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*MEGALITHISM AS A MANIFESTATION
OF AN ATLANTIC CELTIC PRIMACY
IN MESO-NEOLITHIC EUROPE*

1. *Celtic ethnogenesis in Gimbutas' and Renfrew's theories*

According to the traditional, invasionist Indo-European theory, the Celts “arrive” in their historical territory from Central Europe. This is the inevitable consequence of the extremely low date of the alleged invasion of Europe by the Proto-Indo-Europeans: since it is to the north of the Alps that the Celts, «first of the prehistoric peoples to rise from anonymity»¹, are found, it is also from here that they must come. Powell defines «that region north of the Alps, from Bohemia to the Rhine, crucial for the origin of the Celts» and states: «It is this total population of the so called ‘north Alpine Urnfield Province’, centred in southern Germany and Switzerland, that demands special scrutiny in relation to the coming into existence

1. J. FILIP, *Celtic Civilization and Its Heritage*, Prague-Wellingborough, Colet's-Academia, 1977, p. 11.

of the Celts»². We can note the contradiction between the expression «come into existence», appropriately used for an ethnic group, and a period such as Late Bronze Age (during which the north Alpine Urnfield province emerges), which can hardly lend itself to the “birth” of an ethnic group! More recently, in a less traditional manner, but equally vitiated by the assumption of the central European origin of the Celts, Coles and Harding have asked themselves:

when the western part of our area finally emerges into history it is occupied by the Celts and other tribes described by classical historians. *It is assumed that these peoples arrived in the area from elsewhere and were not indigenous* (our emphasis); the question then arises, when and whence did they come?³.

And their answer:

since one cannot descry any major invasion of people into *central Europe* (our emphasis) between the Urnfield period and the (presumably Celtic) Early Iron Age, it follows that all these groups (Corded Ware, barrow-graves of Early Bronze Age, Coțofeni and Monteoru in Romania, Otomani in east-central Europe and the generalised Ūnětice) must be ancestral to the Celts⁴.

Indeed, Celts are the main ‘victims’ of the traditional Indo-European theory. Not only, after having been “born” in central Europe in the Bronze Age, do they have to move immediately (as an invisible people, escaping archaeological radar!) to the extreme west, to occupy their historical territory, but immediately afterwards they must also expand in the opposite direction, on the gigantic colonial campaign that brings them to occupy almost all of Europe. For the Celts, in other words, the same galloping-ethnogenesis model is adopted as the one chosen by Marija Gimbutas for the Proto-Indo-Europeans: a

2. T.G.E. POWELL, *The Celts*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1980, p. 34.
3. J.M. COLES - A.F. HARDING, *The Bronze Age in Europe. An Introduction to the Prehistory of Europe, c. 2000-700 BC*, London, Methuen & Co Ltd., 1979, pp. 335-337.
4. *Ibidem*, pp. 6-7.

model clashing with common sense, as well as with the archaeological record.

Nor is the new scenario more palatable, which e.g. Koch⁵, Waddell and Conroy⁶ have proposed, following, again, the last version of the Indo-European invasion model (Mallory e.a.), namely the «élite infiltration» model. Having realised that the galloping mass-migration of unbeatable pastoral warriors can no longer be defended, traditional scholars now prefer to see both Indo-Europeans and Celts “arriving” as Copper and Bronze Age business men, who unobtrusively and peacefully rob the autochthonous populations of their territories, their resources and – why not? – their language identity! Out goes the barbarian blitz-krieg invasion model, in comes the more civilised, British-colonialism like, infiltration model. Language substitution, alas, remains, despite the lessons one can draw precisely from European colonialism.

Closer to the truth are the many archaeologists who have, for a long time, expressed doubt about traditional views of the Celticization process, and continue to do so. Coles and Harding for example observe:

There is little that is specifically ‘Celtic’ in Urnfield Europe; equally there is no particular reason for introducing Celtic warriors at the end of the Bronze Age, unless the rich graves of Ha C are theirs. Childe suggested, and he was not alone, that Beakers could be the tangible expression of the Celtic race – which would mean that the whole Bronze Age was ‘Celtic’, though the question of origins would remain insoluble⁷.

5. Cf. J.T. KOCH, *New Thoughts on Albion, Ierne, and the “Pretanic” Isles*, «Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium», VI-VII, 1986, pp. 1-28; IDEM, *Ériu, Alba, and Letha: When was a Language Ancestral to Gaelic First Spoken in Ireland?*, «Emania», IX, 1991, pp. 17-27.
6. J. WADDELL, *Celts, Celtisation and the Irish Bronze Age*, in J. WADDELL - E.S. TWOHIG (ed), *Ireland in the Bronze Age. Proceedings of the Dublin Conference (April 1995)*, Dublin, Stationery Office, 1995, pp. 158-169; J. WADDELL - J. CONROY, *Celts and Others: Maritime Contacts and Linguistic Change*, in R. BLENCH - M. SPRIGGS (ed), *Archaeology and Language*, vol. IV, *Language Change and Cultural Transformation*, London, Routledge, 1999, pp. 125-137.
7. COLES - HARDING, *The Bronze Age in Europe*, pp. 366.

Colin Renfrew, in one of the best chapters of his major book, notes:

One of the most obvious features of the archaeology of central Europe in the iron age is the emergence of a prominent élite in south Germany and in southern France, documented most clearly by a splendid series of 'princely graves'⁸.

He refuses, logically, an 'invasion' of Urnfield people, and supports Dillon, who already in 1972 had seen a relationship between English Beakers and the following Bronze Age Wessex culture, and about the latter could conclude: «This is the sort of society which is described in Irish sagas, and there is no reason why so early a date for the coming of the Celts should be impossible». Hence Renfrew's "actualist" conclusion:

I would prefer to see *the development of the Celtic languages* [...] *as taking place essentially in those areas where their speech is later attested* (our emphasis). That implies an Indo-European speaking population in France and in Britain and in Ireland, and probably in much of Iberia also, by before 4000 BC⁹.

And his thesis, borrowed from Hawkes, of a 'cumulative Celticity', sees Ireland, Great Britain and continental Europe «on a more equal footing», and with the Celtic homeland no longer localized, but «constituted by the full extent of the area where Celtic languages came to be spoken», with the exception of the areas of later diffusion¹⁰.

Unfortunately, this is not enough to solve innumerable linguistic problems of which Renfrew is not aware, as well as to reconstruct, with adequate realism, the prehistory of the Celts.

8. C. RENFREW, *Archaeology and Language. The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins*, London, J. Cape, 1987, p. 234.

9. *Ibidem*, p. 245.

10. *Ibidem*, p. 246.

 2. *Celtic ethnogenesis in the Paleolithic Continuity Theory (PCT)*

In common with Renfrew's theory, the PCT¹¹ places the gravity centre of Celtic cultures in the British Isles and on the Atlantic west. But for the PCT Celts were in that area already in Upper Palaeo- and Mesolithic, and had, therefore, all the time not only to develop and to differentiate culturally and linguistically in a realistic way, but also to lexicalize in an independent way all discoveries that took place in that long period in navigation, fishing, hunting, religion, and agropastoralism¹². This is absolutely impossible in Renfrew's model, for which the beginning of Neolithic is, by definition, the lowest date of *undifferentiated Proto-Indo-European*, and therefore the whole differentiation process of Proto-Indo-European must be compressed into the rest of Neolithic and in the Metal Ages. This inevitably creates preposterous problems in the reading of the linguistic (as well as of the archaeological) record, quite similar to those of the traditional theory.

What are the main arguments of the PCT that substantiate its innovative position, making it possible to project Celts and the other differentiated Indo-European groups already into Palaeo-Mesolithic Europe? A full answer – which cannot be summarized here – has been given in one of our volumes about the origins of European languages¹³. For this article we have chosen a single line of reasoning, related to a single, but emblematic, Celtic area: the Isle of Man.

11. Cf. M. ALINEI, *Origini delle lingue d'Europa*, 2 vols., Bologna, il Mulino, 1996-2000, IDEM, *The Paleolithic Continuity Theory on Indo-European Origins: An Introduction*, «Studi celtici», II, pp. 13-41, and the website *online* at <www.continuitas.com>.
12. Cf. ALINEI, *Origini delle lingue d'Europa*, vol. II, pp. 465-603; M. ALINEI - F. BENOZZO, *L'area galiziana nella preistoria celtica d'Europa*, «Studi celtici», IV, 2006, pp. 13-62; IDEM, *A área galega na preistoria lingüística e cultural de Europa*, «A Trabe de Ouro», XVIII, 2007, pp. 333-359.
13. Cf. ALINEI, *Origini delle lingue d'Europa*, vol. II, pp. 465-573.

2.1. *An emblematic example: the Isle of Man*

As is known, insular areas, especially if small, are particularly suitable as testing grounds for (ethno)genetic experiments and theories. Their prehistoric development and archaeological record are necessarily simpler than those on large landmasses, and thus much easier to be read and interpreted. And the striking aspect of the prehistory and history of the Isle of Man¹⁴, is precisely its uninterrupted continuity from Neolithic to Middle Ages, a trait that makes it absolutely *impene-trable* to the theory of the recent arrival of the Celts! Apparently, the Isle of Man does not exist for traditional Indo-European scholarship!

As is known, however, the Isle of Man is linguistically Celtic: until a few decennia ago, the people of the island spoke Manx – an independent Celtic language of the Goidelic type, and thus closely akin to the Gaelic of Ireland and Scotland. This is true also archaeologically, as Clark wrote: *The interaction of British and Irish influences* (our emphasis) and the occasional insular developments *are the chief features of the prehistory of the island*¹⁵.

The first human group we find on the island is that of the Mesolithic Tardenoisians¹⁶, which we also find in almost all Celtic areas¹⁷. Their closest affinities are with the same groups of north-western England and southern Scotland, which in that period were still connected to the continent¹⁸. In the Neo-

14. For which we have used the classic monograph by G. CLARK, *The Prehistory of the Isle of Man*, «The Prehistoric Society», II, pp. 70-92, updated with H.R. KINVIG, *The Isle of Man. A Social, Cultural, and Political History*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1975 and S. BURROW, *The Neolithic Culture of the Isle of Man. A Study of the Sites and Pottery*, Oxford, British Archaeological Reports, 1997.

15. CLARK, *The Prehistory of the Isle of Man*, p. 70.

16. Cf. *ibidem*, pp. 74-75.

17. Bibliography in ALINEI, *Origini delle lingue d'Europa*, vol. II, pp. 501-503.

18. Cf. KINVIG, *The Isle of Man*, p. 22.

lithic, recent research has proved that starting from the 4th millennium «the Isle of Man was well integrated into a network of Neolithic cultural interaction within the Irish Sea provinces»¹⁹. As for pottery «the Manx were influenced by the particular range of designs used in *northeast Ireland and southwest Scotlands*»²⁰.

Also out of the numerous megaliths of the island (Clark's map, on p. 76, shows 21, distributed on the whole coast) only two seem innovative²¹, while the other ones belong to *Irish or Scottish types*, «this indicating that these parts were inhabited by people of the same culture»²². Neolithic settlements on the island (such as Ronaldsway) show the «characteristic 'long house' of many parts of western Britain»²³. Only in the Meso- and especially in the Neolithic, the Isle of Man shows cultural developments decidedly independent from external influences, *without, however, any indication of invasion or immigration*²⁴. In the light of the PCT, this period of independence of the island from Scotland and Ireland (the only one in the island²⁵), expresses itself, linguistically, in the fact that Manx is considered a third *independent* branch of Goidelic, next to the Gaelic of Ireland and Scotland. The Bell Beaker culture also appears on the island in ways that exclude invasions or migrations²⁶. Still later, throughout the Bronze and Iron Ages, «the Isle of Man remained part of the network of material culture practices cur-

19. BURROW, *The Neolithic Culture of the Isle of Man*, p. 11.

20. Ibidem, p. 16 (our emphasis)

21. Cf. ibidem, pp. 11 ff.

22. KINVIG, *The Isle of Man*, p. 25; cf. CLARK, *The Prehistory of the Isle of Man*, p. 80.

23. KINVIG, *The Isle of Man*, p. 27.

24. Cf. BURROW, *The Neolithic Culture of the Isle of Man*, p. 27.

25. Cf. ibidem, p. 33.

26. Cf. *ivi*.

rent throughout the Irish Sea area»²⁷, and the findings are, again, akin to those of north-eastern Ireland and Scotland²⁸.

