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# The realm of the Great Goddess

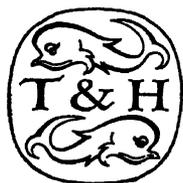


# The realm of the Great Goddess

THE STORY OF THE MEGALITH BUILDERS

Sibylle von Cles-Reden

*121 photographs, 82 drawings*



THAMES AND HUDSON · LONDON

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TRANSLATED FROM *DIE SPUR DER ZYKLOPEN*  
by ERIC MOSBACHER

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1

# Contents

<i>Introduction: The Lament of Gilgamesh</i>	9
<b>Book I Origins</b>	
<i>Discovery of Agriculture</i>	14
<i>The Chieftain's Grave of Eynan</i>	17
<i>Oldest Town in the World</i>	19
<i>Holy Stones</i>	30
<i>Permanent Houses of the Dead</i>	33
<i>Clue from Ghassul</i>	36
<i>Herdsmen or Peasants?</i>	39
<i>Unforgotten Inheritance</i>	45
<i>Egypt</i>	47
<i>Arabian Stonehenge</i>	48
<i>Mesopotamia</i>	52
<i>Westward Journey</i>	54
<i>Goddess from the East</i>	57
<i>Birth of Maritime Trade</i>	58
<i>Triumphal March of the New Religion</i>	67
<i>The Two Faces of the European Megaliths</i>	68

## Book II The Holy Islands

<i>Malta and Gozo</i>	70
<i>Origins</i>	72
<i>Development of Temple Architecture</i>	75
<i>Giant Shrine</i>	78
<i>Golden Temple of Qrendi</i>	82
<i>Realm of the Great Mother</i>	93
<i>Zenith and Downfall</i>	98

## Book III In the Shadow of the Nuraghi

<i>Prehistory</i>	112
<i>Fairy Houses and Giants' Tombs</i>	114
<i>Great Goddess and her Consort</i>	123
<i>Castles of the Cyclops</i>	134
<i>Pottery and Metals</i>	141
<i>A People before Their Gods</i>	143
<i>Holy Mountain and Sacred Spring</i>	150
<i>Ancestral Law</i>	154
<i>Women Custodians of the Past</i>	158

## Book IV The Face of Antiquity

<i>Island of Statue Menhirs</i>	167
<i>Valley of Ancestor Gods</i>	168

<i>Riddle of the Torri</i>	172
<i>Customs and Legends</i>	187

## Book V The Land of Silver

<i>Settlers from Africa</i>	190
<i>Mining Town of Los Millares</i>	193
<i>Primitive Basilica</i>	202
<i>The Creative West</i>	208
<i>Question of Priority</i>	217

## Book VI The Goddess in France

<i>Across the Pyrenees</i>	221
<i>Armed God</i>	227
<i>Allées Couvertes and Rock-Cut Tombs</i>	228

## Book VII Symbols in Stone

<i>Origins of Breton Civilization</i>	232
<i>Island of the Dead</i>	240
<i>Royal Cemetery of Locmariaquer</i>	244
<i>Riddle of the Menhirs</i>	251
<i>The Stone Host of Carnac</i>	253
<i>Powerful Spirits of the Dead</i>	259

Book VIII	A Thousand Years before Ulysses	
	<i>The Colonization of Ireland</i>	263
	<i>The Tomb of New Grange</i>	268
	<i>Legends and Traditions</i>	273
	<i>Island at the End of the World</i>	277
Book IX	Eternal Circle	
	<i>The Melting Pot of Southern Britain</i>	282
	<i>Avebury</i>	284
	<i>Stonehenge</i>	290
Book X	Vanirs and Aesirs	
	<i>The Megalith Builders in Northern Europe</i>	297
	<i>The Stone Bridegroom of Visbeck</i>	301
	<i>Cupmarked Stones and Thunderbolts</i>	306
Postscript		312
List of Plates		314
Illustrations in the Text		317
Bibliography		319
Index		322
Sources of Illustrations		328

Day and night Gilgamesh, King of Uruk, the hero of the ancient Sumerian cycle, weeps over the body of his friend Enkidu. His words express man's timeless anguish in the face of death.

Enkidu my brother, whom I loved, the end  
of mortality has overtaken him. I wept for  
him seven days and nights till the worm fastened  
on him . . . How can I be silent, how can I rest?  
He is dust and I too shall die and be laid in the  
earth for ever.

Gilgamesh goes on to ask the eternal question:

Now that I have toiled and strayed  
so far over the wilderness, am I to  
sleep, and let the earth cover my head for ever?

The longing of all mortals is in his cry:

Let my eyes see the sun until they are dazzled  
with looking. Although I am no better than a  
dead man, still let me see the light of the sun.

After mourning his friend, Gilgamesh leaves his city and his people and sets out alone to seek Utnapishtim the immortal, to learn from him the secret of everlasting life. Fearlessly he faces terrors and ordeals, and at last finds himself face-to-face with Utnapishtim. But his quest is vain; he learns that there is no escaping the universal destiny, hero and superman though he may be. He loses the herb of eternal youth that he has hitherto possessed, and Utnapishtim advises him to bow to the inevitable.

The new religion called for indestructible tombs for the dead to inhabit forever, and this led to the development of a sepulchral architecture whose whole emphasis was on size, weight, and endurance. In later ages its tremendous relics were ascribed to the giants or Cyclops of a legendary past. The building techniques and styles of many different countries and peoples were absorbed into the rich megalithic style (from the Greek *me-gas*, "great", and *lithos*, "stone"), which was the symbol of a widespread religion, a spiritual outlook characterized by a trend to the colossal and an expenditure of effort and labour for the sake of the dead that bordered on mania.

Closely associated with this world of ideas was the cult of stones which found expression in the menhir. Menhirs – the word means "long stone" in Breton – are conical pillars, generally oval at the top, which occur in front of, on top of, or even in megalithic tombs, and often in isolation, sometimes being of enormous proportions. Suggestions of the human form cause some of them to be known as statue menhirs. These statues are generally of a mysterious female figure, more rarely a male figure. In the simpler form of long, untrimmed blocks menhirs are often found arranged in rows or circles or squares. One of the oldest forms of shrine was a stone circle surrounding a sacred area or pillar; this apparently also came to the west from the east.

The power of the beliefs that lay behind the superhuman efforts required to erect the sepulchral and religious monuments of the megalithic cultures was sufficient to cause them to survive the Neolithic Age and continue into classical times and beyond. Physical relics of this first world religion still survive all the way from the Near East to the Orkneys, and the traces left in men's minds have not all been obliterated yet. The builders of the megalithic tombs live on in legends and fairy-tales, in the form of mythical heroes or diabolical figures. Dark memories of ancient beliefs about death and fertility rites once practised at ancestral tombs and menhirs still survive in strange popular customs.

The Church fought hard for many centuries to extirpate these often deep-rooted archaic beliefs and customs, and when they refused to be extirpated transformed and sanctified them by adopting pagan monuments into the Christian cult. Does not Christianity itself preserve a last echo of belief in the necessity of the preservation of the body to the survival of the soul when at the end of the Creed it says: "I believe in the resurrection of the Body and the Life everlasting"?

Thus we still preserve within us something of the heritage of the religion which arose in the shadow of death and acquired its creative strength from contact with death. The faith that moves mountains also moved the huge stone blocks used for the tombs and places of worship of an early breed of men who were determined to endure.

The development and expansion of the religion of the peoples who built the megalithic tombs certainly had an immense bearing on the development of ancient Europe. Tracing the background, the beginnings and effects of this development is also groping back towards the buried sources of our own spiritual world; our tour of these vast monuments invested with man's devout hope of immortality will thus be less an archaeologi-

cal voyage of discovery than a search for our own origins and our own basic nature; a harkening to the never-stilled lament of Gilgamesh which still goes on in our own breasts.

*Discovery of Agriculture*

Perhaps the most revolutionary period in the history of mankind was the neolithic period. In the course of a few thousand years – a mere moment of time in comparison with the endless Palaeolithic Age which preceded it – the world underwent spiritual and material developments so important that even the revolutionary changes of our own machine and atomic age cannot compare with them.

The retreat of the ice sheets in Europe apparently also involved climatic changes in the Near East, leading to the desiccation of wide areas. Deterioration in living conditions may have been among the reasons which between the seventh and the fifth millennia B. C. caused bands of hunters and food-gatherers to give up their accustomed way of life and the unplanned appropriation of nature's gifts for the planned and organised production and storage of food. Gradually they became herdsmen and tillers of the soil, established fixed settlements, and thus created the basis of civilisation.

This development brought man face to face with the forces of the world about him and the world within him. Hitherto he had been a part of nature, at her mercy, it is true, but also securely in her shelter. But now he broke this unity, and started becoming increasingly aware of his own powers and potentialities, and also of the loneliness and hazards of his life. He learnt to discover and experiment, to calculate and organize, to search for laws and standards. Most of the great, still valid principles which lie at the foundation of all civilisations, the first fully developed religions and the fundamental technical discoveries all date from this epoch-making period. In the midst of the untamed chaos of nature, centres of spiritual life arose in the form of the first stable communities; in houses, in circumscribed sacred spaces, at ancestral gravesides. The fundamental structures of present day social life were developed. The primary forms of architecture which still determine the shape of our homes and our sacred buildings also took shape.

The scene of this creative outburst, according to the present state of our knowledge, was in all probability the Fertile Crescent, which extends in a great arc from Mesopotamia by way of Palestine, Syria, and Egypt to the Persian Gulf.

Previously, in the long millennia of the late Palaeolithic Age, the centre of human progress seems to have lain in western and southern Europe. But then the process of development died down, and for a long time the lead passed to the Near East, Egypt, and the Aegean world, which rapidly blossomed under their influence.

Apart from climatic and psychological factors, a vital part may have been played in this process by the fact that no grain grew wild in western and southern Europe, and that wild sheep and goats, which were perhaps the first animals to be domesticated after the dog, were to be found only at its mountainous extremities. Thus, factors vital for the transition to new ways of life were lacking. In Europe the nomadic life of the mesolithic period, in which small bands of hunters and trappers followed the seasonal wanderings of their prey, or fishermen and gatherers of shell-fish supplemented their diet by gathering fruit, roots and vegetables, seems to have developed but little until far into the fourth and even the third millennia B. C. The impulse to change seems to have been supplied by immigrant peasant peoples from outside Europe. As agriculture in eastern Europe is demonstrably older than elsewhere in our continent, the movement must have taken place in an east-west direction. But its starting point can hardly have been in Europe.

It is practically certain that the systematic cultivation of corn began earlier in the Near East than in Europe. We shall probably never be able to establish where and with whom it originated, but the presence of wild wheat in the area of northern Syria and Palestine points to a possible place of origin there.

The remains of very early villages have been discovered in Iraq, Cilicia, and elsewhere in the Fertile Crescent, and accumulated layers of débris of prehistoric dwellings up to sixty feet deep have been found below the ruins of Sumerian cities. But the oldest known permanent settlement and the oldest sickle were found in Palestine.

The Holy Land, that bridge between two continents, never produced a high level of civilization of its own, but again and again ideas took shape there which changed the face of the world. And it may be that one of the decisive steps which led to a new age was also taken there.

In Palestine not only was wild wheat present, but the water conditions were particularly favourable to small groups of men; these two factors may have combined to favour the beginnings of primitive agriculture.

In broad river valleys subject to periodic large scale floods, the water which brings fertility can be tamed and exploited only by the construction of canals, dams, pumps, etc., and the labour and organization involved presupposes a certain stage of civilization and relatively large and well organized communities. Thus the conditions for the transformation of small bands of nomadic hunters and food-gatherers into sedentary peasants and herdsmen were at first more favourable in the *wadis*, the dry valleys of

Israel and Jordan, for instance, than in Mesopotamia or the Nile Valley. In Palestine the drying up of the streams formed in the rainy period leaves enough moisture in the ground during the subsequent hot weather to permit the harvest to ripen without any irrigation. In these conditions a primitive kind of agriculture might have developed relatively easily, seeds being collected by bands of nomadic hunters who turned up regularly at harvest time, and this may ultimately have led to fixed settlements.

This theory is based chiefly on the discoveries of an English archaeologist, Miss Dorothy Garrod, who in 1928 uncovered a mesolithic culture in excavations in the cave of Shukbah in the Wadi en-Natuf not far from Jerusalem. This culture, which subsequently became known as the Natufian, appears to have originated in about 10,000 B. C. or slightly later, and to have lasted until the seventh or sixth millennium B. C.; it was so far advanced in comparison with the late palaeolithic and mesolithic cultures of Europe that it seems to have been a direct predecessor of the Neolithic Age. Since this discovery it has been possible to trace an unbroken line of evolution from the palaeolithic to the neolithic in Palestine.

The Natufian people lived in caves and on rock terraces in front of them, and sometimes in open country. They built stone walls, and produced a substance similar to mortar. Their settlements are characterised by dwelling and storage holes. Their only domesticated animal was the dog. Their religious usages included collective burial, a cult of the dead, and a fertility cult; and a kind of sickle – a long-slightly curved tool inset with a serrated flint blade – seems to have been their invention. The handle is often decorated with attractive carvings of animal figures. Mortars and grinding-stones show that the corn cut with this implement was ground. A sizeable adze that appears among the finds may have been used for digging.

This Natufian culture, which may be of such importance for the beginning of the neolithic period, was not confined to Palestine. Sites since uncovered in Syria, in the Sinai Peninsula, as well as at Helwan in Egypt, show that it spread both north and south. Thus there may be good reason for regarding these people as the originators of agriculture. Numerous skeletons which have been found give us a clear picture of these people. They were of small, delicate build, with strongly developed lower limbs, broad, rather flat noses, a pronounced chin, a slightly protruding upper jaw, and noticeably long skulls. Strangely enough, the only closely related mesolithic type yet known was found at the other end of the Mediterranean, at Mugem, in Portugal, among the skeletons from the accumulations of shells at Cabeço da Arrudas.

Natufian art, with its lively little animal figures, is reminiscent of late Magdalenian naturalistic carvings; and in several respects its industry resembles the western European Tardenoisian industry, which is partly characterised by quite small flint tools. Hence there is some evidence to suggest an emigration from the north, but this cannot at present be demonstrated. In any event, the anthropological evidence seems to show that the Natufian people were predecessors of the ancient Mediterranean race which later played a vital role in the civilization of the Near East and the Aegean.

## *The Chieftain's Grave of Eynan*

The Natufian people are interesting not only as the possible originators of agriculture; they also seem in many ways to have pioneered later religious developments.

A Natufian burial-place was uncovered in 1936 in the course of excavations directed by Miss Garrod in and in front of the cave of Mugharet el-Wad. The remains of sixty-four adults and twenty-eight children were found; all had been buried in a crouching position, or with outstretched body and drawn up knees. A number still wore ornaments made of shell, animal teeth or bones.

But the most remarkable finds came from the rock terrace outside the cave. The approach to the cave was partly obstructed by a dry wall more than twenty-six feet long, made of big stones, in front of which there was an area paved with big slabs. Five small round cavities had been dug in the ground, and a walled-in hearth had been built. Miss Garrod formed the opinion that the place had served for a cult of the dead.

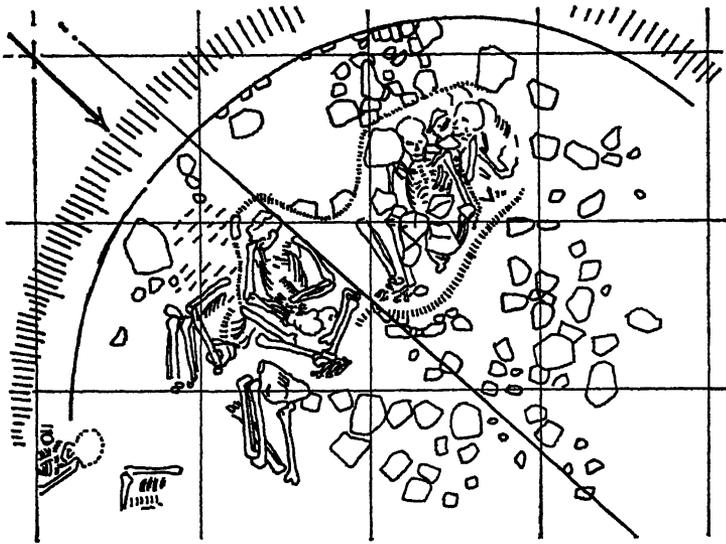
Further interesting finds were made in 1956. A Natufian site was found in open country near Eynan, on the banks of Lake Huleh in Galilee. Round and oval pit dwellings came to light, as well as cavities reminiscent of the bell-shaped silos of chalcolithic Beersheba. The walls seem to have been strengthened by a kind of mortar. Some had served for burial purposes, but their original purpose must have been food storage.

But the big surprise at Eynan was a monumental round tomb, measuring sixteen feet across and two-and-a-half feet deep. Its walls, which inclined slightly outwards, were built of a hard, concrete-like substance. They were polished and painted over with red ochre and ended at the top in a rounded, flattened border, forming a two-foot-thick enclosure round the burial place itself. Outside it was a circle of longish stones (Fig. 1).

When the burial place was excavated, it was found that the first layer consisted of earth and stones. On the southern side a round platform seven-and-a-half feet in diameter came to light. It consisted of carefully laid slabs, and was surrounded by a low wall on which were three big stones surrounded by smaller stones.

In the next layer of brown earth a stretch of paving was gradually reached along the wall. On it stood another hearth, measuring about three square feet and containing a quantity of ashes. Next to the hearth lay a skull, with the two top neck vertebrae, the second of which had been severed by a sharp instrument. Perhaps there had been a human sacrifice here on the death of an important individual.

At the bottom of the tomb two well preserved skeletons were found, and immediately underneath them the remains of another seven, dating from an earlier burial. All were in a crouching position, their feet, and possibly also their arms, had apparently been bound, and some had been weighed down with stones. Nevertheless the excavators did not have the impression that those who had buried them like this were inspired by



1 *Chieftain's tomb at Eynan*

fear. One of the top series of skeletons, that of a man, perhaps the most important of the individuals buried here, had been laid to rest with particular care. His head was half supported on a pillow of stones, and his empty eye-sockets seem to be looking up to the summit of Mount Hermon, the snow-covered peak which dominates the landscape. A skull from the earlier burial had been laid at each of his feet, and another by his right shoulder.

Most of the bodies had ornaments; head-bands consisting of several rows of animal teeth and necklaces made of shells, animal teeth, or the toe-bones of gazelles.

Rich finds came to light in a small pit lying next to the tomb – implements made of flint, bone and other things. There were also a big, well made, cylindrical basalt vessel, and the headless torso of a very primitive, ochre-coloured, small idol. There was no trace here of the stone amulets sometimes found at Natufian sites made in the shape of male or female sexual organs and pointing to a fertility cult. On the other hand there were some remarkable polished limestone “palettes” from five to eight inches in diameter, with a hollow in the middle. All showed traces of red ochre.

This use of red, the sacred colour of blood, for the dead of Eynan, and the red adornment of their tomb, point to the presence of religious beliefs which date back to the later Palaeolithic Age in the Mediterranean area. In the Palaeolithic Age the dead were not only sprinkled with red chalk, but were often laid on a bed of crushed ochre.

Thus this richly adorned and carefully built tomb by Lake Huleh, apparently the last resting place of a family of chieftains, has connections with the most remote antiquity. But at the same time it is a pointer to the future, a symbol of evolution in a

definite direction. Many of the beliefs out of which there subsequently developed the world-wide cult of the dead as represented in the huge structures of the early Metal Age seem to be present here in embryo. The dead still inspire an animal-like fear; but they are also exalted and honoured, for they demand and receive sacrifices and offerings, and objects of great value are put in their tombs. Moreover, they are no longer buried in the dwelling cave, near the hearth, as was usual in the late Palaeolithic, but in their own permanent, well-furnished tomb; they are thus removed to the sphere of the sacred without being put beyond the reach of the living.

Out of the grim experience of death primitive man had evolved a definite system of beliefs and a developed ritual from which his conscious wrestling with the problem of death is very evident.

The connections that may exist between Eynan and the burial customs of the Mediterranean and western European religions of the third and second millennia can be only conjectured. But Eynan certainly shows evidence of a spiritual attitude that could well have led to the latter. At all events it differs fundamentally from that of cultures such as those of the late Neolithic Age in eastern, central and northern Europe in which no care was taken for the dead and there was no sense of continuing community between the living and the dead.

Collective burial also arose very early in Palestine, and became a characteristic feature of the cult of the dead in the Mediterranean area and its Atlantic outposts.

Thus it looks as if at the very beginning of the dynamic Neolithic Age the Palestine area, which from time immemorial has been a meeting-place and fusing point of peoples from the north, south and east, occupied a key position in religious development.

### *Oldest Town in the World*

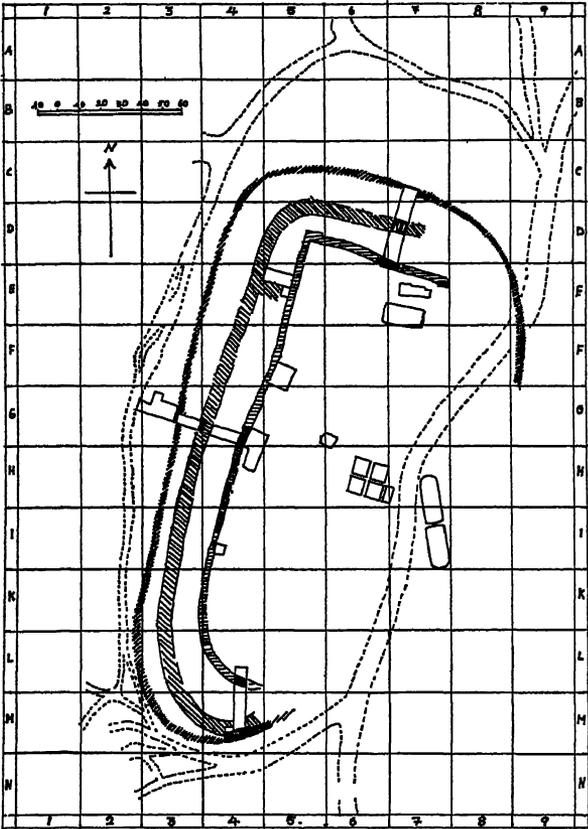
The discoveries in the Wadi en-Natuf cast doubts on the hitherto accepted dating of the origin of agriculture and permanent settlement; this had hitherto been assumed to be not earlier than the fifth millennium B. C. But excavations at Tell es-Sultan, the site of the biblical Jericho, particularly during recent years, have thrown a fantastic light on the secrets of an astonishingly early heyday of Near Eastern cultures.

Tell es-Sultan was built up of *débris* of immemorial antiquity and, like the successive layers of an onion, its excavation yielded up layer after layer of ancient human settlement until finally, in 1956, the heart of the oldest known fortified town was laid bare.

Long before the first pottery was fashioned out of wet clay, long before great civilizations rose on the banks of the Nile and in Mesopotamia, in the restless and timeless age when man still wandered everlastingly in search of food, he seems to have found

a resting place in the Jordan valley, between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, near the spurs of the mountains of Judaea. Here a walled town arose, offering security to its numerous inhabitants. The site had an ample water supply and was strategically important in relation to the southern fords of the Jordan, at one of the classic points of irruption of desert nomads aiming at the fertile coastal strip. The plain, through which the narrow river has worn a deep bed, is now, with the exception of the green oasis of Jericho, a desolate plateau. But once it may have been different (Fig. 2).

Surprisingly, the settlers who established themselves near the Jericho spring lived, not in tents or huts made of reeds or brushwood, but in round, beehive-like houses built of oval-shaped, sun-dried clay bricks, flat underneath and arched like a hog's back on top. Some steps led down to the somewhat sunken living rooms, the floors of which were made of clay laid on a sandy foundation. Numerous charred remains led to the conclusion that a good deal of timber was used in these homes; traces of the wooden covering of a staircase still survive.



2 Plan of Jericho

The people who built these houses had no pottery; instead they used crude stone vessels, and no doubt they also used containers made of perishable materials such as wood, wickerwork, or leather. Their weapons and other implements were of flint and bone. Their diet included cereals, as is shown by primitive querns and grindstones.

The most astonishing feature of the first town of Jericho was its imposing defences, which must have made it look like a mediaeval town. The ruins of a wall came to light, in places still eighteen feet high, built of very regularly shaped stones. Outside it, a ditch twenty-seven feet wide and nine feet deep had been cut out of the solid rock. How this tremendous labour was carried out is all the more puzzling as no big tools such as heavy stone picks were found. Obviously only ordinary flints were used; but the builders may also have had a technique of cracking the rock by heating and then suddenly cooling with cold water. Even more surprising for the excavators than the wall was the discovery on its inner side of a massive round stone tower nearly thirty feet in diameter.

A megalithic-style staircase, consisting of twenty carefully dressed and finished stone slabs, with a roof of slabs each about three feet square, led down to a horizontal passage. The tower seems to have been twice extended by the building of new walls round its stone core. Wall and ditch belong to the time of the second extension. Later another wall built of great blocks of stone came to light; it was still twelve feet high. This, together with the innermost core of the tower, seemed to represent the first stage of the defence works. Only a relatively large and well organized community, with an assured food supply and advanced technical knowledge, could have built such a structure, whose architectural conception and solid construction would have done honour to any mediaeval castle.

The religious life of the inhabitants of the first Jericho was apparently highly developed. The meaning of a number of greenstone objects which may have been amulets can be only conjectured, but there was evidence of a cult of skulls, a manifestation of magic and religious ideas about death which dates back to the Neanderthal period. The dead were buried in deep pits under the house floors, but the head was often severed, obviously as an object of special veneration. Collections of skulls were found at Jericho, just as they have been at the mesolithic site in the Ofnet cave in southern Germany. One collection was arranged in a circle, with the faces looking inwards; another was arranged in three groups of three.

Infant sacrifice was practised. Beneath a bath-like structure made of mud plaster there came to light, besides a complete infant burial, a whole collection of small skulls with the neck vertebrae, which had been violently severed from the bodies, still attached. Thus the grim tradition of such sacrifices, which survived with the Carthaginians until the downfall of their empire, dates back to the very beginnings of civilization on Canaanite soil.

As is shown by their skeletons, the founders of Jericho, who were capable of establishing a walled, town-like settlement at a time when Europe had barely taken the step from the Palaeolithic to the Mesolithic age, belonged in the main to the same primitive

Mediterranean race as did the Natufians. But among them there were some bigger, more robustly built men. These presumably belonged to the Cro-Magnon people who came perhaps from western Asia, appeared in Europe in the Palaeolithic Age with the progressive Aurignacian culture, and played a prominent part in the formation of the later European type.

Palestine, as these and other finds show, has from the remotest antiquity been an incomparable melting-pot. Perhaps the meeting of peoples of different origin and type may have provided the impulse which led to the development of the incredibly early town culture of the Tell es-Sultan. In later ages the course of history was often affected by such encounters.

When the builders of the round houses first settled at the spring of Jericho can at present be only conjectured. In recent years archaeologists have had at their disposal the Carbon-14 method of dating. This is based on the decay that sets in on the death of organic substances. As the rate at which radioactive matter is lost is constant, the date when process started can be calculated from the amount of radioactivity present in human, animal, or vegetable remains. This method, which is particularly applicable to carbonized matter, makes dating possible sometimes within a probable margin of error of only two hundred and fifty years either way, and has become invaluable in dealing with the long ages of prehistory.

A Carbon-14 test at a relatively late level among the numerous levels of pre-pottery culture at Jericho yielded a date of 6,800 B.C. Thus the beginnings of the settlement may date back to the eighth millennium B.C. But so far digging has taken place only at the periphery of Tell es-Sultan; its centre may yield other, and still older secrets.

The position of the town made it vital to any would-be invader of the fertile coastal strip, and the defences of the first Jericho show that its inhabitants, as in later biblical times when Joshua sent out men secretly to spy out the land, had to be always on the watch. What their end was, the reason why their walls, ditches and tower fell into disuse, to be succeeded later by the defence works of a different people, is still unexplained. A natural catastrophe, in which a number of their houses were destroyed by flood water and buried in mud, may perhaps have contributed to their downfall. After a long period of abandonment, the *Tell* was reoccupied by a people with a different, more highly developed culture, who left traces at many levels of occupation.

When Professor Garstang, who conducted excavations at the site from 1930 to 1936, first came on the ruins of their town, which was then assumed to be the earliest on the site, he uncovered buildings of such perfection that their great age seemed scarcely believable.

Work on the second Jericho was resumed in 1951 by Miss Kathleen Kenyon, and rounded off the picture of a domestic architecture which was in some respects not inferior to that of the present day.

The new settlers, or conquerors, who in Miss Kenyon's opinion established themselves on the site in the seventh millennium, lived in impressive rectangular houses with

rooms some of which were more than twenty-one feet long and twelve feet wide. The rooms were arranged round a courtyard which contained the hearth. The walls, for which stones were often used as foundations, were about eighteen inches thick and were of hand-made, sun-dried, cigar-shaped clay bricks. On the top of each brick was a herring-bone pattern of impressions made with the thumb to make the mud-mortar stick better. The floors were of clay – generally covered with a layer of fine plaster, which was often painted red or yellow and highly burnished. The same plaster was used as a wall covering – it curved straight up from the floor, avoiding corners and crevices. Thus the builders of the second Jericho anticipated one of the latest refinements of interior design. Broken lines and corners seem to have been abhorrent to the builders of the second Jericho, for the openings in the walls permitting access from one room to another had no sharp edges, but were rounded off. Some of the openings are so wide that it is hard to believe that they can have contained doors, but others had them, for there are sockets for door-posts. One room was floored with reeds set in clay, and elsewhere traces were found of round rush mats. The roofs were apparently made of reeds packed with mud. In one courtyard there were two small drains lined and capped with stones, and along the outer wall of a house there was a row of narrow, deep vats which may have been used to store rain water.

In spite of their highly developed building technique, the inhabitants of the second Jericho, like their predecessors, had no pottery. Their vessels, or those of them that were made of non-perishable substances, were made of the local soft limestone, which is easily worked and takes a fine polish. Their tools and weapons were chiefly of flint, but often of obsidian, a glass-like volcanic substance which does not occur in the area. Blades of all sizes, arrowheads, borers and scrapers, and finely serrated sickles, some of which were mounted, were present in quantities, and were very well made. Their numerous harvesting implements, as well as a peculiarly shaped quern, with a long block and a grinding hollow which always runs out to one edge of the block and a seat for the operator at the other end, point to a flourishing agriculture. The oval grinding stones are of a very hard material and very regular shape. Marble-smooth polishing stones were found in all sizes, but, strangely enough, neither axes nor picks which might have been used for felling trees or clearing the ground. This makes the more surprising the finds of small greenstone objects which look like miniature axes and could be regarded as the predecessors of the axe amulets of a later age frequently found in the Mediterranean area. Digging sticks such as are still used by primitive peoples may have been used for working the soil, but how the trees used to make the door-posts, for instance, were felled remains mysterious.

Small stone disks and heavier perforated stones may have been spindle-whorls and loom-weights. Malachite beads, among other things, were used for ornaments. Various finds point to an active religious life. Female clay figures with their hands raised to their breast resemble idols of the mother goddess which were later so widely disseminated in the Near East. In a small room, which suggested a private chapel, there was a niche

with a stone pedestal. Near it lay a tallish pillar rising to an oval point. The pillar had obviously stood on the pedestal; it was in fact a menhir, of the kind erected and venerated by the Mediterranean and western European peoples in the third and second millennia.

One particularly big building contained a central chamber more than eighteen feet long and twelve feet wide, with burnished floor and walls. At both ends were a number of semi-circular niches which were once, perhaps, covered by half cupolas. A small basin with traces of burning all round pointed to sacrificial rites having taken place here. The place was probably a shrine, or a public building used for definite ceremonies.

Professor Garstang also found in 1935 a small rectangular shrine with a portico that was originally borne on six wooden pillars, an ante-chamber, and a principal chamber in which clay figurines of domestic animals were found.

The builders of the second Jericho, like their predecessors, buried the dead under the floors of their houses; and they too, as was discovered in 1953, had a cult of skulls, but of a special kind.

Miss Kenyon first found a single skull, carefully placed in the corner of a room under the floor. One of the most remarkable finds of the Jericho excavations followed. Seven skulls were found which were covered from the temples downwards with plaster and delicately moulded in the form of human features. The ruddy, flesh colouring, which in one case was still well preserved, and eyes made of a pair of shells with a vertical slit between – several of them had eyes of cowrie shell – gave them an astonishingly life-like expression. The best-preserved head, with the long, slit eyelids under the high, gently arching brows, the fine cheek-line, and the remarkably long skull in the shape that nature left it, creates the impression of being a naturalistic portrait, and is reminiscent of early Egyptian sculpture (Plates 1, 2).

The lower jaw of the other skulls is missing, and the modellers succeeded only imperfectly in representing it; these skulls are therefore cruder in appearance. But they create the impression of having been modelled with the greatest care, and every effort seems to have been made to imitate definite features. So the heads seem more likely to have been those of venerated ancestors than head-hunters' trophies. Many skeletons at the various levels of the second Jericho culture were found to have buried without heads. A shrine may yet be discovered at which all these missing skulls were collected for cult purposes.

The moulding of these skulls, the attempt to resurrect and give further life to the most important part of the body, may perhaps have been the beginning of the great tradition of portraiture of the dead which later spread through the Mediterranean world from Egypt to Etruria and finally, by way of the Etruscans and the Romans, became a principal theme of European sculpture.

With these Jericho skulls actual portraits disengage themselves for the first time from the anonymous welter of prehistoric humanity and gaze at us across the centuries; faces resembling our own, expressing a determination to be individuals; masters of their



1 Delicate, life-like features moulded in plaster over a human skull.  
From Jericho, and more than 8,000 years old



2 The skull moulded over with plaster of plate 1, in profile

own fate, who would no longer submit helplessly to the universal law of death. Henceforward this rebellion of the living was to continue; the dead were to become ever more real and more important to them.

The plaster-floor people also built a wall, using blocks of stone sometimes weighing tons from the beds of the neighbouring mountain streams. The wall must have been at least fifteen feet high, and was again reinforced on the inside by an interior fill. It has not yet been established whether the wall encircled the whole town which, with an area of about ten acres, was bigger than all the later towns built on this hill and may have had up to three thousand inhabitants. After a collapse a new wall was built, and when this in turn collapsed yet another was built about seven yards in front of it.

The second town on the *Tell* must have survived for several centuries, as is shown by the total of nineteen distinct levels that can be counted at one place. A Carbon-14 test for the eighth level from the bottom gave the date of 6,250 B.C. But by then the plaster-floor culture had been in existence for a long time.

It is not yet known whether the town decayed gradually, whether the hill was abandoned for some reason or other, or whether it fell to nomadic invaders who destroyed it. In any case a new and in many ways more primitive people appeared and settled on the ruins. Over the remains of the well-built, roomy and comfortable houses belonging to a culture that appeared out of the unknown and vanished into it again, a big village of tent-dwellers apparently arose. Only in one respect were the newcomers superior to their predecessors; they made pottery. Quantities of two kinds of hand-made ware indicated a long period of settlement. One kind was exceedingly coarse and crude. The clay was poorly levigated or cleaned, considerable quantities of top straw were added to bind it, and it was ill fired. It was characteristically finished by smoothing with a bunch of grass. The other type, however, had a fine creamy covering with simple geometrical patterns such as diamonds or triangles painted on it in red. A fine burnish was applied to the red portions, while the underlying cream was left matt. The basic shape of the two classes of pottery is the same, but the second is finer and has much thinner walls. This pottery may perhaps have originated in southern Palestine where, however, only one single similar potsherd has been found at Tell Duweir. But the newcomers certainly brought their pottery with them.

They, too, tilled the soil and bred cattle. Their implements, particularly their sickles with teeth of inset flint, were much cruder than those of their predecessors, and they left behind fewer relics of their occupation. They do not seem to have lived in houses or to have built defences, and we have no evidence of their burial practices and no idea what they looked like. But one interesting find, unique in the prehistory of Palestine, definitely dates from their period; this is three grotesque life-size clay figures, each representing a triad of man, woman, and child. Only the man's head was recovered intact. The head, like the bodies, is very flat; in profile it is only a disk. The features are plastically rendered, but are not nearly so naturalistic as the faces of the modelled skulls from the second town. Shells were used for the eyes, which are excessively big



3 Pottery head of idol from late neolithic Jericho

and are the dominant feature. The nose is short and the mouth only a slit; the picture is completed by stylised beard and hair in brown paint. The head is covered by a cylindrical cap, similar to that worn thousands of years later by Carthaginian priests. Perhaps these solemn and slightly mocking features are those of a forgotten god who with his wife and child were venerated as a divine triad. Some unique disk-shaped idols representing such triads which were of frequent occurrence at Kültepe in Anatolia at the beginning of the second millennium B.C. point to the presence of such a cult in the Near East in later ages (Fig. 3).

With the next inhabitants of the *Tell* of Jericho we are confronted with a higher culture. They built houses of hand-made bun-shaped mud bricks, and their pottery is harder, better fired, and less primitive in shape, with well made handles and so called bow rims. It often has a matt red slip, and on a band left in reserve, or covered with a cream slip, a herring-bone pattern is incised. This pottery is important, as it establishes a link with a previously discovered Palestinian neolithic culture which takes its name from excavations in the Yarmuk valley at the southern end of the Sea of Galilee. This brings Jericho into the general picture of neolithic cultures in the Fertile Crescent; between the fifth millennium B.C. and the end of the fourth. These gradually developed from modest village into urban cultures.

The second pottery-making neolithic culture must have ended in the fourth millennium. A period of desolation apparently ensued at Tell es-Sultan, while the chalcolithic

Ghassulian culture developed and flourished not far away at the mouth of the Jordan. Not till about 3,200 B.C. did new settlers appear. They left few traces at ground-level, but buried their dead under the sloping hillside in graves of the type that had become common in Palestine and Syria in the latter part of the fourth millennium. These consisted of a round vertical shaft up to about fifteen feet deep with a burial chamber at the base, entrance to which was blocked by a stone or slab. In one of these graves one hundred and thirteen skulls were found arranged round a heap of ashes and charred bones. Above the skulls a large number of pottery vessels had been placed. Skeletons were obviously burnt here after the flesh had decayed and, in accordance with ancient custom, only the skulls were preserved. Before the final burial the bodies must have been deposited elsewhere while the flesh decayed. The skulls bear traces of scorching which show that they must have been put in place in advance of the burning ceremony; the intention seems to have been that the dead should be present at the latter. When it was over, pottery and other objects were placed in the grave, which was then filled up and closed. The remarkable feature of this grave is the simultaneous burial of such a large number of persons. In other tombs burials dating from various periods were found.

During the long period of the Bronze Age the history of Jericho was similar to that of other towns of the Holy Land continually threatened by invasion. If the Bible had not made Jericho immortal, it would long since have been forgotten. With its capture by the Israelites its importance came to an end. After the sixth century B.C. the hill was practically abandoned. Winter storm water gradually washed away the occupation levels of the past 1500 years, and with them went nearly all the late Bronze Age relics which might have proved the correctness of the Old Testament story of how the walls collapsed at the sound of the Israelite trumpets. The destroyed walls found by Professor Garstang, which were regarded at the time as those of biblical Jericho, have subsequently been attributed to the early Bronze Age. *i. e.*, long before the Israelite assault.

Thus, strange to relate, we have much less evidence about the historical period of Jericho than we have about the prehistoric. Fascinating as the myth of Atlantis, but much more plausible, is the secret of a happy age in which the Jordan Valley may have been the scene of a flourishing civilization which anticipated much that humanity had to struggle to achieve all over again thousands of years later.

The walled town built in legendary antiquity near the spring at the foot of the Mountains of Judaea cannot have been the only one of its kind. There must have been other, similar centres of civilized urban life dependent on a planned agricultural economy. The importation into Jericho of obsidian, turquoise, and cowrie shells shows that extensive trade connections must already have existed. Moreover, the builders of the plaster-floor houses appear on the scene already equipped with an advanced culture which must have developed elsewhere. Where this early civilization developed, whether it included wider areas, what its origins were, remain mysterious. Perhaps excavations at other, still unexamined *tells* of the Jordan Valley will one day supply the answer.

