

Ken Follett: Solstice at Stonehenge [B2]

L'ultimo libro di Ken Follett, "Circle of Days", ci dà l'occasione di scoprire di più (o almeno provarci) sulla storia e sulla costruzione di Stonehenge, il misterioso cerchio di megaliti risalente al Neolitico.

Ken Follett's latest novel, Circle of Days, is based on extensive historical research about the Neolithic community that built Stonehenge. Follett includes all kinds of historically **accurate** details about their everyday life, for example their religion, sexual politics, and building techniques.

BEFORE STONEHENGE

When the book opens, the main structure of Stonehenge has not yet been built. Where the stone circle will one day stand is a similar structure built of wood that the characters in the book call "The Monument". Seft, one of the book's main characters, notices how wooden **uprights** have been erected in a ring. The **crossbars** across the tops of the **uprights** form "a continuous circle that was perfectly **level**." Archaeologists have found evidence that a circular **earthwork enclosure** was built in about 3000 BCE and inside it was a ring of fifty-six **timber** or stone posts. There are even **traces** of posts erected at the site in the Mesolithic era (8500-7000 BCE).

THE MIDSUMMER RITE

Seft and his girlfriend Neen are among the **crowd** who **gather** at the Monument at sunrise on Midsummer morning to watch **priestesses** perform the Midsummer Rite. The young lovers feel a sense of spirituality watching the **priestesses** dance, sing and **drum** as the Sun rises directly between two of the upright **timbers** that form the Monument. The rite forms part of their **worship** of the Solar deity which is at the heart of their religion. People have travelled from **settlements** around the Great Plain to meet at the Monument for the Midsummer Rite. Although researchers don't know

exactly what the purpose of Stonehenge was, it seems certain it had some ritual purpose connected with the solstices.

TRADE AND SEX

Gathering at the Stonehenge site for solstice rituals throughout the year was about more than religion. It provided an opportunity for people from different parts of the Great Plain to trade their goods. Seft's family, for example, brought flint that they'd mined. Neen's family had leather goods to trade. Yana, from a farming family, brought goat's cheese. The Midsummer gathering was also a good opportunity to have sex with people from other communities. Seft and Neen conceive their first child during the Revel, the night of Midsummer Day when established couples would separate for a few hours to have sex with different partners. It was understood that conceiving a baby with someone from a distant community was a positive thing. Couples would raise babies as their own, regardless of who the biological father was. This occasional relaxation of sexual norms in order to widen the gene pool is a phenomenon that anthropologists have identified in many communities throughout history.

WOODWORKING IN STONE

When Seft finds that his house is about to collapse, he comes up with an ingenious technique for attaching a new wooden lintel to the uprights. He uses a chisel to cut a piece out of the lintel that will slot together with a piece sticking out on the upright. This makes the structure much stronger than before when the lintel was attached to the upright with leather straps. It is this ingenious woodworking technique that will be used later to fix in place the massive stone lintels of Stonehenge. The innovative joints used at Stonehenge explain how the huge structure has been so resilient over the millennia. They have not been found in any other surviving prehistoric monument.

Glossary

- **gather** = riunirsi, radunarsi
- **worship** = culto
- **trade** = commerciare
- **raise** = crescere
- **joints** = giunti, giunture
- **priestesses** = sacerdotesse
- **flint** = selce
- **gene pool** = patrimonio genetico
- **timber** = legno
- **goat's cheese** = formaggio di capra
- **lintel** = architrave
- **straps** = cinghie
- **Revel** = festa, celebrazione
- **chisel** = scalpello
- **sticking out** = sporgere
- **earthwork enclosure** = recinto di terra
- **drum** = suonare il tamburo
- **goods** = merci
- **accurate** = affidabili
- **crossbars** = traverse
- **level** = livellato, allo stesso livello
- **regardless** = a prescindere
- **slot together** = incastrare, assemblare
- **fix in place** = fissare, mettere in posizione
- **traces** = tracce
- **leather goods** = articoli di pelletteria
- **widen** = ampliare
- **crowd** = folla
- **settlements** = insediamenti
- **uprights** = pali