Particularly important, finally, is the evidence provided during Iron Age: in the Isle of Man, unlike in most European areas, *the Iron Age is characterized by an uninterrupted continuity until the Middle Ages, as the island was never occupied by the Romans and the arrival of Christianity has left no trace either*. The first new cultural horizon following the Iron Age is that of the Vikings in the 9th and 10th centuries, with houses of Scandinavian type²⁹. Moreover, since the Iron Age in the island is characterized by markedly Celtic traits, such as *Hill-Forts* surrounded by Frisian horses and round houses³⁰ (the latter undefended, which indicates «undoubtedly peaceful [conditions] for some length of time»³¹), the only conclusion one can possibly draw on the basis of this long, and extremely uniform, archaeological record is that the Isle of Man, as well as its surrounding context (Ireland and Britain) was Celtic from the beginning of the Neolithic, and therefore must have been so also in Mesolithic.

2.2. *The Celtic area in Palaeo-Mesolithic times: a reconstruction*

Let us now reconstruct the whole Celtic area as it must have been in that early period. As to the islands, they must have been Celtic before they were islands. As is known, Ireland

27. Ivi.

28. Cf. KINVIG, *The Isle of Man*, pp. 29-31; CLARK, *The Prehistory of the Isle of Man*, pp. 83-86.

29. Cf. P.S. GELLING, *The Hill-Fort on South Barrule and Its Position in the Manx Iron Age*, in F. LYNCH - C. BURGESS (ed), *Prehistoric Man in Wales and the West. Essays in Honour of Lily F. Chitty*, Bath, Adams & Dart, 1972, pp. 285-292, 285.

30. Cf. ibidem, KINVIG, *The Isle of Man*, pp. 32-33.

31. Ibidem, p. 35.

and Great Britain were then still connected to the continent³², and the latter «was but an extension of the French northern cultural province»³³. Consequently, for the PCT the Proto-Celtic area must have extended on dry land from Ireland to historical Gaul and to the part of Belgica that Caesar considered as Celtic. As far as the Picts, who are usually considered non-Indo-European, are concerned, two alternative hypotheses are possible: (A) that they coexisted with Celts *ab antiquo*, or (B) that they intruded from the north-east³⁴. To the south, along the Atlantic coast, the Celtic area would have extended to Garonne where – in Caesar’s times – non-Celtic Aquitania began. The French dialectal picture confirms this thesis, as the area which, because of its stronger Gaulish substrate, we call ‘Gallo-Romance’ (or *oïl*), covers the northern half of France, and has its southern border precisely in the Gironde and in the mouth of the Garonne on the Atlantic coast. To the south of this line the *oc* or Occitanian dialects, of purely “Italid” affinities begin³⁵. To the east, on the continent, the Celto-Germanic frontier can be exactly determined, as both in Belgium and in Switzerland the first Neolithic cultures and their subsequent developments face each other along a line that coincides closely with the present Gallo-Romance-Germanic linguistic frontier, but which until at least Chassey must have been *the* Celto-Germanic frontier. In Great Britain, a possible Celto-Germanic frontier can be assumed, approximately along the mountain relieves of central England, by assuming that the Maglemosians who inhabited the emerged lands between

32. A.D. LACAILLE, *The Stone Age in Scotland*, London-New York-Toronto, Oxford University Press, p. 307.
33. Cf. *ibidem*, pp- 8-9.
34. P. DUNBAVIN, *Picts and Ancient Britons. An Exploration of Pictish Origins*, Long Eaton, The Third Millenium Publishing, 1988.
35. For the definition of Italid, cf. ALINEI, *Origini delle lingue d'Europa*, vol. II, pp. 577-603; G. COSTA, *Note linguistico-culturali in margine a un testo implicito: l'iscrizione paleoitalica da Tortora e l'area italide*, «Quaderni di Semantica», XXIV, pp. 229-277.

Denmark and Great Britain (and who for the PCT are of the Germanic stock), had reached the eastern coasts of England.

In short Celts, as a differentiated Indo-European group, must have settled in north- and mid-central Europe already in Pleistocene, and from that area must have expanded into the whole of western and central Europe and beyond. In the adjacent areas, contacts by, and infiltrations of, Celtic people might have begun already by the end of Palaeolithic, with the beginning of navigation and ocean fishing. A symbiosis with the “Italids”, which could explain the numerous archaic Celto-Italic affinities, could have taken place during the Upper Palaeolithic, in a Magdalenian context, and during the Mesolithic, in a Sauveterrian and Tardenoisian context.

It must be recalled that on the Atlantic fishing and coastal navigation began in the Upper Palaeolithic, and in the Mesolithic it must have had a primary importance, given the central role of fish in the subsistence of populations in that period³⁶. Archaeologists have advanced the hypothesis that at the acme of the Glacial period (*ca.* 18 Kya), the lowering of marine temperature would have caused the abandonment of the most northern areas, and changed the Atlantic coast into a refuge-area³⁷. This would have favoured subsistence based on migratory fish such as salmon, which would have become a regular component of food precisely in the Dordogne, the Pyrenees and Cantabria. The presence of shells inland would prove a tendency to expansion in that direction by these coastal populations³⁸). In the light of this scenario it is easy to imagine that the first Celtic settlements along the Atlantic coast, first to the south of the Garonne, then also to the south of the Pyrenees, took place already in Palaeo-Mesolithic times.

36. Cf. ALINEI, *Origini delle lingue d'Europa*, vol. 1, 589-597; B. CUNLIFFE, *Facing the Ocean. The Atlantic and its Peoples (8000 BC-AD 1500)*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 117-134.

37. C. GAMBLE, *The Palaeolithic Settlement of Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 339.

38. Cf. *ivi*.

To the south of the Celtic area, the groups which settled on the Atlantic coast can be attributed to the largest part to the “Italic” group, akin to Latin and Italic of Italy. But Mesolithic Celtic fishermen gravitating in the Bay of Biscay and frequenting the coasts of Iberian Cantabria could soon reach Galicia and Portugal, exercising their influence on them from the very beginning as regards fishing as a regular activity. Linguistically, this is proven, in the whole of Iberia, by the frequency of Celtic place names, by the importance of lenition (a typical Celtic phenomenon) in the phonological and phonetic local systems, and by other morphological and lexical features that we have discussed in previous works³⁹. For the PCT, therefore, Celts appear to us, in the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic, as a population of fishermen and sea people, naturally inclined to expansion. The idea recently expressed by Barry Cunliffe, that in the 1st millenium BC Celtic was «the lingua franca of the Atlantic community»⁴⁰, works even better in a PCT perspective, where one does not have to ‘invent’ the adoption of a shared (Celtic) foreign language used in an ‘exchange’ perspective, because Atlantic peoples were Celtic since a pre-Glacial age. Therefore, his statement that «the ocean facilitated the emergence of a shared Atlantic culture communicated through a lingua franca we have come to know as Celtic»⁴¹ can more fruitfully be used in a PCT frame, passing from a sociolinguistic to an ethnolinguistic scenario, and referring it to the Palaeo-Mesolithic⁴²

39. Cf. ALINEI - BENOZZO, *L'area galiziana nella preistoria celtica d'Europa*.

40. CUNLIFFE., *Facing the Ocean*, p. 296.

41. *Ibidem*, 565

42. For a possible convergence of Cunliffe's thesis with the PCT ones, cf. F. BENOZZO, *Review of CUNLIFFE, Facing the Ocean*, «*Studi celtici*», 1, 2003, pp. 253-258; Cunliffe's idea of Atlantic Celts in the Late Bronze Age is now taken into account by researchers: cf. J.T. KOCH, *An Atlas for Celtic Studies. Archaeology and Names in Ancient Europe and Early Medieval Ireland, Britain, and Brittany* (in collaboration with R. KARL, A. MINARD, S. Ó FAOLÁIN), Oxford, Oxbow Books, 2007, where attention is given to the radical suggestion that «the arrow – or post-arrow vector

Elsewhere⁴³ we have shown how the linguistic record confirms the importance of the Celtic role in the diffusion of fishing terms in the whole of western Europe, a diffusion that must have taken place during Mesolithic. In the Neolithic, starting with megalithism, and later with the Beaker Bell culture (another fundamental Celtic contribution to European development⁴⁴), Celts mixed also with other Indo-European groups, and in such a measure as to determine important phenomena of hybridization, as demonstrated by the linguistic phenomenon of consonantal lenition, which appears not only in the Italic area (Iberian, Gallo-Romance, Gallo-Italic, Sardinian and Corsican), but also in the Germanic area and in Poland, and the area of which closely resembles that of megalithism [see fig. 1].

The foundations for the creation of the future Celtic hegemony in western and central Europe were probably laid by the megalithic as well as by the Bell Beaker people. In the light of the PCT, in short, Celts are the people who introduced megalithism, metallurgy, horse domestication and horse riding, new types of weapons and of carriages and spoked wheels into the western half of Europe, and who showed the highest degree of development in industry and trade⁴⁵. In the traditional view, Celts are one of the main ethnic groups of European proto-history, in the PCT they are so also, and especially, of prehistoric Europe, at least since the Mesolithic.

– might more reasonably be reversed, from west to east, from the Atlantic Zone (including Ireland, Britain, Armorica, and the northern and western Iberian Peninsula) to what we shall call the ‘Continental Watershed Zone’» (p. 15).

43. Cf. ALINEI, *Origini delle lingue d'Europa*, vol. II, chapter XIII.
 44. Cf. ibidem, vol. II, pp. 482-491, F. BENOZZO, *Radici celtiche tardo-neolitiche della cavalleria medievale*, «Quaderni di Semantica», XXVIII, 2007, pp. 461-486.
 45. Cf. M. ALINEI, *The Celtic Origin of Lat. "rota" and Its Implications for the Prehistory of Europe*, «Studi celtici», III, 2004, pp. 13-29.

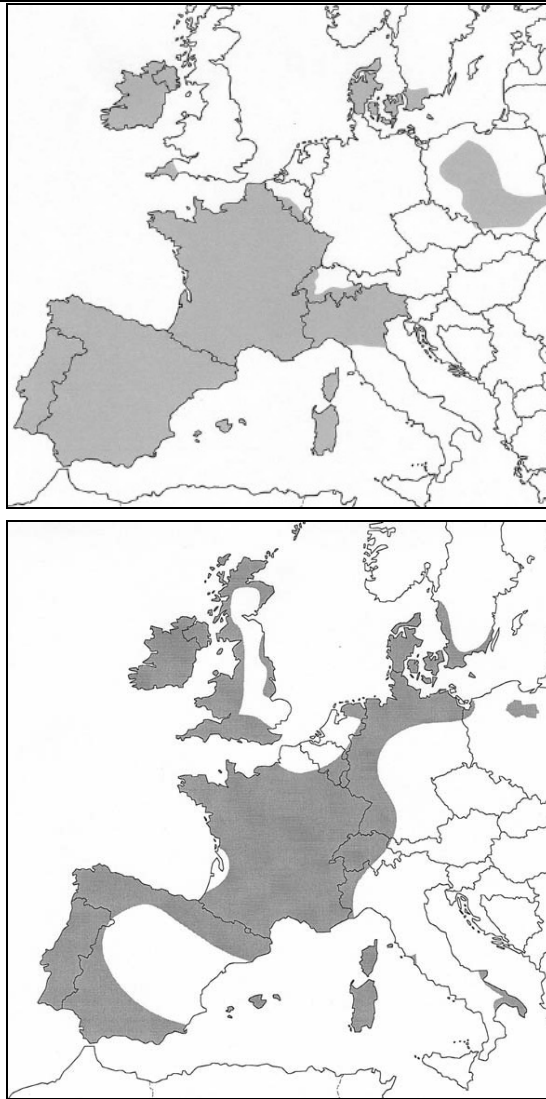


Fig. 1: *above*: the area of lenition [from RENFREW, *Archaeology and Language*, p. 127]; *below*: the area of megalithism [from CIPOLLONI SAMPÒ, *Dolmen*]

3. *Meso-Neolithic megalithism as a Celtic development*

3.1. *The main features of megalithism*

Coming now to our main topic, let us first review the main conclusions reached by modern research on megalithism.