It is possible that in the first third of the last millennium B.C., Palestine and Syria, like North Africa and at any rate a part of the Arabian peninsula, had a higher rainfall than in later times. Traces of sizeable watercourses in areas which are now arid indicate that conditions for settlement were better in the past; they may even have been better than in the Nile Valley or in Mesopotamia, where gigantic swamps presumably prevailed when the climate was wetter. When the soil is adequately watered it still bears rich crops, and in about 6,000 B.C. the Jordan area may have been green and well-wooded, amply supplied with water, game and self-sown wheat; a friendly land in which man was able earlier than elsewhere to rest from his countless thousands of years of wandering. Favourable conditions may have helped him to develop his creative capacities and to evolve ways of life which came later to other areas. But premature progress is always dangerous. The civilized builders of the second Jericho, whose refinement is very evident from the modelled skulls, may have lost the capacity to adapt themselves to the harder conditions imposed by a change of climate, or the increasing desiccation of wide areas may have led to persistent assaults by wild nomad hordes against which even the strongest defences could not hold out indefinitely. New, more primitive, but tougher peoples may have appeared on the scene; peoples who were unable to continue the work of their cultivated predecessors but could only destroy it, and had to begin all over again in an impoverished environment.

Thus there may have perished an ancient human culture which was not confined to the Jordan but also existed at other places still unknown to us. Faint echoes of it may have survived in the memory of later generations, concealed within the legend of the golden age. Many ancient myths that used to be regarded as phantasies have in recent years been shown to contain facts firmly rooted in popular memory.

True, no new hypothesis about the age of our own civilization can be based on the much discussed finds in the forty-five-foot-deep dwelling levels of the two pre-pottery Jericho cultures. But perhaps they show the way that may lead to yet unsuspected discoveries and advances of knowledge.

### *Holy Stones*

So many prehistoric remains have been found in the Holy Land that it is coming increasingly to be regarded as one of the seminal areas of civilization; and perhaps the numerous stone built tombs and monuments to be found there have a bearing, extending beyond its own confines, on the controversial question of the origin of megalithic and cyclopean buildings and the physical and spiritual impulses which lay behind them.

Tombs of great crude slabs and stone blocks have apparently existed in certain areas

of Palestine since neolithic times, and belief in the manifestation of supernatural forces in stones may perhaps have arisen there earlier than elsewhere. The three monoliths of the tomb of Eynan apparently had ritual significance, and the conical pillar found in a niche of a house in pre-pottery Jericho must have been an object of worship.

Worship of stone idols was still widespread among the people of Canaan in historical times, and presented a problem to the Jewish monotheists. The "masseba" of the Old Testament was in fact a menhir. The ancient Canaanites identified such sacred stones with a god, but in the Bible they have been transformed into signs of God's presence or memorials of special events; "witness stones". Thus the ancient Israelites carried out a process exactly parallel to that which took place many centuries later when pagan megaliths were Christianized in the Middle Ages. The famous Gilgal of the Bible was certainly a very ancient sacred stone circle between Jericho and the mouth of the Jordan taken over as a place of worship by Joshua. The traditions of the site were adapted, and Joshua was now said to have caused twelve stones symbolizing the twelve tribes of Israel to be erected there to commemorate the miraculous crossing of the Jordan.

The story of Jacob's ladder is also revealing. It will be recalled that Jacob went to sleep on a stone; after awakening he knew that "the Lord had been in this place", and he erected the stone, anointed it with oil, and called it Bethel, or the House of God. This legend plainly points to the cult of the ancient Canaanite god El-hin, who was also called Beth-El and was worshipped in the form of a menhir.

The Mosaic monotheists had vigorously to combat the deeply-rooted worship of stone idols. "Ye shall make you no idols or graven images, neither rear you up a standing image (masseba), neither shall ye set up any image of stone (maskit) in your land, to bow down unto it" (Leviticus XXVI, 1); and Moses received from God the order to destroy the stone idols of Canaan.

In spite of the hostility of the prophets to the archaic veneration of stones, isolated menhirs and so-called "alignments" still survive in large numbers in Israel and Jordan, as well as circles (Gilgal) and squares of tall standing stones. The areas that they enclose measure from a few to hundreds of yards across. They are noticeably frequent in the area of megalithic burial places.

Some impressive remains survive near the spring of Ain es-Zerka in east Jordan, the classical site of megalithic culture in Palestine. On a rocky excrescence in the middle of a natural terrace surrounded by mounds which contain some hundred and fifty large stone tombs are three menhirs, each ten feet high, standing in a small stone circle, visible from afar. The edge of the terrace was once also surrounded by standing stones, and at its foot a circle of menhirs three hundred yards in diameter still survives.

The Beduin call this site "Mother of Olives", though no olives are now to be found anywhere in the neighbourhood, and the stones were known as El Mreirat, which can mean either "the anointed (with blood or oil)" or "grave monument". It is hardly possible to doubt their connection with the surrounding burial site. The dead of many generations seem to have been buried here within sight of the sacred monument.

Whether the three standing stones were believed to embody the great mother of life and queen of death, or some other god, or the dead themselves, remains an open question. But the remarkable name of the place may perhaps be a pointer to the Great Mother who was worshipped in the Near East from very ancient times in the form of a conical stone. The Phoenician "Queen of Byblos" was represented in the same fashion. The prophet Jeremiah, preaching against the primitive religion of the Canaanites, spoke of them as "saying to a stock, thou art my father; and to a stone, thou hast brought me forth" – another reference to the worship of a mother goddess in the form of a pillar of stone. At the time of the last Punic War the famous non-representational image of the Phrygian Great Mother Cybele, the black stone of Pessinus, a meteorite like the *ka'aba* at Mecca, was brought to Rome.

In a field near the necropolis of El Mreirat is the remarkable Hagar el-Mansub, a stone about seven feet high and measuring about five feet at the base. Its front and sides are carefully trimmed and – the most striking feature – its top is rounded in the shape of a head, separated from the "rump" by a broad deep groove; on its front and the back are incisions or hollows of the kind that often appear on the slabs covering megalithic tombs. This monument has been interpreted as a phallic symbol, though the impression it creates is much more that of a rudimentary human figure. Particular interest attaches to it in the light of recent discoveries of statue menhirs in Corsica.

To the east of the hill of the "Mother of Olives" more rows of stones, many of them of a mans height, form a square with sides nearly five hundred yards long. The whole area of Ain es-Zerka was once a sacred place dedicated to the dead and to the gods.

Such silent witnesses of a vanished religion, which now lie under the bright light of the torrid desert sun, recall other awe-inspiring prehistoric monuments thousands of miles away in a very different climate – long avenues of standing stones to be seen in the *landes* of Brittany and the green fields of England. Do all these monuments have the same meaning? Were they the object of the same worship and the same ritual? Connections between them are conceivable if the standing stones in the Holy Land are old enough to have been the predecessors of their counterparts in the west. So far, however, it has been possible to date only a few of them with any certainty. Their association with megalithic burial places points to an early date. At El Mreirat and Hagar el-Mansub late chalcolithic pottery has been found which points to a date in the second half of the fourth millennium B.C.

The custom of setting up alignments seems to have continued in Palestine until the last phase of the early Bronze Age, which lasted from 2,300 to 2,000 B.C. A row of menhirs in front of the altar of a shrine excavated at Gezer dates from this period, as well as a number of alignments erected near settlements. Even these relatively late monuments antedate those in the west by centuries.

More surprising than the resemblances between Palestinian and ancient European sacred sites is the evident relationship between megalithic and Cyclopean buildings in Israel and Jordan and those of the Mediterranean area and western Europe.

## *Permanent Houses of the Dead*

The great megalithic burial places of Palestine lie east and west of the upper reaches of the Jordan in the mountainous areas round the Sea of Galilee and Lake Huleh. Nomadic and pastoral peoples have since time immemorial traversed and settled in this area which, with its rock-strewn plateaux, wild ravines, and lonely treeless plains, is particularly suitable for grazing. The fact that they did settle here is indicated by the remains of stone villages and Cyclopean defences on hilltops, as well as extensive cemeteries near their settlements and along the ancient tracks that they followed.

The prehistoric death houses of Hirbet Keraziye lie in an impassable area strewn with basalt rocks on the eastern slope of the Upper Galilean plateau high above the north-west shore of the Sea of Galilee. Many still lie buried up to the roof in longish cairns of dark stone blocks. These cairns were carefully constructed, and can be up to forty-five feet long, more than twenty-four feet wide, and nine feet high. The stone chambers are not always in the middle; sometimes there are two in the same cairn.

Today, robbed of their protective covering by time and weather and often ransacked by shepherds and treasure-hunters, they generally look like crude stone tables, consisting of a single block three feet high supported by from three to five upright stones which are tilted slightly inwards. Gaps in the walls were filled in with stones and clay and the entrance closed with blocks or slabs. Simple square or round structures of this kind are generally called dolmens, a word of Breton origin. This is the commonest form of stone tomb in ancient Palestine. Consisting as it does of a few big, untrimmed or only slightly trimmed slabs and blocks, it is also characteristically megalithic.

The necropolis of Hirbet Keraziye contains another typical form of megalithic house of the dead, namely the passage grave. In this there is an ante-chamber to the burial chamber. This is usually only an extension of the latter, but is lower and covered with smaller slabs, and is thus identifiable as a passage. When the passage narrows, the result is a trapezoid structure.

The dolmens of the Jordan area seldom cover an area of more than two or three square yards, though the passage graves sometimes extend over from six to eight square yards. Several courses of stones are often laid to form the walls. Sometimes the stones overlap inwards to form a corbelled vault of the kind that frequently occurs in the prehistoric structures of the near East and the Mediterranean area and was adopted into the sepulchral architecture of Atlantic Europe.

Dry stone walls consisting of several courses of crude blocks, are classified, when the latter are very big, as Cyclopean, not megalithic. The two are related, but are perhaps not of the same origin. Cyclopean walls may have been built in the first place for defensive rather than religious purposes, and probably came to be used for sepulchral purposes only later.

An important aspect of sepulchral architecture is often the orientation of the tombs,

from which some of the religious ideas behind them may sometimes be deduced. Laying out the dead in an east-west direction seems to have been important from the Palaeolithic onwards. In a kind of family tomb in which six persons were buried under an overhanging rock at La Ferrassie in the Dordogne all the bodies except one were laid out in this way. In many ancient civilizations – the Egyptian for example – the realm of the dead was connected with the setting sun; and man's hope of resurrection may at a very early stage have been connected with the sun's rising in the east.

The dolmens and passage graves of Palestine were often but not invariably laid out in a roughly east-west direction in so far as the site permitted, and the bodies were then always laid in the western part of the tomb.

The original stone structures of the necropolis of Hirbet Keraziye over the Sea of Galilee were so built that the first rays of the morning sun should strike them. The builders probably intended that the dead should have the consolation of the sunrise as well as a fine panorama. The view from this spot takes in the dark blue expanse of the water below, the valley down which the Jordan descends from Lake Hule, and the 9,000 ft. peak of Mount Hermon. Beyond the lake the volcanic plateau of Cholan rises to more than 3,000 feet. There are still thousands of dolmens in the south of the plateau and along its western edge.

The greater part of this plateau, with its numerous springs and sparse but fertile soil chaotically interspersed between basalt rocks is very definitely a grazing area, with grass and water for nomads' cattle even in the hottest season. At one time its wealth of water seems to have been important to the dead as well as to the living; its megalithic cemeteries mostly lie near streams or springs. Water apparently played a part in the ritual devoted to the dead. The idea that the latter suffer from thirst, which must be assuaged by offerings of water from the living, is very ancient in the Near East.

Some of the Cholan dolmens were carefully fashioned out of relatively thin and regular slabs. The chambers are rectangular, trapezoid, or polygonal; they are often paved and covered with a single flat slab which sometimes considerably overhangs the walls. Sometimes portholes were made in the front of the tomb. Some of the dolmens at El Metaba have two chambers with a hole in the connecting wall. In some graves a groove apparently indicates that they were divided horizontally by the insertion of a slab. Carved in many roof stones are the mysterious holes and cavities which occur in burial places in western Europe as early as the palaeolithic period. Broad, deep grooves also occur.

Most of the megalithic tombs in Israel and Jordan were originally covered by mounds of earth and stone. In most cases only the ruins of the mounds survive; they were originally built in several layers, paved and surrounded by stones; many were surrounded by a circle of stones sometimes more than two feet high, as if to form a sacred enclosure.

The centres of megalithic culture in Palestine clearly lay in the north and east of the country, but megalithic monuments to the dead also occur in other areas. North of Jerusalem there are the remarkable Cyclopean structures known as the Tombs of the

Children of Israel. The biggest of these is one hundred and sixty-two feet long, five feet high and six feet wide, and its interior is filled with rubble and earth. In one of these structures on which little work has yet been done, a kind of dolmen has been found. There are semi-circular niches in the outside walls of others. Most probably they were used for burials; their name points to their having been used for this purpose.

Near some Cyclopean defences known as the Rugm el-Melful in the neighbourhood of Amman there is an imposing monument, apparently sepulchral in character, with a wall thirty-six feet long and thirty feet wide. The entrance on the eastern side leads to four narrow cells roofed with slabs.

The idea of giving a definite shape to the protective pile of stones over the burial place appears even more plainly in the Tombs of the Children of Israel than in the necropolis of Hirbet Keraziye or in the stepped tumuli of the Cholan plateau. In the last analysis the idea is the same as that behind the highly-developed architecture of the Egyptian pyramids, though the execution is much more primitive.

Similar rectangular structures exist both north and south of Jerusalem. The chambers are often as narrow as corridors. In one instance two chambers are separated by a partition wall. In every case the roof is megalithic.

A special type of prehistoric stone tomb occurs in the Sinai Peninsula. These are *nawamis*; small conical burial towers, generally round or oval but sometimes rectangular, measuring some six to nine feet across and sometimes reaching nine feet in height. The walls, which may be up to three feet thick, are built of medium sized stones, and the roof is a beehive dome of overhanging stones laid in circles. Corbelled domes of this kind, which, unlike real domes, vaults or arches, are locked not by a keystone, but by the slab laid on top of them, later became highly important in the sepulchral monuments of the fourth to the second millennium B. C. They developed into real domes in the princely *tholos* tombs in Crete, and later at Mycenae in particular; and in Spain, Ireland and the far north, the domed tomb, generally with a megalithic approach, developed into the mausoleum of the ruling clan. Thus this architectural form, which apparently originated with the round clay brick and stone structures of the Near East, also travelled from east to west. Its adoption into the sacred architecture of the megalithic cultures shows the synthesis which took place then, not only of religious beliefs, but also of architectural ideas of various origins.

Besides the many big sepulchral monuments in the prehistoric burial places of Palestine there are many smaller graves shaped like miniature dolmens – longish stone boxes (or “cists”) either on or below the surface – and half-dolmens, in which the top slab lies slanting with one side resting on the ground. Forms intermediate between rock-cut tombs and dolmens also occur; in these the artificial cave has a megalithic forecourt.

Whether the piles of stones also indicate burials is uncertain. The erection of a cairn over a body is an ancient custom among the Beduin of the Near East and North Africa, and is one of their commonest burial practices to the present day.

The stone cists and other, simpler graves, may have been for the common people while

the dolmens and other bigger and more permanent mausoleums were for members of leading families, or were perhaps erected only for outstanding personalities.

In prehistoric Palestine the abundance, variety and size of the megalithic tombs, monuments and cult sites shows the strength, importance, and certainly also the long duration, of the cult of the dead with which they were associated. The early settlers of the country, still at a primitive stage of magical and mythical thought, must have clung to this religion with its promise of eternal life as faithfully as the Israelites later clung to the monotheism which ousted the old Canaanite cults. But, while the Jewish religion was confined to a single people, the religious beliefs associated with the oldest Near Eastern cult of the dead, like Christianity later, had an extraordinary power of expansion.

### *Clue from Ghassul*

The question of the age of the various megalithic structures of the Holy Land has so far not been settled; the answer, if we knew it, would be of the greatest interest to the history of the development of such structures in general.

Most of these prehistoric monuments have been discovered and described in the course of the past one hundred and thirty years, but the systematic study of them is still in its infancy. The isolated dolmens, most of which which have long since been opened up and ransacked, yield practically nothing, and only a few intact tombs have so far been examined. The absence of pottery from some of them certainly does not prove that they date from pre-pottery times. At other sites chalcolithic and even early and middle Bronze Age objects came to light. This at any rate shows that they were still in use in those times.

Copper implements, twisted copper wire, and on one occasion a carnelian bead of the kind that occurs in predynastic Egypt, have been found in *nawamis*, as well as shell ornaments and flint arrowheads. This shows the great age of these burial towers in the Sinai area, whose rich copper deposits were exploited by the Egyptians as early as the fourth millennium.

Only in a single instance has it been possible to date stone cists and dolmens with relatively accuracy: at the necropolis of El Adeimah, near the northern shore of the Dead Sea. This extensive burial-place contains more than a hundred big dolmens, many stone cists, standing stones and remnants of cyclopean walls. In 1932 it was examined and partly excavated by M. Stekelis, who uncovered 168 stone cists, of which sixteen lay intact under round or oval mounds. These mounds were only about three feet high, but were carefully constructed of earth and gravel, and the base of each was surrounded

by stones; sometimes small walls radiating outwards formed a trapezoid forecourt. The structures were crowned by concentric circles of big pebbles (on one occasion there was only one circle) in the middle of which stood a small stone block. The cairns measured from six to eighteen feet across. Inside them were rectangular stone cists from eighteen inches to four and a half feet in length. They were made of flat stones with a small covering slab. The "built sarcophagi" contained the remains of crouching bodies and were divided into compartments by walls. As at Eynan, there were a number of hearths both inside and outside the tumuli.

Over the cists there was a quantity of obviously deliberately broken pottery. This was of two kinds. One kind consisted of badly levigated and fired clay: this was hand-made, brown in colour, and decorated with fingernail impressions. Among examples of this ware were round pots, footbaths and biconical forms. Besides these crude products there were others, shaped on the wheel, made of far better levigated clay, well fired and coloured red. Flat-bottomed pots and bowls with scratched or finger-impressed decoration were among this ware.

The remains of the hand-made pots, which were perhaps made only for funeral use, lay directly on the stone cists, but the other fragments, mixed with fan-shaped scrapers which were generally broken too, occurred at higher levels. It looked as if these and the fine pottery had been broken at a ceremony subsequent to the original interment, at which earth and stones were heaped over the grave and these objects were symbolically given to the departed for his own.

Thick layers of wood ash in the hearths inside the tumuli indicated that burnt offerings, perhaps extending over considerable periods, were made to the dead before both cists and hearths were covered in.

Near the burial mound a remarkable variation on Gilgal was found, namely a circle about ninety feet in diameter consisting of stone blocks about two feet high; this was developed into a kind of star-shaped pattern by the addition of smaller stones outside the circle. In its present, much damaged state, it is reminiscent of childish drawings of the sun as a circle surrounded by triangular rays. Potsherds show that this place of worship was contemporaneous with the burial place, and therefore may well have belonged to it.

Further inland, near a hill, are some big dolmens. In the same area more stone cists were found, with pottery similar to that of the burial place below. Stekelis concluded that the whole area was one huge cemetery. He suggested that, for lack of the necessary stone blocks on the shore of the Dead Sea, the builders had contented themselves with making stone cists there, and had erected dolmens only where the necessary material was at hand.

The cists have been regarded as the primary form from which both dolmens and passage graves developed, but all three types frequently occur contemporaneously, and cists often appear very late.

The El Adeimah cemetery must have belonged to the important neighbouring settle-

ment of Teleilath el-Ghassul, the discovery of which was one of the most important events in the eventful history of Palestinian archaeology. It brought to light a highly developed and unique culture which has an important bearing on the chalcolithic civilization of central and norther Palestine.

The people who apparently settled on the site near the mouth of the Jordan in the first half of the fourth millennium B. C., near where it runs into the Dead Sea, lived in well built clay brick houses, which sometimes had foundations of natural stones and timber roofs. The walls of the living rooms were carefully plastered and often painted with pictures in many colours.

The influence of the wonderful efflorescence of pottery and painting of Mesopotamia in the fourth and third millennia – a similar level was not reached again until two thousand years later in the painted earthenware vessels found in Crete – was obviously felt in Palestine. The Ghassulian ware cannot be compared to the thin-walled ware of flower-like, delicate shape recovered from neolithic Susa, but the frescoes reach the level of the elegant, dark- coloured patterns, symbols, and attractive figures on the pottery of Susa and Tell Halaf.

The most famous wall painting at Ghassul is of a star, painted in several colours, about six feet in diameter and with eight long rays. It is filled in with an interconnected pattern of wavy lines, circles and stars, apparently symbolical motifs which may perhaps conceal a religious conception of the universe at that early date. The star, surrounded by unintelligible symbols and small fabulous beasts, dominates the room. That this painting had a magic-religious significance can hardly be doubted. The mystic star with eight rays may have been the emblem of a god. Such a star stood for "god" in the most ancient Sumerian hieroglyphic script, and in historical times was the symbol of the oriental goddess of love, Astarte. Another painting at Ghassul is eighteen feet in width and has an unmistakable radiant pattern. This seems to have served as background for an important personage facing to the right, but all that is visible of him and six other individuals, who are facing to the left – that is, towards him – are the feet in embroidered shoes. Two pairs rest on low footstools of the kind that appear in paintings of oriental potentates in historical times. This fresco must have depicted an impressive ceremonial scene and been the product of a surprisingly refined civilization.

Numerous other fragments of fresco give an idea of the wealth of colourful pictures which decorated the walls of Ghassul. The remnants of another big picture shows demons and terrifying masks, all highly stylised, but among them is a black bird painted in a realistic and vivid fashion.

The pottery of Ghassul is exactly similar to that of the necropolis of El Adeimah. As the settlement on the Dead Sea was destroyed by fire not much later than 3,400 B. C., the stone cists and perhaps also the dolmens in the cemetery can be dated with some certainty at about the middle of the fourth millennium. Some may be older, as the oldest levels at Ghassul, which may throw light on the age of the original settlement, have not yet been closely examined.

Whether the Ghassulian culture, with its evidently highly developed funerary practices, exercised any important influence on the builders of the megalithic tombs in the Jordan area is a very open question. In spite of many correspondences with other prehistoric cultures in Palestine, the megalithic culture there always preserves a distinct individuality.

Recent work shows that, after a period which seems retrograde in the light of the latest finds at Jericho, Palestine in the latter half of the fourth millennium again possessed a number of great and very independent centres of civilization.

Once more there were well built settlements; agriculture and stockbreeding were highly developed; water supply systems were expertly provided, and drains were dug out of the rock; various industries flourished; and steady progress was made in the winning and working of copper.

In central and southern Palestine, excavations begun in 1952 at Tell Abu Matar near Beersheba have disclosed an extensive town of cave dwellings with an interesting culture which shows Ghassulian influence only in its late stage, and suggests rather connections with Egypt. The uniqueness of the finds at Beersheba has presented archaeologists with a number of puzzles, of which perhaps the most fascinating is that of the pebbles with red symbols painted on them which obviously served some religious purpose. They bear a striking resemblance to the famous painted pebbles of a mesolithic western European hunting and fishing culture known as the Azilian after the principal site at which they were found.

At all events, the Palestine of the fourth millennium presents us with a colourful mosaic of various elements of civilization, and the ways of life and traditions of many different peoples mingled in that eternal transit area. What part was played by the megalithic people when they appeared on the scene, and who they were can be only conjectured. But Israel, and particularly Jordan, offers a number of clues to the course of developments and the kind of people they were.

### *Herdsmen or Peasants?*

The number of sickles found at the townlike settlement of Teleilath el Ghassul shows that its inhabitants made their living chiefly as tillers of the soil. The builders of the megalithic and Cyclopean structures in Palestine preferred higher regions, adapted to a pastoral economy. They must have been herdsmen, and presumably they were nomadic tribesmen of the kind that have wandered through the Arabian Peninsula since earliest times and still do so at the present day. Periodic irruptions into richer country by warlike hordes of such nomads have since prehistoric times been the terror of the more civilized,

sedentary settlers of the Near East and Egypt. But these incursions did not always lead only to downfall and destruction; sometimes they involved an influx of new forces and impulses, out of which there arose new ethnographical and cultural patterns.

The first halting place of the later bearers of megalithic culture on their way to the west must have been that mountainous frontier zone between fertile land and desert, Transjordan; at any rate that is where the great majority of dolmen burial places, standing stones associated with cults, and ruins of villages often with Cyclopean defence works are situated. Later the dolmen people also settled on the other side of the Jordan, but apparently they never fully established themselves in the fertile coastal plains; their real home remained the pastoral highlands. Their way of life and style of building differed so greatly from those of the people of Ghassul that it is hard to believe that they can have been the same. The square, timber-roofed, brick houses of the settlers at the mouth of the Jordan, and their carefully plastered and finely painted walls point to connections with the Mesopotamian area and an orderly, stable, urban existence, while the small stone village dwellings of the dolmen builders, generally on hills or eminences, were primitive. The people who used them are more likely to have been semi-nomads, which is what herdsmen characteristically are, than sedentary tillers of the soil. The crude but strong defences of many of the villages are those of a warlike people.

As there is so little resemblance between Ghassul and the ruins of the villages that lie near the dolmen burial places, the necropolis of El Adeimah may perhaps be regarded as having been a meeting-place of different peoples who practised similar burial rites, but otherwise belonged to different worlds. Only a fraction of the necropolis, which covers an area of 6,000 acres, has been excavated, but it is possible that within it lie the remains of settlements associated with the dolmens while the stone cists in the tumuli represent a typically Ghassulian type of burial.

The smallness of Palestine must have meant that religious beliefs and rituals tended to spread throughout the country. Nevertheless individual tribes and centres of civilization seem to a great extent to have preserved their individuality. Much of the country is split up by mountains, and the resulting isolation may greatly have assisted this.

From the pre-pottery phase at Jericho onwards there were always both brick and stone buildings in Israel and Jordan, perhaps as a consequence of the variety of their inhabitants. The first wall of Jericho, built as it was of great blocks, was Cyclopean; and excavations in 1937 and 1938 in the Wadi Dhobai, south-east of Amman, revealed an industry similar to that of the oldest stage at Jericho, as well as circular megalithic buildings made of upright limestone slabs.

Very ancient megalithic structures have also been found beyond the borders of the Holy Land. Excavations by Professor Garstang at Mersin, an early neolithic settlement in the corner where the coastline of Syria meets that of Asia Minor, brought to light walls made of huge blocks which may have been built as early as the fifth millennium. The coastal plain of Cilicia seems to have been a transit area of prehistoric peoples and, like Palestine, it seems to have had very early centres of civilization.

As we have seen, megalithic and Cyclopean building preceded pottery in the Near East. The builders are more likely to have come from the rocky areas at the edge of the great deserts of Arabia and North Africa than from Mesopotamia, which is poor in stone, or from the apparently partially wooded plateaux of Persia, both areas whose natural characteristics favoured building in brick or timber. It was no accident that the first country to attain consummate skill in stone-working and stone architecture was Egypt, which is almost treeless.

The tribes who settled in prehistoric times in the mountainous areas of Jordan and built megalithic structures there may have been not so very different from the migrants from western Asia who appeared on the banks of the Nile long before the first Pharaohs and then mingled with light-skinned Libyans and more southern peoples to form the later Egyptian people. They were apparently semi-nomads, who spent a great part of the year away from their villages, continually seeking out new pastures with their livestock, which consisted chiefly of sheep and goats. But horned cattle must have been domesticated fairly early too, or the bull would not have become the emblem of the ancient Canaanite god Hadad. In the course of time, agriculture may have supplemented stock-keeping and led to a sedentary form of life and thus to the building of permanent villages.

Semi-nomads do not develop a high level of domestic building. Round houses occur chiefly in Transjordan, and their dry stone walls, of which now only the ruins remain, may have been surmounted by a beehive dome or a pointed brushwood roof. Small round buildings with corbelled domes are still used as shepherds' huts in many places in the Mediterranean area and western Europe, particularly in areas which were once sites of megalithic culture; in Apulia such structures are still lived in.

For the settlers in the always imperilled frontier areas of Jordan the defence of their herds and their families was more important than a comfortable home. So they devised the Cyclopean architecture of walls, fortresses, and watch-towers which have often survived the millennia till the present day.

The impressive and well preserved walls of Kurum Hattin above the west bank of the Sea of Galilee, which enclose an area of more than forty thousand square yards within a former crater, may have been built to keep out plundering nomads who grazed their flocks in summer on the opposite plateau of Cholan. It also lay on an important north-south highway which in historical times connected Damascus with Egypt. The last bloody tragedy enacted at Kurum Hattin took place in 1187, when the exhausted army of crusaders was annihilated after taking refuge behind its unbroken Cyclopean walls to make a last desperate stand against the superior forces of Saladin.

Huge walls, often reinforced by revetments, also exist in east Jordan, particularly in the Yarmuk valley, which was thickly settled at an early date, and in the Nucra.

The Rugm el-Melfulf, a prehistoric round tower which has given its name to the whole surrounding area, still stands on the old road to Amman. Seven courses of its wall of great crude blocks are still in place. It measures forty feet across, and was presumably

once surmounted by a corbelled dome. The overhanging courses of stones needed to produce such a dome resulted in the typical frustum shape which recurs in the Cyclopean fortresses of the western Mediterranean islands, namely the prehistoric *nuraghi* of Sardinia and the *talayots* of the Balearics.

At a strategic point at the edge of a deep *wadi* near the Rugm el-Melful and with an excellent view over the country, there is an even better preserved and bigger fortress. This huge complex consists of square rooms grouped about a round tower; the walls are ten feet thick, and the external diameter more than sixty feet.

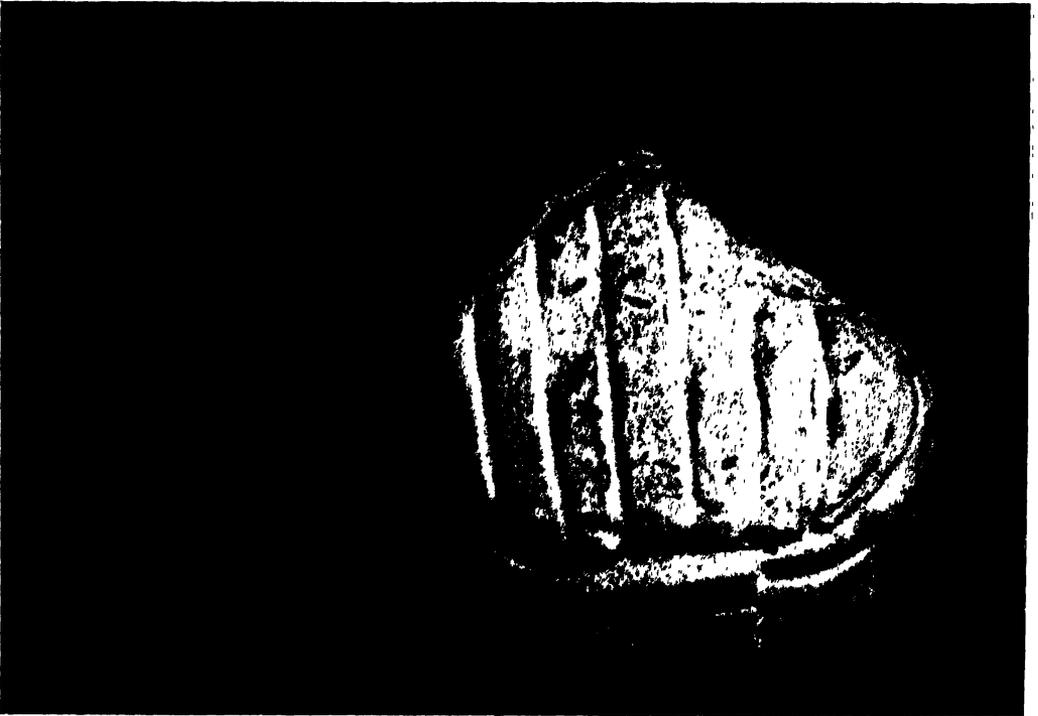
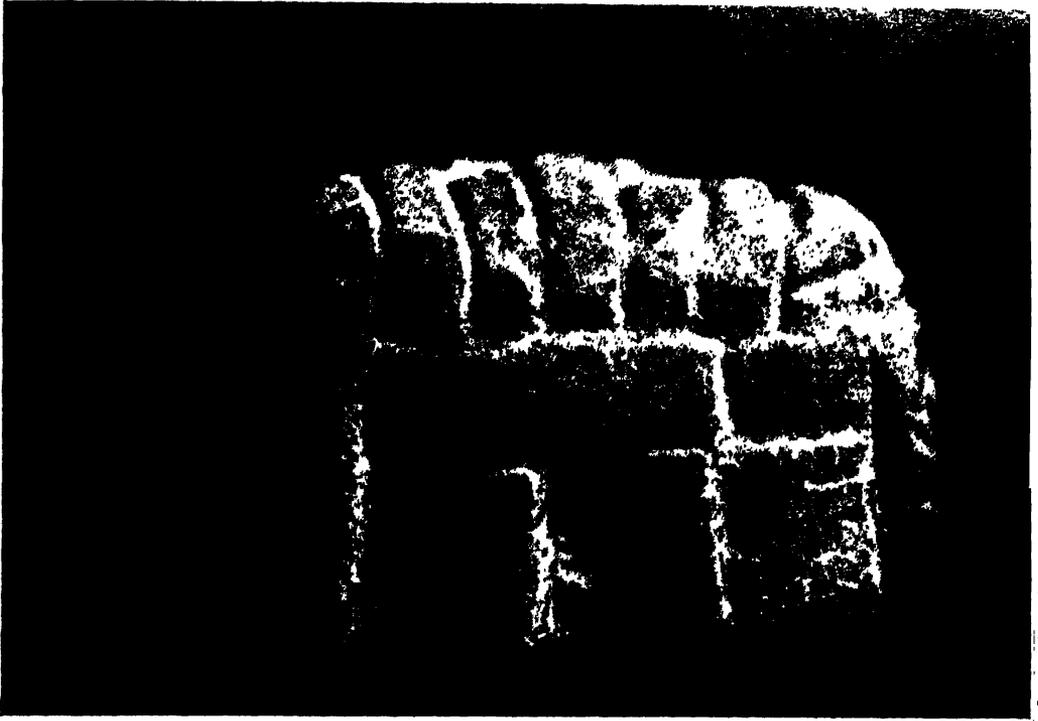
The ruins of other fortresses in Transjordan have square rooms, bastions, and inner courtyards. They have not been sufficiently examined for it to be possible to date them with any certainty. At all events the Cyclopean style of building lasted in the Mediterranean area until well into historical times, and remained very popular with the Canaanites and the Phoenicians. Connections undoubtedly existed in many places in Palestine between Cyclopean defence works and megalithic tombs. It can be assumed that the builders of the small stone houses helped to build castles both for their tribal chieftains and as fortifications to take refuge in, and that they buried their dead in the megalithic tombs which often occur in their neighbourhood.

Perhaps permanent houses for the dead were built before houses for the living. The peculiar relationship to the dead which had already developed in Palestine in the Natufian period may have made its contribution to the development of the religion of the dolmen builders. Death makes a harsher and more violent impact on nomads, who live a hard, unstable, often dangerous life, than it does on sedentary peasants; their wandering life impels them to take special measures for the safeguarding of their dead. Their tombs, which lie by the wayside, or at lonely tribal shrines, or at settlements which are fully inhabited only at intervals, must be strongly built, and they must also be landmarks which can be easily found again.

A nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoral people is in many ways predestined to an ancestor cult and veneration of the dead. This is a result of its social structure. To protect its flocks and herds and keep them together, it generally lives in big family groups; the consequence is a strong clan and family feeling, which can easily extend into the hereafter. Among primitive peoples of the present day, there survives this same feeling that the living and the dead form a single community. The family has a strong sense of unity with its dead; it looks after them, and makes them offerings, and in return the dead are expected to use their mysterious powers for the benefit of the living.

Thus both the religion and the architecture of the dolmen people seem to have been more in harmony with the mentality and way of life of pastoral peoples than with those of tillers of the soil.

Also, during the phase in which civilizations were first developing, it was the mobile pastoral peoples who were the most dynamic element, less as bearers of civilization than as conquerors and founders of states; these, building on the basis of their rigid tribal and patriarchal organization, they developed into autocracies based on military and hieratic



3, 4 Front and view from above of a small limestone model of an temple from Mgarr



5 Outer wall of the Gigantija

power. They were born leaders, often exploiters, but also heroic figures, pioneers and wise kings such as for example David in a later age.

In Egypt, as in Syria and Anatolia, the crook with which shepherds throughout the ages have controlled their flocks was apparently the oldest symbol of authority. Since time immemorial the shepherd with his crook has been an archetype of the guide and leader. In the course of ages the "good shepherd" became a symbol of divine, supernatural power, and the crook a symbol of authority in the religious sphere thus closing the cycle and illustrating the indestructible continuity of spiritual life.

### *Unforgotten Inheritance*

In all ages nomadic pastoral peoples live under similar conditions. Theirs is an archaic world, characterized by customs and ideas whose roots reach far back into pre-historic times. The Beduin of the Holy Land, Arabia and North Africa have undoubtedly preserved many things that enable us to draw conclusions about the nature and customs of their prehistoric ancestors. Their life at the present day offers us clues to, and even evidence about, the ancient past which archaeology alone is unable to provide.

Many tribes still use caves as collective burial places, as in mesolithic times. Often they bury their dead under cairns of stones (or alternatively under a few big blocks of stone). This may represent a *primaevial* type of burial among wandering desert and steppe peoples; at any rate it was the simplest way of protecting the body against jackals and at the same time identifying the place of burial. The old idea of protecting and commemorating the dead with a cairn survived into the times of highly developed cults of the dead, when the latter were given their own, increasingly impressive resting place. The big, carefully constructed and enclosed tumuli which cover the huge megalithic tombs are still basically nothing but cairns, and perhaps the Egyptian pyramids are simply the ultimate, perfected fruition of the same idea carried out on a colossal scale.

The Beduin of Syria, Arabia, North Africa and Upper Egypt still construct many kinds of stone tomb, besides practising cave and cairn burial.

The Arabs believe that earth pollutes a dead body. Graves are therefore lined and covered with stone slabs, just as they were thousands of years ago. Stone cists at surface level, often leaning against a rock, are still usual among the pastoral nomads of Israel and Jordan.

The Bega tribes east of the Nile use long-established big stone tomb cemeteries. The monuments consist of a circular wall about four-and-a-half feet high and from ten to fifteen feet in diameter, made of boulders enclosing a cairn of stones, inside which is a dolmen-like burial chamber.

These are not the only tombs in North Africa in which prehistoric memories survive. Real dolmens were built by many peoples right down to the Middle Ages.

In Israel and Jordan the Beduin of the present day, like their ancestors, tend to choose for their cemeteries mountain-tops or hills with an extensive view, or places near tribal sanctuaries. The bodies are often brought from considerable distances.

The modern shrines of Arab nomads hardly differ from prehistoric sanctuaries. A ring of stones, or a low, round dry wall with a trilithon gateway generally surrounds an empty space. Sometimes, as at a site on the Nebo Ridge, two upright slabs in the centre indicate a tomb. The ancient oriental idea of the *temenos*, a sacred area which must be isolated and fenced off, survives at these simple sites.

Behind the veneration paid to a number of Islamic male and female saints there may lie the tradition of ancient local cults of the spirits of the dead or of local gods or heroes. At many of these places of pilgrimage prayers are said for the fertility of the flocks and the fields, for rain, and for abundant offspring.

Devotion to the dead is particularly marked among the Arabs of east Jordan. Ancestral graves are places of great veneration; they are holy places, and sometimes sanctuaries for criminals or those pursued by vendettas. On the festival of Dahiye, a day of general remembrance for the dead, sacrifices are made to the dead. The sacrificial animal may be a sheep, or a faultless she-camel, which before being slaughtered is saddled and decked out with a man's full equipment, clothes, water bottle, and so forth. It is driven out into the desert, and then caught again. The equipment, which is subsequently given to the poor, symbolizes the "nakedness" of the dead, who "need clothing". The funeral ceremonial always includes a blood sacrifice and a graveside feast.

