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## ORIENTATIONS OF THE GIANT'S CHURCHES IN OSTROBOTHNIA, FINLAND

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MARIANNA RIDDERSTAD, University of Helsinki, Finland, and  
JARI OKKONEN, University of Oulu, Finland

#### *Introduction*


The so-called Giant's Churches are Neolithic stone structures, unique to the coastal area between Yli-Ii and Närpiö in Ostrobothnia in the western Finland.<sup>1</sup> They date from 2500-2000 BCE, and are concentrated on the ancient seashore.<sup>2</sup> Most of them were built on islands or drumlins on the coast, but are now situated as far as 30 kilometers inland because of the post-glacial rebound. There are 40 to 50 of them, depending on the definition, which is not clear, as their function is not yet known.

The Giant's Churches are large, the length of the long axis differing from about 60 meters to 12 meters, and most often rectangular. On the other hand, the height of their walls is rather low, from about half a meter to about 2 meters in some cases. Most of them have "gates", which are lowerings in the walls, suitable for entering the structure. Some of them also have so-called "sacristies", which are stone cairns either constructed as parts of the walls or situated immediately outside of them.

The function of the Giant's Churches has been a matter of debate for over a hundred years. They have been seen as dwellings, burial sites, temples, fortresses, natural formations, giant cold stores for seal meat and hunting enclosures.<sup>3</sup> Some of the smallest constructions may have been dwellings, but the largest ones would have been impractical for that purpose. No usual signs of permanent inhabitation have been found inside the structures.

The present paper is the first one in the series of studies, where the possible deliberate orientations of the Giant's Churches to celestial events are examined. The results may help to clarify the functions of the structures. In this paper, the orientations of 23 Giant's Churches are presented.





An interesting point can be raised based on this movement of the sun close to the horizon line. It is known from the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus that the movement of the moon close to the horizon was considered significant by the builders of at least one Megalithic temple, identified by A. Burl as the ring of Callanish on Lewis, Outer Hebrides.<sup>4</sup> Finland is too far north for the extreme points of the moon to be used for orientating buildings, but a similar effect to the one described by Diodorus Siculus is produced by the movements of the sun, which can be used for orientation purposes. One reason for building these monuments in Ostrobothnia could be related to this kind of movement of the sun at these latitudes.