As is known, the name of megalithism has been given to the grandiose phenomenon that characterizes the Neolithic of the European Atlantic area, but is also diffused in a wider area of Western Europe, and consists of the building and the diffusion of monumental *collective burials*, which were, however, also the centre of complex rituals, connected on the one hand to the observation of the sun and other stars' yearly cycle (of fundamental importance for farming), and on the other to the cult of the dead and to the idea of their resurrection.

Only in one area, in the whole of western Europe, do megalithic monuments already begin in the Mesolithic: Brittany. As we shall see, it is no coincidence that this area is Celtic. Elsewhere, they begin a few centuries after the onset of the Neolithic economy⁴⁶.

Their appearance and extraordinary diffusion, beside «marking the beginning of architecture»⁴⁷, gave an exceptional mark of identity to all areas where they appear: both on the coasts of the Atlantic and North Sea – in Ireland, Great Britain, Brittany, western France, Holland, north-western Germany, Denmark, western Sweden, Portugal; and in the western Mediterranean – in Spain, the Balearic Islands, southern France, Corsica, Sardinia, Puglia (without mentioning secondary and derivative, later areas).

Their importance for European history is enormous, but has increased greatly since the “radiocarbon revolution” has

46. Cf. M. CIPOLLONI SAMPÒ, *Dolmen. Architetture preistoriche in Europa*, Roma, De Luca Edizioni d'Arte, 1990, p. 23.

47. J. L'HELGOUACH, *I megaliti d'Europa*, in J. GUILAINE - S. SETTIS (ed), *Storia d'Europa*, vol. II, *Preistoria e antichità*, tomo I, Torino, Einaudi, 1996, pp. 213-248.

demonstrated that these European constructions are remarkably earlier than those of the east, Egyptian and Greek, disproving the traditional theory of their origin from the east, with a Greek mediation⁴⁸. In particular, the earliest ones, those of Brittany, precede by two millennia the Egyptian pyramids!⁴⁹To better appreciate the change it is perhaps useful to recall that no more than thirty years ago, a renowned archaeologist such as Stuart Piggott could date the building of megaliths to the II millennium, whereas now the earliest have been dated to the VI!

The following table summarizes the chronology (not equally certain, unfortunately, in the different areas) of the diffusion of megalithism in Europe:

<i>Chronological table of European megalithic monuments</i>	
Brittany and western France	5 th millennium (4600 BC)
Iberia	5 th / 4 th millennium (4400 BC)
Ireland and Great Britain	First half of the 4 th millennium (3700 BC)
Denmark	First half of the 4 th millennium (3600 BC)
Germany	3500 BC
Holland	3500-3100 BC
Poland	end of the 4 th millennium BC
Aosta Valley	second half of the 4 th millennium BC
Sardinia and Corsica	4 th / 3 rd millennium BC
Southern France	3 rd millennium BC
Balearic Islands	3 rd millennium BC
Malta (temples)	2800-2200 BC; half of the 2 nd millennium BC
Colchis	second half of the 3 rd millennium BC
Mycenae	1500 BC
Puglia	2 nd millennium BC
Bulgaria and Thracia	12 th -6 th centuries BC

48. Cf. C. RENFREW, *Before Civilization. The Radio-carbon Revolution and Prehistoric Europe*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1973.

49. Cf. A. LEROI-GOURHAN, A. (ed), *Dictionnaire de la Préhistoire*, Paris, PUF, 1988, s.v. *megalithism*.

Further on we will discuss the meaning of this sequence.

3.2. *The 'maritime' character of the megalithic area*

The distribution area of megalithic monuments is basically maritime. It is shown clearly by all maps so far published, from that of Daniel⁵⁰, one of the first specialists of megalithism, to that of Cipolloni Sampò [see fig. 1].

Even Renfrew, who believes in the polygenetic origin of megalithism (see further), and thus denies its diffusion from a primary centre, must recognize: «At first sight the tombs do suggest an almost continuous distribution along the Atlantic coasts from Denmark to south Spain»⁵¹, and more explicitly «The main concentrations of the chamber tombs of western Europe are along what P.R. Giot and T.G. E Powell have called the 'Atlantic façade'»⁵². Cipolloni Sampò, in her recent monograph on European megalithism, has also expressed this point:

What is striking in the distribution of these monuments, especially the more ancient ones, is the fact that they are concentrated especially along the Atlantic coasts, and this is the element that in the past has strengthened the hypothesis of a diffusion by sea of the 'megalithic missionaries'⁵³.

Even if we take into consideration later and clearly derivative areas of megalithism, their relationship with the sea is striking: in European Turkey and Bulgaria, in the Crimea and in the Caucasian Colchis, for example, megalithic monuments appear on the Black Sea coast. Moreover, in all areas the earliest monuments appear on the coast, while those inland are

50. G. DANIEL, *The Megalith Builders of Western Europe*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1963.

51. RENFREW, *Before Civilization*, p. 138 and fig. 25.

52. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 157.

53. Cf. CIPOLLONI SAMPÒ, *Dolmen*, p. 22

more recent: for example in Brittany the earliest monuments are those on the coast of Morbihan, on the northern coast of Finistère and Côtes-du-Nord, on the islands of Jersey and Guernsey⁵⁴.

3.3. *Types and names of megalithic monuments*

Curiously, from the very beginning of pre-scientific archaeology, megalithic monuments have received Celtic names: sometimes real ones (such as Gael. *cairn* 'pile of stones', Welsh *cromlech* 'circle of supporting stones'), sometimes artificial ones (such as *dolmen* 'stone table', *menhir* 'long stone'). This happened simply because from the very beginning the exceptional richness of Breton and Welsh megaliths oriented scholars towards the Celtic area⁵⁵, contributing to the creation of the conditions for the rise of 'Celtomania'. Later, on the basis of increasingly rigorous research, megaliths have received various scientific names, while some of the Celtic ones have been preserved with specialized meanings. The main categories, without considering the numerous subdivisions and local names, are: *chamber tombs* (the superordinate term for the largest part of megalithic monuments), *allées couvertes* (*gallery tombs*), *alignments*, *cairns*, *court cairns*, *cromlechs* (stone circles), *dolmens*, *long barrows*, *menhirs*, *passage tombs*, *wedge tombs*. Some of the main types are reproduced in fig. 2.

54. Cf. J. HIBBS, *The Neolithic of Brittany*, in C. SCARRE (ed), *Ancient France. Neolithic Societies and their Landscape, 6000-2000 BC*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1983, pp. 271-323, 285 ff.

55. Cf. ibidem, pp. 271 ff.; F. BENOZZO, *The Role of Prehistory in the Invention of National Identities: Megalithic Sites and Romantic Imagination*, paper read at the «International Congress of the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism»: *(Trans)national Identities / Reimagining Communities* (Bologna, 12-15 March 2008).



Fig. 2,a: *Dolmen* (Forkhill, Co Armagh, Ireland)



Fig. 2,b: *Passage Tomb* (Newgrange)



Fig. 2,c: *Gallery Grave* (Trebeurden, Brittany)



Fig. 2, d. *Menhirs and alignments* (Carnac, Brittany)

3.4. *The religious and astronomical function of megalithic monuments*

The astronomical function of megaliths, especially in relationship with their religious function, is perhaps their most fascinating aspect. Stubbornly denied until recently, nowadays it is universally accepted, after Atkinson demonstrated it in a sensational way for Stonehenge⁵⁶, and after the sequence of similar discoveries for other monuments. As Barry Cunliffe writes, even if «some of what has been written <about astronomical significance of megaliths> is completely spurious and some is unproven, yet there remains the unshakeable fact that a number of our most impressive megalithic tombs were designed with immense skill to relate precisely to significant solar or lunar events»⁵⁷. Suffice to recall the tomb of Knowth, for example, which has an equinoctial orientation, associated thus

56. Cf. R.J.C. ATKINSON, *Stonehenge: Archaeology and Interpretation*, New York, Penguin, 1979.

57. CUNLIFFE, *Facing the Ocean*, p. 203.

with the beginning of the sowing and harvesting season⁵⁸. The monument of Newgrange is one of the most illuminating examples: Newgrange is an Irish megalithic sanctuary, dated 2475/2465 BC⁵⁹, which consists of a passage tomb [see fig. 2,b].

The tomb was built so that the line of the entrance to its central chamber is oriented towards the point on the horizon where the sun rises on the 21st of December, the day of the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, in modern religious terms Christmas Day. Here is Harbison's description:

When the orb of the sun climbs over the horizon on that day, its rays go straight through the doorways of the tomb, but because the passage behind the entrance rises gently upwards towards the burial chamber, those rays which come through the door only shine in about half way along the upward-sloping passage. Because of this, the builders constructed a so-called 'roof-box' – a small opening above the doorway which allowed the sun's rays to enter horizontally at a sufficiently high level for them to penetrate along the whole length of the passage as far as the centre of the chamber, as O'Kelly discovered in 1968, though others had apparently suggested this possibility earlier.. The 21st of December a pencil-thin ray of sunlight penetrate[s] the chamber for a mere seventeen minutes, from 8.58 to 9.15 a.m. winter time [...]. While it also does so on a few days either side of the winter solstice, it otherwise disappears from the chamber for another year⁶⁰.

Here the scientific and at the same time religious function of the monument appears most clearly. Winter solstice, which the monument 'captures' with great precision, marks simultaneously the end of the main yearly cycle, the solar and agricultural one, and the beginning of a new cycle: New Year. Moreover, since the sunlight hits the tomb placed at the centre of the monument, it is evident that the resurrection of the sun involved the resurrection of the dead, and ensured rebirth for all living heirs or subjects of those buried within⁶¹. The impor-

58. Cf. P. HARBISON, *Pre-Christian Ireland. From the First Settlers to the Early Celts*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1988, p. 68.

59. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 76.

60. *Ibidem*, pp. 76-77.

61. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 77.

tance of these observations for the interpretation of megaliths is enormous, as it permits us to understand the connection between the resurrection of the sun and that of the dead. In more general terms, the function of the monument was at the same time scientific, funerary and magico-religious. Excavations have also demonstrated that alignments of *menhirs* (extraordinarily diffused in Brittany) probably have a mixed function, ritual and astronomic⁶². Studies of the last 20 years have produced statistical evidence that megalithic builders and communities actually observed the lunar perturbation. One emblematic example is the largest artificially cut and dressed stone in Europe, Le Grand Menhir Brisé in Brittany, now interpreted as the biggest lunar observatory of Neolithic Europe⁶³ [see fig. 3].

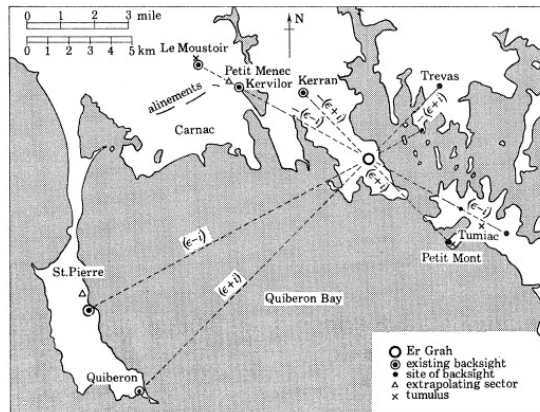


Fig. 3. Orientation of Le Grand Menhir Brisé [from THOMM, *Astronomical Significance of Prehistoric Monuments in Western Europe*]

As we shall see in the next section, Renfrew has added yet another important function to the already rich complexity of

62. Cf. HIBBS, *The Neolithic of Brittany*, pp. 296-297.

63. Cf. A. THOMM, *Astronomical Significance of Prehistoric Monuments in Western Europe*, «Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London» CCLXXVI, 1974, pp. 149-156.

megalithic monuments: that of a territorial and social identity “marker”, an addition that is at present accepted by most scholars⁶⁴. He has, however, used this argument, in our opinion unsuccessfully, to support his polygenetic theory.