Tribes in Petraic Arabia have their own days for commemoration of the dead, when they gather at the cemeteries with their flocks, remaining there for some time. The sacrifices take place in the evening, and the blood of the slaughtered animals must flow into the tomb, as "supper for the dead". Milk is also poured over the graves, and the headstones are anointed with oil. Such rituals are as old as pastoral life and the first olive-groves planted by man.

Memories of the cult of the dead once associated with megalithic tombs may survive in the Beduin legend of the Rephaim, an ancient population of giants who lived east and west of the Jordan, and thus in an area of prominent dolmen distribution. Significantly enough, *rephaim* means "spirits of the dead" both in Phoenician and in biblical Hebrew.

Thus the nomads of the Holy Land, almost untouched by historical and religious change, have preserved an unconscious knowledge of a long vanished world, and the rites in which they demonstrate their love and veneration for the dead are of timeless and immemorial antiquity. Such observances may be the expression of a fundamental attitude of mind which, in the age when the pastoral communities were still playing a vital part in the development of civilisation, may have led to the cult of the dead practised by the dolmen people and by the pyramids.

## *Egypt*

The now century-old controversy about the place of origin of megalithic tombs – which has been sought in the east and south of the Mediterranean, in the Iberian Peninsula, and even as far north as Denmark – is now out dated. The work of recent years has thrown light, not only on the unsuspected wealth of past ages and cultures, but also on the widespread inter-connections that existed at the very beginning of civilizations. A great many influences, traditions, and impulses of various origin were mingled in the monumental picture presented in the third and second millennia B. C. by the ancient culture of which megalithic tombs and sacred structures were the physical expression. This culture had, in fact, far too many roots for it to be possible to speak of a single country of origin in the narrower sense of the word. All that is possible is to trace, as we have done in the case of Palestine, certain conditions which would account for later developments among certain peoples and in certain areas.

Repeated attempts have been made to trace the great European prehistoric cults of the dead back to Egypt. The Egyptian religion, with its colossal sepulchral architecture and its exaltation of the dead to a degree unparalleled in human history, was not without influence on the formation of early Mediterranean cults. But this influence apparently began to spread only in the third millennium. Strangely enough, the idea of building indestructible tombs as eternal dwelling-places for the dead, which subsequently became so exaggerated in Egypt, was not indigenous. In the Nile area no early burial has yet come to light that follows the pattern of the chieftain's grave at Eynan. Until far into fourth millennium the usual form of grave was a simple oval trench. The body was clothed and buried in a crouching position, often wrapped in a mat, and generally with adornments and objects for personal use, as well as clay vessels, some containing food. Thus the idea of the "living corpse" existed in Egypt. But collective burial, which was one of the most important characteristics of the ancient religions of the Mediterranean area and of all megalithic cultures, seems originally to have been alien to the tribes settled on the Nile.

Only after strong Asian influences had started to make themselves felt in the second half of the fourth millennium did new impulses become discernible in the development of the tomb. The trench was widened, a brick wall was built round it, it was covered with wooden planks, and the site was finally marked by a sandhill or cairn of stones; henceforward it increasingly became a real house of the dead. But tombs of the stone dolmen type never became customary on the Nile; instead they were built of brick. Towards the end of the prehistoric period there were graves which resembled a decorated dwelling place. The walls of a big double burial chamber in the cemetery of Hierakonpolis in Upper Egypt were painted with hunting and battle scenes and pictures of ships, all on a foundation of yellow ochre.

With the First Dynasty and the concentration of great power in the hands of a single

ruler, there began the rapid and grandiose development of the tombs of the Pharaohs, intended to serve as imperishable palaces and monuments for the dead god-kings.

Stone makes its first appearance in this architecture at the end of the First Dynasty with the finely hewn granite slabs which pave the tomb of the Pharaoh. With the Second Dynasty the mausoleum assumes increasingly the appearance of a rectangular house. The timber roof is displaced by a brick beehive dome, which perhaps may be attributed to Asian influence.

The so-called *mastabas* of the next stage were originally big square brick buildings containing several rooms, beneath which a deep shaft led to the burial chamber. In the *mastaba* of the Pharaoh Khasekhem of the Third Dynasty the central chamber consists of carefully worked limestone blocks. Brick then gave way to stone in the construction of the *mastabas*, and their dimensions grew to enormous proportions. The step pyramid of the Pharaoh Djoser, which measures five hundred and fifty by three hundred yards at the base and is one hundred and eighty feet high, was built in about 2,600 B. C., and is a series of *mastabas* superimposed on one another. With it begins the history of these architecturally and technically consummate huge stone monuments.

The fame of the mausoleum of the Pharaohs must have spread far afield, and was presumably not without influence on ancient Mediterranean tomb construction. The subterranean burial chambers of the pyramids, with their covering of huge slabs and their megalithic approach, are unquestionably related in conception to the passage graves of Palestine and western Europe. But it is improbable that the dolmens of Israel and Jordan are barbarized offshoots of the Egyptian monuments. Not only are some of them older than the latter, but Nilotic influences are hardly discernible in prehistoric northern and eastern Palestine, though from the later part of the fourth millennium onwards they are plainly visible in the south and along the Syrian coast. Nevertheless there is something in the nature of an underlying relationship between the cult of the dead practised by the early inhabitants of the Jordan area and that of the Egyptians. But this is by no means necessarily due to an influx of Nilotic ideas into Palestine; on the contrary, it could be due to prehistoric migration from the Middle East to Egypt of tribes of Semitic and European type. When one thinks of the widespread expansion of the Natufian culture, the latter explanation seems the more likely.

### *Arabian Stonehenge*

For thousands of years the Arabian Peninsula has been mistrustfully sealed off by its rulers from the rest of the world, and, unlike Egypt, in many respects remains *terra incognita*; little is known either about its history or prehistory. Its endless, silent deserts



6 Aerial view of the Hagar Qim temples



7 Façade of Hagar Qim

of sand and rock and its bare mountains are today, as in the past, the realm of nomadic, half-wild pastoral tribes. And the fertile south, the legendary *Arabia felix*, the land of spices whose fabulous towns and treasures so stimulated the imagination of antiquity that Augustus sent an army of ten thousand men to conquer it, is not much more approachable than it was two thousand years ago. The Roman army never reached the legendary Marib, the capital of Saba. Instead it perished, conquered by the heat and the pitiless desert, by forays with the warlike natives and disease on the long march down the shores of the Red Sea. Later ages were no more successful in penetrating the secrets of the southern Arabian "spice kingdoms". Their names, Minaea, Saba, Cataban and the Hadramaut, were well known in antiquity; they were the source of nearly all spices, which were brought in caravans along tracks of immemorial antiquity. The kingdoms of Minaea and Saba, for which there is written evidence from the twelfth to the ninth centuries B. C., must have lain in the territory of what is now the Yemen.

About a century ago, an Austrian and a Frenchman, daringly disguised as Beduin, became the first white men to see the ruins of the royal city of Marib, which lie at the southern tip of the Yemen at a height of 6,000 feet; with the aid of copied inscriptions they demonstrated to the world that that metropolis had really existed. Since then the ruins of several other sites of ancient Arabian cultures have been discovered, but not till 1951, after lengthy negotiations, was permission given for a party of American archaeologists to dig at Marib.

First to come to light were the ruins, nearly buried in sand, of a great sanctuary dedicated to the moon goddess Ilumquh; it was more than three hundred and thirty feet long and of oval shape, at the focal point of which was a big temple. A magnificent forecourt and a hall of pillars, as well as artificial provision for water games, were laid bare. But, when the workers set about excavating the temple entrance, the governor of Marib became so hostile that their lives became endangered. They were raided, and having lost a large part of their property and photographs were forced to abandon their work and flee, leaving valuable material behind. Thus this promising undertaking was doomed to failure. Since then it has been possible to carry out only four brief digs, generally in adventurous circumstances, in the neighbouring Hadramaut. These, too, confirmed that southern Arabia, at any rate at the beginning of the last millennium before the Christian era, was a cultural centre of the first rank.

But we are still almost completely in the dark about the earliest history of the Arabian Peninsula. Accounts by travellers, both old and recent, point to connections with the megalithic cultures.

Members of the recent Danish expedition to Bahrein reported finding in southern Arabia on their way home burial tumuli similar to those of ancient Palestine, and finds of pottery made it possible to assign these to the third millennium B. C. Towers similar to *nawamis* have been seen by a number of travellers in northern Arabia, and a necropolis between Homs and Hama in northern Syria contains passage graves and dolmen-

like structures whose age remains completely unknown. North of the village of Tisnin a megalithic grave with portholes was found. Two menhirs had been set up beside it.

But the most interesting account is that by an Englishman, W. G. Palgrave, who travelled through central and eastern Arabia in 1862 and 1863 and saw in the uplands of Nedjd in Saudi Arabia, near the villages of Ayun and Rass, three huge stone circles which had consisted originally of numerous trilithons. The biggest was on a slope near Ayun. There were many fallen pillars, but eight or nine were still standing; they were roughly hewn and about fifteen feet in height, and two pairs were still surmounted by the stone cross-piece. What Palgrave saw, in other words, was an Arabian Stonehenge.

How many such mysteries the inhospitable wastes of Arabia may conceal, and what discoveries remain to be made there, it is impossible to say. For the time being there seems little prospect of fruitful archaeological work in the area.

### *Mesopotamia*

Ancient Mesopotamia is much less mysterious and inaccessible than contemporary Arabia. In the course of the past hundred years, archaeological work has thrown light on its civilizations right back to the Neolithic Age. Whole libraries of clay tablets with cuneiform texts have come to light, and told us about its history, religion, and the life of its great cities. The vital role played by Sumerian culture and religion, with its cult of the great goddess, in the early development of the Near East and the eastern Mediterranean islands is obvious today. But no important impulses related to the cult of the dead seem to have come from Sumer. In contrast to Egypt, so far from any great advance having been made, the movement seems to have been retrograde.

Early Sumerian beliefs seem to have fitted in with the ancient Mediterranean pattern. Burial of the dead was similar to that in pre-dynastic Egypt; they were buried in a crouching position in individual graves, clothed and wrapped in a mat, often with a cushion under their head. Putting them in clay or wickerwork coffins, or sometimes in two big clay vessels with open ends laid together, points to a certain concern for the preservation of the body. Sometimes a small brick vault took the place of the usual trench in the earth. In addition to the usual articles of use and adornment, a bowl of water was put in the grave.

With the beginning of urban civilization, it became the custom to bury the dead under the floor of the house. There were family vaults which were used over a long period. But stone-built monuments never developed, nor did any kind of real sepulchral architecture.

In the middle of the third millennium, however, the princes of Sumer, like the

Pharaohs of that time, were treated like gods after their death. This was shown by the discovery in the late 'twenties of the royal tombs of Ur. In the middle of a big cemetery containing the usual modest graves, sixteen tombs of a special kind came to light. Deep rectangular shafts with walls inclining inwards led to vaulted subterranean chambers built partly of bricks, partly of limestone. The diggers had come upon the intact burials of the rulers of Sumer, where they lay amid their treasures. Like their Egyptian counterparts, they evidently desired to take with them into the next world all that they had possessed in this one.

Queen Shub-ad had been laid in her last resting place in all the splendour of her immense bejewelled and thrice-garlanded wig, with crescent-shaped earrings which hung down to her shoulders, and she was covered down to her waist with strings of pearls. The king and queen were accompanied in the tomb by harps and lyres richly inlaid with animal heads of gold and lapis lazuli, a magnificent set of similarly ornamented draftsmen, amulets, animal figures, golden, silver and bronze vessels, a golden helmet worked in the form of a wig, and many other things for the use and enjoyment of the dead rulers in what was evidently thought of as a joyous paradise. A whole court of warriors and male and female attendants in ceremonial clothing voluntarily accompanied their master and mistress in death. An attendant still crouched at the queen's head and another at her feet, and the remains of at least three persons were found in the king's chamber; in the shafts, clothed in their red ceremonial robes, the ladies of the court lay in long rows as if peacefully asleep, their heads inclined to one side, their hands over their eyes. Guards and male courtiers had been laid out separately. They seemed to have gone to their death cheerfully, in the firm belief that they were about to share with their masters the privileges of an everlasting paradise. Apparently a narcotic enabled them to die happily and without a struggle.

The optimistic conception of the next world characteristic of the early period, in which these people believed in resurrection in the bosom of the all-destroying but all-renewing Great Mother seems subsequently to have given way to a gloomy, pessimistic view of the hereafter. This is plainly expressed in the epic of Gilgamesh. Man's lot is now the "grim country from which no traveller returns", where the dead lead a wretched existence in dust and darkness. With the retreat of the primitive maternal world and the appearance of new male gods the world grew uglier, the idea of destruction more dominant, and hope of salvation dimmed.

Though the ancient Mesopotamian religion, with its worship of the Great Mother, certainly had a great influence on the early cults of the dead, it can have had little influence on the sepulchral architecture connected with the latter, as it never developed any monumental tomb architecture of its own. Only the idea of the domed tomb seems to have come from Mesopotamia; at all events it was very ancient there. Excavations among the ruins of the hill of Tepe Gawra near Nineveh uncovered at ground level round stone buildings of the Neolithic period – so called *tholoi*, with beehive domes and sometimes also with side chambers. It is uncertain whether these structures, which

look like miniature editions of the later *tholos* tombs at Mycenae, were mausoleums or sanctuaries, but they were part of a necropolis, and must therefore have been associated with the cult of the dead. The royal tombs at Ur with their barrel and arched vaults show that such types of tomb existed in Mesopotamia. So they may have been part of the great legacy of the ancient Near Eastern cultures to the Mediterranean world and hence to Europe.

Thus the architecture, as well as the general conceptions from which both the outer manifestation and inner content of the religion of the megalithic cultures may have sprung, possessed widespread roots. Whether the first impulse of a development which caused the whole religion to centre round the dead derived from nomads from the edges of the Arabian deserts; whether the decisive impetus came from ancient Mediterranean peoples who took over and developed the palaeolithic death rituals of western and southern Europe, or whether other, unknown elements from the Near East or Africa were at work, is a problem that will probably never be completely solved. We may never have more than fragmentary answers to the question of the origin of this, the first world-wide doctrine which held out to man the promise of triumph over death. Mystery shrouds both the origin and the triumphal progress of this religion. What remain visible are the monuments it left behind on its world-wide journey.

### *Westward Journey*

Man's oldest destiny was that of perpetual wandering – in search of new hunting and gathering grounds, in pursuit of migrating game, in flight from an environment that had turned hostile or from sudden catastrophe. Almost his only defence against the forces of a nature that was liable to unintelligible and shattering changes was the mobility dictated by his own instinct of self-preservation. Tropical abundance gave way to the fearful deprivations of the Ice Age; countries vanished into or rose from the sea; the earth quaked and split open, fire burst out of mountains. Only by evasive action could man survive in the midst of these perils. Though from the beginning he may perhaps have had inclinations towards a settled existence, for thousands of centuries he was condemned to the life of a nomad, knowing no more than short and temporary rest.

In Palaeolithic times and after, incredible distances were covered by bands of hunters and food-gatherers; small, helpless groups of human beings in a world populated by huge herds of animals and dangerous beasts of prey. The ceaseless wandering continued by way of long since vanished land bridges between islands and continents and by other bridges which still survive, and in its course the primitive races of mankind must have

met and mingled with or contended against each other. Most of the peoples of the ancient world must have originated from such encounters between peoples of European, Asian and African provenance.

In the twilight of immeasurable antiquity, all these prehistoric events can be discerned only dimly. To us as we look back at them the palaeolithic and mesolithic periods present a vast but only slightly variegated panorama, obscured by early morning mist, in which only a few great streams of life can be made out. But these affect very wide areas. The primitive stage of mankind is characterized by an astonishing uniformity of development. Prehistoric finds make that melting-pot of races, the Mediterranean area and its offshoots, look like an organic whole throughout which many common cultural phenomena and religious practices prevailed. From the late Palaeolithic Age onwards, North Africa, with its predominantly white-skinned population which today survives in the Berbers and Tuaregs, belonged completely to that world. The Cro-Magnon race, which apparently came from the east, and ancient Mediterranean peoples provided the spiritual foundation on which the advanced civilizations of later times were built.

Presumably as a consequence of the climatic changes that followed the end of the Ice Age, a lively migratory movement set in. The slow desiccation of the Sahara began at that time; it changed from green, well watered grassland, well populated by animals and man, into steppe, and finally in the course of ages into desert. Many tribes may have been driven to migrate by pressure of living space. The members of the mesolithic Tardenoisian culture in Europe, whose small flint implements with their regular geometric shapes point to an African origin, may have been such a people, who sought refuge first in the Iberian Peninsula and from there spread into France and still farther into the north and east of Europe. In that period northern Europe, now finally freed from ice, was definitely settled by bands of hunters and fishermen who apparently came from the west.

With the Neolithic Age, restless man became more sedentary, but at the same time a new wave of migration began. There was an essential difference however between this wave and its predecessors. It was slower and more purposeful. This time the wanderers were not hunting and food-gathering nomads who made their way, haphazardly about the world, driven by hunger and instinct, but organized communities of herdsmen and cultivators searching for new pastures or land to till. With the establishment of a more settled life and better living conditions, the Fertile Crescent must have been the scene of a vigorous population growth, and this in turn made necessary the acquisition of further areas for settlement. So began the colonization movement we have already mentioned; this, from its starting-point among the older centres of civilization in the Near East, must have taken place in an easterly as well as westerly direction. For the first time, migration also took place by sea, as is shown by the settlement of a number of Mediterranean islands during the early Stone Age.

The later neolithic period was extraordinarily dynamic. The advance of eastern peasant peoples to the Balkans and up the Danube and from southern Russia by way of

Poland into central Europe must generally speaking have been slow. Its tempo would normally be dictated by the exhaustion of the soil after about ten years, which caused the cultivators to move on and found new villages elsewhere. But colonization by sea must have advanced at a more rapid pace. What kind of craft the first seafarers used can be only conjectured. Mesolithic fishermen had presumably learnt that a tree-trunk could keep them afloat and that a raft could be made of several tree-trunks. Perhaps they had also discovered the buoyancy of inflated animal skins, which in Iraq and Greece are still used for crossing rivers. Perhaps the first proper boats were canoes made of skins stretched over a wooden frame such as are still used by primitive peoples, and rafts may have been employed at an early stage for ocean-going voyages. With several hundred thousand years of wandering in their blood, the trip to unknown shores may not have seemed so exceptionally hazardous. Certainly the mariners of the early Stone Age never deliberately ventured out of sight of land, but groped their way forward from island to island.

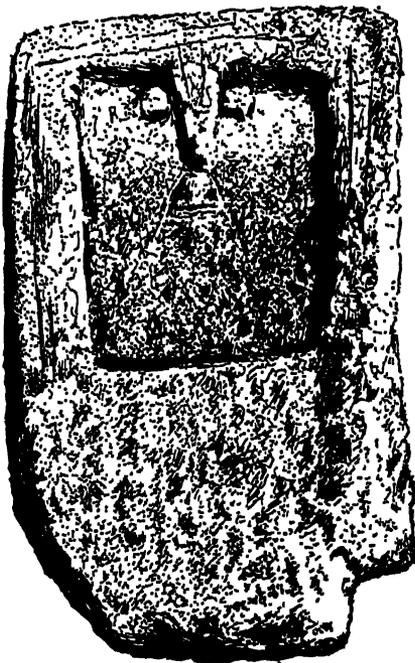
Seafaring in the Near East must have started early, for a migration to Cyprus took place in the pre-pottery period. The settlers presumably came from the opposite shores of South Anatolia or Syria. The craft used must obviously have been seaworthy and navigable to cover such distances.

There are convincing arguments for the hypothesis that colonization of the Mediterranean coasts from the Near East began not later than the beginning of the fourth millennium. The traces left by the settlers not only give clues to their place of origin but make it possible to give approximate dates. We have nothing but potsherds with which to reconstruct, like a mosaic, the history of these first hazardous expeditions, but they show that all the most ancient neolithic cultures of the Mediterranean area are inter-related. Common to them all is a crude kind of pottery, decorated with an impressed, scratched or crenellated pattern before being fired. The sharp edges of shells, bird bones, sticks, and even finger-nails and finger-tips were used to decorate this ware, the decorators' repertoire being everywhere the same. This pottery occurs in northern Syria and southern Anatolia, where it was most widespread and highly developed, in Greece, Italy, France, southern Spain, Sicily and Crete, as well as in North Africa, and in each of these areas it represents the oldest type. A process of world-wide significance is discernible behind these pathetic fragments from the deepest layers of neolithic settlements. In the course of thousands of years it seems to have taken in the greater part of the Old World, for the earliest cultures of China and even South Africa are characterised by very similar pottery.

In Syria and Southern Anatolia this crude and primitive ware was succeeded by an incomparably more advanced type both technically and artistically, to which the thin-walled, beautifully painted ware of Tell Halaf, Samarra, Susa and other sites belong. The new type seems to date from about the beginning of the fourth millennium, so the dissemination of the ware with impressed and scratched decoration must have taken place before that period, perhaps as early as the fifth millennium.

## *Goddess from the East*

The dissemination of pottery, agriculture, and the keeping of livestock, which may have proceeded from people to people after perhaps originating with small groups of eastern origin, was accompanied by the spread of religious beliefs and practices which were highly developed in the Near East as early as the fourth millennium. The archetypal Great Mother, who played a dominant role in early eastern religions, landed on the Mediterranean shores of Europe as a new, more significant, but basically familiar figure, with whom Mediterranean man had been acquainted since the Upper Palaeolithic Age. Worship of the life-creating female principle had come to Europe many thousands of years before, perhaps from southern Russia, and expressed itself in small, generally faceless, ivory and stone idols whose ample proportions certainly embodied the idea of fertility. Perhaps even then men may have associated the Great Mother with hopes of resurrection after death. The striking use made of innumerable shells in palaeolithic and mesolithic burials suggests that they had a magical as well as a decorative purpose, and is a pointer to the presence of such beliefs. For the shape of many shells may have suggested the womb pregnant with the mystery of new life. Cowrie shells in particular were highly prized as amulets, and were traded tens of thousands of years before our era from the Indian Ocean to western France in order to be laid with the dead.



4 *Stele from Asquera showing the Mother Goddess figure*

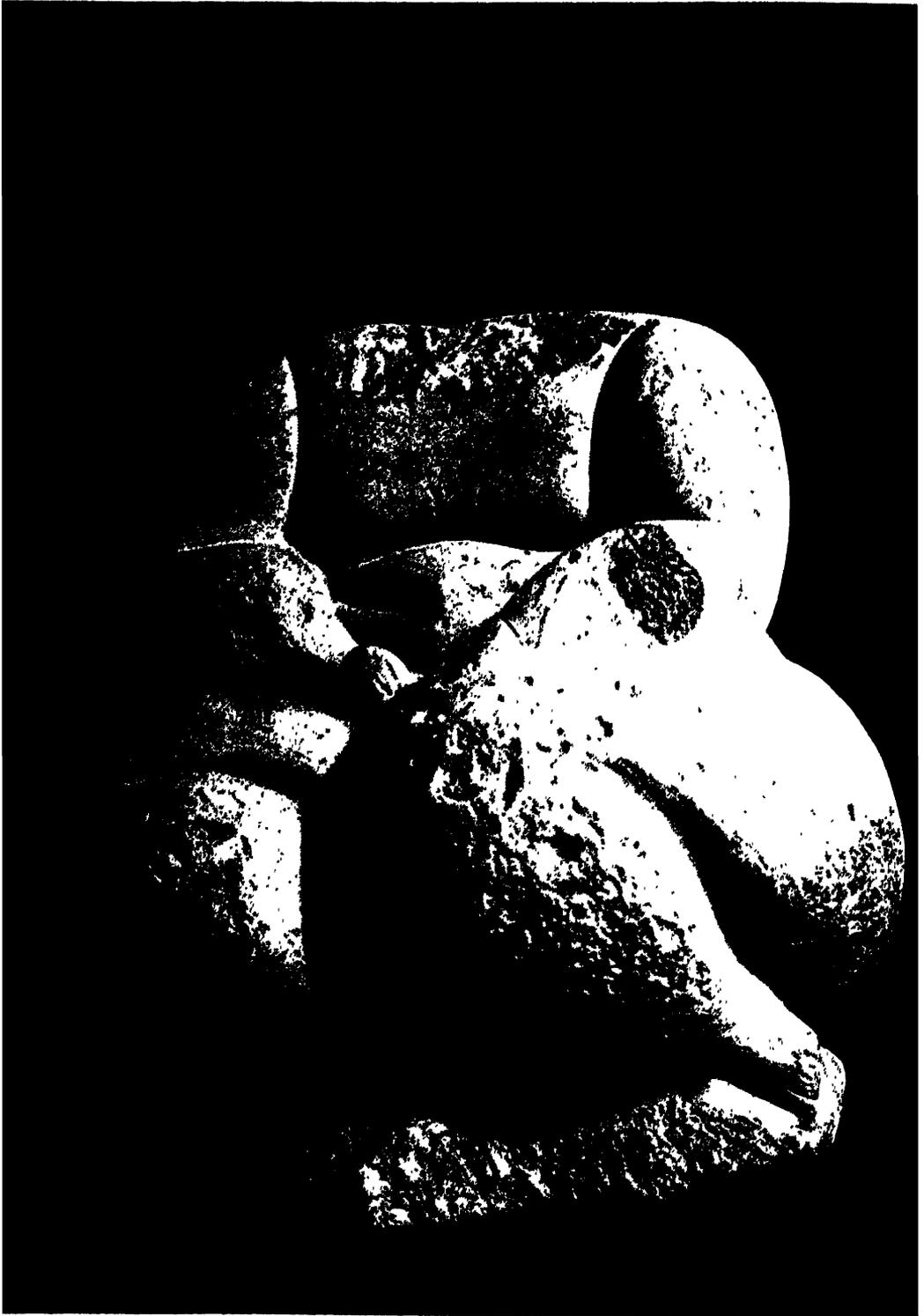
With agriculture and cattle-raising in the neolithic period, the cult of the earth mother, symbolizing fertility and eternal life, returned in new and more highly developed forms. Its idols reflect the more spiritual and more differentiated ideas of an age which sought to make manifest in many forms the good and evil powers of the world, to give them namens, and to address prayers and invocations to them. The traditional steatopygous figures of the Palaeolithic Age did not entirely disappear, but side by side with them highly stylised, sexless figures were made which perhaps betray a more abstract idea of the divine. Very naturalistic female figurines were also made. The importance of the goddess's face began almost to exceed that of her body; it was a sometimes awe-inspiring face, dominated by excessively big eyes under arched brows (Fig. 4). In those times of the discovery of the metaphysical world her power ceased to lie exclusively in her maternal organs, the womb and breasts, but was extended to include, and perhaps largely transferred to, her eyes, in which magic came to be inherent. The sacred emblem of the Great Mother, in the form of an "owl face", consisting where it travels first to Troy, Crete, Greece, southern Italy and Sicily, and later, with make it look like a small sun, appears on clay vessels in neolithic Mesopotamia, from where it travels first to Troy, Crete, Greece, southern Italy and Sicily, and later, with the spread of the religion of the megalithic peoples, far into north-western Europe.

### *Birth of Maritime Trade*

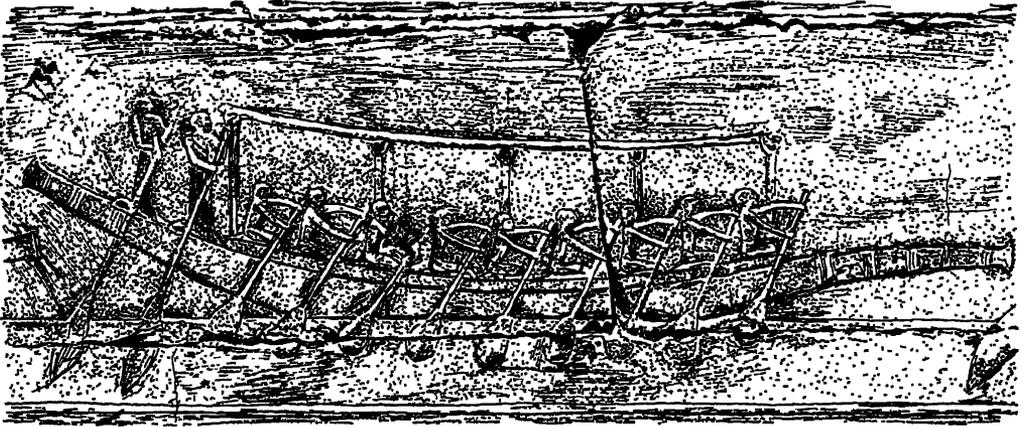
The economic and cultural advance of the Near East and Egypt during the Neolithic Age led naturally to an activation and expansion of barter, and soon to trade on an often astonishingly wide scale. Flints for tools and weapons and basalt for millstones were traded by land and sea, while obsidian – a glass-like volcanic mineral used for various implements brought an early period of prosperity to the Aegean island of Melos and the Aeolian Islands off Sicily. Objects to which magic powers were attributed; amulets and idols and certain stones and shells, found their way deep into Europe.

In the fourth millennium B. C., following the discovery of metals – apparently by western Asian mountain peoples, but perhaps also by tribes in the Sinai area, where copper is plentiful – the great urban cultures of the Near East and Egypt began to develop. At first only copper, gold and silver were worked, but bronze was soon discovered. Once more a phase of technical and social revolution began. New classes were differentiated in the advanced communities of the early metal period. Artisans and merchants, warriors and slaves came into existence, side by side with peasants and herdsmen. A caste of priests also arose; its power later rivalled that of kings, who in the early stage of these civilizations were generally high priests too. The influence of





9 Seated figure from Hagar Qim



5 *Egyptian rowing boat*

the new centres of civilization soon extended to the whole eastern Mediterranean world. Their power of expansion naturally exceeded that of the preceding neolithic cultures, which were in some artistic respects superior to them, as in the manufacture of their pottery, but could not compete in technical ability, organization, or man-power (Fig. 5).

One of the decisive new techniques of the fourth millennium must have been the ability to build swift and stable ships of considerable size, propelled by oar and sail. The masters in this field were probably the Egyptians, who since primitive times had navigated the Nile. They had sailing ships with covered cabins before the fusion of the Upper and Lower kingdoms and inscriptions show that at any rate from the time of the First Dynasty onwards they regularly sailed along the coasts of Palestine and Syria to Byblos, for the sake of the precious timber yielded by the cedars of Lebanon. Migrants from the Nile delta landed on the south coast of Crete, probably in the pre-dynastic period, and settled in the plain of Mesara. It is not impossible that Egyptian ships sailed along the coast of North Africa as far as the Iberian Peninsula at an early stage. Carbon-14 tests made in 1959 of material from newly discovered megalithic tombs in Brittany led to the surprising conclusion that they dated back to the fourth millennium, and their builders came from Iberia.

In the first half of the third millennium, new inroads into the Aegean area must have taken place from southern Anatolia and Syria, leading to the colonization of the Cyclades, which affected Greece. The initiative in seafaring seems to have passed increasingly to the eastern Mediterranean islands, and perhaps also to Troy, with its commanding position on the Hellespont. Cyprus, with its abundance of copper, experienced an extraordinary upswing in importance, and the people of the Cyclades, whose island wealth consisted less of fertile land than of valuable minerals such as obsidian and marble, evidently developed quickly into expert navigators, living on trade and piracy. Engraved terracotta dishes from Syros show us their long, narrow,

oar-propelled ships with high, sharp bow and flat quarterdeck (Fig. 6). These handy vessels, with which the people of the Cyclades appear to have exercised a kind of ascendancy in the eastern Mediterranean before the Cretans, seem seldom to have been equipped with sails. But these Vikings of the Aegean may have used them at an early stage to explore the most distant corners of the Mediterranean. Presumably their purpose was not to colonize, but to discover new mineral deposits and markets. They traded with the ignorant inhabitants of remote areas, exchanging the products of the advanced civilizations of the Aegean and Near East for incomparably more valuable raw materials, and they conquered or colonized fertile coastal strips where metals were plentiful. Pioneers landed on the southern shores of the Spanish Peninsula, as well as in the Gulf of Lions, from where it was possible to penetrate inland by way of the Rhône. One of their expeditions must have discovered the southern Spanish copper and silver deposits, and the results was a settlement at Almeria, where an urban culture of eastern inspiration came into being.

Colonies were also established in southern Italy and Sicily, and Malta, Sardinia, and Corsica must have been stopping-places on the long voyage to southern France and Spain. At this period the Sicilian Channel seems to have been used in preference to the Straits of Messina. The same route was probably chosen later by the Phoenicians, whose ships were certainly bigger and more numerous, but not significantly swifter or more



6 *The underside of a platter from Syros with a picture of a ship*

seaworthy. Since the methods in historical times cannot have differed greatly from those of the Chalcolithic and Bronze ages, we may draw a number of conclusions from the former.

We know from the Book of Kings that the Phoenician fleet took three whole years for the return journey to Tarshish, or Tartessus, the Eldorado of southern Spain, though this certainly included the long stay at their destination. Apart from that, navigation at night was avoided, and ships sailed only in the favourable season between spring and the autumn equinoctial gales. These seafarers did not lose sight of land if they could help it, and the maximum distance they covered in a day seems to have been from twenty to twenty-five miles. In autumn all seafaring ceased; the ships were drawn ashore for repairs, and the crews may have built themselves rough dwellings, hunted and planted seeds to assure themselves of provisions during the next stage of the voyage, due to begin about six months later. No doubt the colonization of most of the Mediterranean islands originated from such landings and winter halts. In spite of the slow tempo imposed by the innumerable interruptions, in the last part of the third millennium there was obviously very active traffic in the Mediterranean, as well as beyond it in the Atlantic, where ships sailed along the shores of western Europe. This may have been encouraged by the growing demand for metals of the advanced civilizations of the Middle East and Egypt, while the success of early expeditions must have emboldened pioneers. The megalithic cultures of western and northern Europe still present us with many unsolved problems, but today it can hardly be doubted that foreign influences played a part in their origin. All new cultural elements, religious ideas and styles of building are first apparent near the sea or within reach of navigable rivers.

The west most probably owed its first knowledge of metals and how to win them to this seaborne influx from the area of the more advanced civilizations. Foreign traders, settlers, and prospectors must have imparted the knowledge of new skills, implements, weapons, pottery styles, and, above all, the art of building in stone. After the establishment of these contacts the backward neolithic or even mesolithic cultures of Spain and France underwent rapid development.

The Iberian Peninsula was predestined by its geographical position to act as middleman between the Mediterranean area and the Atlantic coasts and islands of western Europe. It also had abundant ore deposits and fertile plains near its southern shore, which enabled it to become an economic and cultural centre, and later a bridgehead for further advances northward. Navigators defied the perils of ocean navigation and ventured from its western shores to Brittany, and perhaps even as far as Ireland and Britain. The presence of gold and tin in these two big islands was probably discovered by prospectors from the Iberian mining areas.

The events which led to the rise of the megalithic cultures of Europe certainly extended over a long period, and the process can have been neither continuous nor uniform. Presumably it was the result of the individual enterprise of many small bands of seafarers and adventurers, who may have brought little with them but their skills and

their religion. With very few exceptions, the objects found in megalithic graves are local products, and sometimes betray eastern influence only in the shape of certain novelties. Nowhere do archaeological finds present us with a picture of large-scale colonization, or the suppression of an indigenous by a foreign culture. What took place, so far as we can tell at present, seems rather to have been in the nature of a spiritual awakening under the invigorating influence of ideas from a more highly developed world, a discovery of capacities and potentialities that perhaps took place under the guidance and leadership of a culturally and technically superior foreign minority.

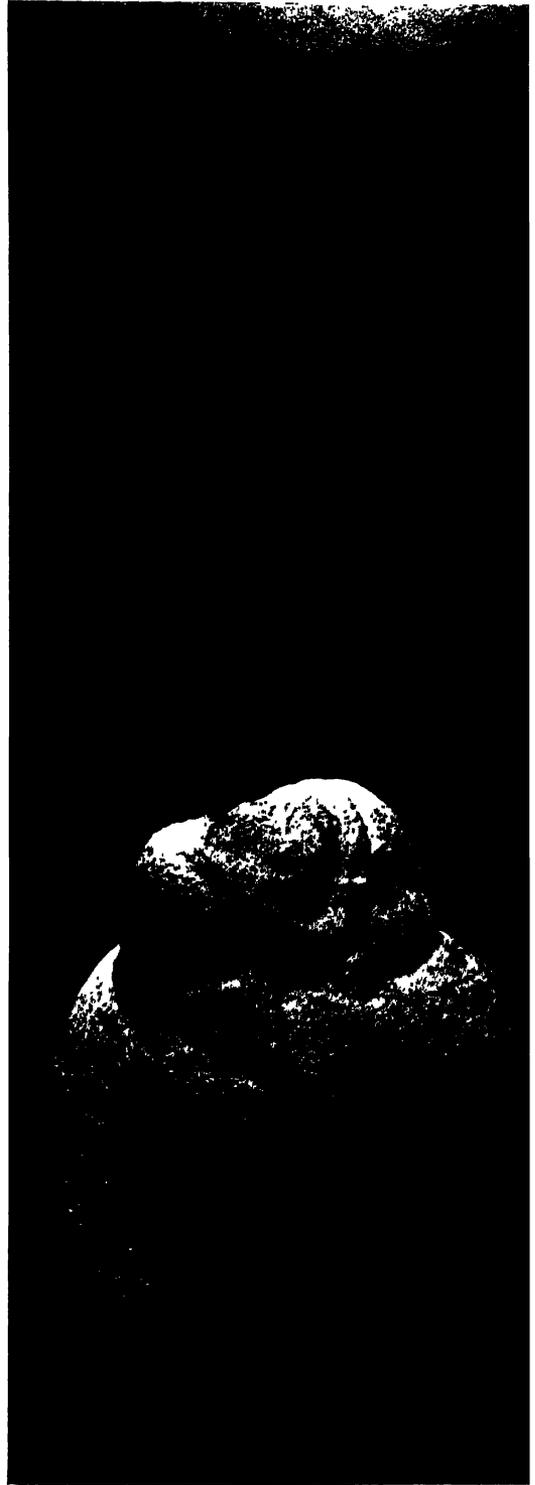
A similar phenomenon took place in the Mediterranean area at the beginning of the first millennium B. C. After the sterile pause that followed the collapse of the Cretan-Mycenaean civilization and thalassocracy in the storm of the Aegean *Völkerwanderung*, a new age of east-west seaborne colonization then began in which Phoenicians, Greeks, and Etruscans rediscovered and re-explored the coasts of the western Mediterranean, whose existence had been forgotten in the years of chaos. The objects and effects of this second wave of colonization, which took place in the historical period, and even the routes it followed, coincided to a great extent with those of its prehistoric predecessor. Once more western Europe was stimulated by the introduction of new gods and religious practices and became part of a wider community bearing the imprint of the eastern Mediterranean cultures.

The colonization of north and central Italy by the Etruscans perhaps offers most parallels with the period of the megalithic tombs. The Etruscans, who were the bearers of a Near Eastern civilization and preserved many traditions from the ancient Aegean world, landed in an area rich in minerals, on the exploitation of which their power was based. This economic development led to extensive seaborne trade. As a result of their superior civilization the Etruscans, though their numbers were certainly small when they established themselves in the south of Tuscany, gradually became masters of an area extending from the Campagna to the Po basin. In the religious sphere they stimulated a remarkable late efflorescence of the cult of the dead; practices and beliefs that dated back to the period of megalithic buildings manifested themselves once more in the construction of huge necropolises.

In the Iberian peninsula, settlers from the eastern Mediterranean may in many respects have played a part similar to that played by the Etruscans thousands of years later, rapidly obtaining a position of power, reinforced and backed economically perhaps by continuing association and trade relations with their place of origin. The prehistoric mining town at Almeria, the point of departure of a chalcolithic culture which exercised an influence far beyond the confines of Spain, is very reminiscent – particularly because of its necropolis – of the Etruscan Populonia (Pupluna), with its cemetery of round corbelled tombs. Populonia was also a mining centre, and was perhaps the oldest of the Etruscan settlements.



