

THE MENHIRS OF PORTUGAL.

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1. *Introduction*

In Portugal, the megalithic phenomenon occurs all over the territory, although the Southern part of the country is where one of the largest concentrations of dolmens, menhirs, and megalithic enclosures known in Europe is to be found.

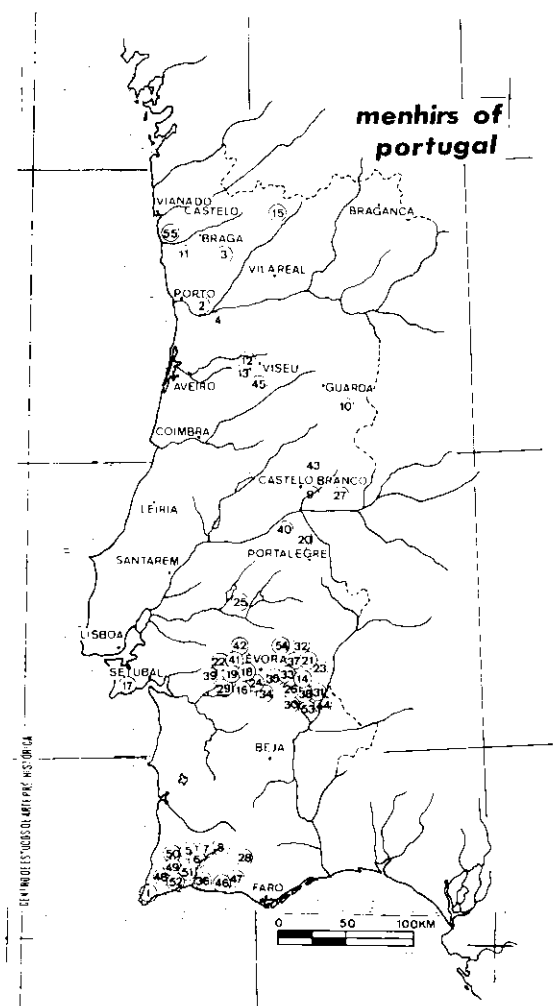
Collective burial chambers have been studied since the second half of the last century, and in spite of the vast literature produced, many of the chronological, cultural and historical problems that remain are yet to be solved. In this regard, the province of Alentejo is one of the best known, due especially to the work performed by the Leisner couple in the middle of this century, giving us a fairly clear view of the typological and cultural evolution of the dolmenic complex in this region of Southern Portugal (Leisner, 1951, 1959, 1965 and 1966). Their system is being confirmed by recent thermoluminescent dating which proves megalithic tombs to have their origin and local evolution in the V millennium B.C., and to be received later in the evolutioned phases of the III millennium, influenced by the neolithic and chalcolithic cultures of the Mediterranean world (Whittle and Arnaud, 1975). Things have been altogether different with the investigation of menhirs and megalithic enclosures. The first news of the discovery of a monument of this type dates from 1864 and refers to the menhir of *Luzim*, in Penafiel (Ferreira, 1864). In 1891 were published (in printing) the first decorated menhirs which were found in the Algarve, near the Southern coast of the country (Veiga, 1891). For over half a century, during which only sporadic mention were made to the finding of a few menhirs, this type of monument is considered by iberic archeologists to be rare in portuguese territory.

It was not until 1964, following the discovery of the menhir and the cromlech of the *Almendres*, that an amazing quantity of menhirs and megalithic enclosures began to appear in the Alto-Alentejo (Pina, 1971; Gonçalves, 1970, 1972 and 1975). Work carried out by the authors throughout these last years also led to the identification of more than forty menhirs in the extreme South of the country, some of which were included in neolithic settlements.