3.5. *Renfrew’s polygenetic origin vs. the PCT monogenetic and Celtic origin of megalithism*

Renfrew denies the fundamental unity of megalithism and thus the existence of a ‘megalithic province’. He maintains, rather, that it is possible to envisage an autonomous origin and a local development for at least four megalithic areas: Brittany, Denmark, southern Britain and Iberia⁶⁵. In doing so, he also criticizes what he calls the «diffusionist trap»⁶⁶, into which even Gordon Childe would have fallen. As geolinguists, with long experience and a solid method in dialect and cultural map reading, we confess to having difficulties in considering a ‘diffusionist’ reading of the distributional map of megaliths to be “biased” [see fig. 1]. Quite on the contrary, megalithism appears to be a cultural phenomenon the distributional area of which is much too compact, and which shows too evident unitary characters, to be explained as a polygenetic phenomenon. It is much simpler, more economic and sensible to assume an original focus area, with one or more areas of relatively independent development. On the cultural historical level, the relative differentiation between the above listed four areas ought to be seen, rather, in the same way that we might speak of an Italian Baroque (and within it a Roman, an Apulian, a Sicilian etc. Baroque), of a German Baroque, of a Bohemian Baroque and the like. To attribute a polygenetic origin to cultural phenomena dispersed *all over the world* is legitimate; it is even in-

64. Cf. L’HELGOUACH, *I megaliti d’Europa*, p. 216.

65. Cf. RENFREW, *Before Civilization*, pp. 140-142.

66. *Ibidem*, p. 138.

dispensable whenever we are dealing with phenomena that reflect universal needs and are realized in clearly differentiated ways (for example, burial of the dead). It makes much less sense when the distributional area of the phenomenon is limited and quite compact, and the phenomenon itself shows clear characteristics of a specific 'typology' and 'style'. megalithism in a strictly generic sense, that is considered as the generic use of large stones of all kinds and in all shapes for monumental purposes can indeed be considered universal. European Neolithic megalithism is too specific a phenomenon, both considering its geographic boundaries and its typological uniformity, to be seen in a polygenetic key. Moreover, the thesis openly contrasts with recurrent remarks by specialists, who speak, for example, of «constructive similarities» between some French tombs and other Irish ones, or between French ones and English ones⁶⁷; of a «cultural connection» of south-Iberian megaliths with those of western Gaul⁶⁸; of «sure analogies» of Portuguese decorative motifs with Armorican or Irish ones⁶⁹; of the «long established relationship» between English monuments and tombs in the region of the Loire estuary⁷⁰; of the similarity – «the best one can find» – between the art motifs in Loughcrew in Ireland and those of a Breton monument⁷¹, of the «important similarities» between the *allées couvertes* of the Parisian basin and cists of western Germany⁷². Hibbs, who also denies the unity of megalithism («There is [...] no reason to suppose that one [megalithic] area derived the form of its ritual complex directly from another»)⁷³, nevertheless admits that «the similarity in general morphology [of the *allées couvertes* of

67. Cf. L'HELGOUACH, *I megaliti d'Europa*, p. 220.

68. Ibidem, p. 225.

69. Cf. ibidem, p. 227.

70. Cf. ibidem, p. 231.

71. Cf. ibidem, p. 233.

72. Cf. ibidem, p. 242.

73. HIBBS, *The Neolithic of Brittany*, p. 314.

Brittany] to the Paris basin *allées couvertes* and the parallel use of certain artistic motifs mean that influence from north-eastern France cannot be ruled out»⁷⁴. He does admit the cultural unity of Breton megalithism on the basis of the identity or similarity of motifs (anthropomorphic designs: pairs of breasts and arms, necklace, axes, daggers) at megalithic tombs and *menhirs* in Brittany⁷⁵, but omits to mention that similar motifs are also typical of megalithic tombs in the Paris basin⁷⁶, which prove, beyond any reasonable doubt, the existence of a wider cultural unity. Finally, Renfrew himself admits the possibility of the derivation of Scandinavian megalithism from Brittany⁷⁷, or that of contacts and exchange of ideas between Brittany and northern Iberia or Ireland⁷⁸, or even that «the possibility that [Iberian megaliths] would be inspired from Brittany to the north cannot yet be excluded»⁷⁹. All these admissions falsify, in essence, the polygenetic thesis.

And as to the origins of megalithism as a whole, then, Renfrew himself asks:

Why, in a specific area – western Europe – do we find such a concentration of megalithic tombs, while in other regions of Europe and the Near East there are hardly any comparable monuments? [...] might this localized distribution not suggest – he continues – a spread, *from a single centre* (our emphasis), of the idea of collective burial in built tombs?⁸⁰.

The rhetorical question anticipates the answer (already given by Gordon Childe) that this is, indeed, the suggestion to be made; nevertheless Renfrew prefers a more difficult reading:

74. Ibidem, p. 293.

75. Ibidem, p. 299.

76. Cf. J. HOWELL, J., *The Late Neolithic of the Paris Basin*, in C. SCARRE (ed), *Ancient France. Neolithic Societies and their Landscape, 6000-2000 BC*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1983, pp.62-90, 68.

77. Cf. RENFREW, *Before Civilization*, p. 141.

78. Cf. ibidem, pp. 141-142.

79. Ibidem, p. 142.

80. Ibidem, p. 156.

the concentration of megalithic tombs on the Atlantic is not due to this 'single spread', but to the existence of the 'Atlantic façade', on which farming cultures, coming from east, would have been forced to stop. Massed here, at the "land's end", and without the possibility of a further outlet, all Neolithic populations would have felt the need to mark their territory with great stone monuments, so that megaliths would have not only the function of cult sites connected to the tombs of tribal ancestors, but also that of territorial markers. Similarly to what, millennia later, medieval parish churches were to rural villages. Megalithic monuments would be, in short,

permanent social centres for the group within whose territory they lay and whose dead they received <and> an indication of societies where cooperation between neighbouring lineages or clans was effected by exchanges [...], and sometimes by participation in the construction of chambered tombs⁸¹.

The social context of these exchanges and this cooperation would be that of the great, collective celebrations documented by ethnography, within which exchange of gifts between groups, families and individuals takes place.

This reconstruction, however, even if it does not lack Renfrew's usual genial touch and might capture some new and important functional aspects of megalithism, as a general picture is obviously dictated by Renfrew's investment in the theory of the Indo-European Neolithic dispersal, which forces him to renounce simplicity, opt for complications and omit to take into account some basic facts.

1) First of all, the chronological table shown above proves, by the simple parallelism between the chronology of megalithic diffusion and the direction of its spread, that the latter took place gradually, from the Atlantic coast inland, towards the rest of western Europe and beyond: the earliest megaliths

81. Ibidem, p. 155.

are the Breton ones, while northern, central and southern European ones, farther away from the Atlantic coast, are more recent. Iberian megaliths, on the Atlantic, are almost as ancient, but, as we have seen, Celtic influence on the Atlantic coast of Iberia could have already started in the Mesolithic. Therefore, one cannot maintain, without falsifying chronological reality, that the wave of advance of megalithism coincides with that of the agriculture. Actually, it clearly goes in the opposite direction, from west to east. Besides, the comparison with medieval parish churches can be used precisely to underline a fault in Renfrew's reasoning. When medieval parish churches were built, they were "Romanic", and thus were born with a strong *stylistic identity*. Their builders were always inspired by a pre-existing model, even when they adapted or modified it, contributing to their "diffusion". The innovation of megalithism followed the same process: it must have been inspired by an initial, Mesolithic (Breton) Celtic model, and could then be reproduced with a larger or smaller number of variations both in the Celtic area and in non-Celtic areas of subsequent expansion. Its Atlantic, north-European and western Mediterranean distribution ought to be seen, in our opinion, as the result of the very first Celtic 'wave of advance', anticipating and announcing the following ones, of the Bell Beaker, Hallstatt, and La Tène cultures, and the Gauls.

2) Secondly, the earliest form of megalithism, that of Brittany, appears with characteristics that distinguish it from that of other areas:

(A) Only in Brittany megalithism finds its roots in the Mesolithic, as it represents the transformation of non-monumental Mesolithic ritual areas⁸². The classic sites for this observation are Tévéc and Hoëdic, two Breton islets (fishermen's settlements!), which have revealed collective burials in

82. Cf. HIBBS, *The Neolithic of Brittany*, pp. 310, 312.

stone cists, covered by stones, already at the Mesolithic level, and dated between 5500 and 5000 BC, thus showing a relationship of continuity between Mesolithic and Neolithic rituals (as even Renfrew recognizes)⁸³.

(B) Only in Brittany, the great concentration of Mesolithic and Early Neolithic sites, that of megaliths, both on the coast and on the islands, and the coexistence of Mesolithic elements (as, for example, deposits of shells in megalithic tombs)⁸⁴, demonstrate the direct continuity of the Mesolithic fishing economy, and bring archaeologists to the conclusion that Mesolithic traditions and people were continued and integrated, and not replaced, by Neolithic and megalithic traditions and people.

(C) The antiquity of Breton megaliths, their construction level and the complexity of the rituals that can be imagined behind them, indicate that their beginning must go back to an earlier period⁸⁵.

(D) As Renfrew himself recognizes: «The range of grave forms in Brittany is striking»⁸⁶. This is often the case with focal areas, elaboration of single types characterizing later areas.

3) Thirdly, in small islands such as that of Arran in Scotland (Firth of Clyde), until recently Gaelic speaking, or of Rousay in the Orkneys, today English speaking, but originally Celtic, it is even possible – as already shown by Gordon Childe – to observe the continuity of the present farms from Neolithic ones, and at the same time the strict connection between megalithic monuments and arable land, both in modern times and in

83. Cf. RENFREW, *Before Civilization*, p. 158.

84. Cf. HIBBS, *The Neolithic of Brittany*, p. 313.

85. Cf. *ibidem*, p. 312.

86. RENFREW, *Before Civilization*, p.141

the Neolithic⁸⁷. Actually, what we observe in Arran and Rousay is the uninterrupted continuity of material culture from the Neolithic to this date. Renfrew is quite aware of all of this, but omits to say that in these islands, just as in the Isle of Man, there is no trace of ‘invasion’ or ‘immigration’ by foreign farmers, as would be expected following his theory. In the light of this evidence, incidentally, it becomes possible to re-evaluate the etymology of Orkney: given the fact that the name *Orkney* comes from Celtic ORK ‘hog, pig’, the only sensible context for this name-giving can be a Neolithic one, when the innovation of domestic animals had made its way to the Atlantic islands.

Gordon Childe, already in the 1st edition of his *Dawn* [1925] had noted: «The great centres of megalithic architecture in Europe are precisely those regions where the Palaeolithic survivals are the most numerous and best attested»⁸⁸. Which implies, obviously, a direct continuity between Palaeolithic and Mesolithic stone traditions and megalithism. Renfrew is forced to deny this continuity because he has to consider “immigrant farmers” who adopt those traditions⁸⁹. But, again, there is no trace in the archaeological record of the arrival of these immigrant farmers!

Finally, if one agrees, as Renfrew does, with Humphrey Case’s thesis that «The passage-grave may indeed be an invention of Atlantic Mesolithic communities»⁹⁰, this position implies the existence of a focus area, that is precisely what was denied in the first place. Renfrew’s interpretation of megalithic monuments as socio-territorial markers remains valid – as it is the observation that there could be no agricultural expansion

87. Cf. *ibidem*, p. 149; see both islands map at pp. 147, 150.

88. G. CHILDE, *The Dawn of European Civilization*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957⁴, p. 133; cf. RENFREW, *Before Civilization*, pp. 157-158.

89. Cf. *ibidem*, pp. 157-158.

90. Cf. *ibidem*, p. 158.

on the coast areas – but it should be reconciled with Gordon Childe’s monogenesis and ‘megalithic missionaries’, given the fact that the meaning of megalithic monuments cannot be reduced to the function of markers, but must include the ‘scientific’ one, connected to the observation of the solar and star cycles, and the religious one, connected to the idea of resurrection of the dead, which is common to all megaliths. Freed from polygenetism, and integrated with the Celtic origin of megalithism, Renfrew’s insights make much more sense.