10 Headless stone figure from Hagar Qim



11 Female figure with bell skirt from Hagar Qim



12 Head of a female statue from Hal Tarxien

## *Triumphal March of the New Religion*

The wave of colonization that came to western Europe from the eastern Mediterranean was certainly not stimulated by missionary zeal; the motives behind it were purely material. Nevertheless the results were similar to those that thousands of years later sprang from the efforts of the western, and especially Irish, missionaries who played a vital part in the conversion to Christianity of central, western, and northern Europe. The vigour of religious development in the period of megalithic building is most striking. The ancient European peoples, who were still to a certain extent under the spell of the magical hunting and fertility rites of the mesolithic period received the new doctrine like a message of salvation. Basically it was not totally new and strange to them, for a maternal principle and the cult of the dead had been widespread among them since palaeolithic times. But what was new to them, perhaps, was the definite prospect of a hereafter that it held out, the magic practices and ritual by which everlasting life could be assured. In particular, the idea of permanent homes for the dead fell on fertile soil in the west, and led to the first stone architecture in Europe. This was a magnificent manifestation both of religious devotion and of the vigorous creative urges of a time of intellectual stimulation.

The eastern custom of collective burial everywhere displaced the individual grave, and nearly all the types of grave which had earlier spread from the Near East to the islands of the eastern Mediterranean, where they had often undergone further development, now appeared in the west. Oven-shaped rock-cut tombs and chambers with horizontal or shaft-like entrance passages spread by various sea routes from Cyprus, the Cyclades, Crete, Sicily, and Malta to Sardinia, southern France and Spain. Round *tholoi* with beehive domes, which travelled at a very early stage from northern Syria to Cyprus and then to Crete, now appeared in the Almeria culture; and with them came stone cists, dolmens, and passage graves. There is only one group of rock-cut tombs outside the Mediterranean, in the chalk area of Petit Morin, near the Marne – and *tholoi* in the west are relatively few. But an extraordinary development of megalithic tombs took place in the west, where they were built on a gigantic scale for which there is no parallel in the east. The simple, massive designs of megalithic architecture seem to have corresponded to something deep in the barbaric temperament of the peoples of the west, which may also have been sympathetic to a doctrine perhaps of pastoral origin.

In the western Mediterranean area and Atlantic Europe, megalithic architecture and the worship of the owl-faced goddess went their own ways. The delicate, fiddle or cylinder-shaped abstract idols which came to the coasts of Iberia from Cyprus and the Cyclades became the patterns for the stylised figures painted or carved in relief on rocks, the walls of tombs, and depicted as statue menhirs. They lived on as the mystical motif on stone tombs even in anti-representational north-western Europe.

While Chalcolithic Age megalithic cultures flourished in Iberia and France, the western Mediterranean island world, on whose outskirts neolithic civilizations had developed in Sicily and Malta in the third millennium, underwent a development of its own. Sicily no doubt played an important role as a geographical and cultural link between the two halves of the Mediterranean. Corsica and Sardinia may for a long time have been no more than stopping-places for ships plying between the Aegean, Spain and France, just as in a later age Carthage, at first known as Utica, remained for centuries a small transit port for Phoenician fleets bound for Tartessos. Large-scale colonization of the two islands can hardly have taken place before 2,000 or perhaps 1,800 B. C. The Balearics were settled even later.

Though Malta, with its unique shrines, represented a high point among prehistoric megalithic cultures, and though Sardinia similarly produced a distinctive civilization, none of the western Mediterranean islands ever approached the importance of Crete, which was a centre of international trade and of a civilization of widespread influence. But the eastern Mediterranean heritage and south-west European influences had a fructifying effect on these islands, resulting in the production of something new and in harmony with the nature and living conditions of their inhabitants, and they certainly handed on a number of impulses which contributed in their turn to the enrichment of the western European civilizations.

Towards the end of the first half of the second millennium B. C. the western Mediterranean area and Atlantic Europe present the appearance of an organic whole, united by trade relations, a common religious outlook, cultural achievements, and the megalithic and Cyclopean style of building. The individual peoples that formed part of it sacrificed nothing of their individuality, however, and accepted and developed further only those alien elements which were in harmony with their own nature. Presumably also influences from the civilizations of the Danube reached them overland. But the unity of the west was primarily the result of an organic development, deeply rooted in the nature and conditions of the ancient Mediterranean, which in a number of respects had already begun in palaeolithic times.

### *The Two Faces of the European Megaliths*

The early megalithic burials and religious sites were the outcome of new religious beliefs and new rites connected with the dead. Later, other, more worldly aspects accumulated about these huge stone monuments, no doubt reflecting economic and social changes, and perhaps also the nature of the new peoples concerned.

With the blossoming of economic and cultural centres in the western Mediterranean, the opening up of territories rich in raw material in Atlantic Europe, and perhaps also as a consequence of increased seaborne trade following the Cretan-Mycenaean succession to maritime ascendancy, a new chapter in the history of the megalithic cultures and their architecture seems to have opened up.

The threads of power may have been increasingly concentrated in definite places and in the hands of fewer groups who controlled the mining of ores, the trade in metals and other valuable substances such as callaïs, jet, and amber for amulets, articles of adornment, and ceremonial weapons, and occupied key positions on the great trade routes by land and sea. In ancient times the working of metals seems often to have been a monopoly of the tribal chieftain. Perhaps individual rulers arose among the leading clans, extending their sway over wide territories and considerable populations.

After the Neolithic Age, developments in the western Mediterranean area continually reflected developments in the eastern Mediterranean area, though in more primitive forms and after a time-lag. So the aristocratic-heroic age of the warlike builder-kings of Mycenae about the middle of the second millennium may have had its parallel in western and northern Europe. The megalithic cult of the dead may have been accompanied by a cult of heroes. In that event, the huge sepulchral and religious monuments of that time would also have been testimonials to the might and power of individual rulers and clans.

The Achaean kings, buried with their faces masked in gold and with their treasures about them, as in the stone circles of Mycenae or in great beehive tombs, were, in their thirst for immortality, perhaps the legendary counterparts of the ruling tribes who from the middle of the third millennium onwards built tombs and stone monuments of unprecedented size from southern Spain to the far north. Rectangular tombs or sanctuaries sixty feet in length were built of huge blocks of stone up to a hundred tons in weight. In Ireland, the corbelled tomb of New Grange can be compared to the *tholoi* of Mycenae; in northern Germany, "giants' beds" were built up into mounds more than a hundred yards long; in Brittany dolmens and menhirs were erected on a gigantic scale. The grandiose final version of Stonehenge also dates from this time of immoderation, which was perhaps given its imprint by the personalities of individual rulers.

No traditions or written documents throw light on the events which involved the greater part of western Europe and the whole Mediterranean area in the development of megalithic architecture, and stimulated the west to a creativeness of its own and a new religious awareness. All that survives is the Cyclopean trail of tens of thousands of stone monuments, whose size and abundance are evidence of the forces that were then set free. Each of the nameless island and continental cultures which then flourished in Mediterranean and Atlantic Europe corresponds to a chapter in the mysterious and exciting history of this early migration of the perpetually restless human spirit.

## Book II      The Holy Islands

### *Malta and Gozo*

The Maltese archipelago lies off Sicily less than two hundred miles from Africa. The main island rises out of the glistening Mediterranean like a bare, steep-sided raft of solid rock. Its area is ninety-three square miles, the neighbouring island of Gozo is one-third as big, and the other islands, Comino, Cominotto, and Filfola, are small reets of rock.

The fierce sun, the desert wind from the south and the salty sea-breezes, scorch and blow away the almost treeless islands' scanty soil. Gozo is greener than Malta, but like Malta it has no real springs; only surface water and a brief rainy season when its stony nakedness is veiled by a shimmer of rapidly blooming and fading flowers. Even the hardy *maquis*, the sweet-smelling Mediterranean scrub, does not thrive there, but agaves and cacti proliferate. Here and there a few palm-trees have been planted, as well as clumps of pine, and fig trees where houses provide shelter from the wind. Only carob-trees grow wild. Their creeping branches, as thick as a man's arm, form squat round tents of shiny green foliage which defy the gales. The thin layer of soil that lies on the rock foundation is enclosed and intersected by innumerable low walls. Every field is a fortress in which a peasant protects himself against pitiless nature and wrings a little nourishment from it.

Unlike many other islands off Sicily, these islands were not thrown up by volcanic action. The dark glow of granite and lava is missing from their substance of yellowish or grey limestone or red sandstone. The sea that surrounds the dead, sun-bleached, rocky mass sparkles like diamonds and fills the inlets in the fissured shore with deep blue, green and violet shadows.

When the first human beings set foot on these little islands more than four thousand years ago, they were less inhospitable than they are today. The settlers probably came

from Sicily, whose south-eastern corner is only fifty miles away. The community they founded lasted for more than seven hundred years, but its story is shrouded in mystery. They left behind huge megalithic religious edifices, but we know very little about their daily life. No remains of settlements have been found, but only pitiful traces of cave dwellings. Their architectural and artistic achievements in the service of an obviously all-important religion are the more baffling in the light of their striking primitive stone implements. These have little variety, and include retouched flint flakes which resemble palaeolithic mousterian tools. The pious and peaceful inhabitants of the Maltese archipelago made no weapons, even for hunting. Neither spindle whorls nor loom weights have been found, and metal appeared in the islands only with the arrival of a new people after the original culture had come to a sudden end. The creators of the highly developed civilization of Malta were no doubt technically backward in many respects; but in their sacred architecture, pottery, and carving, they were a thousand years ahead of the west. It is only from their achievements in these spheres that we can reconstruct the life of this small but gifted people. Like all the various settlers who came flowing into Sicily after the Neolithic Age, they most probably belonged to a civilization whose primary roots lay in Near East. In early times navigators probably tended to follow the African rather than the European shore of the Mediterranean, but the inhabitants of Malta and Gozo must have had occasional contact with seafarers both from east and west. They also had trade relations which extended at least as far as Sicily and Lipari, the sources of flint, ochre, and obsidian. In the first phase of settlement, foreign influences, and perhaps new arrivals, played a certain part. But subsequently the islanders seem to have lived for a long time in relative isolation, and to have developed a unique sacred architecture which still rouses awe and astonishment today.

All their creative energies seem to have been concentrated on a religious experience of overpowering intensity and to have been dedicated exclusively to it. These people must have lived in the shadow of the dead and of mysterious gods whose monstrous amplitude certainly embodied the idea of fertility. Like the small figures sheltering under the robes of the huge female statue that stood in the temple of Hal Tarzien, they must have sought refuge in the living darkness of this tellurian world.

About thirty temples in all were built in Malta and Gozo, some of them of extraordinary dimensions. A huge, labyrinthine cave sanctuary with thousands of graves has also been discovered in the island rock, and we do not know what other secrets it may conceal. Nowhere else in the megalithic cultures of the western Mediterranean and Europe do we find such a concentrated expression of revolt against death made manifest in works of such size and primitive beauty; and perhaps nowhere else are we able to approach so close to the spirit of an age which expressed its sense of the eternal in stone, and in the circle which has no end and no beginning.

## *Origins*

The absence of metal from the earliest Maltese culture at one time caused it to be dated too early. In the 'thirties the Italian archaeologist Ugolini still attributed it to the fourth millennium, though others disagreed. But excavation of the acropolis of Lipari and recent work in Sicily have thrown a great deal of light on the development of pre-historic cultures there and in the Aeolian Islands, and examination of imported objects has made it possible to give a more accurate date to the oldest Maltese civilization.

Copper and bronze, according to the present evidence, first came to Malta with the people who apparently destroyed the megalithic culture there after the middle of the second millennium. The long duration of the Neolithic Age in the islands may have been due to their lack of metals or of products that could be exchanged for copper and bronze; it may also have been due to the conservatism of the original inhabitants, or to a religious taboo on the use of metals. It is hard to believe that copper and bronze can have been completely unknown – some highly burnished pottery suggests the imitation of bronze vessels – and it is possible that these people may have refrained deliberately from the importation of rare and costly raw materials.

One indication among others that suggests that the permanent settlement of Malta did not take place very early – perhaps not till the last quarter of the third millennium – is the fact that collective burial was apparently practised there from the outset, though in the relatively late neolithic Stentinello culture in Sicily, which appears to be related to the earliest Maltese culture, individual burial was evidently the exclusive practice. It is therefore possible that Malta was colonized only after the appearance of the Chalcolithic Age rock-cut tombs in Sicily, or alternatively that colonization took place from another area in which collective burial was already known.

The oldest traces of human presence yet found in the island came from the cave of Ghar Dalam, which also contained a wealth of deposits from primitive times together with remains of extinct animals. The cave is big, and was used both as a dwelling and as a burial-place. Oven-shaped rock chambers for the dead, of the kind that spread from the Near East through the Mediterranean area after the Chalcolithic Age, were hewn at an early stage.

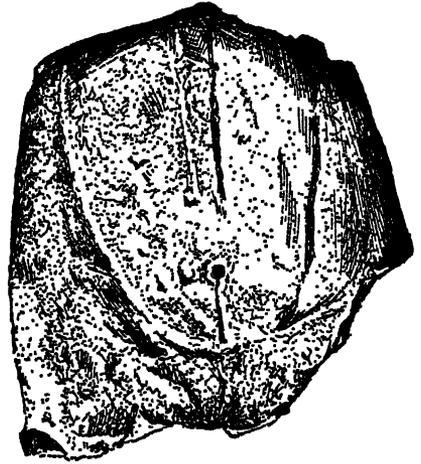
The oldest fragments of round-based pottery were also found at Ghar Dalam. Most of the vessels were decorated with crude and hurriedly impressed patterns. Sherds from a somewhat later period are more richly and carefully decorated with hatching, triangles, and broad bands cut out with a flint knife. The grey or black polished ware of the early phases do not have proper handles, but only lugs. But one eastern-style animal head handle was found at Ghar Dalam. Fragments of red pottery of the so-called Diana style, which prevailed in the Aeolian Islands towards the end of the neolithic period point to connections with that area. The earliest Maltese pottery which, with its impressed decoration of straight lines and angular patterns resembles the early Sicilian,

belongs to the most ancient type which, as we mentioned above, spread through the Mediterranean area in neolithic times. It recalls the pottery of Syria and Palestine, and also that of pre-dynastic Egypt. The first sign of an individual style in Malta pottery appears in the form of curving lines for which there is no previous pattern. This was a first gentle hint of islanders' marked predilection for rounded shapes and curves in all their artistic productions.

The archipelago was not without connections with other civilizations at this period, but its inhabitants had already started going their own way. Five rock-cut tombs accidentally discovered near Zebbug date from this early stage. The upper section had disintegrated, but undisturbed burials were found underneath. The skeletons lay in great disorder, no doubt as a result of subsequent burials in the same tomb, and were mixed with potsherds and other grave-goods. Among them were animal bones, apparently the remains of food offerings or ritual meals. In accordance with the ancient practice, red ochre had been sprinkled over the bodies. Among the objects in the grave were pearls, shell buttons, blades made of imported flint, a mortar made of local stone, and finally the upper part of a broken limestone stele. On this, the oldest carving yet found in Malta, a stylised face appears in relief, with traces of red paint. The mouth is a small opening under which a vertical line is engraved (Fig. 7). Two small holes on either side of the nose were perhaps intended for eyes. The hint of a shoulder can be made out, and indicates that this was once something in the nature of a statue menhir. This find is unique in the archipelago; all the other carvings are in a totally different style. But there are resemblances, particularly in the representation of the mouth, to small idols from Cyprus dating from the early Bronze Age; and there is also something slightly reminiscent of the remarkable stele with heart-shaped face which was dug up outside the gate of the first city of Troy. On the other hand, the work is comparable with the statue menhirs of southern France, Iberia, and Corsica. Thus it could have been brought to the island by mariners from the east, or it could equally well be evidence of western influence. But the presence in the Zebbug graves of mother-of-pearl buttons and stones with V-shaped holes through them such as occur in France and Iberia at about this time points to the latter.

Wherever the Zebbug stele came from, it seems an alien element in the art of the islands. Perhaps the mask-like face conceals the goddess of death who was subsequently represented in Malta in an entirely different style, and the primitive little figures and hints of face to be found on the pottery of this period may possibly be symbols of the same deity. All these novelties may be evidence of the arrival of new settlers.

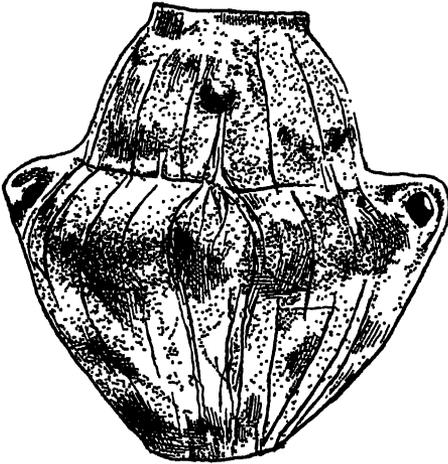
With the second millennium, an advance took place in pottery which was without parallel in western Europe. The ware was partly painted. The stimulus for this may have come from Sicily and southern Italy, where painted ware was introduced by a new people, apparently of Greek origin. But the Maltese produced a very individual style of their own, with red or brown ornamentation on an ivory background or light grey bands on a dark foundation. There was also some delightful yellowish ware with



7 *The oldest Maltese sculpture*

scratched patterns which were given a red incrustation. The pleasure taken in colour by a people living in the clear, strong light of the Mediterranean makes a triumphant appearance in this attractive pottery. The original inhabitants of Malta had no potter's wheels, but in the second millennium they were producing small works of art perfect in form and of the highest quality. Besides the attractive painted ware there were thin-walled jars with bell-shaped necks, real handles and flat bases, pleasingly decorated with vertical lines (Fig. 8).

The development of their own style of pottery was only one aspect of the astonishing growth of the island culture. This can hardly have taken place against a background of earth-shattering events. The period of grim struggle for life, the pioneering period, was over, and a certain degree of prosperity must have prevailed, based on agriculture and stock-breeding. Also there was plenty of fish in the sea, and until sudden disaster overtook them no hostile incursion seems to have disturbed the peace. Thus, this lonely people living on two islands in the midst of a boundless sea under a boundless sky in a world without beginning and without end, royally free and yet captives, may have concentrated increasingly on the mystic realms of the hereafter, on relations with the dead and with the life-giving forces of the underworld. Perhaps the life of the holy islands was dominated by priests and priestesses who spurred the people to the extraordinary feats they performed in the service of subterranean powers. Something of the spirit of that vanished age may perhaps have survived in the fanatical religious fervour of the present-day Maltese and the unchanged taste for huge round religious buildings evident in their Baroque churches. The dome of the church in the little village of Musta is bigger than that of St. Paul's in London and is the third biggest in Europe. This can no more be rationally explained than can the huge temples built in the little archipelago in primitive times.



8 Jar in the early Maltese temple style

### *Development of Temple Architecture*

The prehistoric finds and systematic excavation of recent years have thrown a certain amount of light on the hitherto obscure process of development which led to the building of megalithic monuments for which there is no parallel either in Sicily or elsewhere in western Europe or the Near East. In the first place, connections have become evident between the rock-cut tombs and the sacred architecture above ground. In 1955 a necropolis was discovered in the hills of Xemxija which has apparently yielded the key to the riddle of the origin and functions of the megalithic shrines.

The tombs at Xemxija consist in the main of small, more or less kidney-shaped chambers with slightly arched roofs to which access is gained by way of a round "port-hole" at the bottom of a shaft. There are also double chambers, each with its own entrance but connected by short corridors. One peculiarly shaped tomb measuring twenty feet by eighteen is of special interest as throwing light on the origin of the temple architecture. When the big cave was dug, portions of the rock were left standing to support the roof, and consequently the space round these became a series of round recesses. There was a surprising correspondence between the resultant ground plan of the cave and that of the oldest shrine, whose irregular shape had struck the excavators as being inexplicably complicated. Now, however, as an imitation of a rock-cut tomb it suddenly made sense. The recesses in the burial chambers of Xemxija had structural significance and, having become traditional, were then faithfully copied in stone buildings in which their functional significance was nil. There is much to be said for this hypothesis, which would completely explain the remarkable layout of the temples, and notably that of the early temple of Mgarr (Fig. 9).

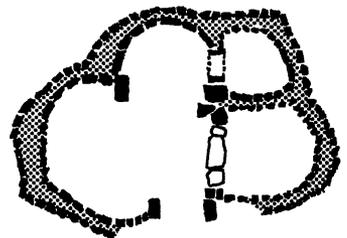
Rock-cut tombs were not infrequently translated into architecture in other megalithic cultures. However, we have no proof yet that burials ever took place in the religious buildings of Malta. Also we do not know whether they were all later than the earliest rock-cut tombs there.

It is a long way from the small shrines of the early period to the huge temples that eventually developed. But the primitive site at Mgarr, which covers about seventy-five square yards, contains the future in embryo. A few low, much restored walls are all that remain to-day, but the roughly oval shape of the building and many details can nevertheless be made out. Access to the interior was gained on one of the long sides through a short corridor consisting of three big slabs; to the right and left of it were two horse-shoe shaped chambers, and opposite the entrance was a third, which was originally connected with yet another chamber by a trilithon doorway. There is no façade; this appears only in later buildings, and a small stone model of a similar building which was found in the course of excavations is also without a façade. The basic design of the prehistoric shrines of Malta and Gozo, though it undergoes development, always remains a series of roundish chambers arranged about inner courtyards and along corridors (Plates 3, 4).

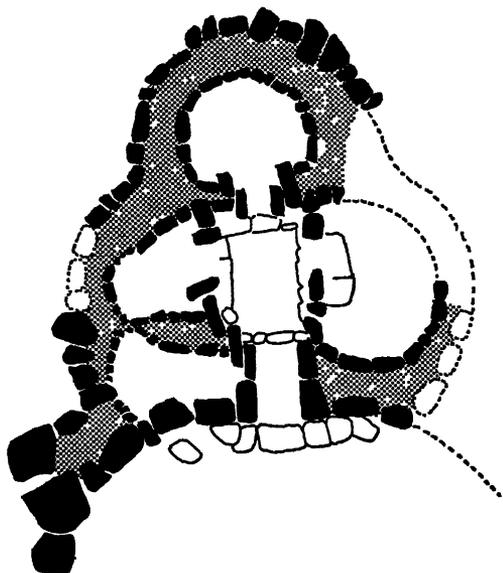
The outer walls of the little temple of Mgarr consist of courses of small stones; bigger stones were used in the interior. Next to it, another shrine twice as big and much more carefully built, was erected later. Its sacred character was emphasized by a massive concave façade of crude blocks, part of which still stands. Four steps lead up to the main entrance in the middle of the façade. A corridor and a massive trilithon entrance lead to a rectangular, paved inner court round which three apse-like rooms are arranged in clover-leaf pattern (Fig. 10).

The megalithic structure is enclosed by a Cyclopean outer wall, and the space between the two is filled in with earth and rubble. The filling, which is sometimes so thick that it encloses the shrine almost like a tumulus, is typical of these ancient Maltese structures, and resemble both in shape and inspiration the tumuli in which the great megalithic tombs of western Europe were covered.

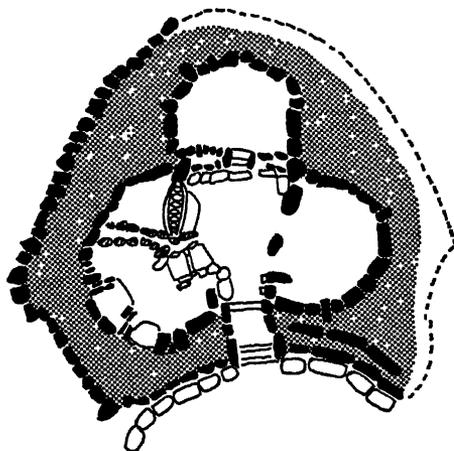
The clover-leaf pattern with which the sacred architecture of the islands took definite shape occurs also in other early megalithic buildings. In 1954 a technically more advanced building of this type was uncovered on the hills of Corradino, near Valletta.



9 *Plan of the oldest temple of Mgarr*



10a Plan of the second temple of Mgarr



10b Plan of the temple of Kordin III

It is about eighteen yards in length, and the flat blocks of standing stone that form the façade and the corridor are hewn and show traces of trimming; the forecourt is paved.

Clover-leaf design is not confined to Malta; it occurs in rock-cut tombs elsewhere in the Mediterranean area, including North Africa, and in the first half of the second millennium monumental beehive clover-leaf tombs were erected in distant Ireland. Thus the clover-leaf pattern is another pointer to connections with the cult of the dead. The concave façade and semi-circular forecourt it enclosed are also widespread feature of megalithic tomb architecture.

Forecourts of this kind, built into burial mounds or marked off by walls in sickle-shape pattern outside the entrances to tombs, occur all the way from Sardinia and the Iberian Peninsula to Britain. Relics of burnt and votive offerings show that they were used for ceremonial rites in which, perhaps, the participants put themselves in communion with the dead and with their own forebears.

From a tomb of several chambers with a place of worship attached it is not a big step to a special shrine for the veneration of the dead. There is a good deal to indicate that in the western European megalithic cultures this step was sometimes taken. We do not know whether or not the oldest shrines in Malta and Gozo were originally burial places, but it is hardly possible to doubt their connection with the cult of the dead.

Religious development in the archipelago led to a growth of ritual that called for ever bigger and more numerous sacred buildings. These developed into independent entities, while the dead went on being buried in caves and rock-cut tombs. The discovery of the Hypogeum of Hal Saflieni has shown that, parallel with the architectural develop-

ments above ground, the rock-cut tombs, as in Sicily and Sardinia, were later developed into extensive systems with shrines of their own.

Such, perhaps, was the process by which in the course of centuries the great megalithic temples developed out of the dark, round, cave-dwellings of the dead; symbols of the womb of the Great Mother, from which everything came and to which everything returned. The temples, in the close embrace of their thick double walls, also remained in the earth, in close connection with the nether regions.

### *The Giant Shrine*

The oldest of all the great temples of the archipelago, the Ggantija, stands on a hill on Gozo. None of the later shrines reached the colossal proportions of this building. Its grey stone masses dominate the landscape, which falls away in long folds and furrows down to the rugged coast. The great curving façade faces the rising sun and looks towards Malta, which is separated from Gozo only by an arm of the sea; a self-contained world which does not look outward.

Gozo had no part in the history which gave its neighbouring island the palaces, churches and fortresses of the Knights of St. John, and made it a British naval base. It lies intact and dreaming, listening to the unchanging voices of wind and wave. It seems still to preserve something of the spell of vanished ages. When the crumbling temple of the island's original inhabitants had grown strange and unintelligible to new settlers, and new names had long since been given to the mother of mankind and goddess of the dead, Gozo still kept its myths and became the legendary realm of Calypso, the daughter of Oceanus. In a coral-coloured sickle-shaped bay carved out of the sloping shore behind the Ggantija visitors are still shown the cave of the beautiful nymph who, according to the legend, caused Ulysses to forget his home for seven years.

In the magic quiet of midday, when the red sea-smoothed sand burns the feet and glimmers of sunlight dart across the blue forests of seaweed at the bottom of the glassy sea, the bay still belongs to Calypso. Within her magic cave she takes form as one of the many manifestations of the Great Mother – who, perhaps, was once worshipped in the huge, cave-like temple above. Gozo has always been an island of goddesses, not of gods.

The people of Gozo may have preserved obscure memories of the great female ruler of the Ggantija. According to one of their legends, the temple was built not by a man, but by a woman with a baby at her breast. Strengthened by a meal of magic beans, she is said to have taken the huge blocks of stone to the site in a single day, and then to have built the walls by night.

It is understandable that later generations should have assumed the Ggantija to have been the work of antediluvian giants. The jagged ruins of weathered, coralline limestone still rinsing up to heaven do indeed look as if they had been built by Titans, not by the hand of man.

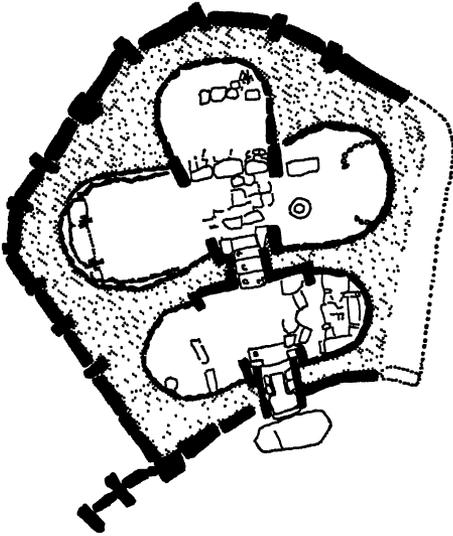
More than 120 years ago, the whole structure was cleared of the débris of centuries by order of the Governor of Malta. Since then, wind and weather have destroyed a great deal that is to be seen in old drawings. In 1954, excavations threw light on the various phases of the building of the temple, and finds of pottery made approximate dating possible. The oldest part seems to have been built in the nineteenth century B. C., when the Maltese culture had already developed its own style. Pottery from that period, with red incrustated scratched decoration, was found in the clover-leaf structure from which the southern temple grew.

Three horseshoe-shaped chambers, each about ten yards long and nearly as wide, are arranged round a square inner court (Fig. 11). The whole structure measures over ninety feet. In front of it is a smaller oval chamber, apparently of later construction, connected to the original inner courtyard by a corridor. Tall hewn and trimmed blocks of yellowish limestone flank the exit, which leads into the open from the front chamber. Round holes in the gate pillars show that it was once shut by wooden beams. Outside the entrance an enormous stone slab serves as a step.

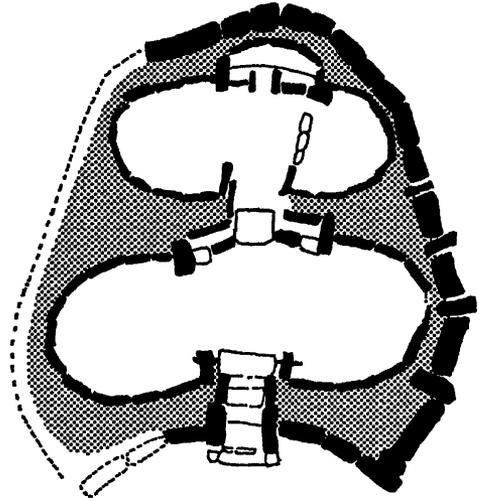
Next to the southern temple a somewhat smaller building was constructed of smaller stones. Finds of pottery show that it dates from a later period. It too has two elliptical chambers connected by a central corridor (Fig. 12). In the rear portion, however, the old clover-leaf pattern has nearly vanished; the central chamber has shrunk to a shallow protrusion. In contrast to the southern temple, the front oval-shaped chamber is the bigger. This second shrine remained the pattern for all the subsequent sacred buildings of this Maltese culture.

Both temples are surrounded by a thick layer of earth and rubble; that round the southern temple is shaped like a pentagon, while that round its neighbour is surprisingly reminiscent of the shape of many tumuli over megalithic tombs in north-western Europe. The whole complex is surrounded by a megalithic-Cyclopean outer wall (Plate 5). This does not, as in the case of earlier structures, consist of rocks laid on top of one another with no attempt at coursing, but has a base of squarely laid slabs – the biggest measures five yards by four – between which smaller rocks, with their narrow side outwards, were inserted like wedges, a new method of construction which gave the walls extra stability. On this base longish blocks were laid in courses, overhanging slightly on the inner side, as if they were the beginning of corbelling.

The inner walls were built in the old, primitive fashion of rocks of different sizes, but their irregularity is evened out by a thick layer of mortar. Numerous traces of colour show that the walls were once painted red. In so far as they are still standing to a sufficient height, they incline inwards. Those of other big shrines in the archipelago do the same, and this led to the bold conjecture that the round chambers were once roofed by



11 *Plan of the southern temple of the Ggantija*



12 *Plan of the northern temple of the Ggantija*

beehive domes. This can hardly have been possible in view of the unusual size of the Ggantija. Chambers nearly fifteen yards across were vaulted over in the *tholos* tombs at Mycenae but, in spite of their astonishing achievements, the neolithic builders of the Maltese megalithic culture, with their primitive tools, never reached the technical level of Mycenae in its prime.

It is, therefore, probable that the round chambers narrowed at the top and were then covered with timber or even stone slabs. Small models of megalithic building found in the temples show roofs made of long slabs, and in the underground shrine of Hal Saflieni a model was found of a round roof made of overhanging courses of stones surmounted by a flat slab. It may be no accident that stone slabs are still sometimes used by Maltese peasants to roof in small buildings.

In front of the slightly curved frontage of the double sanctuary there is a nearly round terrace, about thirty yards in diameter, which was perhaps originally walled in. It was built of several courses of big stones and reinforced by a megalithic wall to prevent it from collapsing. Excavations beneath it brought to light numerous potsherds which showed it to be a late addition to the temple.

The building of the Ggantija must have made incredible demands on the inhabitants of the island. Some of the megaliths used are as big as cottages and weigh forty or fifty tons. Stone balls which were used as rollers to shift them are still to be found lying about in the neighbourhood of the temple. Just as the building of mediaeval cathedrals was the work of many generations and was spread over centuries, so must this shrine have required the labour of the whole population for nearly five hundred years. Like a cathedral, it must have seemed a symbol of security and eternity.

The Ggantija, standing on an eminence with its round domes and broad circumvallation, must have looked more like a burial mound than any of the other big island shrines. The whole complex, while it remained intact, was a compact, barely articulated mass in the grey armour of its cyclopean wall; a shrine which had grown up in close communion with the earth and the underworld, not directed to high heaven.

Nothing in the sacred buildings of the archipelago points to any worship of the heavenly bodies; there is no trace of any sun or moon cult. These buildings belong essentially to the most ancient telluric religions of the Near Eastern-Mediterranean world. The forerunners of the Ggantija are to be sought in the east, even though its concave facades may possibly show influences from the western European megalithic cultures.

The prototypes of the round buildings of Malta are perhaps to be found in Cyprus, in the settlement of Khirokita, with its *tholos* huts built on ground level of clay and sun-dried bricks, which date back to the fourth millennium. They were thirty feet in diameter and had walls six feet thick. The oldest stone beehive dome yet discovered in the Mediterranean area was found on such a hut. The cult of the dead in Cyprus, unlike that in Malta, was characterized by primitive barbarism; it may have been inspired more by animal fear than by love or veneration for the dead, for bodies were laid in a crouching position on the clay floor of the *tholos* and were often bound and weighed down with stones. Nevertheless they were given adornments and pottery to accompany them into the next world, and human sacrifices were made to them. As at Jericho, infants appear to have been the most frequent sacrifices. The skeletons of twenty-five infants came to light in various layers of one of the biggest huts, many of them lying on the bodies of adults. In the same burial *tholos* three hearths were shown by traces of burning. A kind of throne made of stones from a streambed was evidently intended for an ancestral spirit or god of death, whose head was also found. On the back of this seat there was the drawing of a snake. In Mesopotamia, as in Crete, the snake that creeps out of the earth was a symbol of the Great Mother. Very ancient Near Eastern idols sometimes show her with a snake's head on a woman's body. A representation in relief of an erect snake was found on a block at the Ggantija, and the same theme occurs on menhirs in Brittany.

Finds at the *tholoi* in Cyprus show that these living places were also the sites of religious practices. They were often in the middle of an enclosed area containing stone tables and the remains of burnt offerings. This may point a way to the ancient Maltese tables and the remains of burnt offerings. This may point a way to the ancient Maltese dead. No human sacrifices were made in the "holy islands"; libations were poured, and the only sacrifices were animals. What other ritual took place in the red twilight of the round chambers of the Ggantija can be only conjectured. The magic colour of ochre, which for countless thousands of years had been believed to give life to the dead, must have made the temples seem like tombs in which the dead were very near the worshippers. The bigger and smaller shrines of hewn and trimmed slabs to be found at the Ggantija, as at other big temples, were apparently also connected with the dead. A shrine in the

front part of the southern temple still contained a baetyl shaped like an artillery shell. In the Cretan cult, shrines enclosing small stone pillars signified the dead and the tomb, and in Malta they might be interpreted in the same way. At the side of the corridor between the outer and inner chamber in the southern temple there are two big "altars" — formed by thick horizontal slabs held in niches. One is decorated with spirals in relief and certainly comes from the final phase of the Maltese culture, when the influence of the Cretan-Aegean civilization in its heyday was reflected in the richness and refinement of Maltese art and the adoption of a number of ritual practices.

Hardly any sculpture has yet been found at the Ggantija, though a great deal came to light in the later shrines. There are only two small heads to show that idols played a part here too.

The Ggantija was certainly the religious and spiritual centre on which the whole life of the little island of Gozo was based, the abode of forces on which both this life and the next depended. Perhaps it may even have been the eternal home to which the islanders went after death. At all events it conceals secrets from which the veil has not yet been torn. There is an account by an eighteenth-century antiquary of his discovery and exploration of a labyrinth under the temple. There is no reason to doubt his veracity, but the entrance to these primitive catacombs has not yet been rediscovered. Perhaps a rock necropolis extends under the Ggantija similar to the three-storey Hypogeum of Hal Saflieni, a city of the dead to which in the course of centuries a whole people were admitted. The shrine on the surface may have been only the entrance to a still bigger shrine beneath.

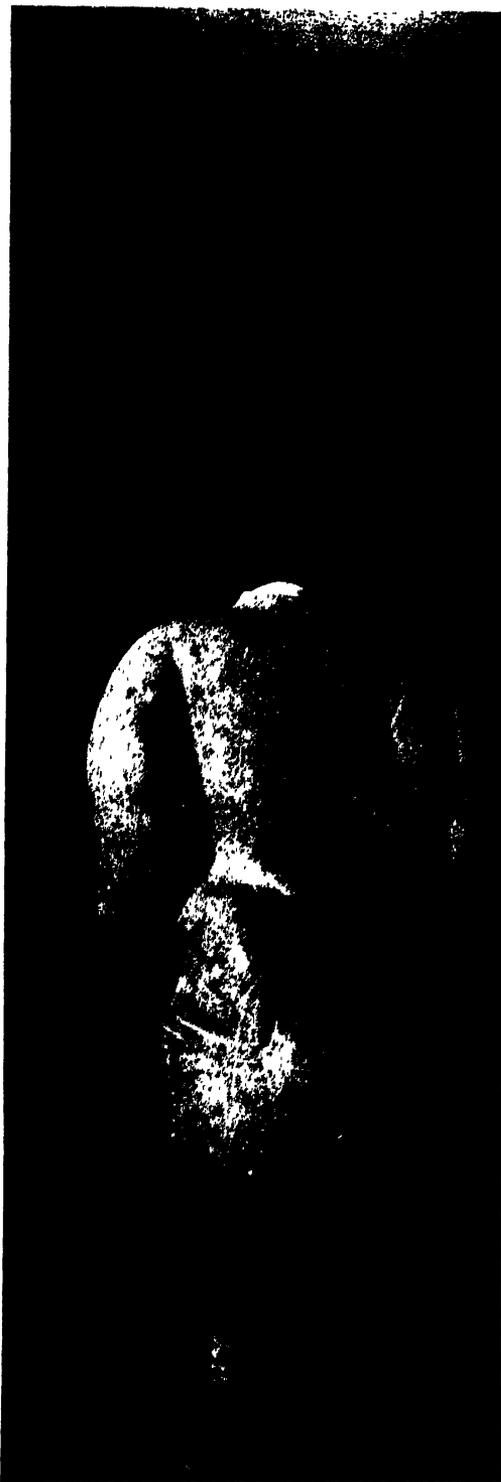
### *Golden Temple of Qrendi*

On the shore of the steep southern coast of Malta, on a slightly sloping rock-shelf not far from the village of Qrendi, there stand the golden-coloured ruins of Hagar Qim, the "stone of prayer". Lower down, nearer the cliff edge, the fantastic profile of the Mnajdra is outlined.

The high wind-swept plateau must have been one of the most ancient sacred areas of the archipelago. Smaller shrines were built here before the huge megalithic structures. In contrast to the Ggantija, this temple looks over the open sea into space. Its façades face south-east, overlooking the unbounded, iridescent surface on which Filfla seems to float like a boat of silvery rock. Nearly four thousand years ago, when the light-coloured, barely articulated stone masses of the temple loomed over the horizon, it must have seemed like a vision from a mythical age and had a magic attraction for passing mariners.



