prompted the construction of several spectacular commemorative memorials and communal burial mounds, both in the US and in Europe.

In Victorian-style cemeteries, the vaults of important families and prominent figures are a combination of tumulus and imposing neoclassical monument. However, tumuli can also provide discreet protection for the remains of some illustrious individual. Between March 1944 and December 1945 in Ravenna, the bones of Dante Alighieri were hidden in a small mound in a public park, remaining out of sight and out of the line of fire until they were replaced in his mausoleum, which had remained intact.

Elks Lodge, United States / Photo Emily Ford.

Columbarium of the Willow Row Barrow, a contemporary burial mound built in 2016, England.

6. Burial mounds today

| From imagination to marketing

Indicative of very diverse cultures and beliefs through the ages, tumuli still intrigue today. They inspire a return to ancient forms of spirituality and the creation of new ones. They still provide a stage for practices that sometimes border on the bizarre.

In adventure or crime literature and films, tumuli are both a setting and a character in their own right. Using them in the name of a work, pop band or album will immediately inject a touch of poetic mystery, animism, paganism or even Satanism, depending on whether you are listening to a world music group, a pagan black metal band or a progressive folk metal group inspired by ancient mythologies.

The incorporation of the iconic image of a tumulus into local culture inspires craftsmen, entrepreneurs and retailers. Along the Roman roads of Hesbaye, various different kinds of eateries have adopted the name ‘Tumulus’, and a bakery has even created a special cake called a ‘tumuluschocomousse’.

| Maintaining, understanding, protecting

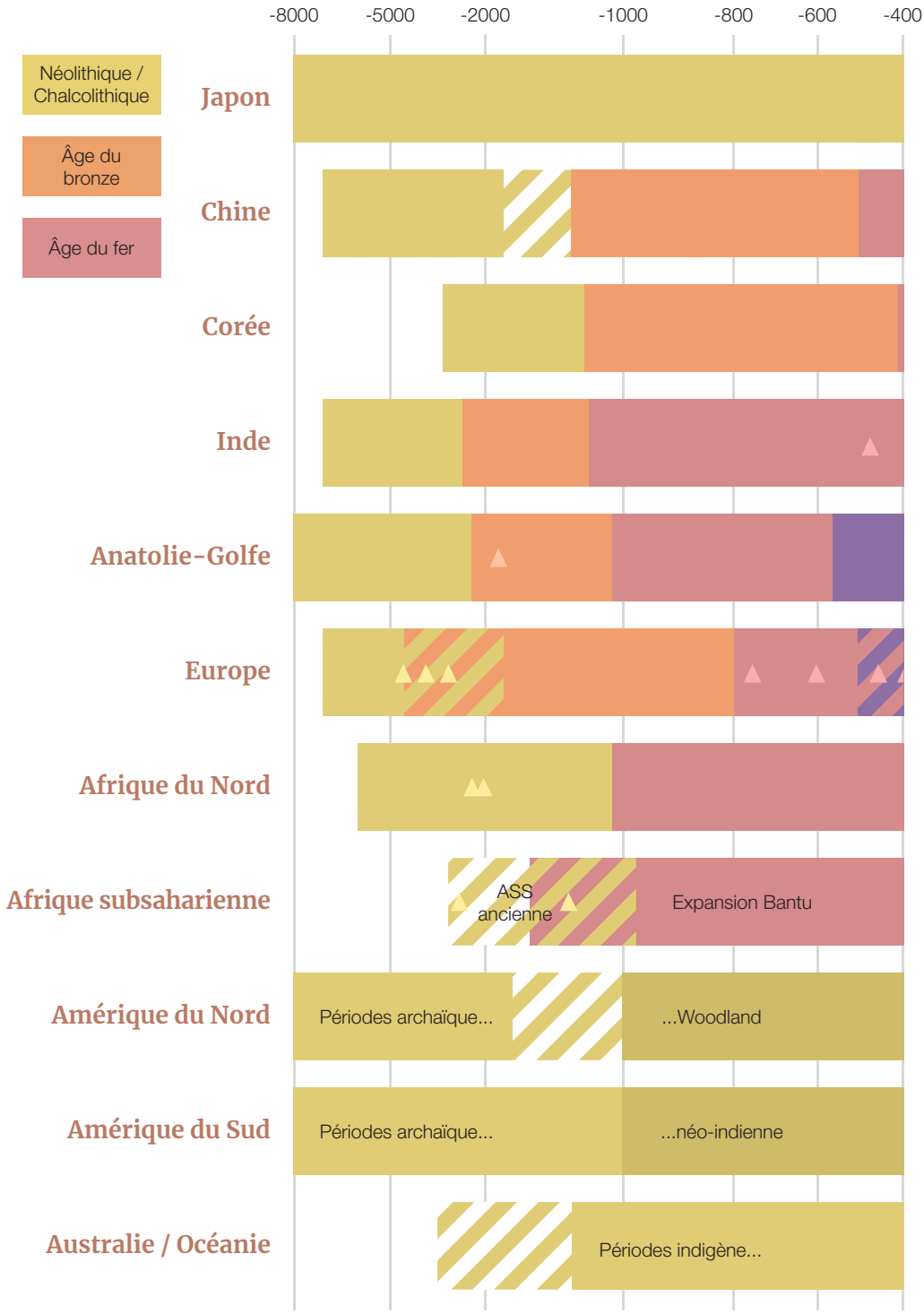
Ever since ancient times, tumuli have often obstructed efforts to plough fields, divide up land or work on roads. Wherever they are, they are used as quarries for building materials.