In short, if one accepts, on the basis of the identity or similarity of function, forms, materials, and locations, as well as of the sequence of available datings, the existence of a ‘megalithic province’, its area can be quite immediately identified with that of the Celts: Ireland, entirely Celtic, is entirely megalithic. In Great Britain, the areas with maximal megalithic density are the three Celtic areas: Wales, Cornwall and Scotland (in its western part, the most exposed to Irish influence). In France, Celtic Brittany is the megalithic area *par excellence*, besides its very focus. In the Iberian Peninsula, the area with maximal megalithic density is that of Galicia, an area where the presence of Celtic peoples has left strong traces on language, toponymy, and folklore. Consequently, the most logical, simplest and most economical hypothesis is that the Mesolithic fishermen of the central Atlantic who were the first to build megaliths were already Celts, and that it was also the Celts who, with the beginning of farming, undertook the spread of megalithic monuments, first along the ‘Atlantic façade’ and in the whole of the Celtic area, then, later, in the other, non-Celtic areas (central Europe; the western Mediterranean and the Tyrrhenian gulf; Holland, northern Germany and Scandinavia), with Celtic contributions varying in dates and importance, but all sharing, on the linguistic level, typical Celtic borrowings and ‘consonantal lenition’⁹¹.

91. Cf. *supra*.

Gordon Childe's vision, according to which 'Megalithic missionaries' would have spread the 'Megalithic religion' from east to west should be reversed in its direction – from west to east – and should be completed with the ethnic and linguistic identification of the protagonists.

4. *Dialect names and local legends on megaliths: evidence of a continuity from prehistory*

In almost all megalithic areas, megaliths have magico-religious dialect names, at times generic, at times specific, the antiquarian value of which has hardly been touched on by linguistic research⁹². Moreover, dialect local names of megalithic sites are often connected to legends, of extraordinary value for arguing a continuity of European cultures and languages from prehistory⁹³.

Scholars have occasionally claimed that the folklore of megaliths goes back to a distant past⁹⁴, and their colleagues

92. Apart from other studies that we will quote below, cf. T.W.M. DE GUÉRIN, *List of Dolmens, Menhirs and Sacred Rocks, Compiled from Guernsey Place-Names, with Legends & c.*, in «Report and Transactions. Société Guernesiaise», IX, 1922, pp. 30-64; M. DE BARANDIARAN, *Rapports entre la toponymie et l'archéologie au Pays Basque*, in *Actas y Memorias del Troisième Congrès International de Toponymie et d'Anthroponymie*, Bruxelles, 1949, pp. 137-142; IDEM, *Toponymes inspirés par la mythologie basque*, in *Actes et Mémoires du Cinquième Congrès International de Sciences Onomastiques*, Salamanca, 1958, pp. 222-227; M. ALINEI, *Dal totemismo al cristianesimo popolare. Sviluppi semantici nei dialetti europei*, Alessandria, Edizioni dell'Orso, 1984; IDEM, *Origini delle lingue d'Europa*, vol. II, pp. 479-481.
93. Cf. ALINEI, *Origini delle lingue d'Europa*, vol. I, pp. 409-412; ALINEI - BENOZZO, *L'area galiziana nella preistoria celtica d'Europa*, pp. 34-40; IDEM, *A área galega na preistoria lingüística e cultural de Europa*, 341-343; F. BENOZZO, *Names and Legends of European Megaliths: Evidence of an Ethno-linguistic Continuity from Prehistory*, paper read at the «6th World Archaeological Congress» (Dublin, 29th June - 4th July 2008).
94. Cf. A. VAN GENNEPP, *La formation des légendes*, Paris, Flammarion, 1917, pp. 164-165, H. OHLHAVER, *Großsteingräber und Grabhügel in Glauben und Brauch*, «Mannus», XXIX, 1937, pp. 192-255, 193-195, 254; H.-J. DEPPE,

have often considered this thesis as implausible. We are aware that – as Cornelius Holtorf writes – «folklore can also be manipulated, and some tales are in fact of very recent origin»⁹⁵. There are many cases attesting these “manipulations”, and he himself recalls a few examples from the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern area:

During the 17th century, for instance, the Hertha-legend in Tacitus was mistakenly linked by the antiquarian Philipp Clüver to the Stubbenkammer on Rügen. Once established, however, the legend remained attached to the site and is still today often referred to in the local tourist industry. Similarly, an old grindstone found in Forst Werder became an *Opferstein* in c. 1856 when a man was keen to be able to show his friends a local sight. Moreover, the great similarity in the themes of many folktales over large areas seems to suggest that such tales are influenced more by each other than by the places they are about. The folklore of ancient sites may thus be due to a widespread social phenomenon rather than to a continuity of oral tradition from prehistory⁹⁶.

Nevertheless, the new perspective offered by the PCT gives the opportunity of reconsidering the problem from an epistemologically renewed approach. The numerous communities of European dialect-speakers – who later become the “rural masses” – have virtually remained in the silence of prehistory until a short time ago, and their world, their material and spiritual culture have become subjects of special sciences, all marked by the norm ‘substandard’ or ‘subordinate’ or, as formerly, ‘popular’ or ‘folk’ (not only dialectology, but also folklore, ethnography, ethnology, cultural anthropology, popular/folk literature, popular/folk medicine, religion, law, music, art, and so on). This substandard universe, parallel to the cultivated one, represents, as has been pointed out many times, a universe of ‘remains’ and ‘wreckages’. But,

Die 'Heistersteine' bei Waren, «Carolinum: historisch-literarische Zeitschrift», LXXIV, 1983–1984, pp. 7–34.

95. C.J. HOLTORF, *Monumental Past: The Life-histories of Megalithic Monuments in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Germany)*, University of Toronto, Centre for Instructional Technology Development, 2000–2007, p. 12.

96. *Ibidem*, p. 15.

in order to define precisely their provenance (remains and wreckages of what?) it is necessary to relate this universe with what is the critical moment of the phenomenon – the moment of its birth, towards the end of the Neolithic and at the beginning of the Metal ages, the beginning of social stratification, the beginning of *history* for élite groups, and the beginning of a new form of *prehistory* for the socially inferior groups. The universe whence these various collections of *remains* come - from dialectal ones to those associated with traditional *folk tales* and *myths* – is the universe of the groups who lost their liberty with the beginning of the Metal ages and the establishment of stratified societies. Naturally, it is also a continuation of the preceding universe of the Palaeolithic egalitarian societies. This conclusion is, in itself, a first step in the formulation of a theory of generalized continuity⁹⁷.

In this sense, it should be stressed that the literacy of dialects (and the way of considering legends) cannot be in any way compared to the literacy of literary languages (and the way of reading non-legendary literature): the latter use writing in order to become an instrument of power in addition to that of culture. Dialects are made literate in a passive manner, usually in order that they may be better studied: even when made literate, they can never compete with the national norm, which is the sole instrument of power, of culture, of science, and of education. Therefore the prehistory merged with the dialects does not cease even when they are made literate. If we accept these observations,

we shall be no longer able to maintain, *sic et simpliciter*, that old written languages are older than modern dialects. What we have in this case are two different usages of the word 'old', ambiguous in itself, which concern two phenomena of different nature and are therefore impossible to compare. As I have already said, it is always possible to avoid the ambiguity in the two usages by contrasting 'archaic' with 'old' on the one hand, and 'innovative' with 'modern', on the other hand. Substandard dialects are 'archaic', and as such represent an earlier layer than written languages, irrespective whether these are modern or ancient⁹⁸.

97. *The Problem of Dating in Linguistics*, «Quaderni di Semantica», xxv, 2004, pp. 211-232, 221.

98. *Ibidem*, p. 222.

This reversed approach, which is confirmed for example by the totemic motivation behind many dialect names of animals⁹⁹ or by the prehistoric motivation of many dialect names of hand-tools and crafts¹⁰⁰, consents to re-evaluate many folkloric and linguistic data in a new ethnophilological perspective¹⁰¹. We will try to offer a representative exemplification of the evidence given by these dialect names and legends to the PCT, considering also linguistic areas different from the Celtic one, such as the Italic (names and legends from Corsica, Galicia, Portugal and France) and the Germanic (names and legends from Mecklenburg-Vorpommern).

4.1. *Correlation between legends and the chronology of megaliths*

The first relevant aspect to underline concerns the correlation between names, legends and the chronology of megaliths.

In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (where the almost 1,200 megaliths known occur in several architectural types and are

99. Cf. ALINEI, *Dal totemismo al cristianesimo popolare*; this subject has been one of the most studied during the first 30 years of existence of the international journal «Quaderni di Semantica»: cf. R. CAPRINI, *Animali totemici. L'esperienza di «Quaderni di Semantica»*, «L'immagine riflessa», VII, 1998, pp. 221-236.
100. Cf. M. ALINEI, *European Dialects: A Window on the Prehistory of Europe*, «Lingua e Stile», XXXVI, pp. 219-240; F. BENOZZO, *Un reperto lessicale di epoca preistorica: emiliano occidentale "tròl", galego "trollo" "rastrello per le braci"*, «Quaderni di Filologia Romanza», XIX, 2006, pp. 217-221; IDEM, *Il poeta-guaritore nei dialetti d'Europa*, in S.M. BARILLARI (ed), *La medicina magica. Segni e parole per guarire*, Alessandria, Edizioni dell'Orso, 2007, pp. 45-55; IDEM, *Lepri che volano, carri miracolosi, padelle come tamburi: una tradizione etnolinguistica preistorica in area emiliana*, «Quaderni di Semantica», XXIX, 2008, pp. 165-184; IDEM, *Sciamani e lamentatrici funebri. Una nuova ipotesi sulle origini del pianto rituale*, in F. MOSETTI CASARETTO (ed), *Lachrymae. Mito e metafora del pianto nel Medioevo*, Alessandria, Edizioni dell'Orso (in press).
101. Cf. F. BENOZZO, *Etnofilologia*, «Ecdotica», IV, 2007, pp. 208-230; IDEM, *Back to the Hidden Cave. Ethnophilology of the European Tradition*, Roma, Viella (in press).

all associated with the people of the Neolithic Trichterbecher [TRB] culture, c. 4000-2800 BC¹⁰² many tales describe megaliths as giants' graves, houses or ovens¹⁰³. The oldest references to *tumuli gigantis* are found in written documents of 13th c.¹⁰⁴, and today megaliths are still named *Hünengräber*, 'giants' graves'. Apart from giants, there are often references to fairies, creatures who are said to live inside the megalithic hill and protect hidden treasures; they are often called *Unterirdische*, 'subterraneans'¹⁰⁵. The opposition between *Hünengräber* and *Unterirdische* is significant for the PCT approach, because – as it has been noted¹⁰⁶ – fairies are usually associated with burials from the Bronze and Iron Ages, while giants are linked to Neolithic burials in megaliths. This fact can be considered as a reflection of the belief that the land was first inhabited by giants and then by fairies (followed by humans), and the only reasonable explanation is that its origin must go back to – respectively – the Neolithic and the Metal Age.

The same dichotomy can be observed in Brittany, where, according to local folktales, different inhabitants live in different kinds of megaliths. For example, the smaller and more recent megalithic complexes (Bronze and Iron Age) are often referred as *roches aux fées* ('fairy stones') while bigger and more ancient structures are said to be inhabited by an old woman,

102. Cf. M. MIDGLEY, *TRB Culture. The First Farmers of the North European Plain*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1992.

103. Cf. J.D.H. TEMME, *Die Volkssagen von Pommern und Rügen*, Berlin, Nicolaische Buchhandlung, 1840; K. BARTSCH, *Sagen, Märchen und Gebräuche aus Mecklenburg*, Wien, Braumüller, 1879 [repr. Hildesheim-New York, Georg Olms, 1978], pp. 26-39; A. HAAS, *Burgwälle und Hünengräber der Insel Rügen in der Volkssage*, Stettin, A. Schuster-Haas, 1925, pp. 53-60.

104. Cf. G.C.F. LISCH, *Andeutungen über die altgermanischen und slavischen Grabalterthümer Mecklenburgs und die norddeutschen Grabalterthümer aus der vorchristlichen Zeit überhaupt*, «Jahresbericht des Vereins für mecklenburgische Geschichte und Alterthumskunde», II, 1837, pp. 132-148.