13 Front view of the "Venus of Malta"



14 Back view of the "Venus of Malta"





16 Corbelled slabs in the front of the Mnajdra oval



17 Trilithon gateway in Mnajdra with pitted decoration

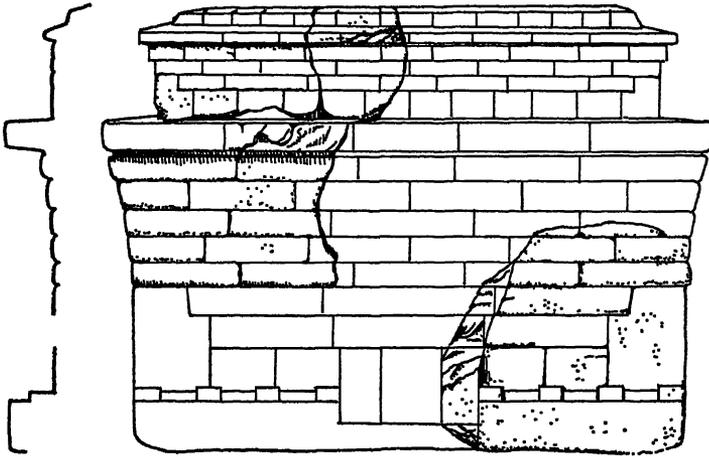
As the small size and poverty of the islands bore no relation to the huge dimensions of their shrines, it is tempting to regard them as having been a kind of ancient Mediterranean Delphi – a forerunner of the original Delphi dedicated, not to the cult of Apollo, but to a female, subterranean power, that of the great snake Delphyne, whose name conceals an archaic word for the womb. The god of light did not prevail at Delphi until he had slain the serpent with his arrows. No such transition from an ancient tellurian to a uranian religion took place on Malta and Gozo. But oracles are generally closely associated with subterranean powers, and the oracle of Delphi was older than Apollo; the consultation of oracles seems to have been a feature of the ancient Maltese cult. There are also indications that the sick and infirm went to the shrines to be healed and that, as in classical times, people used to sleep in them in order to enter into communion in dream with the powers of the underworld and to obtain counsel, predictions about the future, or relief from suffering.

In historical times there were many famous island shrines in the eastern Mediterranean. The sanctuary of the Cabeiri in Samothrace enjoyed special popularity with mariners. Those initiated into the secret cult practised there received a purple sash which they wore round their bodies as a protection against the perils of the sea.

It is easy to imagine that a widely known place of pilgrimage of this kind may have existed at Malta, but we have no evidence of it. Hardly anything that has come to light suggests votive offerings by foreign pilgrims. The numerous objects found in the temples are nearly all local products.

But foreign influence was unquestionably at work in the final phases of the temple culture, with its sudden advance in building skill. The beginning of the Ggantija dates from a time when contact with the outside world was evidently sporadic, and the islanders were developing their own culture in seclusion. They concentrated, not on improving their building methods, but on observing formal traditions which had ritual significance. The huge clover-leaf structures communicate much more than their successors do the feeling of being antechambers to the underworld; magic places where the spirits of the dead were conjured up. At Hagar Qim, the visible remains of which date from a later period, the architecture is still largely in accordance with tradition, and its sepulchral character is evident in numerous details. But side by side with this there is an effort to achieve purity and harmony of form. The pleasure evidently taken in the decoration of the interior chambers betrays a higher cultural level and Aegean influence.

The majestic ruins of Hagar Qim (Plate 6) glow warm and golden in the sunlight of a stony plateau flecked with a few patches of parched green. The whole structure, which grew ever bigger and more complex in the course of its long history, is built of yellowish globigerina limestone; at the Ggantija this was used only for the interior. It is softer and much more susceptible to atmospheric action than coralline limestone but also much more easily worked and dressed. Now, however, its aesthetic possibilities had been discovered, and careful workmanship and decorative effects were aimed at. The skill of building technique in Crete at this time must have had a share in this development.



13 *Reconstruction of a model of a temple façade of the later type*

The long, massive, slightly curved façade of Hagar Qim conveys a sense of strength at rest (Plate 7). In front of it is a curved forecourt, paved with great slabs. In the middle of this great stone bay is the deep, dark entrance gate. The front wall of the temple evidently once consisted of regular and accurately fitting slabs and blocks and was a good thirty feet high. All that remain standing today are the six great base slabs surrounding the gateway. The two outer slabs are about twelve feet high and twelve feet across. Two courses of big square blocks are laid on this foundation. The upper course overhangs the lower and dovetails into the slabs of the façade. The gate, consisting of two megaliths over which a third is laid, is reminiscent of the back gate of the Citadel at Mycenae. A stone step, which may have served as a seat, runs the whole length of the front.

Fragments of a small model found at the shrine of Hal Tarxien near Valletta give us an idea of what such a façade looked like when the temple culture was in its prime. From it we may conclude that originally six more courses of rectangular blocks probably stood on the base of the wall at Hagar Qim, forming a frontage that was somewhat broader at the top than at the base. On top of these there may have been more courses of smaller blocks. A façade of this kind would have been thirty or forty feet high (Fig. 13).

Behind this remarkably designed and balanced frontage there extends a curious maze of chambers, passages and courtyards. Besides the principal structure there are two smaller buildings and traces of a third. The principal structure consisted originally of the two traditional ovals. The rear oval, however, was broken into, and instead of the central niche there is an exit into open air immediately opposite the entrance at the front. The place of the left hand chamber is taken by a broad passage which leads to a fan-shaped extension on the south-west composed of rectangular chambers of various sizes and shapes. Nearly all these structures, which were uncovered 120 years ago and were more closely examined in 1954, seem to have been completed in the penultimate phase of the Malta culture, *i. e.*, in the seventeenth century B. C.

From the cool semi-darkness of the gateway one steps into the first central chamber, which is now bathed in the light of a fierce African sun. Though it now lies open to the light of day, the place still suggests a dark burial cave. The recesses are separated by slabs nearly nine feet high, and in these there are the "portholes" typical of megalithic tombs all the way from Palestine to north-western Europe. The semi-circular chambers in the rear are the only ones in which the walls are crudely built, which suggests that they are the oldest.

Finds of pottery make it probable that the last additions to the great complex were two small pillar niches dating from the final period of the temple culture.

A filling of earth and stones separates the inner buildings from the outer wall, which again consists of huge megaliths, only slightly hewn. One of the slabs is twenty-one feet long, nine feet tall, and more than two feet thick. Behind the rear oval at the back is a fifty ton block more than fifteen feet tall; the purpose it served in the shrine is not clear.

In the course of centuries the stones of Hagar Qim that face the sea have weathered into strange, distorted shapes, but inside the temple the regular outlines and smooth, honey-coloured surface of the blocks and slabs have to a great extent survived. No trace of stucco has been found, and if red paint was used it has completely vanished. The only implements used to work the stone seem to have been simple stone mallets and the horns of oxen and goats. The stone was smoothed with small tools made of imported flint. Like the builders of the second town of Jericho, the original inhabitants of Malta disliked sharp corners and edges, and the edges of their stone buildings were often rounded.

Nearly everywhere at Hagar Qim, where several courses of stones still stand on the megalithic base, there are indications that the inner walls were built in such a way that the space between them narrowed towards the top. At one place the overhanging blocks are so accurately fitted together that no jutting overlap was formed. A number of slabs and blocks in the chambers and corridors are honeycombed with small holes. This remarkable form of decoration, which appears in the penultimate phase of the temple culture, may have had ritual significance.

Bigger holes, hollows and cavities are found in the floor and corridor slabs of all the megalithic temples of these islands. In passages and doorways they served practical purposes, holding the hinges or fastenings of doors and screens. They may also have held rings used for tying up sacrificial animals. Maltese peasants still tie up their cattle in this way.

But the holes and – often very big – cavities to be found opposite the main entrance at Hagar Qim and other shrines were certainly for religious purposes. Some of them were plugged with perfectly fitting stone covers and were filled with animal bones.

At Hagar Qim, as at the Ggantija, there are stone slab recesses as well as smaller shrines. In some of them animal bones have been found, the remains of sacrifices in these symbolic ancestral tombs. Apart from these signs of Aegean influence, to the right and

left of one corridor are two mushroom-shaped monolithic altars, the table slabs of which are rimmed, as if to contain some fluid. They are the only examples in Malta of their kind, which is widespread in the eastern Mediterranean area.

There are also a large number of lower, box-shaped altars fashioned of smaller slabs. On one of them are two spirals in relief on a background pattern of holes. No doubt this motif, which occurs again at the sanctuary of Hal Tarxien, stands for the great goddess's magic eye, in which all her power was believed to be concentrated. The same eye, in the form of two spirals with eyebrows, looks at us from the slabs which close the entrance to rock-cut tombs of this period in Sicily. There is also a stylised indication of a human form which leaves no doubt that the spirals stood for eyes.

The finest altar at Hagar Qim is a piece of rectangular stone about twenty-eight inches high, each corner of which has been carved into a pair of small pillars. An indented slab at the top is surmounted by a rounded slab, whose horizontal surface is slightly hollowed. The whole thing is covered with a pattern of holes, and on all four sides are carvings of tall, fern-like plants in pots (Plate 8); it was once painted red.

Similar altars appear in works of art from Crete, where the plant motif was common. At the foot of the altar five figurines were found, and four more came to light in the western chamber. Some of them may have been representations of the unknown god to whom sacrifices were made in the Maltese shrines.

One monstrously corpulent figure, more emblem of fertility than human being, squats on huge thighs. The enormous pelvis and equally large shoulders are like one oval superimposed on another larger oval, and the observer is involuntarily reminded of the double oval shape of the temples; the same pattern, perhaps the same underlying idea, may be expressed in both. Resting on the masses of flesh of this mysterious deity's lap – it is identifiable neither as male nor female – are two surprisingly tiny hands, and the feet are also oddly delicate (Plate 9). These statuettes are between seven and a half and ten inches high and their heads are missing, but a cavity with a holed rim makes it clear that the head was inserted separately and was perhaps movable. Heads independent of bodies have come to light in a number of shrines in Malta and Gozo. They are small and quite naturalistic.

All the squatting figures of the kind that have so far been found seem to be sexless. One, strange to say, is naked in front while at the back there are indications of a fringed robe over which there falls a long, thick plait. Certain relationships are evident between early Near Eastern and Maltese idols, and one of the objects of veneration in the Cyclades in chalcolithic times was the figure of a steatopygous squatting woman. But in general, extreme stylization turned the Cycladic and Near Eastern idols into abstract shapes, often rather like fiddles. Though they may have no sexual characteristics, there is no doubt that the idea of a female deity lay behind them. But the Maltese idols are not abstract figures; their asexuality is not the outcome of extreme stylisation. It seems rather to express the islanders' idea of a divine being embodying cosmic strength and abundance on a superhuman scale.

The same deity may also be represented by the naked standing figures found at Hagar Qim. One such finely worked limestone carving is more than eighteen inches high. The shapeless body with its rolls of flesh and unwieldy legs stands on a red-painted base punctuated with holes. The right arm hangs downwards and the left hand is raised to the breast. Again the head is missing (Plate 10).

In addition to these remarkable productions, in which ancient memories of palaeolithic carvings seem to survive, a definitely female statuette came to light at Hagar Qim, wearing a dress with a wide, bell-shaped skirt of the ancient Cretan fashion and a heavy necklace (Plate 11). Once more the delicate left hand is raised to the breast. The feet are invisible; apparently the figure is supposed to be seated. Perhaps this is a representation of the Great Mother, the guardian of the living and the dead. To her ponderous body there may once have attached a Madonna-like head, similar to a small terracotta head found at Hal Tarxien. This small work of art shows a pleasing face with high forehead over which the hair lies in carefully combed strands. The eyes seem closed, as if dreaming; originally they appear to have been painted, in order to give them life. There is trace of a smile of a Quattrocento, that Madonna (Plate 12).

The spirituality of this fine head and the delicate hands of all these figurines contrasts strikingly with the grossness of their bodies. In its timeless stillness and absorption the seated idol resembles Far Eastern statues of the meditating Buddha and enable us to suspect something of the religious atmosphere of the islands.

Also found at Hagar Qim was the so-called Venus of Malta in red terracotta, in a style entirely different from that of these singular, stylised productions. The Venus of Malta is a naked, rather heavily built woman of normal proportions. Her left hand lies under her breast, and the broken right arm perhaps pointed towards her lap. Head and feet are missing. The torso betrays a surprising anatomical knowledge, and the back is a small masterpiece of modelling which reminds one of Maillol's sculptures. Whether she was a woman or a goddess figure is an open question. The arms are in a position which occurs frequently in eastern idols, and this perhaps points to her having been the latter (Plates 13, 14).

All these figurines from Hagar Qim bear witness to a highly developed cult obviously associated with a number of deities, and they apparently date from the end of the fourth or perhaps the final phase of the temple culture. They can scarcely antedate the seventeenth century B. C., but are probably younger.

Long before Hagar Qim was built, a small clover-leaf shaped shrine was built in a hollow a little way below it. Its graceful construction can still be plainly made out. Next to it, like a scene from a lunar landscape, stand the ruins of the great double shrine of Mnajdra (Plate 15). They extend almost to the edge of the plateau, which here falls away in broad rivers of rubble down towards the sea, whose hollow roaring voice, as it surges into the inlets in the cliffs, is perpetually audible at the lonely temples above. Wind and weather have eroded the outer walls of coralline limestone and destroyed the sickle-shaped façade.

Excavations have shown that the south-westerly structure with its numerous annexes is the older. The carefully dressed and laid megaliths of the interior are in part well preserved. In particular, four courses of blocks still stand on their massive base at one spot in the chambers of the front oval, to which entrance is gained by a massive covered gateway. Three steps lead up to a low door-hole in one of the tall base slabs. This gives access to a small chamber with some niches of complicated construction, one of which is partly screened by a slab with a window-hole (Plate 16).

On the north side of the wall is another chamber, accessible only from the outside. Through an opening in the wall one can see into the front hall of the temple. Nearly the same arrangement is to be found at Hagar Qim. It may have been used for secret rites; perhaps the voice of an invisible priest may have made oracular pronouncement through the wall.

A roofed corridor, again with an altar on each side, leads to the very much deformed rear oval of the older shrine. On the left are three pillar niches. These must have been of special importance, as they have an entrance of their own which is one of the high points of ancient Maltese architecture. Its ornamentation dovetails into the back wall of the front chamber. Two imposing blocks stand like sentries on either side of an elegant trilithon gateway which encloses a slab out of which a doorway was accurately hewn. All the stone surfaces of this gateway are punctuated with innumerable little holes which create an attractive effect of light and shade (Plate 17).

No other shrine is so richly decorated in this remarkable fashion which, in spite of the delicacy of its execution, creates the impression of being very primitive. Later it went out of fashion in favour of a more refined type of relief decoration.

The other, north easterly, temple that of Mnajdra, which stands in an oblique position beside it, is bigger and more uniform with its two similar ovals, but it is less imposing. The base of the inner walls is of faultless construction, but consists of smaller slabs; in the later structures megalithic building was evidently in decline. There is no façade, as the whole structure is built on a round stone platform surrounded by a Cyclopean wall. The main entrance consists of a small corridor ending in a massive slab, now half-destroyed, with a big porthole of the kind which occurs elsewhere only in the inner chambers. It looks as if an attempt was made here to emphasize the original function of the shrines at a time when they were coming to bear less and less resemblance to burial places. The high threshold before the gateway may perhaps have represented a barrier between the profane world and the sacred realm of the dead. In popular belief, thresholds have preserved magical and prophylactic properties to the present day.

A trilithon enclosing a slab with a porthole in it screens off a small annexe behind the left-hand chamber containing a pillar niche. The various notably small and inaccessible chambers of the later temples may point to a sharper demarcation between laity and priesthood; in the course of centuries the latter may have built up their position as intermediaries between this world and the hereafter and thereby increased their power. No doubt they were also looked to for healing diseases and afflictions.

A female clay figure found in Mnajdra with an unnaturally swollen belly and strikingly sunken back looks like a very lifelike study of a sufferer from an abdominal tumour. Crude statuettes from other shrines also show physical deformities. One had sharp pieces of shell stuck into various parts of its body. These statuettes may have been *ex-votos* offered by patients who had recovered; alternatively they may have been a magic way of treating disease or of inflicting it on enemies. The sick and the bereaved may have been brought to the golden temples over the sea several thousands of years ago just as they are to places of pilgrimage today. At evening, the empty labyrinth of the "stone of prayer" is filled with blue shadows, and the light of the declining sun sets the stone ablaze.

The loneliness is filled with intangible life, and the wind among the broken walls seems to echo whispering, imploring, ecstatic voices repeating the never-changing prayers and lamentations of men seeking to escape their destiny. The two big ovals of the upper chamber Mnajdra assume the huge shape of a forgotten deity who was both impersonal, kind and terrible, like the earth itself.

### *Realm of the Great Mother*

While the shrines of Malta developed from small burial pits into huge temples up in the light of day, the dead were buried ever deeper in the island bedrock.

In 1902 some houses were being built on the road to Hal Saflieni on the outskirts of Valletta. While one of the bell-shaped water tanks with which every house in these parched islands is provided was being hewn out, the ground collapsed, revealing a subterranean cavity. Nevertheless the building of the houses was continued, and only after they were completed did anyone think of informing the Government of Malta, who appointed a committee to conduct excavations.

Work was begun under the direction of E. Magri. An immense system of cataconibs on several storeys came to light, consisting of burial chambers, halls, passages and steps, and containing about seven thousand skeletons. Magri was transferred elsewhere, but fortunately work was continued under Sir Themistocles Zammit, the director of the museum in Valletta. To this versatile and unusual man is due the fact that the study of Maltese prehistory was henceforward conducted scientifically instead of in the dilettante manner of the nineteenth century, in the course of which a great deal of material of priceless value had been lost. Henceforward increasing light was thrown on the prehistory of the archipelago. Its megalithic remains had hitherto been generally ascribed to the Phoenicians; at the turn of the century their true nature had been recognized only by the German archaeologist Albert Mahr, who admirably described and interpreted them and tried to give them their due place in Mediterranean prehistory.

Sir Themistocles Zammit completed the excavation of the necropolis and in 1911 published a complete description and plan.

The Hypogeum, like the later Christian catacombs at Mdina, the old Maltese capital, served both as cemetery and shrine. It was dug out of the limestone of the top of a hill, and its initial stages must have looked not very different from the tombs of Xemxija, some of which were already linked by a short corridor. Finds at the top level, which was naturally the oldest, show that it dates back to the third millennium. The process of extending it continued for centuries until it reached down to about thirty feet below the surface of the rock. It is interesting that this depth roughly equals the height of the shrines above ground.

The trilithon gateway which gave access to the labyrinth was severely damaged when the modern houses were built, and the megalithic superstructure which surmounted it had long since disappeared. Its remains came to light in 1909 while a road was being made in front of the new houses. Today a modern entrance and steps lead down out of the noise and heat of the suburban street into the cool silence of this city of the dead, whose darkness is only imperfectly banished by the electric lighting. The Hypogeum consists entirely of curved lines, concave surfaces and rounded vaults. In the flickering light of little oil or grease lamps – there is no sign that torches were ever used – these caverns must have suggested the protective darkness of a maternal womb in which the dead were laid like ripe seeds to be regenerated and made fertile again.

From the crudely hewn upper chambers, round which the burial cells peer at one like empty eye-sockets, the way leads down to a sacred area perhaps dedicated to a secret cult of the chthonic powers. The approach is through long vaulted halls with carefully dressed walls on which there are traces, like bloodstains, of the sacred ochre. The ceilings are covered with several kinds of spiral ornamentation and engraved symbols. The Great Goddess of the primitive Mediterranean world left her mark here. On one wall there is a pattern of a different kind, a black-and-white checkerboard which also appears on pottery from Xemxija and vessels from southern France dating from the same period. This may be a sign of western influences, which are less tangible in Malta than eastern influences, but which continually recur nevertheless.

A broad, sweeping, ceremonial kind of architecture carried out with extraordinary precision in the soft, brownish limestone announces the proximity of the "holy of holies". An imitation of the elegant façade of a megalithic temple with a trilithon gateway and pillars projecting between niches can be made out in the uncertain light. On both sides, burial chambers with carved stone doorways are reminiscent of chapels. On the ceiling of this hall there are imitations of long, overhanging beams or slabs (Plate 18).

Another even finer hall lies beyond. On the left there is a recess in the wall suggesting a kind of apse, with a doorway with a huge architrave, again enclosed with pillars and niches, and over it a suggestion of a corbelled half-dome carved out of the rock. In the floor immediately outside the doorway are two rather deep and wide round cavities which were closed with stone plugs. One contained a pair of goat horns (Plate 19).

These two halls, with their decorative inner façades which in their time were presumably painted red, precede the little chamber which was perhaps the heart of the necropolis. This is kidney-shaped, after the fashion of the old rock-cut tombs, and was both burial place and shrine. It looks as if it had just been extended when the island culture came to its sudden end. In a kind of altar niche there is a hollow in the floor in which some object of worship presumably stood. A stone ring near the roof may have served to support the upper part. There is a suggestion of improvisation about these arrangements, which may have been temporary while the chapel was being refashioned. In front of the chapel there was apparently a pillar niche.

The rites that took place in this chamber were presumably secret. There are holes in the walls at the entrance and at the exit which leads on to the lowest level; these no doubt supported doors or some other screening arrangement which kept the "holy of holies" from the eyes of the profane.

Beyond the chamber a doorway leads to the steps that descend to the deepest level of the necropolis. On reaching the limits apparently set by the "holy of holies" above, the burial area turns in an arc, spreading under the upper halls. Here the tombs are like well shafts, over which one steps on narrow dividing walls. The shafts were once stuffed with earth and skeletons. The ceiling, as in the crypt of a Romanesque church, is supported by massive pillars where the rock was left to ensure that the vaults overhead should not collapse.

The last burial chambers were made in the oven shape of the ancient east. They were empty when discovered; perhaps those who were to have rested in them were slain and left unburied.

The digging of the catacombs of Hal Saflieni extended over more than five hundred years. Finds of implements and traces of unfinished working show how primitive were the methods used. Wedges or picks of horn or antler were first driven with stone mallets into the globigerina limestone, which is soft below ground. When the desired size had been reached, the sides of the cavity were laboriously trimmed with small flint blades. Great skill was used in taking advantage of perpendicular or horizontal natural fissures in the rock, which often splits smoothly.

Architectural development in the islands comes full circle here. The small round rock-cut burial chambers led to the huge, oval temples in the light of day and then back again into the underground rock, where this time it was the turn of the surface structures to be imitated.

The necropolis of Hal Saflieni, like the islands' megalithic shrines, was unique in its period. In no other Mediterranean island did rock-cut tombs develop in this fashion. In Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age Sicily they never extended beyond a few chambers, and the decorative façades that occasionally occur in them approach those of Hal Saflieni neither in dimensions nor in execution; nor is the Sardinian necropolis of Anghelu Rujù comparable with them.

Unlike the great shrines on the surface, the hidden ant-heap of Hal Saflieni in which

every cell was filled with dead can never have been the scene of a public cult. Apart from the priesthood, probably only a few privileged individuals descended into its gloomy halls for special ritual purposes, to make offerings to the dead, to propitiate ancestral spirits and gods of the underworld, to consult oracles, or to be healed. Nowhere else were the subterranean powers more closely approachable. Communion with them perhaps took place in a hypnotic trance or dream.

A form of divination practised in historical times at Greek or Roman shrines was the *incubatio*; priests or priestesses would sleep in some isolated or sacred place, generally a cave or grotto, and afterwards make predictions based on their dreams. People also slept at shrines or ancestral tombs to be healed of sickness. Two remarkable statuettes of female figures asleep on couches found in one of the halls decorated with spirals may indicate how ancient such practices were.

The finer of the two terracotta figurines is reclining on her right side. Her little head, with its hair cut short at the neck, rests on a kind of solid cushion or head-rest (Plates 20, 21). Once more the gracefulness of the head and the small doll-like hands are in striking contrast with the exaggerated rotundities of the body. This time the naked torso and heavy breasts leave no doubt of the figure's sex. The huge hips and thighs are covered by a Cretan-style, three-quarter-length skirt with a curvilinear pattern and a deep fringe at the bottom. The feet are of normal proportions. In spite of her enormous physique, the finely modelled little "sleeping lady", as she has been affectionately christened, is very attractive. The concave couch on which she lies as in a shell resembles those on which some of the clothed figures are seated; they may have had a wooden frame covered with reeds or canes. The "sleeping lady" is a strange and singular figure, but she seems human, not divine. Perhaps she is a priestess listening in clairvoyant sleep to voices from the underworld.

The islanders' ideal of feminine beauty seems to have been dictated by their predilection for rotundity. The "sleeping lady" does not create the impression that her exuberance of form has only a symbolical significance. Nearly all the representations of women in ancient Maltese art are more or less rotund. A female dancer scratched on a piece of broken pottery from Hal Tarxien is also very corpulent. This amplitude of form was obviously in conformity with the tastes of the original inhabitants of Malta, and incidentally corresponds with ideals of feminine beauty that still survive in Africa and Asia.

The second sleeping figure from Hal Saflieni, whose head is missing, is artistically not the equal of the "sleeping lady". She is shown lying on her belly in what seems an attitude of total subjection.

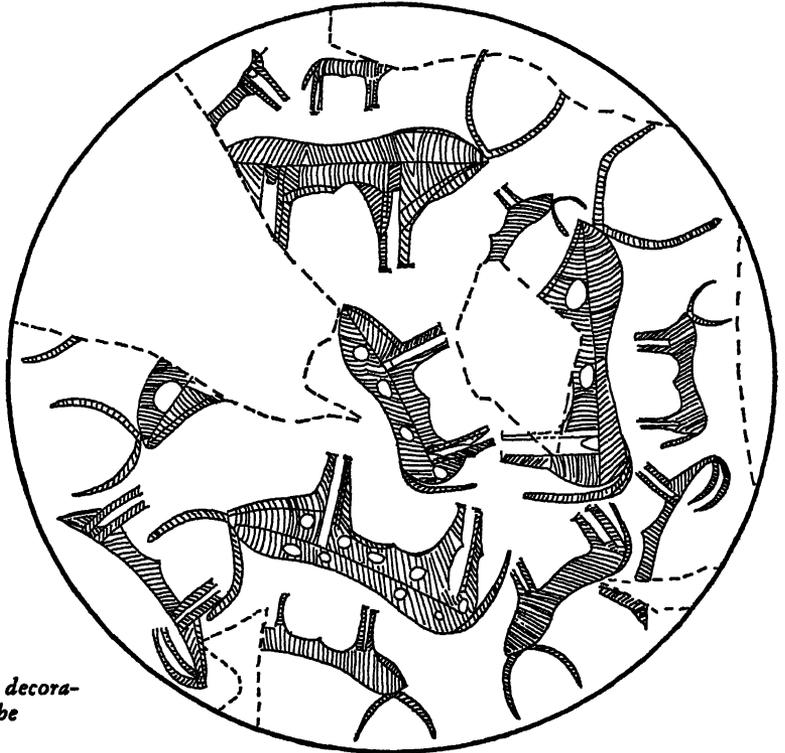
But the strangest find in the Hypogeum was yet another figure, made of soft stone and lying on one of the usual couches. This figure is not human; it is of a fish. Another fish, made of clay, was also found in the Hypogeum, and a relief of fishes came to light in the ruins of the temple of Bugibba situated directly on the seashore. Fish were certainly among the offerings made in the shrines.

A number of sexless, tremendously fat figurines were found in the Hypogeum and in the temples alike. They always follow the same pattern. One naked, standing idol from Hal Saflieni is about sixteen inches tall and about thirty inches round the waist.

Apparently older than all these carvings in the pure Maltese style are a "fiddle-shaped" bone idol in the style of the Cyclades, and a small primitive clay head with a prominent triangular nose which resembles Aegean and Anatolian products.

In addition to these traces of the eastern origin or connections of the colonisers of the archipelago, among the objects buried with the dead were not only large quantities of pottery, but also numerous wedge-shaped greenstone pendants of the type that occur frequently in chalcolithic Spain, France, and Sardinia. A winged or "phallic" double bead made of the same substance and buttons with V-shaped perforations similarly betray western Mediterranean influence. But, whatever cultural stimuli and religious ideas reached Malta from the two halves of the Mediterranean, there is no doubt that they underwent vigorous further development there and turned into something *sui generis*.

Divination and acoustic conjuring tricks were also evidently practised in the subterranean realm of Hal Saflieni. In the wall of the hall of the red spirals there is a recess which is too small for a burial. It is not a half-finished burial chamber as the decoration



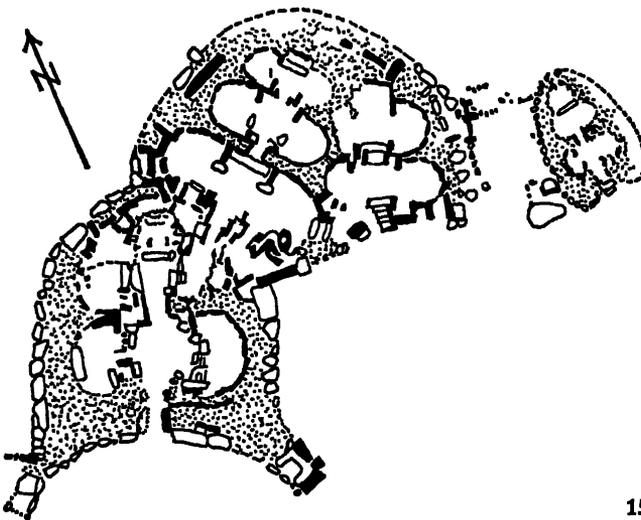
14 Pottery plate with a decoration of bulls from the Hypogeum

is the same as that of the hall. A voice speaking into the recess reverberates with unearthly resonance through the vaults, for a kind of moulding along the wall helps it to re-echo. The faithful must have listened in awe to a disembodied voice emerging either in whispers or tones of thunder from the depths.

In the course of centuries, about seven thousand dead were buried in the necropolis of Hal Saflieni, and one would assume it to have been the burial place of a big settlement. Whether the houses that now surround it were built over the remains of such a settlement is a question that only chance can settle. But it seems certain that this area of Malta was a centre, perhaps the most important centre, of the island's culture, for the finest temples of the archipelago are concentrated here.

### *Zenith and Downfall*

The temple of Hal Tarxien is barely a quarter of an hour's walk from the Hypogeum. Its excavation began in 1914 and took five years, for it was buried beneath huge mounds of rubble, from which the tops of megaliths protruded. The many important finds that were made threw new light on the final phase of the islands' original culture and the fate of their inhabitants. Three big inter-communicating buildings and a smaller annexe came to light, covering altogether two and a half acres (Fig. 15). The ruins had for centuries been used as a quarry by the people of the neighbourhood, and great damage had been done. Nevertheless the former glory of the place can be patiently reconstructed.



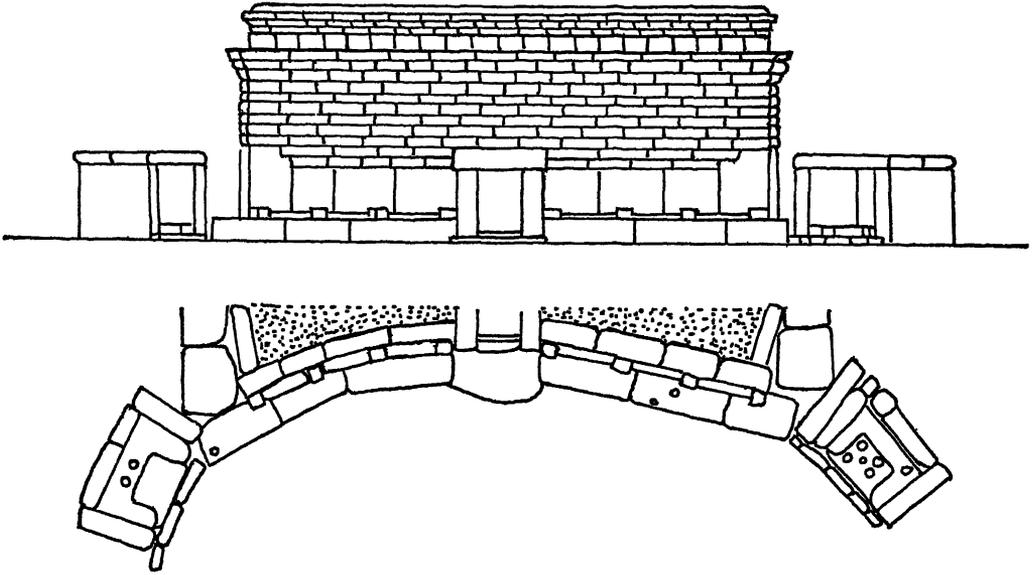
15 *Plan of the temples at Hal Tarxien*

The most westerly of the three temples, apparently the last monumental building of the original Maltese culture, provides the best evidence of the riches of a fully developed civilization. The refinement of architecture and the baroque wealth of decoration seem balanced on the knife-edge which separates progress from decline. In the latest temple of Hal Tarxien the superhuman labour required for such structures as the Ggantija or Hagar Qim yields pride of place to a higher artistic level and a more refined building technique.

The huge stone skeletons of the early structures still convey a sense of the religious awe which inspired them; but the splendid halls of the western temple at Hal Tarxien are less awe-inspiring than impressive in a worldly sense. The spontaneous mystical experience of the archaic period seems here to have been transformed into a well organized religious system based on precise formulae. The contents of individual chambers point to a complicated ritual for which a staff of specialists must have been required. Hal Tarxien and the neighbouring Hypogeum were perhaps the citadels of a priestly caste in whose hands lay temporal as well as spiritual power.

The monumental nature of the buildings of the triple temple has to a large extent vanished. The outer and most of the inner walls have disappeared; their place has been taken by modern walls, or they survive merely as foundations. Above all, the unusually long, curved façade is missing; only a few of the blocks that went to make it remain. This façade was once longer than that of Hagar Qim (Fig. 16). The fragment of a small model found at Hal Tarxien, which we mentioned above, appears to show the front view of the western temple. (At any rate it was the custom a thousand years later among the Etruscans, who inherited many ancient Mediterranean cultural practices, to keep miniature models of their temples within the temples themselves.) The façade of Hal Tarxien, with its megalithic base and less massive superstructure of long slabs, was certainly as high as a house. At either end was a strange little chapel of a kind unknown elsewhere. Of the right hand chapel a big square slab survives, with a thick rim on three sides. Six irregularly arranged conical holes were drilled in the surface of the slab, and the whole was originally contained in a stone shrine whose remains are still visible. A number of stone balls were scattered about near this mysterious structure, and it has been suggested that these might have been used for a ritual game in which they were rolled into the holes in the slab. More probably, however, the stones were used as rollers to shift the megaliths; many were found still lying under the huge pavement slabs at Hal Tarxien. The holes may have held the bases of statuettes or other sacred objects. Similar but smaller bases for holding sacred objects have been found in prehistoric shrines in Sardinia. Another possibility is that libations were poured into them.

Because of the destruction of the gateway and the façade, entering the temples of Hal Tarxien is less impressive than it is at Hagar Qim. In contrast to the Hypogeum, the sequence here is from the most modern to the most ancient parts, and in the first oval of the western temple the visitor is confronted by the last and most splendid phase of the island culture. Here only the huge size of the floor slabs recalls the gigantic structures



16 Conjectural reconstruction of the façade of Hal Tarxien

of earlier centuries. In the central hall and the two side-chambers one is immediately reminded of the magnificence of the ancient palaces of Crete. All the proportions are elegant, and carved ornamentation is everywhere. The central chamber is marked off from the side chambers by two finely worked miniature façades decorated in relief. The numerous tall stone blocks and altars are covered over and over with finely chiselled ornamentation, the effect of which was once perhaps enhanced by red and white paint. The fundamental theme is the spiral, which appears everywhere in many variations. Here it seems sometimes to have lost most of its sacred significance, for it elaborates into tendrils like a plant, and is often split up into its component parts and developed or simplified into new patterns. The execution of the relatively high, slightly concave relief work, for which no metal tools were used, is astonishing (Plate 22).

Aegean influence is unmistakable in the late Maltese style. The same exuberant spirals that were painted on clay vessels in Crete or platters in the Cyclades overrun the pale golden limestone surfaces of Hal Tarxien. Nearly everywhere it sprouts into attractive patterns of curves and points. The Cretan predilection for vegetable themes obviously spread to Malta.

The spread of cultural elements from the east at this period can be observed in an area wider than Malta. The Cretan-Mycenaean maritime ascendancy cast a long shadow over the Mediterranean. In the sixteenth century B. C., bases for Aegean commercial shipping were apparently firmly established in Sardinia, Sicily and the Aeolian Islands; these last became once more important centres of *entrepôt* trade between east and west, separated from their rise in the neolithic period based on obsidian exports by a period

of economic stagnation which was probably the result of the appearance of copper and bronze elsewhere. The islanders may perhaps have possessed their own ships with which they took Aegean finished products to the west and returned with valuable raw materials which were then trans-shipped to the east. In any case, seaborne trade must have been active at this period, and that explains why Malta was brought into livelier contact with the outside world.

In the final period of megalithic culture in Malta an engraving of magical significance, which recalls one of the letters of the Cretan Linear A Script appears on a big, cylindrical greenstone bead, which was certainly imported. The symbol occurs four times, encrusted with gold. A Cretan double axe has also been found scratched on a potsherd.

Contacts with the Late Middle Minoan and Early Mycenaean cultures are also betrayed by the decoration of pottery with simple or elaborate volutes contained in semicircles, and more rarely in spirals. In addition to these, western themes are evident in the patterns and plastic decoration of many vessels (Plates 23, 24).

In the final phase of the Maltese culture, external stimuli combined with the unusual native talent to raise the art of pottery making to a level which was not reached again in the western Mediterranean area until historical times. Thousands of potsherds which came to light in the later shrines belong mainly to well-made carinated bowls with big triangular handles. These were perhaps used for ritual purposes, as they show no traces of long use. The perfection of form of this hand-made and well fired ware is as astonishing as is the wealth of decorative ideas which it displays. As in earlier times, red-encrusted scratched decoration plays a big part, but in addition there was a new and attractive use of colours and shapes. Magnificent big jars were inlaid before firing with bands of reddish clay which were afterwards outlined with white incrustations. The honey-brown slip was given a high polish. Biconical storage vessels were made nearly three feet high, and ornamented with patterns of predominately curved lines with occasional lozenges or a criss-cross design.

On some vessels there are scratched drawings of sheep, goats, oxen, birds and snakes. Very attractive are pots with a plastic decoration of round studs raised by "jabbing" the clay, and emphasized by filling the jab or pit marks with white paste.

Western inspiration may perhaps be evident in a cruder, reddish or purple coloured pottery, unburnished and without a slip, and decorated with impressed patterns and plastic animal heads or primitive faces.

The great quantity of sherds found in the shrines points to offerings of drink and food and the ritual destruction of the vessels used to prevent them from being profaned by everyday use. Their high quality may have been connected with their sacred function.

Representations of animals similar to those on the pottery occur in the Hal Tarxien temples. There is a fine frieze showing in low relief, goats, a pig, and a ram on an altar in the first chamber on the left (Plate 22). Thus the animals brought here to be sacrificed were eternalized, as was done much later in Roman times. Evidence of such sacrifices was found in the neighbouring central hall of the western temple.

Two cubical altars decorated with spirals stand, as usual, on either side of the entrance to the rear part of the sanctuary. One of these is hollow. On it is an artistically worked shrine built into a small slab with a porthole (Plate 25). Quantities of animal bones had been thrown through this hole on to the altar, which when it was excavated was found to be full to the top with this evidence of ancient sacrifices. A crescent-shaped section of the front of the altar had been cut out and put back in position, and behind it was a small recess containing a sharp flint knife, a perfect instrument for throat-cutting (Plate 26).