Consequently, today we know of several hundreds of these megaliths, and the outlook still generally accepted a little more than a decade ago has been completely changed. It can be legitimately assumed that investigation of this religious-ideological phenomenon is still in its beginnings in Portugal, and that much work is yet to be done until satisfactory solutions have been found to the innumerable problems we are still facing. It shall be attempted

Fig. 30

Menhirs' map of Portugal (numbering respects chronological order of discovery or publication). 1: Cabo de S. Vicente; 2: Marco de Luzim; 3: Cepeaes; 4: Castelo de Paiva; 5: Monte Branco; 6: Monte de Pedra Branca; 7: Monte de Roma; 8: Cumeada of S. Bartolomeu de Messines; 9: S. Martinho of Castelo Branco; 10: Folba da Torre; 11: Barcelos - cromlech; 12: Fataunços; 13: Bicao dos Conqueiros or Covas; 14: Wedding Rock or Rock of the Lovers; 15: Turrimbeiras; 16: Vale-de-Rodrigo; 17: Vale da Palha; 18: Almendres - cromlech (with some decorated menhirs); 19: Almendres; 20: Povoia and Meadas; 21: Outeiro; 22: Portela dos Mogos - cromlech; 23: Bulhoa (decorated); 24: Veladas (decorated); 25: Paiva - cromlech; 26: Ribeira do Alamo - cromlech; 27: Granja de S. Pedro; 28: Alto das Alagoas; 29: Herdade da Correia; 30: Farisoa - cromlech; 31: Xarez - themenos (with some decorate menhirs); 32: Pedra Alcada; 33: Penedo Gordo; 34: Vale de Cardos - cromlech (?) (with some decorated menhirs); 35: Perdigoes - cromlech; 36: Vale de Lama; 37: Herdade da Capela - cromlech; 38: Vidigueiras; 39: Courela da Casa Nova; 40: Vale Sobral; 41: Oliveirinha; 42: Casbarra; 43: Fonte Fundeira - cromlech; 44: Xarez - phallic menhirs; 45: Caparossa; 46: Caramujeira; 47: Areias das Almas; 48: Courela do Castanheiro; 49: Monte da Sobrosa; 50: Portela do Padrao - alignment; 51: Monte da Rocha; 52: Luz; 53: Gagos; 54: Santa Margarida; 55: S. Paio de Antas.



in the course of this paper to establish a critical balance of our knowledge in this field, starting by a geographical, morphological and technical characterization of the material to proceed to the discussion of chronology. We shall end by drawing the conclusions that may be outlined at the present moment.

2. The Geographical groups

Menhirs are nearly present throughout the country, showing a dispersion which is certainly more the product of the coincidence of their discovery than the result of a true cultural distribution. They concentrate in two clusters in the area south of the Tagus River, the first being located in the Alto-Alentejo, around the axis Monsaraz-Evora, and the second in the Algarve, centered in the triangle Lagoa-Silves-Lagos.

2.1. Northern and Central Portugal

North of the Tagus River 12 sites have been spotted in irregular distribution, forming no coherent pattern. They merely present the consequence of their discovery, following the chance of information or as marginal results of other studies. They considered a geographical group hereafter only as a question of convenient classification, but it is certainly to be expected that further studies will lead to a substantial change in the distribution map and to

the definition of several cultural patches, allowing a better understanding of their typological characteristics and relations with the examples of the South.

In *Barcelos* there seems to have existed a *cromlech* (Vasconcellos, 1917, p. 118), and north of Castelo Branco, we have recently identified another at *Fonte Fundeira*, formed by a circle of small standing stones grossly chiselled, positioned around a large, tall rock which naturally rises in the center. From the same region stems a menhir (*S. Martinho*) with a well shaped phallic head, reused as a stela during the Late Bronze Age by flattening of one of its sides, on which was carved a composition of the type of the decorated stelae of Estremadura (Almagro, 1966, pp. 36-38).