105. Cf. BARTSCH, *Sagen*, pp. 41-52.

106. Cf. HAAS, *Burgwälle*, pp. 51, 60.

whose name in Breton is *gwrac'h*¹⁰⁷ This name is an emblematic one: it occurs in fact in many European dialects as the name of natural phenomena (such as the rainbow or fog), animals (such as the ladybird or the weasel), illnesses, manufactured items, etc.¹⁰⁸; in order to explain this, one should recall that an 'old woman' (Lat. *vetula*, Germ. *Alte*, Slav. *baba*) is present in myths, fairy tales, Carnival and many other folk festivities and oral traditions the world over, so that some scholars (e.g. Vladimir J. Propp) consider her as the main totemic ancestor, the Mother of All¹⁰⁹. Once again, the motivation behind the name *gwrac'h* can be dated to the Neolithic (the age to which the concept of the Great Mother can be ascribed), while the name 'stones of the fairies' must belong to Metal Age conceptions.

A similar connection between chronology and names has to be found in Galicia, where the numerous legends and names (*pedra dos mouros, casa dos mouros, anta da moura*) indicate that in popular beliefs megaliths were built by giants named *mouras* (feminine) and *mouros* (masculine) (cfr. Alonso Romero [1998: 21]), terms connected with the Celtic root **MRVOS*, whose meaning is both 'dead man' and 'supernatural being'¹¹⁰. Another frequent name used for dolmens is *mámoa*, a word connected with Latin *MĀMMULAM* 'breast': this meaning is consis-

107. P.-R. GIOT - J. L'HELGOUACH - J.-L. MONNIER, *Préhistoire de la Bretagne*, Rennes, Éditions Ouest-France, 1998, p. 501.
108. Cf. M. ALINEI, *Slavic "baba" and other 'old women' in European Dialects. A Semantic Comparison*, in *Wokol języka. Rozprawy i studia poświęcone pamięci profesora M. Szymczaka*, Wrocław, Ossolineum, 1988, pp. 41-51; IDEM, *Origini delle lingue d'Europa*, vol. 1, pp. 696-699, F. BENOZZO, *La flora, la fauna, il paesaggio: l'importanza dei nomi dialettali per la conoscenza del passato preistorico*, in *Dizionario del dialetto di San Cesario sul Panaro*, a cura di F. Benozzo, vol. II, *La vita nei campi: fauna, flora e attività agricole*, San Cesario sul Panaro, Amministrazione Comunale, 2007, pp. 13-55.
109. Cf. ALINEI, *Slavic "baba" and other 'old women'*.
110. Cf. ALINEI - BENOZZO, *L'area galiziana nella preistoria celtica d'Europa*, p. 39; IDEM, *A área galega na preistoria lingüística e cultural de Europa*, p. 342, BENOZZO, radici celtiche tardo-neolitiche della cavalleria medievale, p. 477.

tent with the aspect that megaliths had in prehistory, when dolmens were covered by earth and formed small hills and mounds [see fig. 4], and with legends where the *mouras* are frequently described as breast-feeding their young on the megalithic site¹¹¹. Therefore, these names and legends must have originated in a period when the shape of the megaliths were different from the one they have at present (what we see today is only the skeleton of the original architecture).

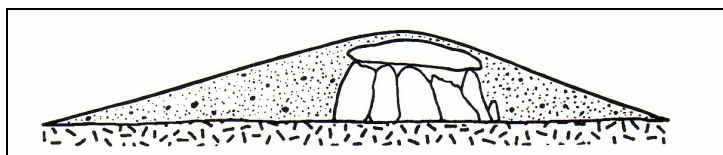


Fig. 4. Original aspect of a *mámoa*
(from X.L. LEMA SUÁREZ, *Polas, antas e mámoas da Costa da Morte (Galicia)*,
Vimianzo, Seminario de Estudos Comarcais, 2007)

On a level of prehistoric chronology, one can say that while the motivation of the image of dead men and supernatural beings (implied in the etymology of *mouro* / *moura*, and emphasized by the frequent use of the word *anta*, which originally means ‘threshold, entrance’) goes back to the original (Mesolithic) meaning of megaliths, the one implicit in the meaning of ‘breast’ seems to derive from the typical Neolithic ideology of earth-mother.

Irish legends are emblematic too. In the first place, they are connected to megaliths built in Neolithic times, and as such can be explained much more simply in the framework of the PCT – which brings them back to the megalithic context itself – rather than by the traditional theory, or in Renfrew’s dispersal model, which impose a discontinuity of some kind in the local ethnicity, without an adequate explanation for it, and con-

111. F. ALONSO ROMERO, *Las mouras constructoras de megalitos: estudio comparativo del folclore gallego con el de otras comunidades europeas*, «Anuario Brigantino», XXI, 1998, pp. 18-26, p. 22.

tradict the reality of the monuments to which the legends clearly refer and around which they have blossomed. Tara's site is one of the numerous cases that can be cited: traditionally its legend is connected to the residence of the Irish kings, and to St. Patrick in the 5th century BC. But the *Passage Tomb* of Tara is dated to the 4th millennium BC and its legend can only go back to that period¹¹². The abovementioned Newgrange, the famous *Passage Tomb* of the 4th millennium BC, of exceptional value for its transparent religious and astronomical function, is the legendary burial place of the prehistoric kings of Tara, as well as of the *Túatha Dé Danann*, 'the people of the goddess Danu'. These supernatural beings are believed to have lived 'underground', performing supernatural deeds for the people¹¹³. Newgrange was also considered the dwelling of the Daghdha, the good god. Finally, it looks on the river Boyne, the female goddess of which, Boand, is inextricably tied to the history of the *Brú na Bóinne*¹¹⁴. Newgrange, in short, was a magical place. Traditional Celtic scholarship attributes all these legends to the Iron Age, or at the earliest to the Bronze Age, whereas it itself is dated to the 3rd millennium: it is difficult to believe that oral tradition of such magico-religious character began two millennia after the building of monuments the function of which was magico-religious!

112. Cf. M.J. GREEN, *Dictionary of Celtic Myth and Legend*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1997, s.v. *Tara*; C. NEWMAN, *Tara. An Archaeological Survey*, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 1997.
113. Cf. Carey [1992]****, P. HARBISON, *Pre-Christian Ireland. From the First Settlers to the Early Celts*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1988, p. 73.
114. Cf. GREEN, *Dictionary of Celtic Myth and Legend*, s.vv. *Boann, Daghdha*; E. BHREATHNACH, *Bóand/Bóinn/Boyne*, in J.T. KOCH (ed), *Celtic Culture. A Historical Encyclopedia*, 5 vols., Oxford, CLIO Publications, 2006, vol. 1, pp. 217-218.

4.2. *Correlation between legends and recent excavations*

There are surprising correlations between folktales and recent excavation results, which seem to suggest a long continuity of folklore.

In Wales we can quote the legend of Bryn yr Ellyllon (Hill of the Elves), near Mold: this folktale, attested since 14th c., refers to a certain mound that contained the body of a nobleman, clad in golden armour and equipped with his weapons, who was killed by a giant (*cawr* in Welsh) because he had tried to enter his subterranean realm. In 1833 the mound was excavated and the skeleton of a man, wearing a corset of gold (that the most recent analysis has dated to ca. 900 BC) was found near two big dolmen-stones presumably belonging to the 3rd millennium BC¹¹⁵. This discovery gives evidence to the hypothesis that megalith legends belonging to the oral tradition originated in prehistory.

Another case is the *Königsgrab* (King's Grave) of Seddin (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern), where a folktale tells that King Hinz was buried with his sword surrounded by a threefold 'coffin'. Early 19th c. excavations on the megalith revealed his ashes in a bronze pot which was contained in a clay pot which was contained in a grave chamber, together with a sword¹¹⁶. Among other similar cases in the same area, one might recall the *Bollenberg* near Falkenwalde, Kreis Prenzlau in Brandenburg, the *Dronninghoj* near Schuby in Schleswig-Holstein, and three *tumuli* in Peckatel near Schwerin: also in these three cases excavations confirmed details of old folktales¹¹⁷. In

115. Cf. A. ROSS, *Folklore of Wales*, Stroud, Tempus, 2001, p. 90.

116. Cf. A. KIEKEBUSCH, *Das Königsgrab von Seddin*, Augsburg, Filser, 1928; OHLHAVER, *Großsteingräber und Grabhügel in Glauben und Brauch*, pp. 210-213; H. WÜSTEMANN, *Das Königsgrab von Seddin, Kreis Perleberg, und das kulturelle Gepräge seines zeitlichen Horizontes*, Berlin, Humboldt-Universität, 1966, p. 2.

117. Cf. U. LEHMKUHL - E. NAGEL, *Ein neolithischer Kultplatz in Falkenwalde, Kreis Prenzlau*, «Bodendenkmalpflege in Mecklenburg», XIII, 1991, pp. 7-51; OHLHAVER, *Großsteingräber und Grabhügel in Glauben und Brauch*,

Mönchgut on Rügen, the locally used field name *Kirchhof* ('graveyard') was surprisingly confirmed in its meaning when several prehistoric urn-burials were discovered right there.

4.3. *Correlation between legends and the religious-astronomical function of megaliths*

Not surprisingly, oral legends show different levels of correlations with the astronomic function of megaliths (see above).

In the Nebbiu Region (Northern Corsica) one can quote the legend of the *Lurcu* (*A fola du Lurcu*), which is situated around the Monte Revincu. According to this legend, the *Lurcu*, a giant-shepherd with long hair, lived near a place named Casta. His house (*casa di u Lurcu*) and his mother's house (*casa di Lurca*) are two dolmens (dated 3500-2000 BC)¹¹⁸, separated by a plateau named *Cima di Suarella* where a set of megalithic rectangular or circular structures can be found (dated , 4327-4044 BC)¹¹⁹. It is said that the giant was very clever and powerful. People from the nearest village to his house (Santu Petru di Tenda) decided to kill him: they captured him by means of a stratagem near Bocca Pianosa, a place where the *Lurcu* used to come to drink. In order not to be killed, the *Lurcu* told them three secrets: 1) how to make a special cheese with sheep's milk (called *brocciu*), 2) what to do with the rest of the milk when the cheese has been made, and 3) how to *legghje u celu* ('read the sky') in order to make long journeys far from the island of Corsica. Nevertheless, after telling the three secrets, the giant and his mother were killed and buried near Bocca Pianosa and

pp. 206-208]; HAAS, *Burgwälle und Hünengräber der Insel Rügen in der Volkssage*, pp. 51-52.

118. Cf. F. LEANDRI - F. DEMOUCHE, *Les mégalithes du Monte Revincu*, «*Archéologia*», CCCLVIII, 1999, pp. 32-41.

119. Cf. *ibidem*.

Bocca Murellu, where one can still find two early non-dolmenic tombs (dated 4094-3823 BC)¹²⁰.

The first element to observe is the connection of the legend with the life of shepherds: there are in fact other several elements related to the traditional practices of shepherds on megalithic sites indicating a continuity from prehistory. For example, in the region of Corsica named Ciutulaghja (Appiettu) a technique is still carried out, named *invistita*, consisting in leaving the flocks of sheep free to move along paths that have been created in the past by the sheep themselves. The territory created by these virtual boundaries (named *rughionu*) coincides with megalithic (Neolithic) areas. Recent studies argue that this 'instinctive' itinerary exists as a result of a constant practise of pasture that has its roots in Neolithic customs¹²¹. The association between megaliths and transhumance itineraries of shepherds has been noticed also with reference to the Iberian Peninsula: Spanish pastoralism appears around 6500 BC, and the two principal sites where the phenomenon has been observed (Cueva de l'Or in Alicante and Cueva de los Murciélagos in Córdoba) are important megalithic areas¹²². Together with this possible connection with prehistoric agropastoralism, it would be difficult not to recognize in the Corsi-

120. Cf. ibidem; F. LEANDRI, *Les mégalithes de Corse*, Paris, Editions Jean-Paul Gisserot, 2000; for an analysis of the legend in its megalithic context, cf. J.F. SANTUCCI - G. THURY BOUVET - K. EL HADI - A. ÖTTAVI, *Legends, Megaliths and Astronomy in Corsica Island: U Monte Revincu*, «Environment et culture», XII, 2004, pp. 520-528; the linguistic and archaeological problem of Corsica has been studied in a PCT frame in M. ALINEI, *Le conseguenze per la linguistica corsa delle nuove teorie sulle origini delle lingue indoeuropee*, «Rivista Italiana di Dialettologia», XXX, 2006, pp. 139-171.