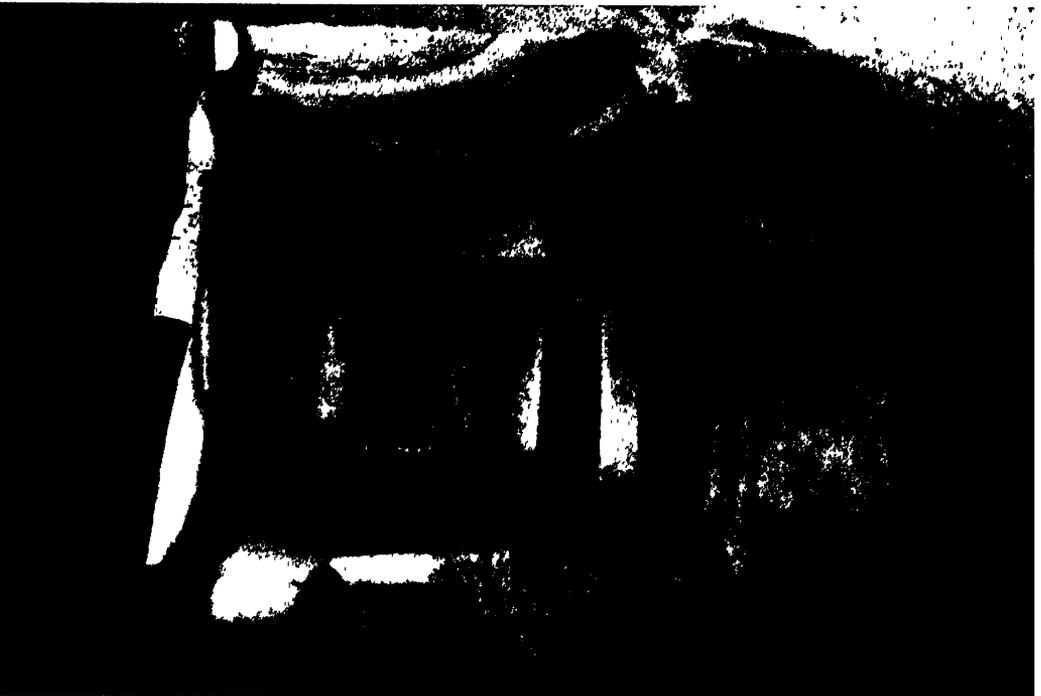
The blood of the slaughtered animals was probably poured into a stone vessel with a hollow base which stood in front of the left-hand altar. Strong traces of burning in a hollow in the middle of the court point to fire ceremonies which accompanied the ritual.

The Great Goddess for whom the blood of the animals flowed and the fire was lit is represented by a gigantic statue which stood in this chamber. When the site was excavated, the base and damaged lower part of a piece of statuary emerged. The statue itself must once have been about eight feet high. No other statue as big as this dating from such an early period is known in the western Mediterranean or even in the Aegean area. The exceedingly corpulent goddess seems to have been shown sitting on a stool. Her grotesque, pear-shaped legs and relatively tiny feet still protrude from under her flounced and pleated rock skirt, underneath which small human figures are sheltering. In mediaeval paintings similarly tiny Christians are to be seen kneeling at prayer in the shelter of huge Madonnas.

Figurines from Hal Tarxien which are probably copies of this big sculpture enable us to visualize the peaceful goddess with her wide skirt, her gracious, earnest face, and her hand raised to her breast, as she once sat in her temple in the red glow of the sacrificial fire.

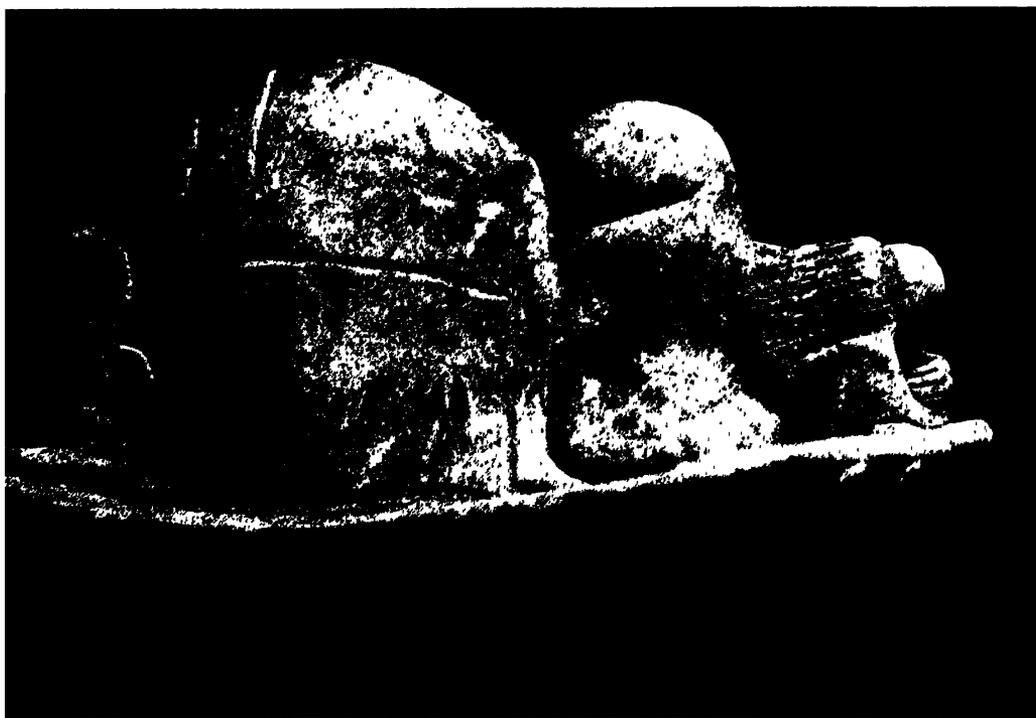
The rites practised at Hal Tarxien were presumably dedicated to this eternal mother figure, to the mysterious sexless deity, to the dead, and to phallic stones (Plate 27). Small models from Hal Tarxien show us shrines containing small red-painted pillars. These were, perhaps, not just emblems of the fertility-giving dead, but something in the nature of gods themselves, a manifestation in stone of the cosmic power of procreation.

The mother-cults and legends of classical Greece contain indications of a primitive Mediterranean religion in which the phallus was an object of veneration. When we find Demeter sometimes surrounded by a strange swarm of small phallic beings, the so-called Dactyls or "fingers", this is surely a reflection of an age before the Greek imagination had humanized the gods, when the female principle still predominated. Passages in Greek literature indicate that Hermes was once no more than a phallic stone. The ithyphallic pillars which crowned the god's head seem to represent a stage of transition in his gradual humanisation. The worship of phallic pillars must have represented a stage in religious development before the warlike father-god appeared on the scene with his thunderbolts. As yet only worship of the earth mother prevailed, together with that



18 Entrance to the front chamber of the Hypogeum

19 Inner chamber of the Hypogeum with an imitation of a corbelled vault



20, 21 'Sleeping lady' in terracotta, from the Hypogeum, Hal Saflieni



17 *Pillar cult scene on a gold ring from Mycenae*

of the dead and the associated though ambiguous cult of stones (Fig. 17). Archaic beliefs of this kind may have been well adapted to the simple way of life of the original inhabitants of Malta, who apparently gave their goddess no anthropomorphous male partner, but an impersonal embodiment in stone of the forces of procreation.

The decorative architecture of the big niche leading off the back of the second oval in the western temple of Hal Tarxien still survives. Here, as in the Ggantija, a conical baetyl probably stood. A wide platform, the front of which is decorated with a double row of running spirals, blocks the entrance to the sacred spot. Behind it a finely worked shrine stands on a base slab.

Apart from this niche and its empty shrine, the purpose of which can be only conjectured, there are no traces of ritual installations in the rear part of the western temple. There may perhaps have been an open courtyard in the place of the left-hand chamber; on the right are a number of small chambers, from which a megalithic corridor leads to the central shrine, facing north-east. Here we find ourselves back in an earlier epoch, which expressed itself, as at Hagar Qim, in simple, more severe and more monumental shapes.

The big front oval has a grandiose and harmonious effect, with its pavement of large slabs and the massive walls consisting of tall, broad, and carefully worked base blocks, still surmounted in places by several courses of the wall. In the centre there is a round hearth, and two small chambers with big recesses roofed with heavy slabs open out of it on the south side. In one of the recesses there now stands a huge stone vessel which was found in the central chamber and may have been used for ritual purification.

Rich ornamentation is lacking in this shrine. But two bulls and a sow with thirteen piglets are carved in relief on the stone wall slabs of the right-hand chamber. The bulls are of the humped or Indian variety. Similar animals are to be seen on a platter from the Hypogeum. A clay figurine from Mgarr shows a cow of European type. Thus the meeting of elements from east and west is illustrated again.

A conflagration must once have raged in this part of the temple; its traces can be seen on the wall slabs to a level lower than that of the pavement, which was apparently subsequently relaid. The conclusion is that the temples contained combustible material, probably a timber roof.

There is no doubt that the chambers at Hal Tarxien were roofed in. This was shown by the good condition of the delicate globigerina limestone floor and the reliefs when they were laid bare. The rapid weathering of the sculptures after their excavation caused the best pieces to be removed to the museum, and copies have been put in their place. The reliefs would never have survived if exposed to the light of day.

The first relatively spacious oval area in the second shrine creates the impression of having been a kind of antechamber. No doubt people bringing sacrifices gathered here. They were apparently not admitted to the inner chambers of the temple, the only one in the archipelago which has three ovals one behind the other, each smaller than the last. The arrangement of the corridor suggests that a forbidden area began here.

Two rectangular blocks, each of about a man's height and with an altar in front of it, flank the megalithic rear wall of the central court into which a doorway of huge slabs opens. A stone threshold fills the whole space in front of the doorway; perhaps this was the beginning of the area which profane feet were not allowed to touch; the way was barred by the goddess's awe-inspiring eyes gazing from two close spirals carved in relief on a stone barrier. The effect of the whole is of a piece of stage decoration consisting of a few bold and simple shapes – the background for a timeless mystery play (Plates 28, 29).

In the "forbidden" area the magic eye spiral appears four times on each of two finely worked slabs against a background of the old pattern of holes. This time the warning-off signs appear at the entrance to the two side-chambers, without, however blocking the way to them. In the central area there is another hearth (Plate 30).

The other two ovals are even more carefully constructed than the front one. In the left-hand room of the rear oval, which is very incomplete, there is, in addition to some shrines and a notably wide central niche, an architectural sensation, though admittedly a highly controversial one. In the recess on the left, lying on the first slab of the very regular base wall, is one of the long blocks of which the upper part of the wall once consisted. Stone wedges under the back of it seem to make it tilt forward slightly. If this was its original position, it would mean that we had here the earliest example yet found in the Mediterranean area of a real vault. In that case, the smallest semi-circular rooms of the highly developed late temple buildings would have been covered by real half domes, and the ancient Maltese architects would have anticipated a development which began in Europe only with the Etruscans (Plate 31).

Instead of a stone pavement the "forbidden" part of the second temple is floored with *torba*, a composition of limestone fragments. Excavation here yielded remarkable results. The chambers, like some at Hagar Qim and other temples, had originally been hewn out of the rock but, strange to relate, the holes had subsequently been filled in and the surface restored to its former level. At the lower level many sherds from the penultimate phase of the temple culture were found; these had belonged to an older building. Thus perhaps the inner area enjoyed especial sanctity because of its situation at the site of a very ancient place of worship.

The route by which the priests entered the "forbidden" area is indicated by some narrow steps which survive between the back wall of the front oval and the wall of the third shrine. They lead to the top of the wall round the right-hand recess of the "holy of holies". No doubt a secret passage in the thick double wall was used by initiates to gain access to the rear chambers.

The priests probably organized a good deal of impressive magic in the dim chambers of the temple. They may have moved the heads of the statues by strings and caused mysterious voices to be heard. In the third temple, to which access is gained from the second, there is, as at Qrendi, a hidden chamber between the outer wall and the massive right hand recess of the rear oval. This was accessible only from outside, but has a little window opening on to the interior. And a tube bored at knee level through one of the wall slabs emerges almost at ground level in the front chamber. Through this amplifier the hollow voice of a priest may have reached those in the front chamber, like a voice from the beyond.

In the Hypogeum the ritual was perhaps predominantly in the hands of women; at Hal Tarxien, however, priests seem to have prevailed. Their likeness may survive in three terracotta statues found in the "forbidden" part of the middle temple. These are made of only slightly fired clay and are hollow inside. They seem to have been modelled on a straw foundation, which burnt when the clay was fired. All were in a much damaged condition and needed a great deal of restoration. The best preserved figure is eighteen inches high without its missing feet, and was certainly painted. The head was made in one piece with the body, and this may indicate that it was not an idol. Its proportions are normal. The upper part of the body, of which not much more than the left arm and shoulder survive, was unclothed, and the arms were folded. The lower part of the body is covered by a pleated robe. The face is expressive, and is surmounted by waves of hair. Because of their damaged condition the three statues are not positively identifiable as male, but the best preserved of them creates the impression of having been a dignified portrait of a high temple official. The lively features and long nose are quite distinct from the fuller, gentler, female heads (Plate 32).

Perhaps this serious-looking personage was one of the leaders of a hieratic state, a closely knit community with a religious foundation.

We do not know where the seat of temporal power lay in the archipelago, what it looked like, or whether it was a megalithic *anaktoron*, a princely palace in the Mycenaean fortress style like the structure dating from a later period which has been found near Pantalica in Sicily. But excavations at Hal Tarxien have yielded indications that a great non-religious building existed. Besides the model of a temple facade, a portion of what looks like a model for a big elliptical building with many rectangular rooms was found. Only the base walls are indicated; it could have been a governor's quarters or a kind of cloister. Its remains may be buried under the houses round Hal Tarxien.

Valetta and the old Maltese capital of Mdina may have been built on the sites of primitive settlements. But, even if they were, it seems inexplicable that no other sites

dating from the first Maltese culture should have been found. The Qrendi shrines suggest that a sizeable settlement must have existed in the neighbourhood but, though it is open country, no traces of any such community have been found. Numerous traces of villages dating back to neolithic times have been found in Sicily and the Aeolian Islands, and in the Maltese archipelago itself there are many traces of prehistoric dwelling places and defences dating from the period between the downfall of the earliest culture and the occupation of the islands by the Phoenicians between the eighth and seventh centuries.

It is strange that only the highly civilized original inhabitants of Malta should have left no traces of their non-religious life. Were the builders of these incomparable temples not tillers of the soil, but shepherds and fishermen who lived in huts or tents and had no aspirations other than those inspired by their gods and ancestors? They left behind in all more than thirty shrines of various sizes, but we have no background against which to set them and no clues to the organization which lay behind the fantastic amount of labour that went to their building. Like castles in oriental stories, they might have been built by an army of spirits.

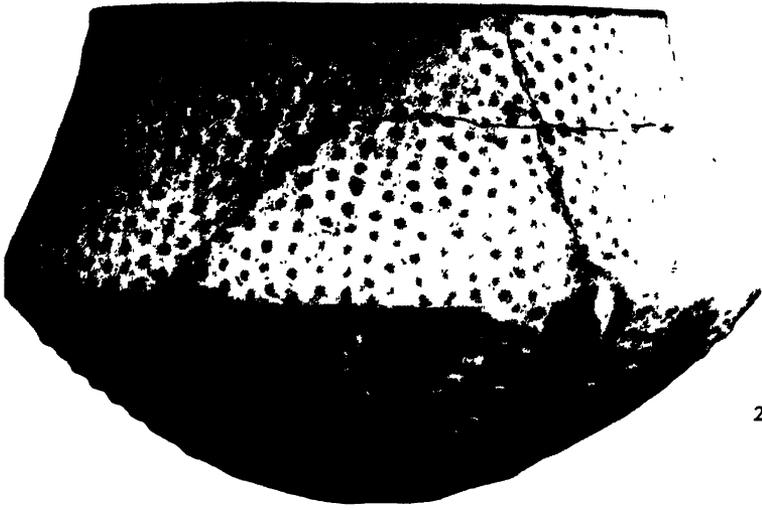
The population of the islands must undoubtedly have been considerable during the long centuries of their striking cultural advance, and yet their origin and daily life remain a closed book. But unexpected evidence was found at Hal Tarxien of a tragedy which presumably brought their history to an end. When one of the small rear chambers was excavated, a cemetery was found with cremated burials and numerous grave goods in a layer of black earth. These burials were totally unrelated to the products of the first island culture. The level at which they were found was separated from the temple floor by a layer of fine, light earth nearly three feet deep. There had obviously been an interval long enough for the sea wind to have filled the desolate chambers of the shrine with dust and sand.

The new arrivals were more primitive than the original inhabitants, but they possessed formidable weapons – copper daggers and axes and sharp obsidian arrowheads. They were in advance of their predecessors in their knowledge of metals, but artistically they could not compete. Their crude, badly fired clay vessels with scratched patterns of straight and angular lines were dissimilar in every way to the marvellous temple pottery. They were fond of adornments. Thick necklaces were found consisting of several rows of tiny flat shell beads, faience, a bluish vitreous material traded by Mycenaean seafarers, and pendants of stone, clay, and mother-of-pearl.

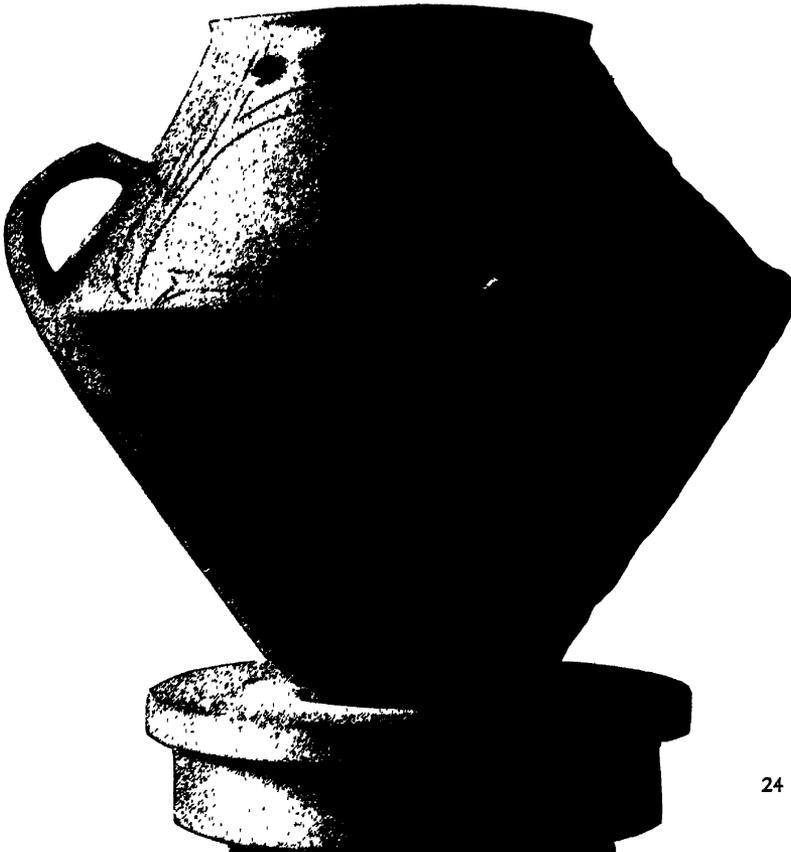
These new arrivals from a dynamic, warlike world who cremated their dead also worshipped the Great Mother of the eastern Mediterranean, but in a fashion which contrasted greatly with that of the original inhabitants. Their strange goddess, a round discovered with geometrical patterns, is seated on a small throne. Only the legs and a protuberance which serves for a head give her some semblance of human form.

Many idols of this kind were found in their graves, but only two are rather more naturalistic, each having breasts and a face. One has a crescent-shaped head ornament.





23 Carinated bowl from Hal Tarxien decorated with applied studs and white paste inlay



24 Big biconical vessel from Hal Tarxien

Both are faintly reminiscent of Mycenaean cult figures which are completely stylised but bear most resemblance to Anatolian disk idols dating from the beginning of the second millennium (Plate 33).

The presumed destroyers of the first Malta culture certainly also belonged to the Asia Minor-Aegean group of civilizations, though their artistic, technical, and religious traditions differed greatly from those of the original Maltese. Megalithic building was not unknown to them, though they produced nothing remotely comparable with that of their predecessors. The various, mostly relatively small, dolmens that occur here and there in Malta and Gozo are, according to the latest findings of Professor J. D. Evans, their work.

These monuments and the pottery provide a clue to their origin. An isolated group of similar megalithic tombs occurs in the neighbourhood of Otranto at the extreme tip of the heel of Italy; an area where peoples from the east had constantly landed since early times. Early Bronze Age pottery in South Italy and the so-called Capo Graziano ware from the Aeolian Islands are related both in shape and decoration to that found in the cemetery of Hal Tarxien. The route followed by this type of pottery, which was also the path of prehistoric migrations, can be traced by way of Greece and Troy to Cilicia and Cyprus.

Before the discovery of the Hal Tarxien cemetery the sudden disappearance of the ancient temple culture at the height of its development about the middle of the fifteenth century B. C. was an insoluble riddle. No memory of its magnificent buildings or of its sculpture and pottery style survived in the works of the later settlers in Malta and Gozo.

It looks today as if the downfall of the pious, defenceless, original inhabitants followed the landing of this people, who first established themselves at Otranto and from there made forays into Sicily and the Aeolian Islands. The conquerors, like the Saracens of a later age, may have been bold and pitiless pirates who sailed in swift ships. Nevertheless the complete extinction of the islands' first inhabitants is very strange. It is conceivable that the whole male population was massacred by the invaders, but some at least of the women might have been expected to survive as the victors' spoil. In that case pottery, whose production in prehistoric societies before the introduction of the potter's wheel was the woman's task, would have preserved traditions dating from its most splendid period.

But the builders of the great temples vanished from the islands, which had been turned into holy soil by their primitive Mediterranean religious beliefs, as mysteriously as they came. Some spiritual traces, however, they left behind. Ancient ideas about the earth mother and the dead were resurrected from deep levels of the mind in the mystery cults of classical times and were developed into a new doctrine of salvation which was later not without influence on the early stages of Christianity.

## *Book III*      In the Shadow of the Nuraghi

### *Prehistory*

The first glimpse of Sardinia approached from the mainland in the early morning light, is of the craggy outlines of the granite peaks along its eastern coast rising threateningly from the pearly sea. The entrance to the long Gulf of Olbia is guarded by islets of steep rock. The first warm rays of the sun release the strong perfume of the *maquis*, the dewy, shore-side scrub which in spring is covered with millions of white, yellow and pink flowers. Even during these few weeks of exuberant blossoming the beauty of the mountainous landscape is severe and tragic, lacking in southern cheerfulness.

The island is marked by traces of an early phase of creation, giving it a strangeness, a sense of not altogether belonging to the age of man. Sardinia formed part of a land bridge between Europe and Africa which disappeared in the Tertiary period, and geologically it is older than Italy. The characteristic landscape consists of small, extinct volcanoes, flat-topped table mountains, strange valleys of tufa and basalt, mountains of primaeval rock containing a metallic gleam. It seems unweathered by the centuries, and unchanged and untamed by the hand of man. One big fertile plain, the Campidano, cuts across the southern half of the island from the broad Gulf of Cagliari to the Gulf of Oristano on the west. In the course of centuries reckless deforestation has largely turned the high plateaux of the interior into steppe land.

Perhaps the ferocity of the scene, which up to a few thousand years ago was lit by the glow of volcanoes, deterred mariners from landing for a long time. The volcanoes, the rugged east coast down which streams of lava flowed into the sea, the dense forests, may have intimidated men of the third millennium B. C., whose heads were full of mythological ideas. To them it must have seemed an uncanny place, the haunt of demons.

The oldest traces of settlement so far found in the south and west of the island apparently date from the beginning of the second millennium. Its topography makes

it more accessible to North Africa and Iberia than to Italy. The first settlers are therefore more likely to have come from the former, and perhaps also from the Aegean. Smaller Ligurian bands may also have arrived by way of neighbouring Corsica.

The ancient Sard language, in so far as traces of it still survive beneath the Latin, shows a relationship with Basque and with North African languages. There are also a few words of Ligurian or Tyrrhenian but none of Semitic or Indo-Germanic origin.

Skeletons from prehistoric burial places show that the first inhabitants of the island belonged to the ancient Mediterranean race. Astonishingly pure Cro-Magnon types are still to be found in the mountains. In about the middle of the second millennium, Sardinia was undoubtedly incorporated into the east-west shipping routes and came under the influence of the civilization of the Aegean and the megalithic culture of western Europe. In classical times the memory of various waves of colonization survived in the form of legends which have been passed on to us by Apollodorus, Diodorus Siculus, and Pausanias. We are told of Libyans who came to the island led by Sardus, a son of the Phoenician god Melkart, whom the Greeks identified with Hercules. Aristaeus, a son of Apollo and the nymph Cyrene, is also said to have come to Sardinia with his mother and to have introduced agriculture, the palm and the olive. The foundation of the town of Nora on the west side of the Gulf of Cagliari was attributed to an Iberian hero, Norax of Tartessus.

The most detailed particulars handed down to us from antiquity refer to the colonization of the island by forty-one of the fifty sons born to Hercules by the daughters of Thespius. This legendary band of brothers is said to have landed in the island under the leadership of Iolaus, the nephew of Hercules, and to have settled in a fertile plain which was called Iolaëum after him. Olbia is said to have been founded by the Thespiades. Iolaus is reported to have sent for Daedalus, who in Greek mythology is always a symbol for the awakening of the arts, and to have set him to building temples and gymnasiums. Diodorus claims to have seen these in person, and Pausanias remarks that the Sards still held the memory of Iolaus in high honour in his time.

The Sherdani – several times mentioned in Babylonian and Egyptian texts from the fourteenth and nine centuries B. C. as being one of the seafaring peoples who threatened Egypt from the sea – could conceivably have been Sards. The clothing and weapons of the Sherdani portrayed on the reliefs of Medinet Habu do in fact resemble those of the bronze figurines of ancient Sard warriors.

It is by no means beyond the bounds of possibility that the islanders, whose relics show them to have been a very warlike people, should have undertaken military expeditions towards the end of the second millennium. Before the rise of the Etruscan thalassocracy the Tyrrhenian was known as the Sardinic sea; this may be a pointer to the Sards' having exercised a maritime ascendancy in that area. They may have developed into seafarers under the Mycenaean. In later times, however, they increasingly withdrew into the interior while Phoenicians, and perhaps also Etruscans and Greeks, established themselves on the coasts.

From the end of the second millennium until about the middle of the first there flourished in Sardinia a culture marked by great individuality and strangely archaic features. Its relics are the so-called *nuraghi*, great fortresses, of which thousands are still to be found in the island. The first settlers in Sardinia certainly brought with them ancient Mediterranean traditions and religious beliefs similar to those of the first settlers in Malta, but something entirely different developed from them. Life on the great, wild island of Sardinia was governed by other, grimmer laws, which left such a deep mark on its inhabitants that up to the present day they still feel the shackles of past ages. The life of our own age, with its cities, harbours and industries, prevails only on the periphery of the island. In the mountains the people still preserve something of their ancient nature, and the past lives on, not just in the form of mute prehistoric tombs and Cyclopean defence towers, but in strange customs, in the grim shadow of the vendetta and in ageless pastoral ways of life.

### *Fairy Houses and Giants Tombs*

In Sardinia, as in Malta, the dwelling and burial places of the first settlers were caves. At first, no doubt, their chief means of livelihood were fishing and hunting in the island's huge forests rather than agriculture and cattle-raising.

Their religious horizon was dominated by the cult of the dead. The rocky slopes of the island are in many places still honeycombed with bigger and smaller cells and chambers; primitive cemeteries which remained in use over long periods and were improved as time went on. They are popularly known as *domus de janas*, or "fairy houses", in unconscious memory of the spirits of the dead who once haunted them.

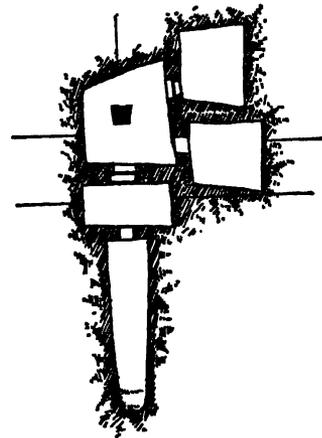
Among the early settled areas of the island, which covers an area of more than nine thousand square miles, were, in addition to the southern and western bays, the plateaux of the interior. These are bounded on the north by the dramatic features of the Gallura mountains and on the east by the 6,000 ft. range of the Gennargentu. What was once undoubtedly a thickly wooded and relatively densely settled area is now a silvery, treeless upland of planetary emptiness and silence, dominated by the geometrical forms of table- and pyramid-shaped hills, the great flattened tops of extinct volcanoes, and the smaller, not dissimilar, shapes of the *nuraghi*. Here and there the desolate plain is broken by protuberances of brown and gold-striped limestone, brown tufa, or blackish basalt. It was in the sides of these that the oldest east-Mediterranean-type oven tombs were hollowed out, and later rectangular chambers with flat roofs. The small door-holes of these early cemeteries are often in the middle of a relatively big but shallow recess in the rock wall, suggesting the beginnings of a forecourt (Plate 34).

Shepherds, who are the masters of this domain, where the tall, lanky grass is never cut but is cropped in the course of the year by the migrating flocks, often shelter in the long since emptied burial chambers. All these sites, known and profaned for many centuries, have naturally not yielded many finds dating from the phase of original settlement.

A few years ago, however, the oldest piece of indigenous sculpture yet discovered, the so-called Venus of Macomer, came to light in a cave on the edge of this town. The steatopygous basalt figurine, with a rudimentary head and without arms or feet, is reminiscent of palaeolithic female statuettes, though it dates from not earlier than 2,000 B. C. With it were found thousands of stone implements, many of which were also of very ancient type. The blades, scrapers, triangular daggers, and arrow and spearheads of the ancient Sardinian stone industry are only retouched, but the axes, hatchets, and club-heads are highly burnished. Club-heads from pre-dynastic Egypt and Early Stone Age Crete could have been the prototype of the Sardinian products.

The island's wealth of obsidian, diorite, quartz, flint, limestone, and basalt led to a vigorous production of stone implements which may have lasted almost into the Iron Age; obsidian was presumably also exported.

The veil that covers the origins of civilization in Sardinia is first lifted in the second quarter of the second millennium B. C. To this period belongs the famous necropolis of Anghelu Ruju with its thirty-six collective tombs, discovered outside Alghero in 1904. It was hewn out of the rock floor of a plateau, and represents an extraordinary advance in comparison with the primitive oven tombs (Fig. 18). Its carefully worked and



18 *Plan and elevation of a tomb at Anghelu Ruju*

structurally well designed round, oval, or square chambers are reached by shafts, steps, or long slanting passages in the fashion of the Mycenaean *dromoi*. As at Hal Saflieni, massive pillars of living rock have been left in some of the subterranean halls. Traces of red show that the walls were once painted. In one chamber the walls are decorated with a coffer pattern. Benches were hewn on which to lay the dead. Most of them, however, – in one vault there were no fewer than one hundred and thirty – were laid on their side or in a crouching position on the floor. Ochre had apparently been sprinkled over all of them. One lay in a pit inside the chamber over which a roof scooped out of half a tree trunk had been put.

In contrast to the Hypogeum in Malta, the dead were not presided over by the emblem of the Great Mother Goddess, the sacred spiral. Instead, a stylised bull's head with lyre-shaped horns is carved in relief on either side of a door-hole and on pillars and walls. This is the emblem of the eastern weather god, who controlled the lightning and released the life-giving rain. A slanting sickle shape with a longish point, perhaps representing a ship, appears twice. In the middle of one hall a small conical pillar was found. At the top, remarkably enough, a cross is engraved. Remains of ashes and shells in some chambers point to ritual meals or sacrifices in honour of the dead.

Though the necropolis had been ransacked in ancient times, it still contained numerous objects pointing to a culture of Aegean type, but also showing Iberian influences. Among the finds were axe amulets and flat stone figurines of the Great Goddess in Cycladic-Cretan style, as well as copper daggers, arm-bands, needles, arrowheads and beads, rings and beads of silver and lead pendants. There were also objects made of flint, disk beads, pendants and armrings made of indigenous and imported stone, and necklaces of animal teeth and shells. Among the remains of burnished pottery decorated with geometrical patterns, fragments of bell beakers of the Iberian type, which spread through Europe about 1800 B. C. came to light, and enabled an approximate date to be given to the tombs. This pottery and the silver which was found point to connections with Spain.

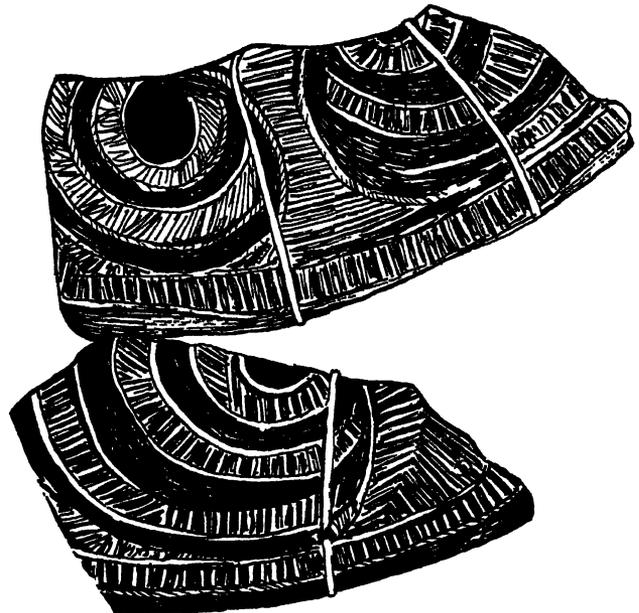
Anghelu Ruju was certainly the cemetery of a sizeable settlement, presumably founded by Aegean mariners who established a port of call in the Gulf of Alghero for ships bound for the south of France and Iberia. The south and west coasts of Sardinia, with their natural harbours, fertile hinterland, and rich supplies of copper and lead, must have been attractive to colonists. By about the middle of the second millennium the island seems to have been relatively thickly settled. Economic and cultural progress was accompanied by vigorous religious development. The cult of ancestors and of the dead continued to play a dominant role until the end of the indigenous civilization.

Roughly contemporaneously with Anghelu Ruju, some caves above Ozieri served both as burial place and shrine. In these uncanny vaults the presence of chthonic powers must have seemed especially vivid. A narrow shaft leads down to a ghostly hall of stalactites which is ninety feet long, thirty feet wide, and from twelve to fifteen feet high. Behind it is another hall, in which a deep spring symbolises communion with the underworld. From an alcove a gallery and narrow defile leads to an abyss filled with

the hiss and roar of an invisible waterfall. A large number of dead were buried in the vaults thus filled with ghostly noises, and no doubt were honoured as powerful demons. Among the objects found were stone implements, and especially the remains of many clay vessels. It is obvious that offerings were continually made at this sacred burial spot. Potsherds found at the foot of the entrance to the shaft showed that vessels were often dropped down there.

In Sardinia, as in western Europe, pottery was handmade down to historical times. Apart from some very crude and poorly fired pottery similar to that still made by the farmers at the present day, finer, burnished ware with impressed, scratched, and painted geometrical decoration was made for ritual purposes from the very beginning. It was chiefly this type which has been found at Ozieri. There is an interesting similarity between many of the vessels and ware from Hal Saflieni. Like the latter, the ornamentation is curvilinear and the incised bands had incrustations of red and white paste. The ancient sacred theme of concentric semi-circles, which occurs frequently on Mycenaean vases and as a grave ornament in the megalithic cultures of Iberia and north-western Europe, also appears in one series of potsherds at Ozieri. There are also tripod bowls which may be attributable to Aegean prototypes. The wealth of this pottery, and that of the objects found in the necropolis of Anghelu Ruju, shows the multiplicity of influences that affected the origins of the Sardinian culture (Fig. 19).

In great contrast to the awesome natural burial caves of Ozieri stands the man-made rock-cut cemetery of Sant' Andrea Priu, near Bonorva and Macomer, which is the finest in Sardinia. It lies hidden in a rock wall of hard, red trachyte which rises out of the low

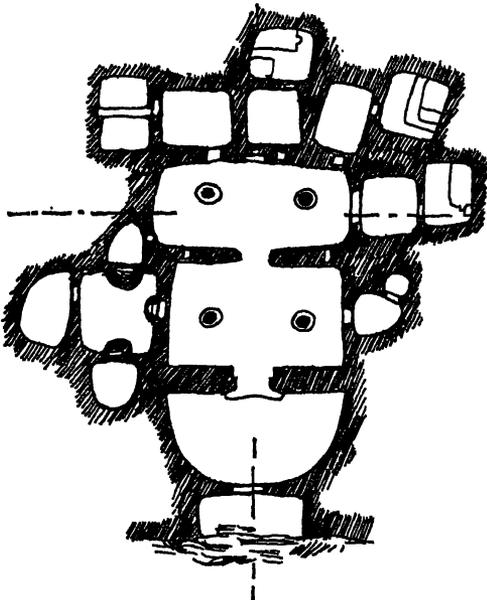


19 *Potsherds from the cave of San Michele Ozieri*

brushwood like the ruins of a mythical palace with gaping door and window holes (Plate 35). At the top is a mysterious, dolmen-like monument hewn in ancient times out of the living rock.

The first small burial chamber may date back to the Chalcolithic Age, but the many-chambered additions of the late phase bear a striking resemblance to Etruscan tombs in southern Tuscany. In the eighth century there were apparently contacts between Sardinia and Etruria which went beyond mere trade relations. Strabo mentions the presence of Tyrrhenians in the island, and Festus actually speaks of Sardinian Etruscan kings. Hence it is certainly no accident that in its final stages the necropolis of Sant' Andrea Priu came to look hardly different from the great Etruscan rock-cut cemeteries in the neighbourhood of Viterbo. Here, too, there were sculpted façades and entrances. But atmospheric action has done its work, huge fragments of the rocky eminence have collapsed and few traces of the outside architecture at Sant' Andrea Priu remain. All the same the chambers inside the rock are well preserved (Fig. 20).