2.2. Alto-Alentejo

Several hundred menhirs, isolated or integrated in megalithic enclosures of circular or square ground-plan, are distributed around the villages of Monsaraz and Evora. Chiselled in local granitic rock, their dimensions vary between 3 and 4 meters in height, however reaching 5.60 m. with the phallic menhir of *Outeiro*, 6.70 m. with that of *Póvoa and Meadas* or 10 m. with the natural bilitth of *Pedra Alçada*. As for the technical and morphological characteristics, the following groups are distinguished:

- 1 - use of natural outgrowths chosen for the suggestive form they display, sometimes with rough human work; the "Fat Stone", now destroyed, had a profile resembling the womb of a pregnant woman, and the "Rock of the Lovers" takes the form of an uterus; it is even today the destination of propitiatory practices of sexual basis and a place of pilgrimage for the surrounding population which in times of drought goes to the

Fig. 31
Square enclosure at Xarez, Monsaraz. Some of the monoliths belong to the group of the "pedras-talbas".





Fig. 32
Menhir 1 of Caramujeira, Lagoa.

menhir to invoke the rains (Vasconcellos, 1938). It is carved with cup-marks and cruciforms, and also displays a huge cross in relief, in baroque style, having evidently been christianized in recent times.

- 2 - use of natural mobile boulders of elliptic and bulgy shape, and sometimes submitted to rough shaping; they are currently known as “pedras-talhas” by association with the big vessels or “talhas” used in the Alto-Alentejo for containing water and wine, originating in the roman *dolia* (e.g. *cromlechs*’ menhirs of the *Almendres*, *Ribeira dos Alamos*, *Xarez* and menhir of *Veladas*).
- 3 - carefully chiselled menhirs of cylindric form, with hemispheric or pointed tops, clearly phallic (e.g. *Perdigoes*, *Almendres*, *Outeiro* and central of *Xarez*).

Some of these menhirs are decorated with relief engravings. At *Bulboa*, one of the sides (the other, also ornamented, has not been analyzed yet) shows a composition divided in two drawings: the upper with a figure probably representing the sun, and the lower with several wavy lines surrounding a representation that has been paralleled with the schist “croziers” (Gonçalves, 1972), an object of obvious magico-religious value found amongst the grave-goods in the developed phase of megalithic tombs of the Alto-Alentejo. Similar representations are also found engraved on several megalithic tombs and menhirs of Brittany like at *Petit-Mont* and *Mané-Rutual* (Breuil and Boyle, 1954), and on the menhir of *Kermarquer* (Helgouach *et al.*, 1970).

Several menhirs of vague anthropomorphic shape from the *cromlecb* of the *Almendres* also have compositions of the same type, formed by wavy lines associated with circles engraved on the upper part. Likewise, on the menhirs of *Casbarra*, *Vidigueiras* and *Vale-de-Rodrigo*, decorations of the same kind have been recorded. Ten of the monoliths found close to the *themenos* of *Xarez* show an engraved composition which repeatedly combines the two motifs: the circle and a U-motif.

Yet another motif frequently found on Alto-Alentejo menhirs is the cup-mark, engraved in several depths and diameters, forming either a cluster

(*Vale Sobral 1*) or set in a vertical line which follows the length of the menhir from top to bottom (e.g., *Casbarra* and central of *Xarez*).

Some of these monoliths have been treated to represent large phalli. The most notorious example to be found is the menhir of *Outeiro* where realism goes as far as to show, at the vertex, the urethral opening, a big hole of 0.30 m. in diameter.

Out of the eight megalithic enclosures of this region, the best-preserved is the *cromlech* of the *Almendres*, formed by 95 monoliths of the "*pedra-talba*" type and set in elliptic ground-plan measuring 60 m. in length and 30 m. in width. Several menhirs are decorated with compositions of circles and bands of wavy lines. At *Xarez*, an enclosure of square ground-plan of *themenos*, surrounding a large central phallic menhir, was reconstructed, based on the supporting gear laid open by excavations.

At *Vale de Cardos*, we can find another version of these megalithic structures, formed by a central menhir 3.20 m. high decorated with more than 80 cup-marks, surrounded by four other, smaller menhirs whose dimensions range from 0.50 to 0.70 m. in height.