121. Cf. F. LANFRANCHI, *Relations entre l'espace pastoral corse et la répartition des sites préhistoriques*, in *Archeologia della pastorizia nell'Europa meridionale*, Alvi, Bordighera, 1991, pp. 121-135; see also IDEM, *Le secret des mégalithes*, Ajaccio, Albiana, 2000; IDEM, *Mégalithes et sociétés préhistoriques: concepts et terminologie*, «L'Anthropologie», CVI, 2002, pp. 295-326.

122. R.W. CHAPMAN, *Transhumance and Megalithic Tombs in Iberia*, «Antiquity», LIII, 1979, pp. 150-152.

can legend of the Lurcu a correlation between the megalithic setting of the legend and the references to the astronomical skills of the giant. This correlation appears even more plausible after recent relevant studies on the orientations of megaliths at Monte Revincu made by researchers from the University of Corsica. The results of this study are clear:

Although we are dealing only with 7 monuments and eight orientations, it is most unlikely that their orientations would be so similar purely by chance, and the signature in azimuth must result from some astronomical intention on the part of the builders. [...] We can see that the azimuth are highly non random (from 68° to 130°) measures about $1/6^{\text{th}}$ of a circle. Such a concentration of axes cannot have come about by chance. Furthermore the declination [...] show that all the eight orientations are in the correct range to face the rising sun or moon [...]. The seven megalithic sepulchres of the Nebbiu region [...] face roughly between north east and south east; more exactly between azimuth 68° and 130° , and declination between $-25\ 1/2^\circ$ and $+17^\circ$. We already point out that the builders seems to orient these monuments for reasons of astronomy. Furthermore we can deduce that the Lurcu dolmen is faced the rising sun around midwinter sunrise while the Lurca dolmen is facing the rising of the sun about one month before or after the midsummer sunrise¹²³.

Similar astronomical correlations can be observed in Wales. In the Aberystwyth area (Ceredigion, central Wales) a legend has been collected about a giant named Cerdden, whose body originally formed part of a Neolithic circle of standing stones, two of which remain. His supernatural ability consisted of the art of building ships that were able to navigate without sailors, and that allowed him to quickly reach distant places far from the coast of Wales¹²⁴. Once again, the folktale seems to identify a megalithic site with a centre of observation, measurement and divination of the sky: among other functions (so-

123. SANTUCCI - THURY BOUVET - EL HADI - OTTAVI, *Legends, Megaliths and Astronomy*, pp. 525-526; cf. also M. HOSKIN, *Orientations of Corsican Dolmens*, «Journal for the History of Astronomy», xxv, 1994, pp. 313-317; LEANDRI - DEMOCHE, *Les mégalithes du Monte Revincu*.

124. C. GROOMS, *The Giants of Wales*, Lampeter, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993.

cial, funerary, magico-religious, cognitive, symbolic)¹²⁵, prehistoric astronomy in fact played an important role in the orientation and mapping related to the earliest navigation techniques¹²⁶.

Also prehistoric sites in Central Alentejo (Portugal) have been studied in relation to lunar observation and practices:

it has long been noticed that most enclosures found in Central Alentejo are generally located at the top of a gentle slope facing east, and that a large menhir is regularly found close to the west top, slightly north of the axis of symmetry. A close inspection of several sites (Almendres, Vale Maria do Meio and Portela de Mogos) has revealed distinct internal features that, when observed from the large menhir, seem to lie in the appropriate direction of the average Spring Moon azimuth. Additionally, Almendres seems to have a clear corridor in the northern arm of the enclosure, which is oriented in the same direction and incorporates a truncated monolith. [...] A careful topographical survey has shown that the symmetry axis of the horseshoe points also in the direction of 98°, and therefore that the open arms seem to be intended to embrace the rising Spring Full Moon in the otherwise featureless horizon¹²⁷ [see fig. 5].

Megalithic art and artefacts (with representations of the Sun, rectangles, and figurative associations of rabbits and hares) demonstrate the importance of the moon in the magico-symbolic contexts of Neolithic Portugal¹²⁸. Cult objects with

125. Cf., G. COSTA, *Le origini della lingua poetica indeuropea. Voce, coscienza e transizione neolitica*, Firenze, Olschki, 1998, pp. 244-249.
126. Cf. C. RUGGLES, *Astronomical and Geometrical Influences on Monumental Design: Clues to Changing Patterns of Social Tradition?*, in T.L. MARKEY - J.A.C. GREPPIN (ed), *When Worlds Collide: The Indo-Europeans and the Pre-Indo-Europeans*, Ann Arbor, Karoma, 1990, pp. 115-150.
127. C. OLIVEIRA - C.M. DA SILVA, *Moon, Spring and Large Stones: Landscape and Ritual Calendar Perception and Symbolization*, in *UISPP Congress Session: Monumental Questions: Prehistoric Megaliths, Mounds, and Enclosures* (Lisbon, 4-9 September 2006); *on line* at <www.crookscape.org>, p. 44.
128. Cfr. C.M. DA SILVA, *Sobre o Possível Significado Astronómico do Cromleque dos Almendres*, «A Cidade de Évora», II, 2000, pp. 109-127; C.M. DA SILVA - M. CALADO, *New Astronomically Significant Directions of Megalithic Monumentos in the Central Alentejo*, «Journal of Iberian Archaeology», V, 2003, pp. 67-88; IDEM, *Monumentos Megalíticos Lunares no Alentejo Central*, in M. CALADO (ed), *Sinais da Pedra. Actas do 1º Colóquio*

the shape of the Moon Crescent (*lunules*) were found in a recent excavation of the Iron Age site at Garvão¹²⁹; they are in silver or in some other bright metal, and frequently they are implanted in icons of “Our Lady” of particular devotions (N^a Sr^a da Conceição regularly stands on a celestial starry sphere with a white moon crescent behind).



Fig. 5. Full moon rise directly on the symmetry axis of the horseshoe enclosure at Vale d'el Rei (Pavia) [from OLIVEIRA - DA SILVA, *Moon, Spring and Large Stones*]

In Garvão, the use of such small crescent moons still survives in the form of amulets used to invoke the protection of St^a Luzia. Neolithic rock art at the Lapa dos Gaivões (Arronches) might have some lunar meanings too: «although the anthropomorphic and serpent images are predominant, there is a group of marks that seem to represent a tally. A detailed examination shows four rows of seven individual linear marks, as if to represent the full cycle of the Moon with its four phases of approximately seven days each»¹³⁰. This astronomical context has been observed in almost all the megalithic sites of Portu-

Internacional sobre Megalitismo e Arte Rupestre na Europa Atlântica, Évora, Fundação Eugénio de Almeida, 2003.

129. C. BEIRÃO *et al.*, *Depósito Votivo da II Idade do Ferro de Garvão*, «O Arqueólogo Português», IV, 1985, pp. 45-136.

130. OLIVEIRA - DA SILVA, *Moon, Spring and Large Stones*, p. 45.

gal: among the others, one can recall megaliths between St. Sebastiao and Evora Monte and between Evora Monte and Castelo, where a northeast-southwest direction can be observed: St Sebastiao to the northwest and the Ossa range to the northeast define the arc of horizon in which the ridge is visible. They are the only sections of the ridge that appear on the skyline: «these elevations simultaneously coincide with the limits of the rising and setting of the sun and the moon in the north»¹³¹. Megalithic Enclosures in Central Alentejo are now studied for alignments related to the Spring Full Moon¹³² [see fig. 6].

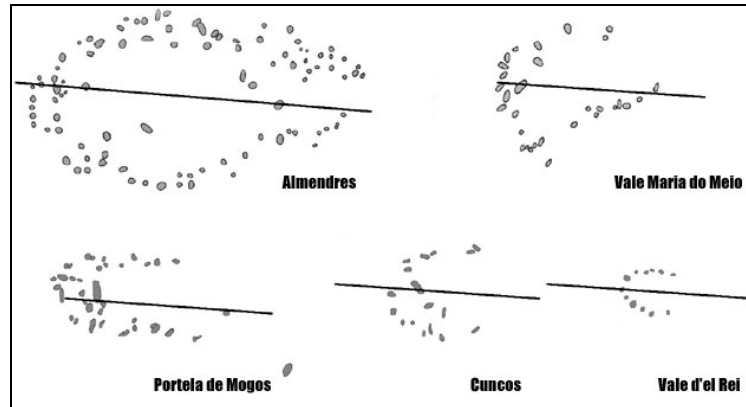


Fig. 6. Plans of Megalithic Enclosures in Central Alentejo and their alignments related to the Spring Full Moon [from C.M. DA SILVA - M. CALADO, *Spring Moon Sites in Central Alentejo*, on line at <www.crookscape.org>]

131. P. ALVIM, *Sobre alguns vestígios de paleoastronomia no cromeleque dos Almendres*, «Évora», II, 1996-1997, pp. 5-23, p. 21
132. M. HOSKIN - M. CALADO, *Orientation of Iberian Tombs: Central Alentejo Region of Portugal*, «Archaeoastronomy», XXIII, 1998, pp. 77-82; C.M. DA SILVA, *The Spring Full Moon*, in «Journal for the History of Astronomy», XXXV, 2004, pp. 475-478.

In these same places where archaeologists have underlined that the orientation of funerary megaliths appears to be connected to the spring full moon, as a consequence of a symbolic representation of resurrection, rebirth, or new life, at the beginning of spring («it seems possible to recognise a local cultural practice, or celebration, of the equinox, by a prehistoric society conscious of the celestial order»¹³³), local folktales tell stories about giants who were able to resurrect themselves when killed. This is so in the case of the Spell-Bound Giant of St. Sebastiao, who was killed by sailors coming from the Atlantic and buried there under the highest of the megalithic stones, before rising again and becoming the defender of the coast from pirate incursions¹³⁴.

The association with rebirth and fertility can be probably put at the origins of the fertility cults of megalithic stones, particularly documented in central France:

In Eure-et-Loir the young women who desired to have children rubbed their abdomens against a rough place in the Pierre de Chantecoq. This stone had [...] the power of obtaining husbands for them. The women of the neighbourhood of Simandre (Ain) accomplished the same object to the menhir erected there. At St Ronan (Finistère) the young married people a few year since [...] came and rubbed their abdomens against the Jument de Pierre, a colossal megalithic stone standing in the middle of a moor [...]. To be confined "every seven months" the women went to render the same homage to the Pierre Longue, near Dax, in Landes. About the middle of nineteenth century, the women of the country of Luchon, in order to be fruitful, rubbed themselves against a menhir on the mountain of Bourg d'Oueil and they embraced it with fervour. Several of these blocks had the reputation of causing women to be fruitful¹³⁵.

133. OLIVEIRA - DA SILVA, *Moon, Spring and Large Stones*, p. 46.

134. Cf. C. PEDROSO, *Portuguese Folk-Tales*, New York, Folk Lore Society Publications, 1882 [repr. New York, Benjamin Blom Inc., 1969], p. 55.

135. J.D. MCGUIRE, *The Cult of Stones in France*, «American Anthropologist», iv, 1902, pp. 76-107, 83-84.

Rubbing against stones was not only efficacious for fruitfulness: stones could also be used to gain strength or to recover health¹³⁶.

The same idea of fertility, with a closer connection to the astronomical function, is to be found in the belief (well documented in central France) that stones put near megaliths grow, turn around and move: this is said to happen particularly at the date of the winter and summer solstices¹³⁷.

The fact that megaliths must have been of great cosmological significance is confirmed by their tendency to be clustered in groups and topographic positions which spatially describe each time a microcosm¹³⁸. Stone-settings, as markers of prehistoric burial mounds, were probably the borders between the world of the living and that of the dead. This deep-rooted perception of megalithic sites is confirmed by the fact that many megaliths in Europe were for several centuries used for burials. In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, for example, «people associated with the partly contemporary <to TRB culture> Kugelamphoren (Globular Amphora) culture (c. 3100-2700 cal. BC) frequently removed previous skeletons and demolished older grave goods in order to create room for their own burials»¹³⁹.