The largest of the numerous tombs – perhaps it was that of a princely family whose retinue was buried with it – is reached by way of a covered terrace forming a concave forecourt. Behind it lies a semi-circular vestibule with a flat ceiling on which a flat disk with radiating lines is engraved. A very similar ceiling occurs in an archaic tomb in the Etruscan cemetery at Cerveteri. A bench along the forecourt wall was perhaps intended for offerings. The way continues through a gateway with an architrave in high relief into a hall about twenty-one feet long and twelve feet wide supported on two pillars. Small

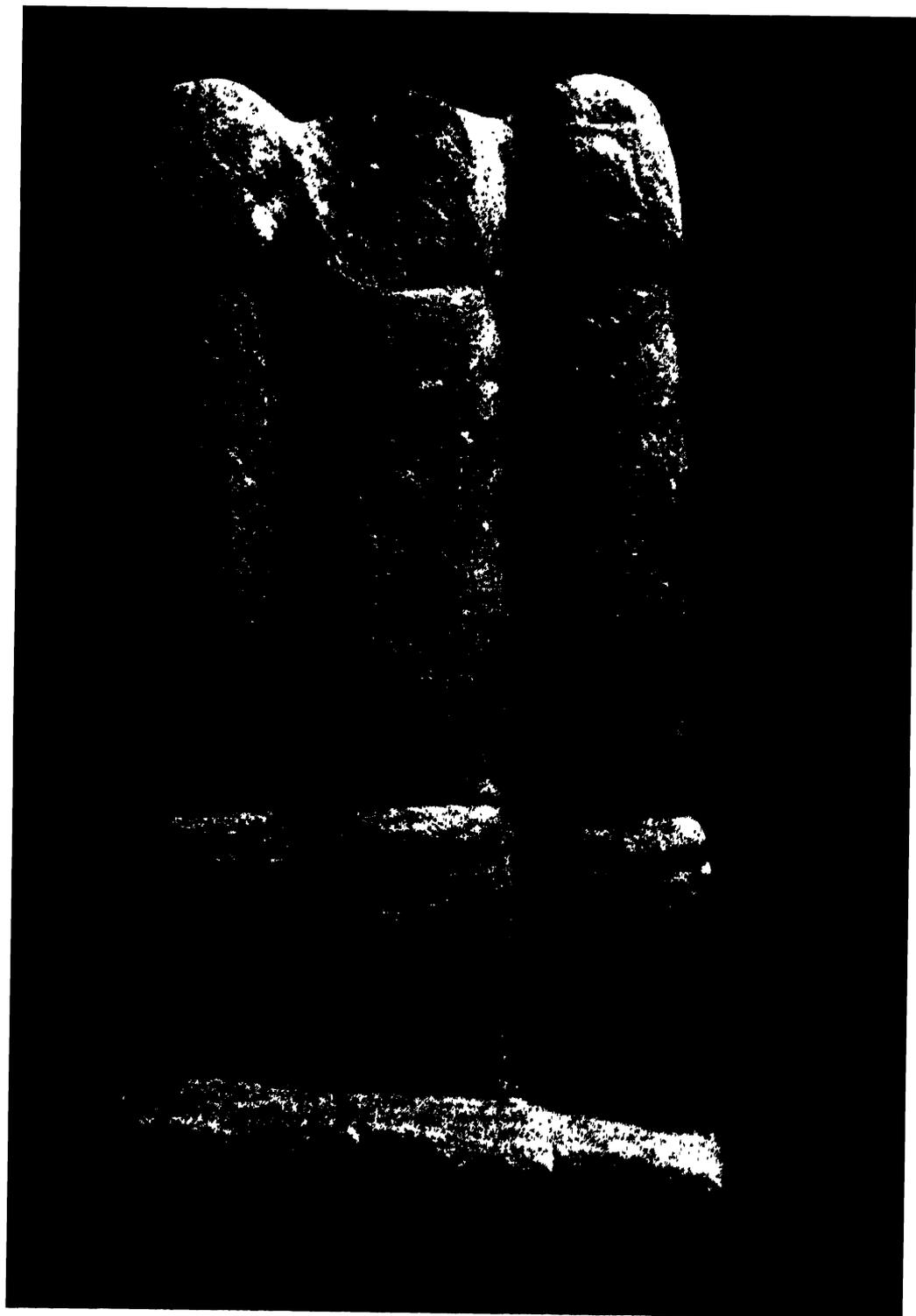


20 *Plan of the largest rock-cut tomb of Sant' Andrea Priu*



25 Sacrificial altar with shrine at Hal Tarxien

26 Flint sacrificial knife found in the altar niche



27 Phallic idol, originally painted, from Malta

chambers open out on either side. Beyond it is another smaller hall, again with two pillars and a light shaft; eight small chambers lead off it. A number have bed niches for the dead. Supports for their heads were hewn out of the stone.

In the Middle Ages the central hall was converted into a church. Faded frescos still cover the walls, which once perhaps glowed with the magic red of primitive ages.

In addition to this burial suite of three big, symmetrically arranged halls and fourteen subsidiary chambers, there are nineteen other tombs. Some contain imitations of houses, just as Etruscan tombs do. There is an imitation of a gabled roof, and one of a conical structure resembling a *nuraghe*. There are holes and hollows in the floor of some of the chambers of Sant' Andrea Priu similar to those in the Maltese shrines (Fig. 21).

In these burial places with their one thousand one hundred graves the unbroken development of the Sardinian rock-cut tombs from the beginning to the end of the island's culture can be plainly traced. They represent, however, only one aspect of the cult of the dead in Sardinia, where from the beginning of settlement there was a remarkable mixture of eastern and western influences.

In the north, in the Gallura, the dead were buried not in natural or artificial caves, but in stone-built tombs. Their shape derived originally from the east, but they may perhaps have come to north Sardinia from the west.

The earliest are cists made of small slabs. They may be up to six feet long and six feet wide, and were buried under mounds which were surrounded by several concentric stone circles. The biggest circle is twenty-five feet in diameter. Beads were found, and a steatite bowl, apparently imported from Crete which points to a relatively early date for the site. Also, as in neighbouring Corsica, trapezoid, semicircular or rectangular dolmens were erected. Finds of bell beakers plainly indicate the Iberian southern French character of these mausoleums.

The last and most monumental form of megalithic grave in Sardinia, typical of the uplands in the interior, is that of the so-called Giants' Tombs. (Fig. 22): long galleries buried under heaps of stones. They are generally constructed of base slabs on which Cyclopean walls rise to a corbelled vault. Occasionally the roof consists of big slabs. These structures, which are up to sixty feet in length, seem to have come into fashion towards the end of the second millennium. They may have been family tombs of the lords of the *nuraghi*, or perhaps the collective burial places of small villages. The oldest are relatively crude, but later the façade was carefully built and given monumental shape. The entrance was blocked by a tall stele, rounded or squared off at the top and with worked edges. Food offerings for the dead may have been put through an opening at the lower edge, or the latter may have been intended as a way of escape for the spirits of the dead. Generally, however, it was closed. Sometimes such slabs, standing in tall grass or in the middle of a cornfield, are the only relic of a destroyed tomb. Where larger sections have survived, it is sometimes possible to see that the cairn of stones in which the tomb was enclosed broadened out and formed a concave frontage in the middle of which the stele stood. At some graves two semi-circular walls jut out on either side of

the stele, and in these cases the plan of the whole monument bears a remarkable resemblance to the bull's heads of Anghelu Ruju. The forecourts formed by the sickle-shaped façades were unquestionably used for cult purposes. Small benches along the wall were no doubt placed there to receive offerings, and pits in the floor were probably used in the sacrificial ritual. Excavation of these forecourts yield many more votive offerings than do the graves themselves (Plate 36).

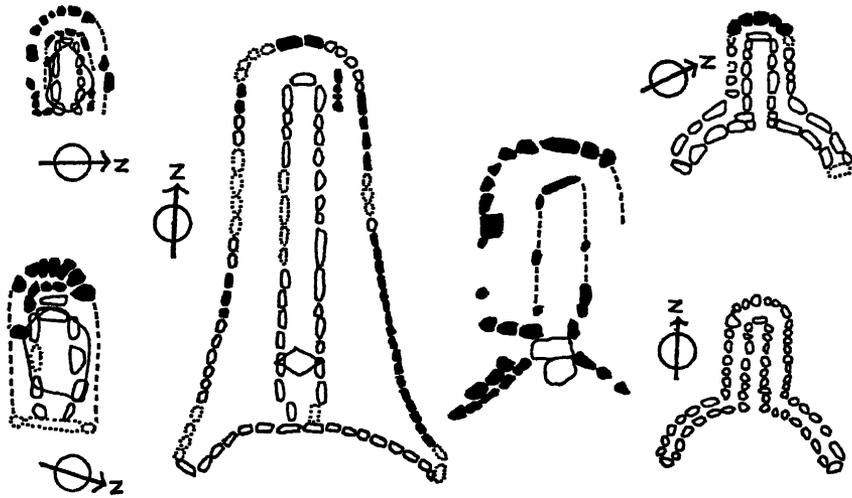
There are few clues in ancient literature to the cult practised at the Giant's Tombs. In historical times they were believed to be the burial places of Iolaeus and the Thespiades, the mythical heroes of Sardinia, and the Sardis are said to have had a practice of sleeping in them for five nights in succession in order to dream oracular dreams or to be cured of sufferings.

The idea that dreams originated in the realm of the dead and the belief in the magic effects of sleep at ancestral tombs were apparently among the oldest features of the religion of the megalithic peoples; so deeply rooted were they that they survived practically unchanged into historical times. Aristotle, Diodorus and Pausanias mention *incubatio*, which is known to have been practised at temples as late as the second century A. D. It played a prominent role among the Libyans. Among the Berbers and Tuaregs in North Africa, who have preserved a number of traditions from prehistoric times, it is still the practice on certain occasions to sleep at one of the ancient megalithic tombs for the purpose of obtaining succour from the dead.

Christianity was unable completely to wipe out this immemorial custom. It survived in the form of sleeping in churches at the tombs of saints, an experience which was expected to lead to visionary dreams. The practice survived in Ireland until our own age.



21 *Rock-cut tomb of Sant' Andrea  
Priu with reconstruction of  
roof beams*



22 Plans of ancient Sardinian Giants' Tombs

There is an other ancient tradition according to which the legendary heroes of Sardinia did not perish after death, but remained in a state of perpetual sleep. This may throw light on the beliefs of the ancient Sards, and hence on those of the builders of megalithic graves in general. It too accounts for the origin of the Sardinian story of the nine sleepers, and also perhaps, for the veneration paid to the seven youths of Ephesus which is to this day remarkably frequent in areas where megalithic cultures once prevailed. In A. D. 250 these youths, according to the legend, were walled up in a cave during a persecution of Christians under the Emperor Decius, but by God's grace they emerged unharmed after sleeping for a hundred years. Perhaps behind this story there lies no historical event, but memories of much older beliefs about ancestral gods who lived on immortally in their stone tombs.

The conservatism of the Sardinians, who, into historical times, kept to the cults of their megalithic past has thus revealed to us something of the secret that surrounds the megalithic tombs of ancient Europe.

### *Great Goddess and Her Consort*

The oldest sculptures from Sardinia are representations of the Great Mother.

The so-called Venus of Macomer, a primitive, rudimentary, but naturalistic figurine, is no more than a faceless symbol of the goddess, but in the Anghelu Ruju period, under

Aegean influence, she came to be venerated in the more spiritual form of a three-foot-high marble idol (Plate 38).

Eyeless and mouthless, the face shows only a nose, and two spherical breasts protrude from the flat, trapezoid torso. The lower part of the body is merely a round, tapering pillar intended to be stuck into the earth or a holder.

Three thousand five hundred years separate this gleaming white, still intact, geometrically abstract carving from the atomic age, and yet as a timeless symbol of an elementary human experience, it has an immediately intelligible message for us.

It is uncertain whether this masterpiece, which was found near Senorbi in southern Sardinia, was indigenous; it seems more probable that it came from overseas. It bears an unmistakable resemblance to second millennium idols from the Cyclades. No other prehistoric stone carving of similar perfection has yet been found in Sardinia, and it seems that the mother goddess was later represented in her original form as a statue menhir, presumably under the influence of the southern French megalithic culture. In fact a statue menhir similar in every respect was recently found in a south Sardinian cave.

Conical stones with women's breasts have frequently been found in Sardinia in association with "giant's tombs". Three of them, the *pedras marmuradas*, stand on a plateau above Macomer (Plate 37).

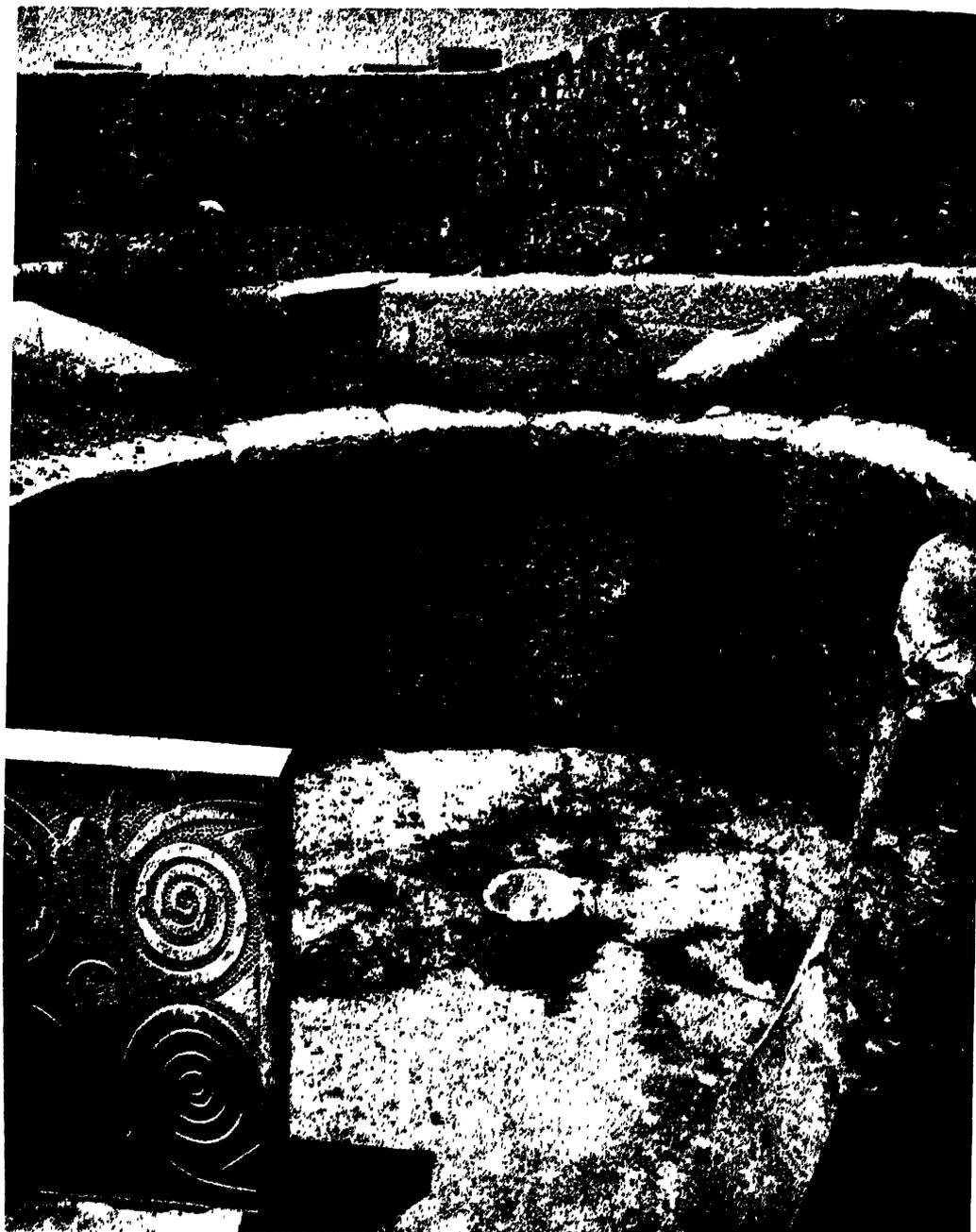
An hour's climb through grassland leads to them. The uniformity of the scene is only occasionally broken by cork-trees bent by the wind, or dark basalt rocks dotted about the landscape like great tortoises. At first one may meet a cavalcade of peasants riding home from the cattle-market under big green umbrellas, but higher up total solitude prevails. Silence hangs over the landscape like a thick veil, broken from time to time by the cawing of crows or the gentle sound of cow-bells with their sheep-bone clappers. In spring tall, pale lilac asphodels shimmer in thousands on the slopes. The Greeks used to believe that the fields of Hades were covered with them; here they are known as "Sardinian flowers", certainly they belong inseparably to this landscape, they seem symbols of its melancholy, which is transfigured by their spectral beauty.

The *pedras marmuradas* stand some distance apart from each other, like sentries in front of a destroyed "giant's tomb". Behind them the country rises in long undulations to a hill on which the Tamuli *nuraghe* towers towards the sky. No doubt the megalithic tomb was associated with this fortress. The menhirs are about three feet high. Three are dressed stones shaped like sugar-loaves; the other three, with their small breasts, look like strange female dwarfs turned into granite by witchcraft.

One can be reasonably confident that the simple conical menhirs represented male figures. In that case the stones of Tamuli would represent three couples no doubt ancestor deities or deities of death. Analogies with western European tomb sculptures suggest a goddess of death and her partner, symbolizing the principle of life and fertility which was believed to regenerate the dead and give them strength. The menhirs may also have been intended as a protection for the grave, a defence against destructive demons.



28 Approach to the "Holy of Holies" in the central temple of Hal Tarxien  
29 Septal slab with the spiral eye symbol



30 Eye spirals in the passage-way to a side-chamber of the middle temple of Hal Tarxien







- ◁ 32 Reconstruction of a large terracotta figurine of a priest, from Hal Tarxien
- 33 Disk-shaped idol of the period of the Invaders, from Malta



- 34 Prehistoric rock-cut tombs at Pectenadu, Alghero  
35 Rock-cut necropolis of Sant' Andrea Priu



- 36 Entrance slab of a Sardinian Giant's Tomb, with 'spirit hole'  
37 Female menhir at the Pedras Marmoradas



38 Marble idol of the Great Mother,  
from Sardinia

Another instance of the mystic couple occurs inside the "giant's tomb" of Perdu Cossu in the form of a female and a phallic stone.

After the beginning of the *nuraghi* culture the veneration of a male deity in the form of a phallic pillar seems to have been widespread in Sardinia. There is a remarkable group of five phallic menhirs, some of them quite tall, on the grass outside the little Romanesque church of San Lorenzo near Silanus. The pagan stones, which apparently came from some prehistoric place of worship in the neighbourhood of the village, were brought to the church and unsuspectingly re-erected in the sacred precincts. Thus these emblems of a forgotten fertility god stand today in close proximity to the crucifix.

Thousands of years ago such menhirs, of which a considerable number have been found in the island, may have been the objects of an orgiastic cult. A small carving from the late phase of the *nuraghi* culture shows three naked women dancing a wild dance round a stone.

It is not impossible that the Great Mother, whose ascendancy in the eastern Mediterranean was drawing towards its close about the middle of the second millennium, also lost her original importance in the ancient Sard religion. From the outset she was probably provided with a partner, whose connection with the dead and hence with the fertility cult is evident as early as the time of the Anghelu Ruju bull's heads. Representations of bulls, and above all the symbolic horn motif, appear in connection with religious practices until the end of the *nuraghi* culture.

The male deity of the Sardis may have resembled the weather god of the Near Eastern pastoral peoples whose cult spread through the Mediterranean area in the third millennium. El, the "great bull", or Baal Hadad, the god of lightning, whose emblem was also a bull, may have reached Sardinia by way of Crete and Mycenae. The veneration of phallic pillars there may have been an aspect of the cult of the bull god.

In spite of all the indirect evidence pointing to the worship of a god of death and of fertility, we have no written confirmation of its existence. Sardus Pater, of whose cult in Sardinia we have historical evidence, was represented on a throne and with a crown of feathers, just like the Carthaginian Baal. He was therefore presumably also the chief god of the Carthaginians who established themselves on the coasts of Sardinia in the fifth century. The Sardis may have ended by identifying him with their own deities.

If the evidence for a dominant father-god in Sardinia seems sketchy, that provided by the *nuraghi* culture is more substantial. The huge defensive structures and later the Bronze Age art, confront us with a patriarchal social structure and a definitely virile, warlike world, very different from the maternal, contemplative world of Malta. This world is marked by deep religiousness, but of a type characteristic of the titanic late phase of megalithic culture, in which veneration of ancestors has developed in to a cult of heroes. The great circular buildings of the ancient Sardis are not temples, but fortresses, expressing a dynamic, aggressive spirit. The builders of the *nuraghi* were as fierce and terrifying as the Cyclops of Greek legend, and to the present day their wildness does not seem to have entirely vanished from the islanders' hearts.

## Castles of the Cyclops

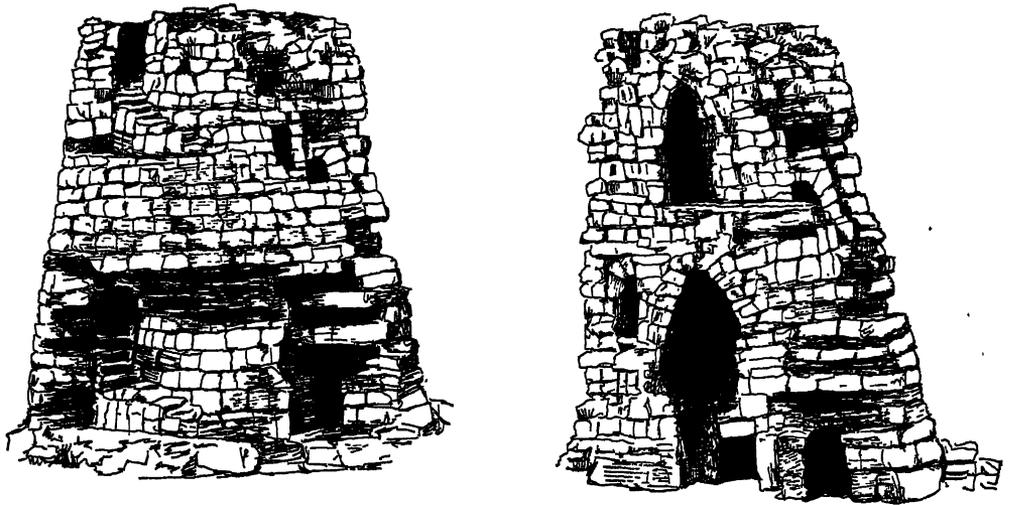
Three thousand *nuraghi* – there were once about seven thousand – still dominate the Sardinian landscape. Their squat, sturdy, brown or grey ruins, overgrown with ivy or golden lichen, stand alone or at the centre of Cyclopean defence works at entrances to valleys, on high plateaux, flat mountain-tops and rocks overlooking the sea. On the threshold of European history, mankind's oldest building tradition once more assumed colossal proportions. In the face of these mighty walls the millennia dwindle and the ancient past seems more real than the present (Plate 39).

Lined up behind these Sardinian fortresses, like steps leading further and further backwards in time, are the royal castles of Tiryns and Mycenae, the citadels of megalithic Palestine, the *nawamis* on the slopes of Sinai, and finally the *tholoi* of Arpachiya near Nineveh. It is a long way from the Near East to this island in the western Mediterranean, from the fourth millennium to the end of the second. No doubt the agents of this migration of an architectural style were Mycenaean mariners. Their influence on Sardinia is undeniable. It is evident not only in the construction of the *nuraghi*, whose vaulted chambers are like barbarous imitations of the monumental burial vaults of the Atrides, but also in the shape of bronze weapons and implements, and in pottery. Cretan double axes have come to light, as well as three copper bars, each weighing 60 lb, with Minoan inscriptions.

The strange name of these ancient Sardinian towers is apparently of Phoenician rather than of Greek origin. *Nurhag* is Phoenician, meaning "big house". The island dialect also includes the words *nora* or *nurra*, indicating something like a stone cairn, and finally the legendary King Norax of Tartessos may lurk behind the word. Corbelled roofs occur in Iberian tombs at the beginning of the chalcolithic Almerian culture.

The date of the *nuraghi* is as controversial as is the origin of the word. Their primitive appearance and the pure Bronze Age look of the whole *nuraghi* culture at one time caused their age to be greatly exaggerated – they were attributed to the beginning of the second millennium. Later work has shown that they must be much younger than that, and at the present one is inclined to date the beginning of the *nuraghi* architecture at about 1,000 B. C. But weapons and pottery from the earliest *nuraghi* and also their crude construction of boulders piled irregularly on one another may indicate that they are somewhat older. At any rate, Achaean colonists established themselves in Sardinia long before the end of the second-millennium period of Mycenaean ascendancy in the Mediterranean, which lasted roughly from 1,400 to 1,200 B. C.

The first *nuraghi* were one-storey structures generally from twenty-seven to thirty feet high, containing a single room from eighteen to twenty-seven feet in diameter with a corbelled dome of overlapping courses of stones. Their most striking characteristic is their deliberate seclusion from the outside world. Compact, like rocks almost devoid of loopholes, with entrances either as low as a foxhole or so high that they can be reached



23, 24 Interior of a nuraghe showing steps and corbelled chambers

only with a ladder, they seem the very archetype of fortresses (Fig. 23, 24). Sometimes the only entrance is subterranean. Almost complete darkness generally prevails within. On the left-hand side of the entrance corridor, a ramp or spiral staircase leading up to the roof is often hollowed out of the massive wall; on the right there is often a recess for a guard, placed in such a way that an enemy who penetrated into the fortress would be unable to protect himself with his shield. The same principle was used in Mycenaean fortresses.

At the height of the nuraghic culture between 800 and 500 B. C. these unicellular structures developed into castles with towers, terraces, courtyards and outer walls (Fig. 25). Phoenician and Greek influence may be reflected in the greater sophistication of the defence system and the improved building technique. In later times, regular courses of rectangular blocks partly or wholly displaced the crude constructions of polygonal megaliths. The outer walls were dressed and the joints were filled in with stones and clay. The huge boulders of the early period partly gave way to smaller material. But the fortresses as a whole still preserved their primitive appearance, as emblems of an older age.

At first the *nuraghi* were apparently fortified houses of individual clans, but later they were frequently the centre of larger settlements and served both as chieftains' dwelling places and as castles in which the people could take refuge in emergencies. Inside the sheltering walls, which were from fifteen to forty-five feet thick, were wells, cisterns, store-rooms and even foundries and smithies.

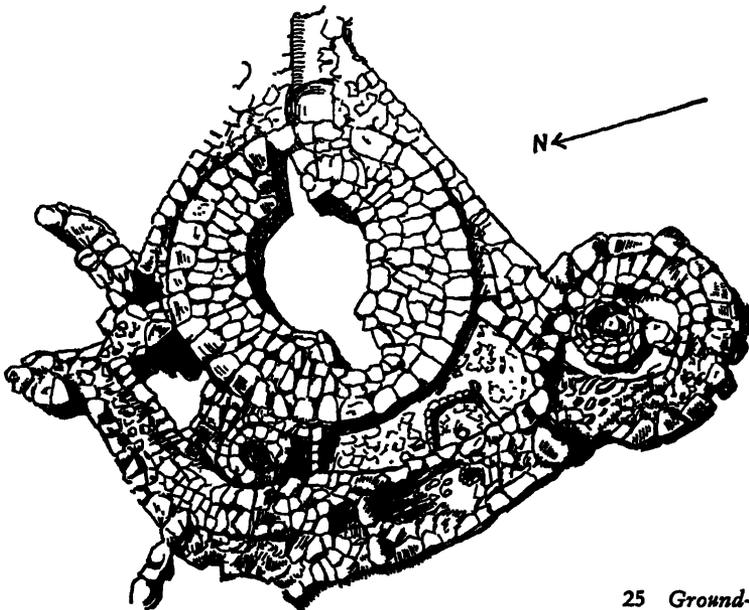
The inhabitants of the forty-seven *nuraghi* settlements which have so far been counted lived in dwellings which were imitations in miniature of their chieftains' castles. They were generally circular and, especially in the early period, had astonishingly solid walls, sometimes as much as eleven feet thick.

The biggest of these structures were twenty-seven feet and the smallest nine feet in diameter. In contrast to the fortresses, the entrances were relatively high and built of big slabs, and were fitted with trunnions which held stone or wooden doors. Recesses in the wall served as cupboards. These dwellings contained stone benches and round or square hearths, next to which mortars were often found. Generally there was one room only, with a pen for livestock attached. The floor consisted of clay, stone paving, or sometimes the living rock. The smaller dwellings had a beehive dome, and the bigger apparently had conical roofs made of brushwood and clay.

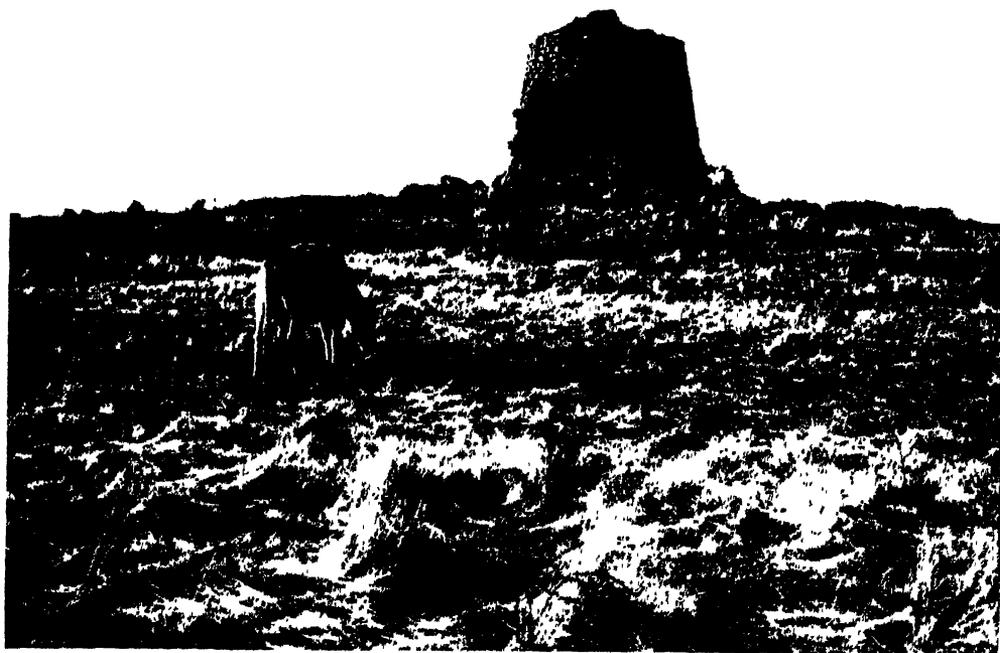
Excavations at the *nuraghi* village of Serra Orrios brought to light what may have been a food shop. The remains of clay vessels which had contained corn were found on a bench. There was also a smithy, with anvil and casting moulds. Some notably big buildings may have served for assemblies. One building evidently served for religious purposes; the interior arrangements, with a stone table in front of three wall niches, resemble those of the Maltese temples. Stone beakers and troughs were evidently used for sacrificial or purification rites.

The primitive inhabitants of Sardinia, hardly affected by the customs of the foreign peoples of the coastal towns, went on living in their villages unconquered and independent in the shelter of their Cyclopean fortresses, and they preserved their own culture and way of life during the period of obviously peaceful co-existence with the Phoenicians.

One of the most magnificent memorials to their state of military readiness is the *Losa nuraghe* which also admirably illustrates the development of these fortresses from their



25 *Ground-plan of a nuraghe fortress*

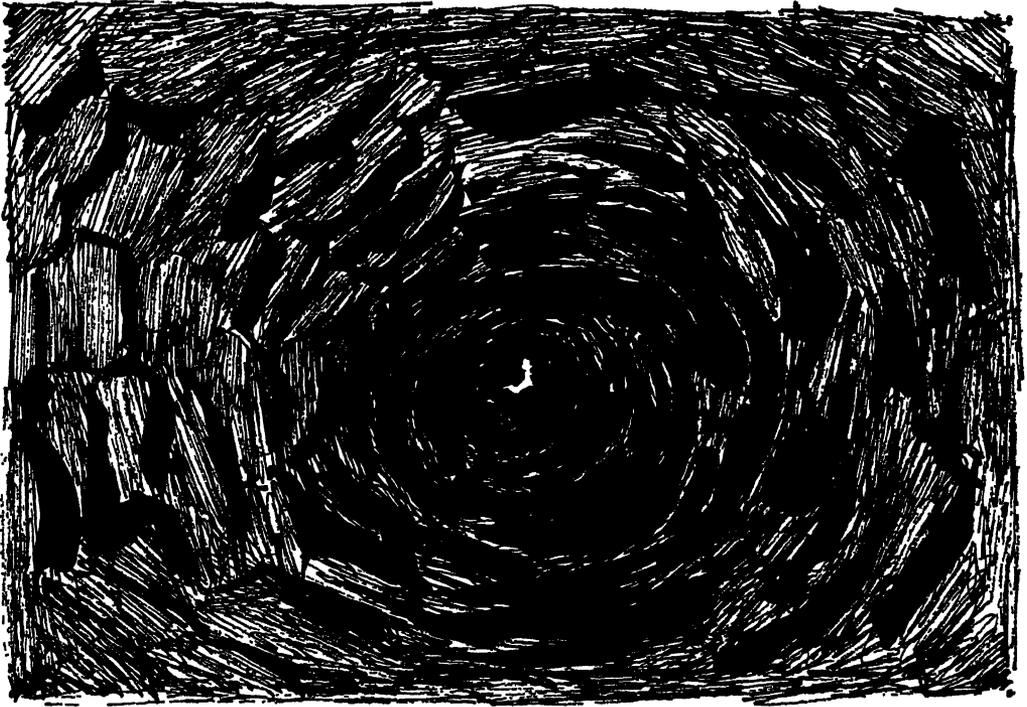


39 The Succoronis *nuraghe*: a characteristically shaped *nuraghe* near Macomer

40 The Losa *nuraghe*



41 Passage in the Losa *nuraghe*



26 Looking up into the dome of the nuraghe of Losa

early to their final phase. It stands like a great block of brown basalt, still about forty-five feet high and as big as a small block of flats in the midst of pastoral country on the plateau of Abbasanta (Plate 40).

Tall grass waves on the top of the great structure, ivy covers its flanks like moss, hawks nest in it, and bees build their hives in its loopholes. The ruins do not seem dead, however, for the cries of birds and the humming of insects fill its crevices with life, and at midday shepherds with their shaggy sheep rest in its shade. In early summer fennel grows tall among the brushwood which has buried the remains of the outer bastion, and mullein stands ceremonially on the fallen blocks of its ruined walls.

Access to the fortress is by way of an opening high in the wall; penetrating it is like entering a mine, or the mythical cave of Polyphemus, and it is hard to believe that these dark stone vaults were made by the hand of man. The boulders of which the original nucleus of the building was made are as huge and crude as those hurled at the Greek ships by the one-eyed Cyclops in the *Odyssey*. A corridor to the main hall leads past the niche in which a guard with drawn sword once stood ready to face an intruder. In the semi-darkness the stone courses of the corbelled dome rise impressively overhead; the place seems as high as a cathedral (Fig. 26). Opposite the entrance are the first steps of the spiral staircase built into the wall, which is many yards thick. The *nuraghe* is lined

like a shell by the windings of this staircase. There is another domed chamber on the first storey; because of the conical shape of the building it is smaller than the first. In the course of many centuries the upper part of the building has partially collapsed. The third chamber is in ruins, but part of the roof terrace survives. A round hole was found there, with cork slabs as a protection against damp; presumably it was a weapon store.

This tower probably dates from about 1,000 B. C. Three others were later added to it and a wall was built connecting them. Thus the original *nuraghe* became the nucleus of a triangular citadel.

Tall, narrow tunnels with sloping convergent walls (Plate 41) lead from the central structure to the vaulted chambers of two of the other towers. The third was accessible from the upper storey, from which a ramp leads down to it. Its entrance is six feet above ground-level; no doubt it was reached by rope-ladder.

As a dwelling place the gloomy, Cyclopean citadel is uninviting, but as a fortress it is well planned; it must have been reducible only by starvation. The whole of the interior was laid out with a view to defence. The passages are so low that a man must stoop, or even crawl, to use them, and they could be barricaded by heavy slabs. At the doorways, as in the passages, an enemy's freedom of movement was severely restricted; two warriors would be sufficient to keep at bay a whole host trying to gain access to the upper storeys of the main building, and a few men would be able to catch a large number of intruders in the halls like rats in a trap.

The outer wall, with small round watch-towers by which the *nuraghe* is surrounded, was apparently built in the third century B. C. At that time the death-struggle between Rome and Carthage had begun, and this involved a direct threat to Sardinia.

No doubt the *nuraghi* were originally built because of frequent tribal feuds; quarrelsomeness and particularism are still Sardinian characteristics. But in the eighth and seventh centuries B. C., when Phoenicians, Greeks, and Etruscans started actively colonizing the western Mediterranean area, the constant threat from the sea caused the Sards to take joint defence measures. A strategic system is evident in the close grouping of *nuraghi* along the invasion routes. In a number of areas they were situated just sufficiently close together to enable fire signals to be passed on from one to another when enemy ships were sighted off the coast. In some areas the *nuraghi* are so thick on the ground that they suggest a confederation or principality under single leadership. It is possible that at the zenith of the island's culture it was governed by a few chieftains, each of whom may have controlled a relatively large area.

The most astonishing large-scale defensive site is on the Giara di Gesturi, a table-mountain seven and a half miles long and two and a half miles wide, whose sheer basalt cliffs rise to a height of 1,800 feet above the plain. Thousands could take refuge with their cattle on the flat top of this natural fortress, along whose rim stood more than twenty watch-towers covering its approaches. Two *nuraghi* in the centre of the plateau no doubt served as headquarters.

The latest defensive structures, such as the Sant' Antine *nuraghe*, which has several

towers and still stands to a height of fifty-five feet (Plate 42) or the Domu s'Orcu fortress, were probably built under the guidance of Carthaginian engineers as a bulwark against the Romans. The circumference of Domu s'Orcu was about four hundred and fifty feet; and the sixty-foot-high central *nuraghe* was surrounded by smaller towers and platforms on which there was room for a whole regiment. There were ten chambers on the ground floor of the building, including a big hall with many niches. The huge fortress contained eleven tunnels and was surrounded by four courtyards. It had four gates. Such a structure could have been built only in expectation of a large-scale attack.

After the Roman legions had stormed the Carthaginian ports in 238 B. C., it took them three more years to subdue the island's original inhabitants. No doubt the huge fortresses had to be conquered one by one. The Sardis withdrew farther and farther into the mountains, fiercely contesting every inch. The bitterness of the struggle, which was pursued with bloodhounds into the most remote corners of the island, can be deduced from the account given by its conqueror, the consul Titus Sempronius Gracchus, who boasts of having killed or captured eighty thousand Sardis. But this slaughter did not put an end to their desire for independence; there were continual revolts, and in 177 B. C. the Romans had to send another army to Sardinia.

No other prehistoric European people developed the cyclopean round building in such a monumental fashion or clung so stubbornly to its own way of life as long as its independence lasted. From primitive times to the present day the *nuraghi* have symbolized their character – their indomitable fighting spirit, mistrustful reserve, and stubborn conservatism.

### *Pottery and Metals*

The unmistakable stamp of the ancient Sard culture also appears in fields other than that of architecture. In the protective shadow of the *nuraghi* the islanders' artistic gifts manifested themselves in works that interpreted and refashioned in highly individual nanner the legacy of older Mediterranean civilizations.

Typical of the pottery of the nuraghic period are rounded, finely worked and burnished grey or black vessels reminiscent of the Etruscan bucchero ware. They are decorated with plastic ornamentation or scratched patterns. The magico-religious symbolism of some vessels provides clues to the islanders' beliefs, and are also important for the light they throw on some of the mysterious engravings which appear again and again in the megalithic cultures of western Europe.

In the Sardinian, as in older eastern Mediterranean cultures, particularly the Trojan, pottery undoubtedly played a part in the cult of the Great Goddess. In the imagination

of primitive man a squat, bulky jar must have represented the very essence of the feminine. Receiving, preserving, and dispensing nourishment, it became the emblem of woman, the vessel in which life is formed and from which it emerges; it also symbolized woman as the dispenser of milk. The identification appears unmistakably in Trojan face urns, which from the time of the third Troy onwards are given stylised female form; pottery with these female symbols may have travelled to the west from Troy with the cult of the mother goddess.

A fragment of a black Sardinian urn shows in relief a daemonic female being with a head of exaggerated size, together with concentric circles with a point in the middle. The meaning of these mystic symbols here is plain; they stand for the eyes, nipples, and navel, the centres of the fertility and power of the Great Mother (Plate 43).

On other vessels concentric circles of various sizes with points in the middle are scattered over the surface or arranged in decorative patterns (Plate 44). Besides these magic symbols of the fertility cult to which prophylactic powers were certainly ascribed, protuberances symbolizing female breasts which frequently occur on the pottery also point to the cult of the Great Mother. Pottery decorated with such symbols was probably used exclusively for ritual purposes. Magical meanings were attached to most ornamentation on prehistoric pottery.

In addition to the sacred circles, the decoration of the nuraghic pottery includes attractive vertical and horizontal hatchings, rows of zigzag lines, and lozenge and checkerboard patterns.

But the masterpieces of ancient Sardinian art arose out of the metal industry, whose extraordinary development was assisted by the presence of deposits in the island. Copper was at first imported, as is shown by the find of Aegean ingots of the metal. By the middle of the second millennium, the deposits of the Sinai area and Cyprus had been exploited for thousands of years, and the working of the Iberian deposits had been in progress at least since the end of the third millennium B. C. No doubt the Sardinian copper and lead deposits like the Spanish mines before them, were discovered by specialists from the eastern Mediterranean, who also introduced advanced methods of winning and working the metal which were far superior to the Tuscan, for instance. Tin for the making of bronze must have been imported, and supplies could have come from the south of France, Tuscany, or Spain. The abundance of copper in Sardinia was certainly the reason for the unusually long duration there of the Bronze Age, which at one time caused an erroneously early date to be attributed to the nuraghic culture. As iron had to be imported, the Sardis contented themselves as long as possible with the native metal.