2.3. Algarve

They concentrate in the geographic triangle defined by the towns of Lagoa, Silves and Lagos, constituting a well-defined and homogeneous religious and cultural complex, characterized by the building and erecting of menhirs of modest dimensions varying in size, from the smaller conical "betyls" of *Arei-*

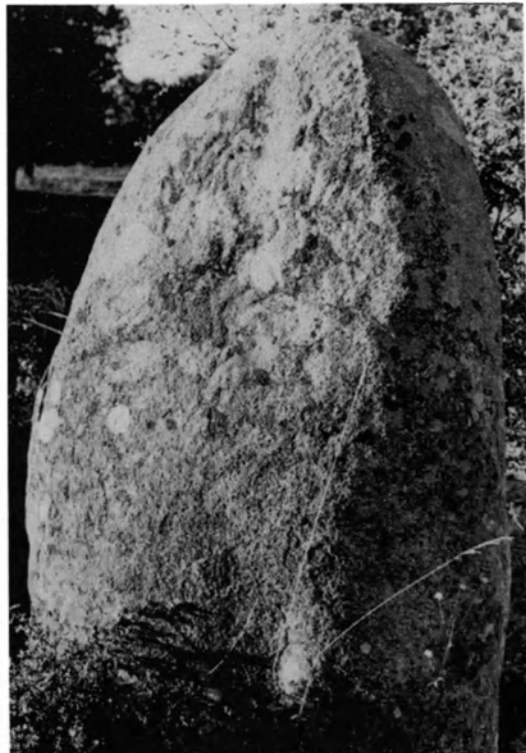


Fig. 33
One of the decorated menhirs of the Almen-dres' cromlech, Evora. Visible on the upper part area three circles associated with bands waving vertically, morphologically belongs to the group of "pedras-talbas".

as da Almas and Caramujeira of approximately half a metre high, to the bigger menhirs that can reach 3.60 m. Generally, they are carefully chiselled out of white limestone or red sandstone, these rocks being found on the surface close to where they were erected. They are normally conical or eggshaped or more rarely as in Caramujeira, sub-rectangular.

More than 10 specimens are decorated in relief, either with bands of wavy lines that run vertically along the sides (Caramujeira 16), sometimes starting from a "phallic beltline" which encloses the top in transverse direction (Caramujeira 1 and 15), or with chains of connecting ellipses, again vertical, appearing either drawn in contour (Courela do Castanheiro 1) or completely set off in relief (Caramujeira 17). On menhir 1 at Monte de Roma the circle surrounding the phallic top, like a cord, crosses over the side.

We still ignore the pattern in which these monuments may have been set up, since at Caramujeira where, in a small area, these have been found 28 menhirs so far (some partly complete specimens, and some more or less fragmented). They were removed from their original positions by engines working there extracing sand. It has, however, been observed at Portela do Padrão, in Bensafrim, that five menhirs had been set in a line marking the hills descending from 60 down to 30 m. of altitude above sea level. The now disappeared menhirs of Silves (Monte de Roma, Monte Branco and Monte da Pedra Branca) and those of S. Bartolomeu de Messines (Cumeada) also seem to have been erected on high points (Veiga, 1891).

Fig. 34
Menhir 17 of Caramujeira, Lagoa.



Fig. 35
Menhir 1 of Courela do Castanheiro,
Bensafrim, top mutilated by a fracture.



Menhir 1 of *Caramujeira* was built in two pieces which subsequently were united and overlapped at the moment of erection. The same technique seems to have been followed at Menhir 3 of *Monte de Roma*.

3. Chronology

Dating these monuments presents us some extremely delicate problems due to the fact that there are but a few ill-defined cases in which they appear in an archeological context, and also that when associated to megalithic tombs, we do not know to which phase of tombs use the menhir may be attributed.



Fig. 36
Menhir 15 of Caramujeira, Lagoa.

