

STONEHENGE: AN ANCIENT SEX SYMBOL?

Stonehenge has dominated the Wiltshire landscape for more than 4,000 years and is one of the world's most important heritage sites, but its purpose has remained a mystery. Some researchers have claimed the stone circles were used as a giant computer; others that Stonehenge was an observatory for studying stars and predicting the seasons; and a few have even argued that its rings acted as a landing ground for alien spaceships.

Now a University of British Columbia researcher who has investigated the famous prehistoric monument for several years has announced he has uncovered its true meaning: it is a giant fertility symbol built in the shape of the female sexual organs. «There was a concept in Neolithic times of a great goddess or Earth Mother», says Anthony Perks, a gynaecologist who decided to investigate the idea that the circles could have symbolic anatomical links. «Stonehenge could represent the opening by which the Earth Mother gave birth to the plants and animals on which ancient people depended.»

According to Perks's analysis, the critical events in the lives of the builders of Stonehenge—who began their work around 3,000 BC— were births and deaths in their families and community. But there is no evidence of any burials near Stonehenge, Perks adds. «There is little sign of death; there are no tombs, because Stonehenge was a place of life and birth, not death, a place that looked to the future. To a biologist, the smooth and rougher stones arranged in pairs, united by heavy lintels, suggest that male and female, father and mother, joined together», he states. «The central area is empty because it represents the opening to the world, the birth canal.» Stonehenge was constructed to honour the Earth Mother for «giving life and livelihood».

This intriguing theory has failed to impress experts. David Miles, chief archaeologist for English Heritage, which owns the site, said Perks's theory, although interesting, was essentially untestable. «If Stonehenge was built so that it looked like a female sexual organ when viewed from above, how were people supposed to see that? As far as we know, they didn't have hot-air balloons in prehistoric times.»

In fact, scientists have shown that Stonehenge was not built in one single stage, but was put together over a period of more than 1,500 years in a series of successive modifications and improvements. Nor was it built by the druids, the people more often associated with the site. In fact, many more ancient tribes and societies—individuals attempting to make their impact on the landscape of England— were responsible.

The archaeologist Jacquetta Hawkes once said that every age gets the Stonehenge it deserves. In the 1960s, at the dawn of the computing era, researchers argued that you could use Stonehenge as a giant calculating machine. Later, in the more mystical New Age, it was argued that the monument was really a spaceport for aliens, while, in the Middle Ages, it was said Stonehenge was built by giants. By those standards, this latest idea seems to say something quite odd about the twenty-first century.

(From the press. Adapted)

shape: forma

burial: enterrament / entierro

lintel: llinda / dintel

site: jaciment, excavació / yacimiento, excavación

odd: estrany, excèntric / raro, excèntrico

Série 4 - A

PART ONE: READING COMPREHENSION

Choose the best answer.

[0,5 points each correct answer]

1. Stonehenge is...
 - a) one of the world's greatest monuments from ancient times.
 - b) a set of monoliths in a big circle in British Columbia.
 - c) no longer a mystery.

2. Dr. Anthony Perks claims that Stonehenge...
 - a) was a watch-tower to study plants and animals as well as the seasons.
 - b) has the shape of female genitalia.
 - c) was a Neolithic goddess of Death (or Earth Mother).

3. Dr. Perks claims that there are no tombs or burial grounds near Stonehenge because...
 - a) the stone circles were built for sacrificial ceremonies.
 - b) the ideas about creation and regeneration are fashionable again.
 - c) Stonehenge was a place of life and birth.

4. Dr. Perks thinks that the central area of Stonehenge is empty...
 - a) because it is enclosed by the inner circle of giant bluestones.
 - b) so that people can pray and celebrate astronomical events.
 - c) as it may represent the opening to life and livelihood.

5. One of the following statements is **false**. Which one?
 - a) Families did not bury their dead in or around Stonehenge.
 - b) People were farmers but not hunters in that area.
 - c) Stonehenge could represent the fertility of the earth.

6. David Miles thinks Dr. Perks's theory...
 - a) is an established fact.
 - b) cannot be proved.
 - c) is not interesting at all.

7. The builders of Stonehenge...
 - a) started their job about 5,000 years ago and completed it in several stages.
 - b) were mostly Celtic druids who made the place enchanted.
 - c) carried the stones from far away and polished them with very efficient tools.

8. «Stonehenge was a spaceport for aliens». This is what many people believed...
 - a) in the Middle Ages.
 - b) early 20th century.
 - c) in the New Age period.