Under mounting pressure from road traffic, urbanisation or the construction of artisan or industrial areas, some examples have now been rediscovered thanks to the preventive archaeological research conducted before any development work is undertaken.

Thanks to national governments or UNESCO, tumuli often have cultural and historical heritage protection because they are symbols of national identity or sacred (even taboo) places. Sometimes it is because of their ecological and landscape value.

Etal-Berder tumulus in the middle of a private housing development, Larmor-Baden, Brittany, France.

Mound H, A’ali necropolis, Bahrain, under pressure from property development in 2012 / Photo Karl Hjalte Maack Raun © Moesgaard Museum.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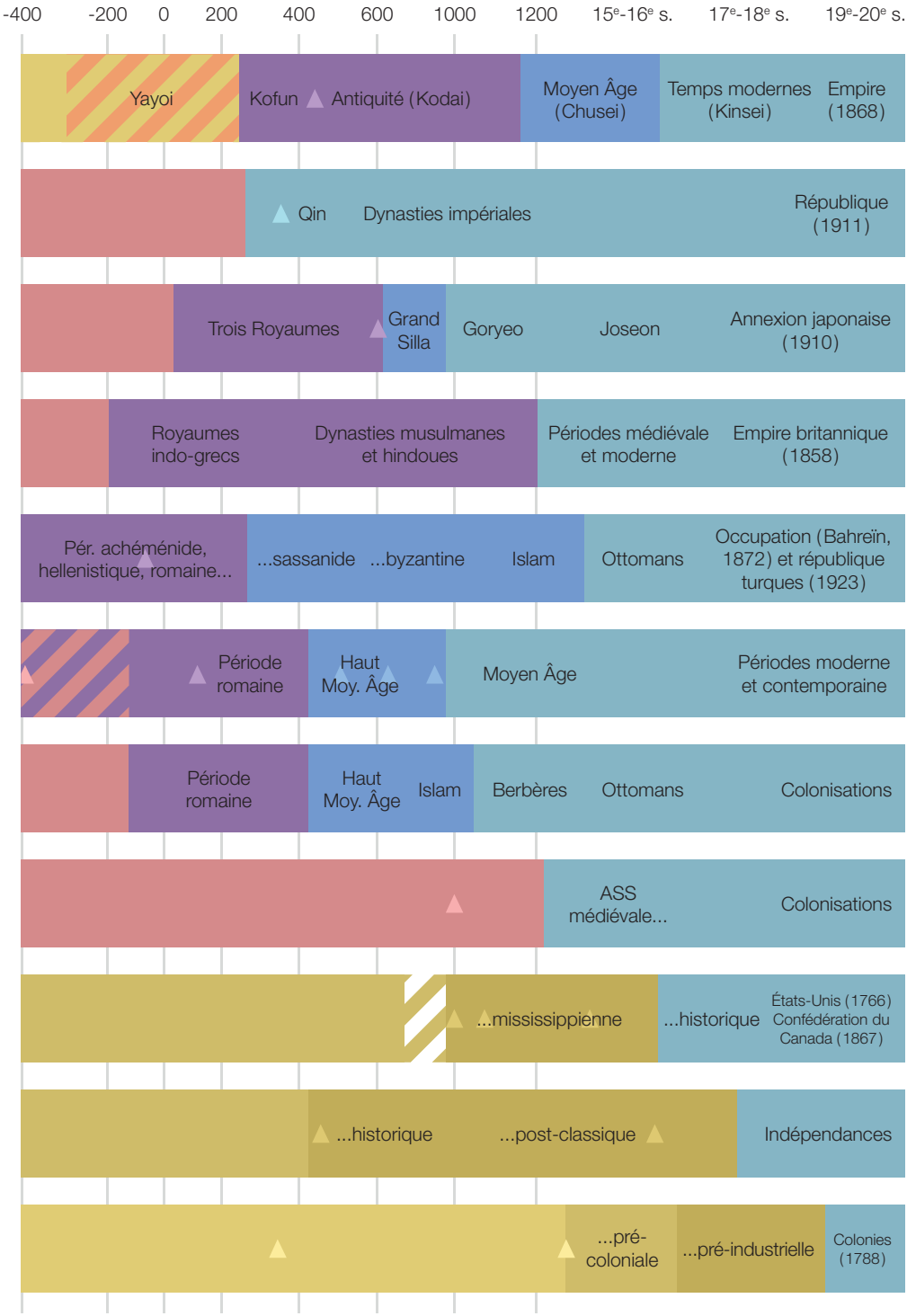
Afrique du Nord
Afrique subsaharienne
ASS ancienne
Expansion Bantu
Amérique du Nord
Périodes archaïque...
...Woodland
Amérique du Sud
Périodes archaïque...
...néo-indienne
Australie / Océanie
Périodes indigène...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Yayoi
Kofun
Antiquité (Kodai)
Moyen Âge (Chusei)
Temps modernes (Kinsei)
Empire (1868)
Qin
Dynasties impériales
République (1911)
Trois Royaumes
Grand Silla
Goryeo
Joseon
Annexion japonaise (1910)
Royaumes indo-grecs
Dynasties musulmanes et hindoues
Périodes médiévale et moderne
Empire britannique (1858)
Pér. achéménide, hellenistique, romaine...
...sassanide
...byzantine
Islam
Ottomans
Occupation (Bahreïn, 1872) et république turques (1923)
Période romaine
Haut Moy. Âge
Moyen Âge
Périodes moderne et contemporaine
Période romaine
Haut Moy. Âge
Islam
Berbères
Ottomans
Colonisations
ASS médiévale...
Colonisations
...mississippienne
...historique
États-Unis (1766)
Confédération du Canada (1867)
...historique
...post-classique
Indépendances
...pré-coloniale
...pré-industrielle
Colonies (1788)

TUMULUS

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Speakers

Raymond Brulet, Nicolas Cauwe, Marco Cavalieri,
Christian Frébutte, Florence Gaignerot-Driessen,
Anne-Donatienne Hauet, Allard Mees.

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Société archéologique de Namur.

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