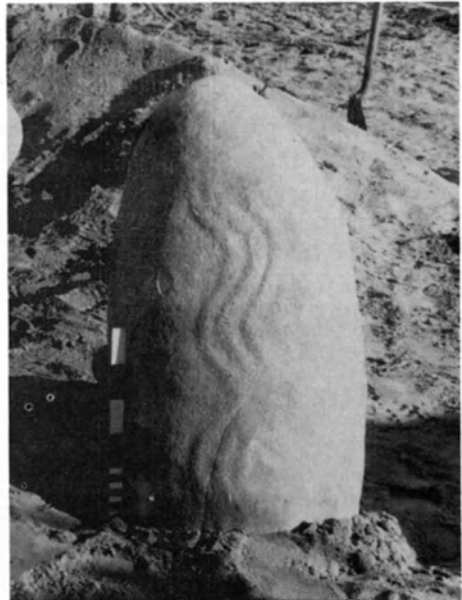


Fig. 37
Menhir 16 of Caramujeira, Lagoa.

Difficulties arise even in the dating of the dolmens, considering we possess an insufficient number of absolute datings to allow us to work on monuments which were in use for several centuries and by different cultures. Under these conditions, the chronological results emerging from this analysis have a necessarily approximate value and may be used only for general reference.

In the Alto-Alentejo, the distribution of menhirs shows us a clear association with megalithic tombs, the same fact being recorded north of the Tagus River (menhirs of *Luzim* and *A. Paio de Antas*, erected in the proximity of barrows). Knowing that the dolmenic complex has a fairly wide chronological spectrum, the problem therefore lies in determining to which phase or phases the menhirs can be attributed, or if, on the contrary, like in Brittany, where they constitute a phenomenon which has been present ever since the early phase, and subsequently accompanies the whole evolution of the dolmenic complex (Helgouach, 1976).

Two places are known where these monuments were found together with megalithic tombs. At *Vale-de-Rodrigo*, a menhir decorated with wavy lines and other symbols lay toppled over and buried at the entry of the corridor of a false-vault dolmen, which apparently was used for a relatively short period. It furnished characteristic goods for the evolutioned phase of the megalithic series of the Alentejo, with stone axes, a gouge, flint arrowheads, collars of schist beads, schist idol-plaques, a crozier and typical megalithic pottery, usually found in Alentejo passage graves. The architecture of the tomb chamber is constituted by a trapezoidal base formed by large megalithic orthostats and roofed by a corbelling structure, a fact indicating an initial moment of the meeting of the two traditional cultures. The Alentejo megalithic and the *tholoi*, stemming from the southeast of the Iberian Peninsula (Leisner, 1944).

By drawing a parallel between tholos 19 at Los Millares, Spain, the tholos of Farisoa and the big dolmen at *Comenda da Igreja*, Alentejo, the latter monuments having been dated, the first by C-14 (Gorbea, 1970, p. 18) the other two by thermoluminescence (Wittle and Arnaud, 1975, p. 7), the false-vault dolmen of *Vale-de-Rodrigo* and the associated menhir may be situated on a chronological horizon near 3.000 B.C.



Fig. 38
Phallic menhir of Outeiro in Monsaraz. Visible in opposite light is the uretral opening at the vertex.

Fig. 39
East side of menhir of Bulboa in Monsaraz. On the upper part, the probable figure of a Sun and on the lower a composition of wavy lines around a representation interpreted as being a "crozier".