A similar case is the reuse of earlier megaliths for infant burials belonging to the Bronze Age at Fourknocks (Co. Meath, Ireland)¹⁴⁰. Also here, one can observe a connection between folklore and archaeology: there are in fact many folktales concerning 'dead child' traditions of changelings and

136. Cf. *ivi*.

137. Cf. *IMF*, 1963, p. 104; 1967, p. 317; 1974, p. 217; 1977, p. 247; 1980, p. 247; 1995, p. 120.

138. C. RICHARDS, *Monuments as Landscape: Creating the Centre of the World in the Late Neolithic Orkney*, «World Archaeology», xxviii, 1996, pp. 190-208.

139. C.J. HOLTORF, *The Life-Histories of Megaliths in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Germany)*, «World Archaeology», xxx, 1998, pp. 23-38, 25.

140. Cf. N. FINLAY, *Outside of Life: Traditions of Infant Burial in Ireland from Cillin to Cist*, «World Archaeology», xxxi, 2000, pp. 407-422.

child murderers in Ireland¹⁴¹, and these are often associated with megalithic sites where excavation has found evidence of prehistoric and protohistoric infant burials. Not by chance, again on a level of uninterrupted stability from prehistory, ritual megalithic places of the Neolithic continued to be used and perceived as ritual places also with Christianity. Among the many examples one can quote the Welsh site of Ysbyty Cynfyn, in Ceredigion, where Neolithic stones stand upright at regular intervals in the churchyard wall, creating a Christianized stone circle around the church¹⁴² [see fig. 7].



Fig. 7. Picture of a megalith embedded in the churchyard wall at Ysbyty Cynfyn

141. Cf. A. O'CONNOR, *Women in Irish Folklore: The Testimony Regarding Illegitimacy, Abortion and Infanticide*, in M. MACCARTAIN - M. O'DOWD (ed), *Women in Early Modern Ireland*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1991, pp. 304-317.

142. Cf. ROSS, *Folklore of Wales*, p. 92.

4.4. *Towards a stratigraphy of megalithic legends and names: the new "seaward perspective" and its relevance for the PCT approach*

We have insisted on the fact that the astronomical function of prehistoric architectures is closely connected with navigation and orientation techniques. As Barry Cunliffe writes,

the astronomical knowledge embedded in the construction of at least some of the megalithic monuments is no more than might have been expected of people rooted in a tradition of sea travel, who used their close observation of the heavens to help them navigate and daily experienced the disappearance of the sun on the western ocean. That this highly specialist knowledge was given architectural form might in some way reflect the claim of the elite to have a spiritual relationship with the celestial power who controlled the rhythm of the world¹⁴³.

Together with this, for the PCT perspective it is interesting to underline the presence of legends whose motivation can be only understood in the frame of fishermen communities. Apart from the many explicit references to the magical art of navigation of giants found in legends told in the coastal territories of Portugal, Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and Corsica (see above), one has to underline that the same characteristics are intriguingly present in dialect names and folktales related to megaliths of central France, a (Celtic!) territory that is apparently far from the world of fishermen. We limit ourselves to the mention of dialect names such as *La pierre du géant pecheur*, 'the stone of the fisherman-giant' (Saint-Antoine-du-Rocher, Indre-et-Loire)¹⁴⁴, *La pierre de la mèr*, 'the stone of the sea' (Vaudancourt, Paris)¹⁴⁵, *La tombe du pecheur*, 'the fisherman grave'¹⁴⁶, *Le pecheur mort*, 'the dead fisherman'¹⁴⁷; among the legends, one can recall the one about the megalith of Saint-Hilaire-la-

143. CUNLIFFE, *Facing the Ocean*, p. 558

144. Cf. *IMF*, 1967, p. 125.

145. Cf. *IMF*, 1975, p. 369.

146. Cf. *IMF*, 1977, p. 248.

147. Cf. *IMF*, 1977, p. 247.

Gravelle (Loir-et-Cher), according to which it was built by a giant named Le Grand Pecheur ('The Great Fisherman')¹⁴⁸.

On a motivational level, the only possible explanation is that megalithic legends and names related to the sea and the fishermen are the original ones. In a PCT approach, they must refer to the fishermen communities that lived along the Atlantic coasts, from North-Western Spain to the Hebrides, in the Mesolithic. This view of a 'compact' prehistoric Atlantic area is also confirmed by the most recent genetic research, which demonstrates that the genetic stock of Galician people is the same as that of the Irish, the Welsh, and the people of Cornwall, and goes back to the Palaeolithic¹⁴⁹; the name that geneticists have given to this marker is, not by chance, «*Atlantic Modal Haplotype*»¹⁵⁰.

It is relevant to quote here an important article by Tim Phillips – one of the most fruitful studies ever produced in the huge field of megalithism. In his view, most of the studies on megaliths have limited themselves to take a land-based approach. As he recalls, a recent GIS study that incorporates control samples has shown, on the contrary, that the majority of the Orkney monuments are located on the coast over-looking large areas of seascape¹⁵¹. In siting the monuments, the view out from them must have more important than the view of them from the land, and also scholars should make the effort of considering megaliths from a seaward perspective:

many of the chambered cairns of Orkney were located to be visible from the sea, often occupying critical points along the coastline. Indeed, locations

148 Cf. *IMF*, 1974, p. 219.

149 Cf. B. SYKES, *Saxons, Vikings, and Celts. The Genetic Roots of Britain and Ireland*, New York-London, W.W. Norton & Co., 2006, p. 162

150 Cf. *ibidem*, pp. 162, 239, 293.

151. P.E. WOODMAN, *Beyond Significant Patterning, Towards Past Intentions: The Location of Orcadian Chambered Tombs*, in C. BUCK (ed), *Proceedings of the UK Chapter of Computer Applications and Quantitative Methods in Archaeology*, Oxford, British Archaeological Reports, 2000, pp. 91-105.

on headlands and tidal islands echo the siting of many coastal megaliths in Brittany [...]. They could mark the 'ownership' of fishing grounds, as suggested by Clark in southern Sweden. The monuments may have represented symbolic markers of the physical and conceptual boundary between the sea and the land [...], the dead being disposed of on the edge of the land and backed by the sea [...]. They could be part of a cosmology signifying ancestral memories of an earlier period when the resources of the sea were exploited to a much greater extent¹⁵².

Evidence for a close relationship with the sea comes from the assemblages recovered from some of the chambered cairns and settlement sites: fish bones and marine mammal remains, bottom-feeding fish species such as cod, haddock and ling¹⁵³. Gabriel Cooney, commenting on Phillips' article, underlines that, not surprisingly, architectures like megaliths «are often named and given ancestral significance and are used in defining and orally recounting lineage histories and rights of ownership. This gives us a good sense of people being at home on the sea and seeing it as a habitually used and important activity area»¹⁵⁴. Although Phillips' case study is represented by the territory of Orkney and northern mainland Scotland, one can

152. T. PHILLIPS, *Seascapes and Landscapes in Orkney and Northern Scotland*, «World Archaeology», xxxv, 2003, pp. 371-384, 380; Phillips is quoting J.G.D. CLARK, *The Economic Context of Dolmens and Passage-graves in Sweden*, in V. MARKOTIC (ed), *Ancient Europe and the Mediterranean: Studies Presented in Honour of Hugh Hencken*, Warminster, Aris & Phillips, 1977, pp. 35-49; C. SCARRE, *A Pattern of Islands: The Neolithic Monuments of North-West Brittany*, «European Journal of Archaeology», V, 2002, pp. 24-41, 26; IDEM, *Coast and Cosmos: The Neolithic Monuments of Northern Brittany*, in IDEM (ed), *Monuments and Landscape in Atlantic Europe: Perception and Society during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age*, London, Routledge, 2002, pp. 84-102, 84; V. CUMMINGS - C. FOWLER, *Places of Transformation: Building Monuments from Water and Stone in the Neolithic of the Irish Sea*, «Journal of the Royal Antiquarian Institute», ix, 2003, pp. 1-20.

153. Cfr. PHILLIPS, *Seascapes and Landscapes in Orkney*, p. 380.

154. G. COONEY, *Seeing Land from the Sea*, «World Archaeology», xxxv, 2003, pp. 323-328, 325.

easily ascertain the strength of his conclusions for the majority of the European megalithic areas¹⁵⁵.

From this point of view, it is interesting to consider the presence, in Galicia, of a unambiguous continuity on coastal sites between Neolithic megaliths, post-medieval *fachos* (small sentry stone boxes built on mountains top, that were used for watching the coast and for sending nocturnal signals by torches to the sailors [the name derives from the Latin *FASCULA, a variant of FACULA ‘small torch’]), and modern *faros* (lighthouses). A beautiful example is the Facho de Donón, (Cangas do Morrazo, Pontevedra), where in the same place one can still observe megalithic remains, ruins of a sanctuary devoted to the god Berobreo (Late Bronze Age), and a post-medieval *facho* [see fig. 8].

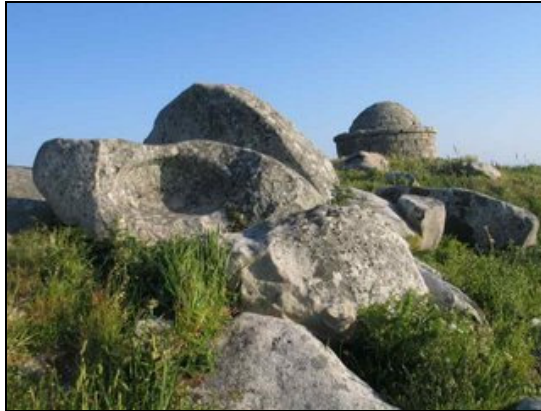


Fig. 8. Prehistoric, protohistoric and post-medieval Remnants at The Facho de Donón

Once again, this continuity emerges in folktales, such as the one recently collected by Enrique Couceiro in Bajo Miño.

155. See above, § 3.2; and cfr. also V. CUMMINGS, *Between Mountains and Sea: A Reconsideration of the Neolithic Monuments of South-west Scotland*, in «Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society», LXVIII, 2002, pp. 125-146, 133.

Here, in fact, we find a reference to the fact that the use of fires along the coast goes back to the *mouros*, that is to say the mythical inhabitants and builders of prehistoric megaliths (see above):

Los *mouros* vivían en lo alto de los montes, y cuando venía el enemigo se avisaban de un monte a otro; por ejemplo, avisaban desde el monte Santa Tecla [...] al de San Xulián [...], y desde allí pasaban aviso aquí, al monte Faro de Entienza, y al Castelo [...], y también al Faro de Portugal [...]. Y así estaban preparados para cuando viniera el enemigo. Para pasarse el aviso encendían *fachos* en lo alto de los montes; nosotros llamamos *fachos* así, a los fuegos, a las hogueras. Por eso son Faros, porque desde ellos se avisaban¹⁵⁶.

Our interpretation of the origins of megalithism, intended as a phenomenon belonging to Mesolithic Celtic fishermen later spread in Neolithic farming communities (a process similar to the spreading and 'translation' of fisherman techniques and words into the ideology of agricultural communities, easily verifiable with reference to the dialectal terminology of ploughing)¹⁵⁷ is corroborated by our analysis of megalithic folklore, and brings to the same conclusion reached by Phillips: the importance of the sea for understanding the megalithic phenomenon is crucial, and it must be emphasized.

Indeed, cumulative evidence given by linguistics, archaeology and ethnophilology indicates that we should reconsider the whole question of European megalithism from a Mesolithic, Atlantic, Celtic, and continuist perspective*.

156. E. COUCEIRO, *El palimpsesto montaraz. Imaginarios y prácticas en torno al monte en Galicia*, «Revista de Antropología Experimental», VIII, 2008, pp. 1-28, 12.

157. Cf. ALINEI, *Origini delle lingue d'Europa*, vol. II, pp. 893-897, BENOZZO, *La flora, la fauna, il paesaggio*.

* The authors of this study specify that, although it has been written together and from an identical point of view, paragraphs 1, 2 [2.1, 2.2], 3 [3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5] should be attributed to Mario Alinei, and paragraph 4 [4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4] to Francesco Benozzo.

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