During the excavations of a large passage grave at *Granja de S. Pedro* (Castelo Branco), two phallic menhirs were found *in situ*, the larger one with the phallic gland chiselled and engraved with cup-marks, both erected on the left side of the corridor (Almeida and Ferreira, 1971). As they were enveloped by the great barrow covering the megalithic monument, they must at least be prior to its construction and to the last burials celebrated in the tomb. Unfortunately, the grave goods are very poor and atypical, although the architecture presents typological characteristics in common with the great dolmens of the Beiras (Central Portugal), and with the megalithic passage graves of the Alentejo. In the first of these regions the datings of C-14 from 2.900 ± 40 B.C. (GrN-5110) and 2.640 ± 65 B.C. (GrN) obtained for the dolmen of Carapito I (Leisner and Ribeiro, 1968) indicated, once they had been calibrated, a horizon in the middle of the IV millennium for these large dolmens, among which must possibly be also included the construction of the megalithic tomb of *Granja de S. Pedro*. Due to lack of published data on the stratigraphic relation between the foundations of the menhirs and those of the orthostats of the dolmens, we ignore if these were contemporaries of the

construction of the funeral monument, or if they were erected during one of the possible phases of use. The evidence of *Vale-de-Rodrigo* and *Caramujeira* presently suggests a chronology towards the end of the IV millennium B.C., for these two menhirs

In the Algarve, at the settlement of *Caramujeira*, which is being studied by the authors (in cooperation with E.C. Serrao), more than twenty menhirs were found, chiselled from white shellbearing limestone, in which six specimens decorated in relief with bands of wavy lines or with chains of connecting ellipses three of these having "phallic heads" marked by transversal cords. Judging by their technique, morphology and style they belong to the complex of menhirs of the Western Algarve. Although excavations are still in progress, it seems that the existence of two horizons can be recorded at the settlement of *Caramujeira*, concluding above all from typological data, because the stratigraphy appears substantially turned up by the loosening of the ground for the local vineyards. The first horizon, with plastic pottery, carved and stamped non-cardially, shows strong influence of the cultures of the Late Early Neolithic of the Southern Peninsula (caves of Andaluzia and settlements of the litoral Alentejo), and can be set in the middle of the IV millennium B.C.; the second, characterized by the use of nipples pottery, plates with wide and thickened rims, plain carinated and round-bottomed pots, pottery with indented rims and bodkins on wide chips, sometimes with impressed decorations which denounce local survivals of the primitive phase, must be attributed to the Late Neolithic/Early Chalcolithic, based on parallels with sites in the Estremadura area, where this complex appears in stratigraphy. Although to the present date no menhir had turned up in a safe and revealing stratigraphic sequence, the exact conformity between the distribution of these monoliths and the area of the settlement (confirmed also at the neighbouring site of *Areias das Almas*) indicated their integration in the context of one of the inhabited *Caramujeira's* phases, possibly the second, considering the analogy in figuration and concept with the decorated menhirs at *Vale-de-Rodrigo*, *Bulhoa* and *Almendres*. In this case they might be dated in the late IV, early III millennium B.C. or even somewhat earlier, considering the absence of more developed chalcolithic materials already existing in the *Vale-de-Rodrigo* grave-goods.

4. Conclusions

From such elements as we possess today it appears that the existence of two occurrences of menhirs south of the Tagus River, constituted by the groups of Alto-Alentejo and of Algarve, differ in dimension, morphology, technique and cultural context, but are related by the same basic ideological-religious concept which is specified in each of these regional complexes. Referring to this, a comparison between the decoration of the menhirs of the *Almendres cromlech* and those at *Monte de Roma* is especially revealing.

The menhirs of Algarve seem to integrate in the scope of neolithic cultures that developed during the IV millennium, relating, at least at *Caramujeira* and *Areias das Almas*, to settlement contexts, a fact which also distinguishes them from the Alto-Alentejo specimens which are associated with the

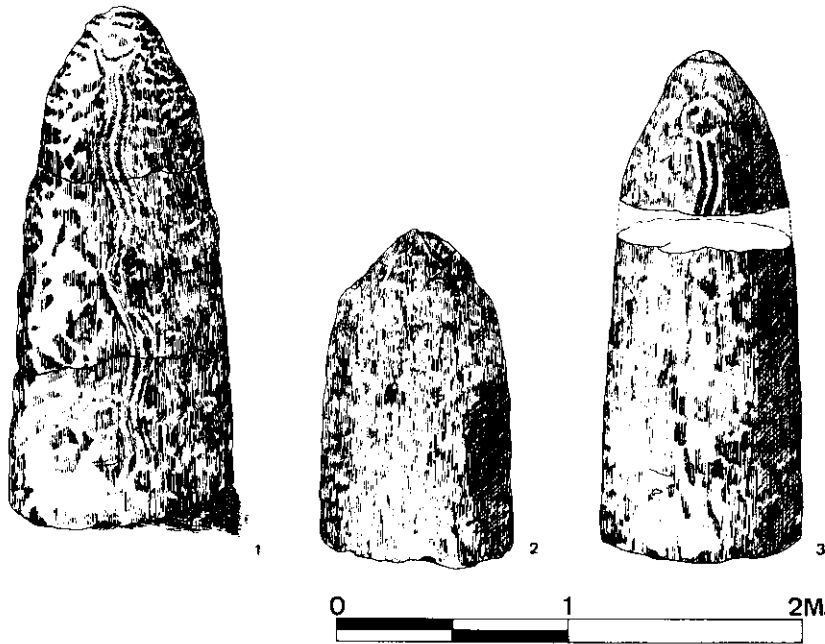


Fig. 40
Menhirs of Monte de Roma, Silves.

dolmenic complex. For the reasons given, it is possible that the Algarve menhirs are somewhat prior to those of the Alentejo. In both places where the menhirs of the Alentejo group can be correlated with datable material, evidence suggests that these monoliths (and also the megalithic enclosures, considering the presence of the same type of decoration at *Bulhoa* and in the *cromlech* of the *Almendres*) are associated with the dolmenic complex of the Alentejo, already in its developed phase, during the Late Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic, and held their ground as one of its religious-ideological aspects.

The small amount of data that we possess today, therefore, indicates a chronology situated approximately between 3.500/3.200 - 2.750/2.500 B.C. for the menhirs of Southern Portugal. At present, a more precise dating cannot be achieved.

The menhirs of *Granja de S. Pedro*, in connection with a megalithic monument showing, as we mentioned, a typological transition from the architectonic structures of the Alentejo and those of Central Portugal, could indicate that the ideological-religious movement responsible for the construction and erecting of menhirs was already in diffusion north of the Tagus River in the second half of the IV millennium, perhaps following the expanding of megalithic tombs, which is thought now-days to have begun around this date (Wittle and Arnaud, 1975). It is a working hypothesis to be checked by further data, but which could account not only for the menhirs known in this region, but also for the appear in the decorated dolmens of Northern and Central Portugal of figures reflecting a similar ideological conception as found in the compositions of *Bulhoa* and *Almendres*. In fact, on the dolmen

of *Carapito I* (Leisner and Ribeiro, 1968), on the orthostat C6 of *Antelas* (Castro, Ferreira and Viana, 1957) and on another of unknown origin, kept at the museum of the Anthropological Institute Dr. Mendes Correia, Porto (Shee, 1974), appear radiated solar reproductions associated with wavy lines which, although with other characteristics, follow the same figurative conception underlying the compositions of the menhirs of *Bulboa* and *Almendres*. Also at *Antelas* (Castro, Ferreira and Viana, 1957), *Pedralta C2* and *Escariz 1* (Shee, 1974), we find the use of wavy lines in the painted decoration of the orthostats and it is to be ascertained that the idoliforms represented at *Antelas C5* can be related, as been signalled (Castro, Ferreira and Viana, 1957, p. 331) to the schist-plaques of the megalithic cultures of the South.

It is still a very obscure problem, all the more so as we know very little on the megalithic cultures of Northern and Central Portugal, but it seems that the use of one and the same image language in *some* of the funeral paintings of the dolmens of the regions north of the Tagus River and in the menhirs of the Algarve and Alto-Alentejo indicates that these different manifestations,

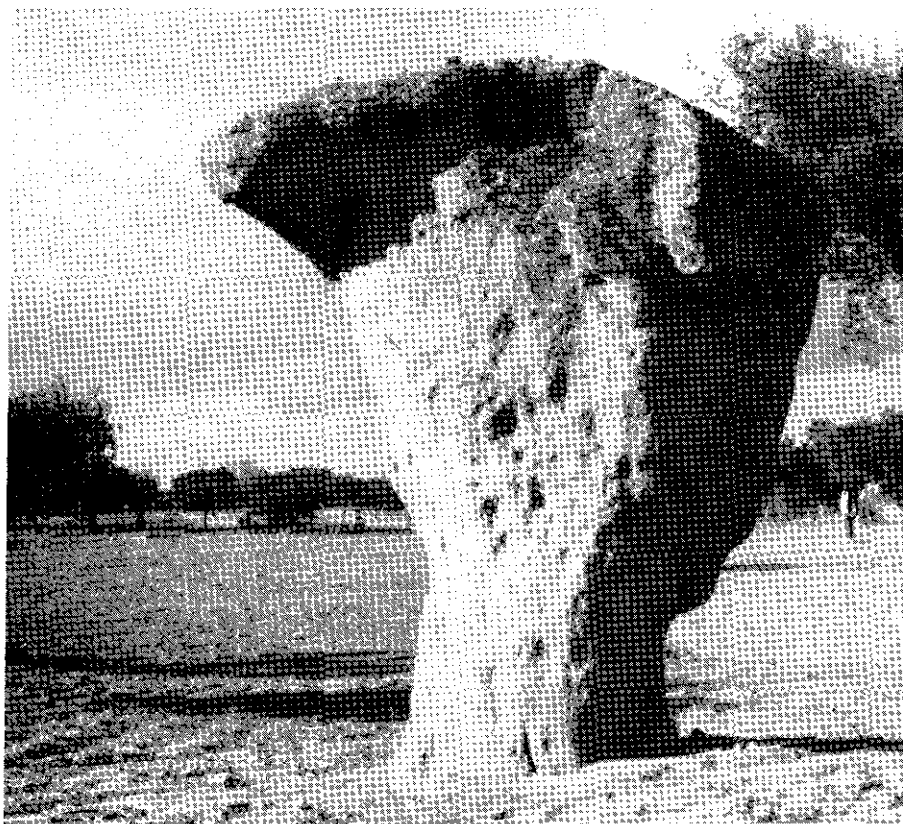


Fig. 41
Natural menhir of Rock of the Lovers,
Reguengos de Monsaraz.

which certainly fulfilled distinct ritual functions, are the material expressions of the same ideological-religious structure which emerged at the same time in several areas of the country.

Riassunto: In questo articolo viene presentato un dettagliato resoconto dell'attuale conoscenza dei menhirs del Portogallo. Dopo un esame della loro distribuzione geografica nelle regioni settentrionali e centrali, il Nord Alentejo e l'Algarve, sono trattati i problemi cronologici relativi ad ogni regione; segue un'analisi critica degli elementi decorativi. Viene studiato come le decorazioni siano l'espressione materiale di complesse ideologie magico-religiose del tardo Neolitico e del Calcolitico. Altri problemi di carattere cronologico, culturale e storico, vengono esposti, se pur non sempre risolti.

Résumé: Dans cet article l'état actuel des connaissances des menhirs du Portugal, est étudié en détail. Après l'analyse de la distribution géographique des monuments dans les régions septentrionales et centrales, l'Alentejo du nord et l'Algarve, les problèmes relatifs à chaque région et les éléments gravés sur les statues stèles sont étudiés. Les figures constituent la codification des complexes idéologies de type magico-religieux, répandues dans ces régions à la fin du Néolithique et au Calcolithique. Plusieurs questions trouvent une réponse; néanmoins plusieurs des problèmes chronologiques, culturels et historiques, mentionnés restent encore ouverts.

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