Nearly fifty hoards of bronze objects have so far been found in Sardinia. Some of them were coppersmiths' stocks, others were treasure, corresponding to the hoards of coins of historical times. Instead of money, they contained pieces of metal and small axes, which were the current medium of exchange. The most important finds, however, were accumulations of votive offerings made at shrines. These were kept in clay vessels, stone cists, or were simply buried.

Light is thrown on the Sardinian casting methods by numerous steatite forms, stone crucibles from which the metal was poured with stone spoons, and by the bronze objects themselves. The statuettes were cast by *cire perdue*, and the bronze was hammered. Welding was unknown, but riveting was used. A number of smelting furnaces have been found measuring about three feet across and made of fire-resistant clay. Charcoal and ore were placed in alternate layers, and heat was applied from below.

The numerous well-shaped bronze implements are nearly all based on very ancient Aegean prototypes, to which the conservative islanders remained faithful to the end of the Bronze Age. Only the axe blades betray connections with Spain or the south of France. In addition to axes, adzes, and picks, scissors, saws, sickles and spoons came to light. Some bronze vessels with animal handles and ox and dove motifs also point to eastern models.

The warlike character of the ancient Sards is again attested by the multiplicity of their bronze weapons. Five different types of sword were produced, including some more than four feet long, and there were some extraordinarily fine votive swords. There were also barbed lance heads, javelins, and halberds. Daggers may perhaps have been a sign of princely or priestly rank. Leather and bronze were used for helmets and armour. There were small round bronze shields in addition to wooden shields covered with leather.

So far as ornaments were concerned, the nuragic period was characterized by chains, cylindrical bronze beads and rings, and broad metal necklets with embossed parallel lines, and also the so-called torcs which were also the vogue in western and northern Europe.

But the finest products of the ancient Sard metal industry were the bronze statuettes in which the *nuraghi* people mirrored themselves and their lives with fascinating spontaneity.

### *A People before Their Gods*

The makers of the bronze figurines of the nuragic culture, like all primitive peoples, had no thought of producing works of art. Their products were for magic-religious purposes. All these statuettes, the feet of which were provided with pegs to enable them to be placed in stone holders or in front of shrines, were votive offerings. The human figures were intended to serve as substitutes for the persons portrayed, for in the magic-filled primitive mind the representation of a man was in a way identical with the man himself. If he put his statue in a shrine, it was equivalent to being there himself, expressing his gratitude or piety, and thus remaining in permanent and close contact

with the god. The ancient primitive belief that like must inevitably lead to like also caused the Sardinian artists in bronze to reproduce certain things or events in the belief that this would cause them to come true. Thus, statuettes of animals were intended either as thank-offerings or to ensure good hunting. Statuettes of cattle may sometimes have been symbolic animal sacrifices; a figurine of a pregnant sow was probably intended to induce the favour of the god with a view to increasing the size of the herd.

As in the case of palaeolithic cave-painting, the production of works of art in the Sardinia of the nuraghic culture was the almost unintentional consequence of this pictorial magic. Gifted artists with an unusual feeling for style and plastic effect succeeded in their bronze figurines in showing, in forms as simple as they were expressive, the intrinsic nature of a society which to the end of the *nuraghi* culture remained essentially megalithic. The purity, strength and completeness of this art make an immediate impact. In form it was somewhat influenced by the geometrical style of early Greek, Etruscan, Phoenician and Iberian sculpture, but the result, which so clearly portrays the islanders' character, is sharply differentiated from the contemporary work of other Mediterranean peoples.

More than four hundred figurines, varying in size from a few inches up to fifteen, give us a life-like picture of the people who built the *nuraghi*. All of them, from humble shepherd and peasant to proud tribal chief and fierce warrior, from water-carrier in loin-cloth to finely dressed priestess, were assembled in the presence of their gods. The number of armed warriors is striking – another testimonial to the large part played by fighting in the islanders' hard and quarrelsome life.

Correspondences between shapes of weapons and types of helmet and armour which appear in this statuary, and Phoenician statuary from the necropolis of Tharros in the Gulf of Oristano which dates back to the eighth century, together with dateable finds of Sardinian bronzes in southern Etruria, now enable us to attribute the zenith of the island's art to the period between the eighth and sixth centuries. Three different styles can be distinguished, but the order of succession has not yet been established.

The most outstanding works come from a hoard found on the slopes of the Monte Arcosu above Uta in the neighbourhood of Cagliari. They are the most geometrical of all the statuettes, with long, narrow, flat bodies and often disproportionately big but very expressive heads. A few lines and surfaces are worked into compositions which are almost Cubist in effect. Finest of all is a carving nearly sixteen inches in height that must represent a chieftain, the dignified lord of a *nuraghe* (Plate 45). He carries a broad sword over his right shoulder, and in his left hand he has a gnarled stick. A belt with a long dagger is slung across his chest. He is clothed in a short doublet and a simple cloak made of a square piece of material secured at his shoulders and hanging over his back. He is bare-footed, but seems to be wearing leather leggings, and on his head a round cap. His face shows excessively big almond-shaped eyes under ornamental brows and a very long nose over a small mouth. His expression is solemn.

A number of smaller figures in the Uta style follow the same pattern. Instead of

holding a sword, the right hand is raised in a gesture of veneration as in the presence of the god.

Two fine warriors from Uta are very similar to the chieftain in demeanour and appearance. One holds a shield in his left hand (Plate 46), and the other has a bow slung over his shoulder. Both carry swords over their shoulders and wear small horned helmets.

Two interesting groups of wrestlers also come from Uta. One shows two men with hands of exaggerated size raised ready for the fray, the other, the final stage of the contest, with the victor kneeling on his opponent (Plate 48). These scenes have been interpreted as representing a battle between gods, but ancient Sardinian bronzes nearly always create the impression of episodes from real life. The groups of wrestlers may have been intended as an invocation of victory in a struggle that perhaps had some kind of ritual significance.

The numerous warrior figures in the Uta style (Plate 47), which include a warrior with a sling, another shown in profile with drawn bow, and a Bowman in clothing reminiscent of that of Assyrian soldiers, may be invocations of victory or expressions of gratitude for safe return after battle.

Many statuettes show men and women making offerings. A shepherd brings the god his first-born lamb, which he carries over his shoulder, a peasant brings bread and a bowl with milk or some other liquid (Plate 49). These figurines are generally very small and artistically are not the equals of the Uta masterpieces, but common to them all is a great vividness of expression. Striking in its simple piety is the crude figure of a peasant with pointed beard and loincloth, a cylindrical cap, and a bag slung over his shoulder, offering the god, with an expression of humble fervour, a small cake and a bowl (Plate 50).

A figurine showing a man on crutches, found during excavation at the great mountain shrine of Santa Vittoria di Serri, shows that the healing of infirmities was also sought there.

A woman with a dead warrior on her knees evokes a primitive *pietà* (Plate 51). Both figures are crudely carved and badly proportioned, and yet this work is one of the most powerful of the ancient Sard bronzes. The inconsolable anguish of all mothers of all dead sons seems to be condensed into the timeless mask of the woman's narrow, excessively big head, the eyes nearly closed under her thick eyebrows, and her compressed lips. In silent grief she offers the deity her dead son. Perhaps the object was to seek vengeance on the slayer.

This group has also been interpreted as representing a goddess with her son and as illustrating an unknown myth. It seems simpler to regard it as an illustration of what must have been an all too frequent event in the warlike life of the *nuraghi* people. There are other bronzes that seem to favour this interpretation. In one of them the son sitting on his mother's knees is no warrior, and is obviously alive; in another a seated woman has a small child on her lap. Both mothers have their right hand raised in the

usual gesture of veneration. They are therefore less likely to be goddesses than mothers perhaps seeking succour for their sick children. The right arm of the *pietà*, which is missing, may have been raised in the same gesture. Also, religious representations generally followed a very uniform pattern, while these three groups are relatively very different from each other.

Religious significance was certainly attached to the numerous ships made by the Sardinian artists in bronze. The bow always ends in an elegant, stylised stag's or ox's head, and sometimes animals are placed inside or round the sides (Plate 52). Instead of a mast, one little ship has a pillar with something like a pair of horns on it. Perched on this is a dove, the symbol of the Great Goddess in Crete and Cyprus. Some of the ships were evidently intended to be suspended, and may therefore have been oil lamps.

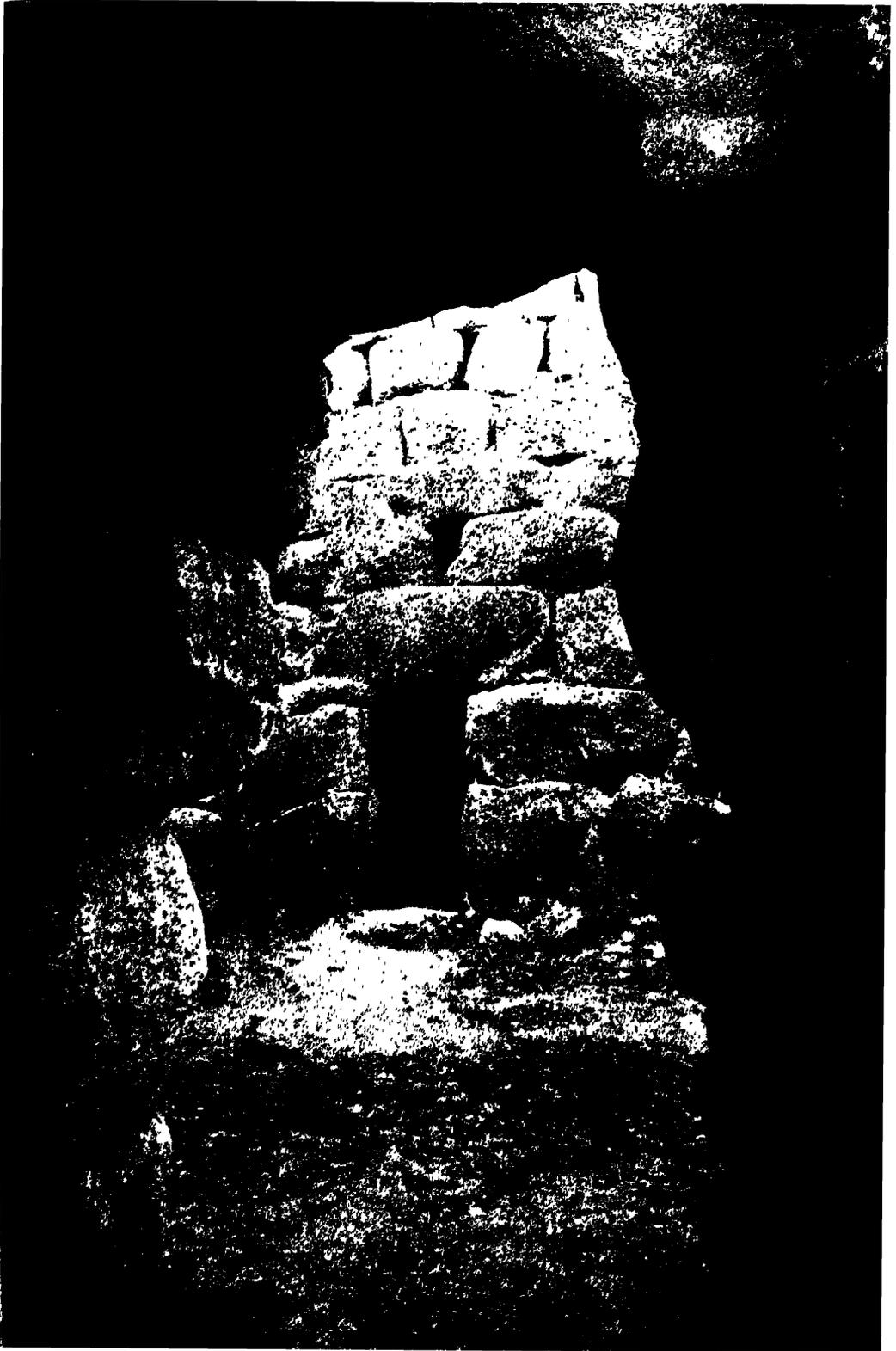
A magnificent example with a whole menagerie on board came to light in a seventh-century Etruscan grave in the necropolis of Vetulonia in the Tuscan ore area. It has been interpreted, among other things, as evidence that cattle were transported between Sardinia and the ports of Etruria. It certainly points to connections between southern Etruria and the island. But the animals are perhaps the result of the orientalizing style of the seventh century, and may therefore have had a religious rather than a realistic significance. The ship may have been a ritual object in the cult of the dead. At any rate, clay boats occur frequently in Etruscan tombs; they were perhaps intended to facilitate the dead person's journey to the shores beyond. The ships found in Sardinia may be votive offerings made by mariners.

Long, finely made swords with a two-headed stag or bull impaled upon them (stags and bulls were certainly sacred animals in Sardinia), were frequently offered to the gods; they were fixed to the stone benches of the shrines with their points upwards. A small warrior often stands on the animal's back (Plate 53). In so far as these weapons were not trophies offered in gratitude to the gods, they may have been connected with hunting or fighting magic.

Classes of cult objects include a small bronze box on wheels, a model of a *nuraghe* with several towers, a house with a gabled roof on which two birds, apparently doves, are seated, and a finely worked, sickle-shaped, two-branched candelabra with two faces and mysterious dagger- and fork-shaped engravings on the stem.

The big part played in the life of the islanders by cattle-raising and hunting is evident in many vivid bronzes of tame and wild animals. The expressive, linear Uta style is reflected in the tense body of a fox and an elongated but elegant bull (Plates 54, 55). The frequent representations of cattle are another pointer to a bull cult. A bronze centaur with helmet and plume of feathers may be based on foreign patterns.

A sharp contrast to the abstract, geometrical, Uta style is provided by figurines found chiefly at the shrine of Abini in the mountainous area of the interior. They are more naturalistic, more voluminous, are worked out in far greater detail, and above all are richly decorated with linear surface patterns. The exaggerated lengthening peculiar to the Uta figurines is lacking. There are numerous statuettes of warriors in full array,





43 Fragment of a Nuraghic vessel,  
showing daemonic female figure



44 Black burnished Nuraghic jar with a  
design of concentric circles

with various kinds of helmets decorated with plumes and unusually long horns (Plate 56). These large head-decorations were certainly intended to give the warriors who wore them the strength of the animal from which they came. Sometimes the horns are provided with round tips, which may have had religious significance. The oldest representation of such horns known to us occurs on a Cretan seal.

The most remarkable works of the Abini group are three warriors with four eyes and four arms each and carrying two round shields. The grotesque appearance of these figures is enhanced by a helmet with huge tipped horns (Plate 57). These probably do not represent any mortal warrior who wished to enhance his strength by a magic doubling of himself, but some god or hero whose supernatural powers were indicated in this way. Nothing comparable to this four-eyed and four-armed figure is known in the Mediterranean area. The three-faced Geryon of Greek myth can hardly be connected with this mysterious figure, which must mark some wishful thinking on the part of the *nuraghi* people.

A bowman standing on a horse has been interpreted, by oriental analogies, as a god on his sacred steed. But it probably represents some sort of equestrian feat. Mounted games are still held in Sardinia to mark religious festivals, when the lads of the village perform acts of bravado on horseback.

Another bronze belonging to this group shows a woman wearing a short pleated or decorated cloak and a tall, disk-shaped head decoration. In her hand is an object that might be a flute. Presumably she is a priestess or musician connected with the cult.

Women are generally shown in a long, smooth tunic and with the same simple cloak flung over their shoulders that is worn by the men (Plate 49). They are often shown offering the god a bowl and raising their right hand. One of these female figures wears a pointed hat resembling the *tutulus* worn by Etruscan women, and a thick necklace. Another presents herself to the deity with veiled head.

In addition to the ambitious Uta style and the fine linear Abini style, there is another, more primitive group in which only people of lower degree are represented. These figures are relatively crude and blurred, but they are lively and expressive. One of these rough-and-ready pieces shows an ithyphallic hermaphrodite playing a pipe with three tubes, of the kind that still survives in the south of the island and is known as the *launeddas*. The Sardinians extract strangely attractive and wild music from this instrument. Its rich, ecstatic rhythms may contain memories of an orgiastic cult centring round the faun-like demon of fertility.

Thus in the form of these ancient votive bronzes the real and imaginary forms of the ancient Sards step mysteriously from the shadow of their Cyclopean towers. What they can tell us is vague and fragmentary, but the strength of the religious impulse which moved them is evident. The remains of their shrines bring us one step nearer to their secrets.

## *Holy Mountain and Sacred Spring*

Within sight of the huge nuraghic citadel on the Giara di Gesturi, a smaller basalt eminence, the Giara di Serri, two miles long and half a mile wide, rises out of the volcanic landscape of central Sardinia. The flat top of this table mountain, which is more than 1,800 feet above sea level, was in prehistoric times perhaps the most important religious centre of Sardinia. No doubt the ancient Sardis regarded this striking, isolated spot, endowed by nature with the appearance of a kind of divine citadel, as imbued with exceptional sanctity.

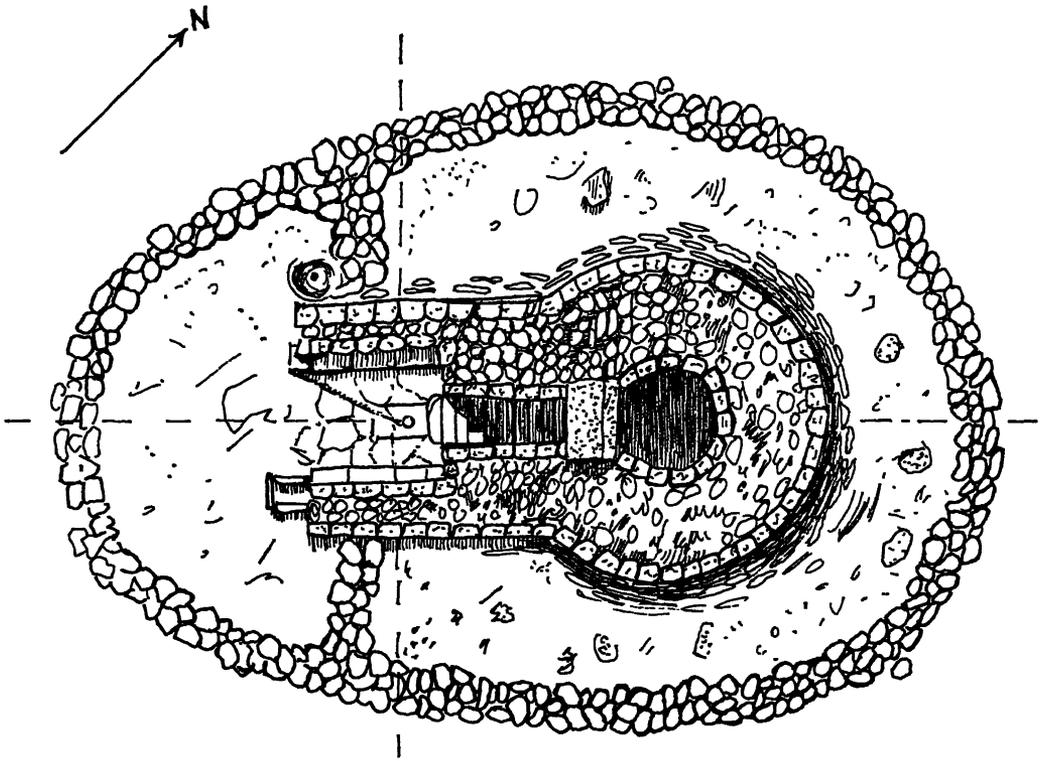
Excavations have brought to light the remnants of numerous sacred and profane buildings, from which it has been possible to draw a clear picture of what went on in that great sanctuary.

A Cyclopean wall of basalt blocks, reinforced at strategic points by small towers and loopholes, surrounded the chief shrine of the area, the temple of the sacred spring, which stood in an elliptical enclosure. That part of the shrine which was above ground-level – it was evidently destroyed by the Romans – apparently consisted of a circular well-house with a rectangular forecourt marked off by two walls. Stone benches for votive offerings stood against the walls of the forecourt. The architectural decoration of this building, of which fragments – including a stylised bull's head – have been found, betrays Phoenician influence. In front of the entrance is a stone slab with a drainage hole in the middle, opening into a pit in the rock floor. This was apparently used in sacrificial ritual. Behind the entrance, a steep stairway under a corbelled roof leads down to the spring. The sacred water was made to flow into a carefully constructed round shaft surmounted by a dome of overlapping black and white circular courses of alternating basalt and limestone blocks. The interior architecture of the *nuraghi* was here boldly transferred underground (Fig. 27).

There were also a number of open places of worship on the Giara di Serri which continued the ancient megalithic tradition of worship within a sacred area.

A Cyclopean circular wall nearly thirty-five feet in diameter, along the inside of which there ran a bench for votive offerings, appears to have enclosed only a *baetyl*, just as did the stone circles in Palestine thousands of years before.

Inside a square enclosure a remarkable pair of pillars was found, rounded at the top and connected by a sculpted frieze which was divided into rectangular areas. Numerous small holes in this monument suggest that votive offerings were once inserted. Before this double pillar was taken to the Cagliari museum, it was the object of popular superstition, resembling in this a great many menhirs in western Europe; ancient beliefs of great antiquity may survive in such superstitions. The people had christened the two pillars "heaven" and "hell", and obviously associated the former with forces bringing good fortune. The top of the "heaven" pillar had been worn flat and polished smooth by innumerable hands and lips.



27 *Ground-plan of the nuraghic temple of Santa Vittoria di Serri*

In addition to the various sacred stones, the *nuraghi* people venerated in Cretan fashion a bronze double axe on a cylindrical pedestal standing inside an enclosure.

In the late period of the nuraghic culture, another circular walled area, measuring about sixty yards across with a pillared portico, was built on the Giara di Serri. No doubt pilgrims gathered there, and perhaps assemblies and festivals were held. On the north side are benches and tables, and a structure that may have been a communal kitchen. The area also included a foundry where votive bronzes were cast which were later sold to pilgrims, together with amulets. Altogether the activity that took place in this forum may not have differed greatly from that which still takes place today at the great centres of Christian pilgrimage.

The sacred mountain was probably also the seat of a hierocracy that ruled over this prehistoric Vatican. Its dignitaries may have lived in the noticeably well-built structures – small *nuraghi* with rectangular forecourts – the remains of which were laid bare during the excavations.

The many shrines on the Giara di Serri, to which the little church of Santa Vittoria was added in the Middle Ages demonstrates the richness of the religious life of the

last centuries of the nuraghic culture. Perhaps both uranian and chthonic powers were worshipped on this lofty eminence. The bull's head from the shrine over the spring is a pointer to the Near Eastern god of weather and fertility who was worshipped in the form of a bull in the very ancient temple of Tell Khafaje next to the idol of the Great Mother. The conical stones, the double axe, and small bronze doves from the shrines also point to the cult of a male and a female deity. The spring, whose connection with the underworld was emphasized by the subterranean domed chamber, may have been associated with veneration of the Great Mother and of the dead.

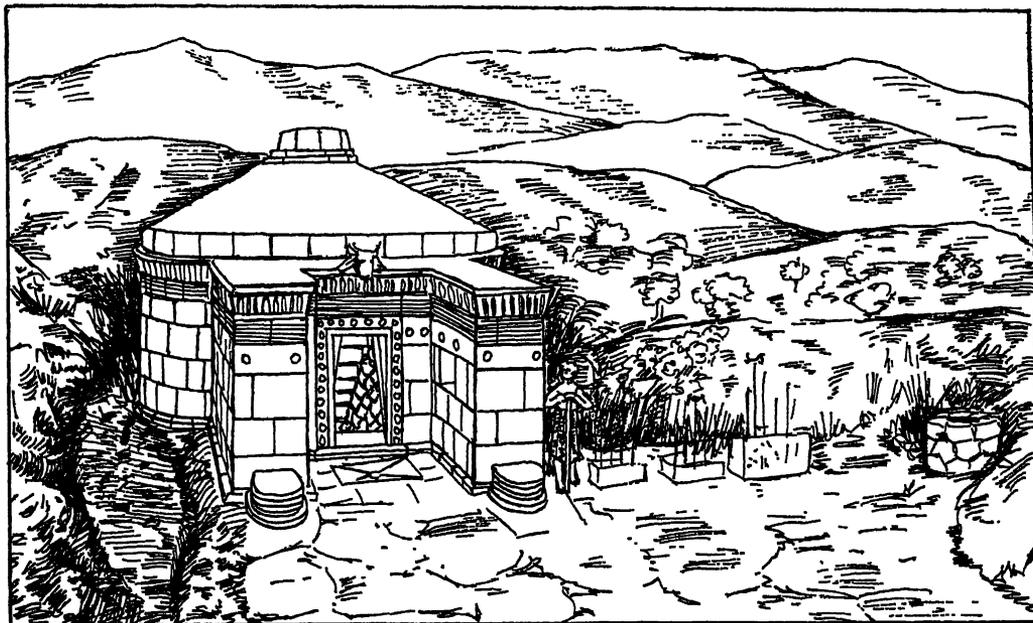
Since neolithic times, water has played a great part in the religious beliefs of many peoples. In the Mesopotamian creation myth it was the primary element of which the universe was made. As the life-giving element *par excellence* it was able to regenerate mortals, and even immortals, who by the mystic act of immersion returned to the uncreated in order to be reborn. The purifying power of water made men worthy of entering sacred places; it could purge them of their sins, and wipe out the past. Water also assuaged the thirst of the dead, had a rejuvenating effect, possessed magic healing powers, and could bestow prophetic gifts. The cult of sacred springs has in some cases survived from neolithic times to the present day, and divination by water still survives as a popular practice. In the Christian religion the ancient symbolism of water survives in baptism. As St. Paul said, it is by immersion that man symbolically dies and is reborn, purified and renewed; like Christ rising again from the grave. The idea of the "water of life" is to be found in the legends and myths of very many peoples.

The many mineral springs in volcanic Sardinia may have contributed to the origin and wide dissemination of the water cult. Hardly any of the ancient shrines seem to have lacked a spring. In the shrine of Abini, which consists of an elliptical wall of granite blocks nearly six feet thick surrounding a sacred area measuring about forty-five feet across, the whole contained in a big oval enclosure, there are two springs, with pools and round shafts. The famous statuettes of four-eyed and four-armed warriors came partly from the pool in the principal shrine, partly from hiding places near it.

Until well into the twentieth century, the inhabitants of the neighbouring village of Teti avoided the Abini site, believing it to be haunted by ghosts. But in times of drought shepherds went there before dawn, struck the rocks with long sticks, and called upon the spirits of the place to send rain.

A fine example of continuity in the cult of a healing spring is provided by the temple of Sardara (Figs. 28, 29), over which the little church of Sant' Anastasia was later built, no doubt to break the pagan spell. The people still descend steps worn smooth by the feet of countless generations into the fifteen-foot by ten-foot chamber where the spring rises in order to fetch the healing water of the *Fontana de is dolus*. The six-foot-high entrance to this shrine and the paved forecourt, again marked off by two walls, still survive, and the circular stone courses of the subterranean dome narrow to a circle three feet in diameter.

About twenty spring shrines are known in Sardinia, and they are all of similar



28 Conjectural reconstruction of the temple at the spring of Sadara

construction. The dome of the Fontana Coperta, a mineral spring near Ballao, and its rectangular antechamber survive intact. Water is still regularly drawn at many of these ancient sites.

The most astonishing underground structure of this kind is that at Golfo Aranci, which has a tall, pointed dome and descends to a depth of forty feet. Forty steps, the pattern of which is exactly followed by the stepped roof overhead, lead down between accurately laid walls of hewn blocks, one course to each step, to the dark gleaming mirror of the sacred water (Plate 58, Fig. 30).

In this magnificently built well-shrine the *nuraghi* architecture celebrated its last triumph before its creative period came to an end.

References in ancient literature provide clues to the various uses to which these places were put. A remark by Sallust shows that the therapeutic properties attributed to the springs of Sardinia were widely known. He speaks of their healing effect on sick eyes. Solinus mentions water ordeals to which accused persons were subjected. The guilty were said to emerge blind after immersion in the sacred spring, while the innocent were given enhanced sight and renewed strength.

A number of practices survive in the island which show that belief in the magic power of water in cases of eye-trouble is not yet dead. A rock pool near Bonusó in the province of Sassari in which water accumulates after the thaw enjoys especially high

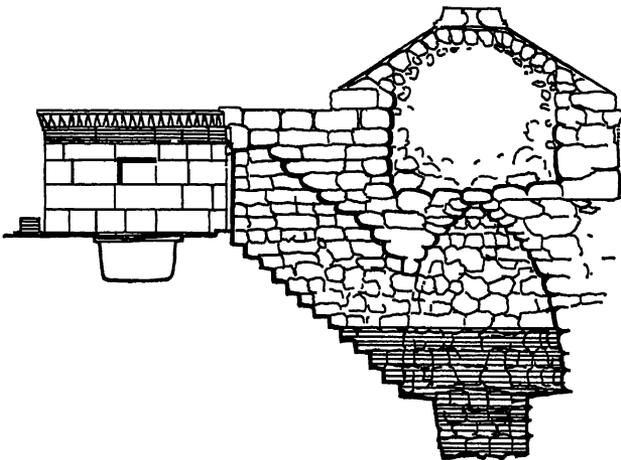
repute among the shepherds. Coins, rosaries, and other objects are thrown into the pool, and the eyes are then bathed in its waters.

An unconscious memory of the ancient cult of springs may have led to the building at the beginning of the eighteenth century of the remarkable shrine under the church of the Beata Vergine dei martiri at Fonni, the highest village in Sardinia. In a cave-like crypt underneath the church the grave, peasant-like figures of saints, who in appearance and expression resemble nuraghic bronzes watch over the spring, which has been divided up into ten little outlets representing the ten virtues of the Virgin Mary.

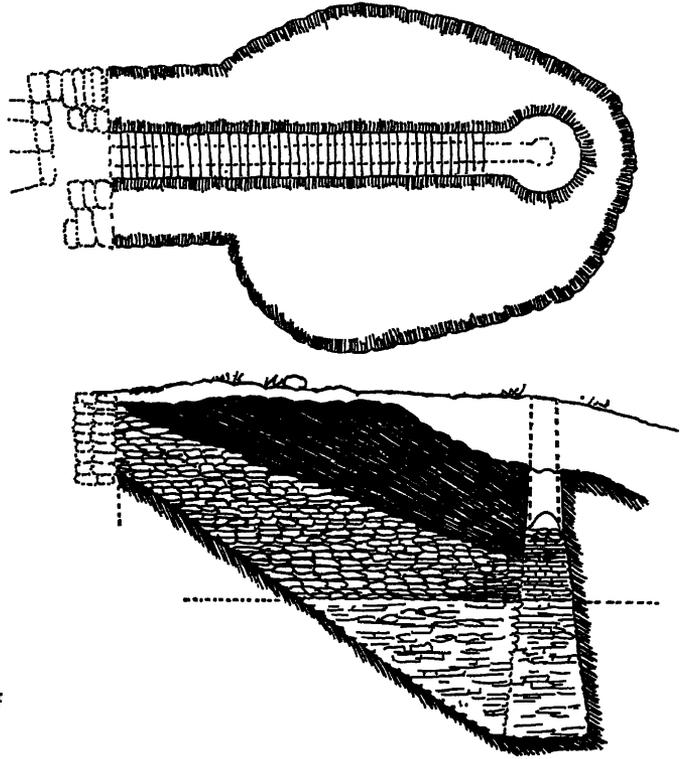
The ancient sacred springs whose waters still flow seem emblems of a continuity which in Sardinia has never been completely broken. The prehistoric shrines, Cyclopean fortresses, tombs, and cult stones which fill its wild landscape in such unique fashion with the mystery of a vanished age are only the outer signs of an inner reality which still to a great extent survives among the people of the mountain areas. They have maintained into the twentieth century the marks of a creative primitive age in which the multiracial colonists of the island merged into a single people who created something new out of the cultural and religious traditions of earlier Mediterranean civilizations and by it vigorously expressed their nature, their beliefs, and their destiny.

### *Ancestral Law*

The Cyclops of the *Odyssey* were shepherds, and the builders of the *nuraghi* were also apparently shepherds and herdsmen rather than tillers of the soil. After the Phoenicians had established themselves in the natural harbour areas, the Sards slowly withdrew



29 Section of the temple at the spring of Sadara



30 *Ground-plan and elevation  
of the temple at the spring of  
Golfo Aranci*

from the constantly threatened coasts on which new conquerors and pirates in search of spoil continually landed throughout their history; and gradually they developed into an essentially inland people, who left seafaring to the foreign peoples along the coasts. Cut off in this way in their inaccessible mountains, they succeeded to a great extent in preserving their independence into historical times; even after they had lost it they maintained their own individuality and traditions to an unusually high degree. Their withdrawal from the sea has lasted to the present day, and it is so complete that for as long as anyone can remember fishing has been practised, not by natives, but by immigrant Neapolitans and Genoese.

The concentration of the *nuraghi* and the prehistoric villages in the high pasture land enables us to think of the lords of the Cyclopean castles as owners of big flocks, like biblical patriarchs. Presumably the settlers in the interior of Sardinia in primitive times did not differ greatly in customs and religious traditions from the ancient Palestinian pastoral tribes, with whom they had in common not only the cult of the dead and megalithic tombs, but also Cyclopean defence works.

In classical times, they were the representatives of a much older world, and so they remain today. In their attachment to their traditions, they perhaps offer us the key

to a number of puzzles which confront us when we consider the megalithic cultures of western and southern Europe; possibly they can tell us something about the vanished generations who built the great megalithic monuments.

Pastoralism still remains the real way of life of the Sardinians and that most in harmony with their nature and temperament. The island's soul lies in the sparsely inhabited interior with its bare plateaux and impenetrable *maquis*, its oak forests and rocky valleys full of the sweet scent of oleander groves, the iron-grey and brown mountains of the Barbagià, to whose slopes cling dark stone villages; and it lives on in the ways of the people, and in their eyes which are full of an ancient knowledge. The way of life, the customs, the unusually pagan Christianity of these phlegmatic, untamed mountaineers sometimes enable us to glimpse as in a mirror a world of beliefs and circumstances that may be very like those of ancient times.

The sheep-owning aristocracies of the mountain villages still divide up the country into huge grazing areas, as the *nuraghi* clans once did, and lead a life laid down by the laws of long ago.

In the treeless uplands round Macomer, over which great flocks of sheep roam like restless clouds, the shepherd still builds his *pineddu*, a circular structure of dry stones piled one on top of another, covered by a pointed brushwood roof or a flat beehive dome; his hands are only the latest in an endless chain of hands that have performed the same task. His primitive house is windowless like the *nuraghi*, and the only light is that of an open fire, whose smoke escapes through the low door opening and the chinks in the walls. In summer he sleeps on the bare ground, in winter on a sheepskin (Plate 59).

If he is an old man – the young men now wear their costumes only when there is a *festa* – he wears the black woollen Phrygian cap, the *beretta*, which is worn or folded differently in every village, wide linen trousers coming down to his calves, and a *mastrucca*, a sleeveless jacket made of black lambskin or crude, home-woven wool. This last is a garment known in the Mediterranean from ancient times and is referred to by Cicero as being typically Sardinian.

The mountain shepherds sometimes make cheese in the prehistoric fashion. They pour milk into a cork container or hollowed-out stump of an oak-tree and bring it to the boil by dropping hot stones into it. They make the same four-holed flutes that their forefathers did, and decorate them with the geometrical patterns which were scratched on the island's first pottery. The strange, monotonous music that they play on these instruments is older than anything known on the mainland of Europe (Plate 60).

The sacred instruments of primitive times – the *luneddas* of the bronze hermaphrodite, the bull-roarer, whose hypnotic voice once accompanied magic rites, the shrill pipes made of pumpkin and vine stalks, the deep-voiced shell and ox horns used to blow signals on these like the strange monotonous songs the shepherds sing while they sit with their heads in their hands on a sunny rock, suddenly bursting forth into wild laments, are still capable of stirring buried depths and renewing in us forgotten emotions.

When the mountain peasant walks through the dry fields with his big, brown cows, which are as proud and active as half-wild animals, and scratches at the earth with his single-pointed wooden plough, or when the women in their brightly coloured woven skirts cut with a hand sickle the small patches of corn that grow between the scrub and the rocks, "a thousand years seems but a day" in Sardinia. The oxen are still driven in couples to the threshing floor round the edge of the circular cornfields, and the primitive triangular carts consist merely of a split tree-trunk splayed open by a few boards and placed on crude disk wheels.

Small, blindfolded donkeys walk round and round in the farmyards turning primitive mills made of barely dressed stone, and in their deadly inescapable routine there is something of the fate of their masters, who sometimes seem just as hopelessly bound to primitive ways. Not only the poetry and simplicity of archaic ways of life are still evident in Sardinia; its dark and terrible features are also evident. Since the time of the rock-cut cemeteries and megalithic tombs the close community between the living and the dead has never been broken. A dead man still requires the aid of his kin, and, if he died by violence, it means vengeance – the vendetta. The idea, reaching right back into prehistory, that the dead thirst for blood, which must be assuaged, and that the killer must be sacrificed to his victim, has maintained its baleful influence.

The laws that governed life and death in immemorial antiquity still prevail. The obligation of the vendetta lies upon the whole family of a murdered man, and 1,500 years of Christianity have not succeeded in changing this. On the contrary, the saints, and even the Madonna, are involved by the mountaineers in their bloodthirsty pagan rites. Indeed, before the avenger strikes he may well go to church and dip his knife in holy water so that it shall do its work well, while St. Anthony is the patron saint of a magic cursing ceremony which continues for nine nights.

But the avenger does not strike surreptitiously or without warning. Nowadays warning is generally given in writing on the cemetery wall. The challenge used to be given in more barbarous language. One day the victim would find his favourite horse with its ears and tail mutilated, his oxen with their tendons cut, or his cornfield in flames. At this stage of the drama there was still generally a possible way out; the paying of ransom might lead to a reconciliation. But if three bullets were left on the threatened man's window-sill there could be no going back. The avenger still binds himself by fearful oaths, the obligation to kill that he assumes makes him a *fuori legge*, an outlaw, and ultimately his only refuge is banditry. Every killing leads to another, resulting in the extermination of whole families. At the beginning of the century it was still possible for a big-village to be depopulated by a vendetta that had lasted for generations.

The police are almost helpless in the face of these blood-feuds. The people of the Barbagia take no notice of state justice; the laws valid in their eyes are the laws of their ancestors, and nobody betrays a vendetta killer, whether out of solidarity or out of fear for his own life.

In the nineteenth century, family courts still existed which dealt with offences against the extremely rigid Sardinian moral code, whose origins are probably also very ancient. A girl who took a married lover, for instance, might be sentenced by a court consisting of her kin to be strangled with her own hair.

The old wildness of the *nuraghi* people which still survives as an ineradicable instinct, the poverty of the backward mountain areas, the institution of the vendetta, and an unbroken tradition dating back to the feuds of prehistoric time – all these lie at the roots of Sardinian banditry, which no efforts have yet been able to suppress. Strabo reports that in winter the inhabitants of the Sardinian mountains used to descend in large bands upon the fertile plains, and at the turn of the century *grassazioni*, or large-scale, well-organized plundering expeditions, used still to terrorize the population.

These things are the grimmer side of the legacy from a pitiless primitive world that lives on among the Sardinian mountaineers. But its nobler side also survives in the sanctity of the family, and the sacred duty of hospitality. In war-time the Sardinians always provide the best soldiers. Above all, however, the beauty, the riches, and the secrets of an ancient culture are kept alive by the women of Sardinia, the practitioners of a unique popular art in which the impulses of the island's wild and colourful past survive, making use of everything from the magico-religious symbols of the nuragic period to their magnificent costumes, which show Spanish influence.

### *Women Custodians of the Past*

On summer evenings, when the inhabitants of the little village of Dorgali, perched like a nest among the rocks of the Barbagià, have all come home, the place seems like a big beehive, vibrating with the hum of many voices. No artificial lamplight breaks up the warm darkness of the steep little alleyways; only the moon floods with its honeyed light the brown roofs of the houses crouching on the mountain-side. Motionless black figures sit on balconies and thresholds. Only the women's hand spindles still turn unceasingly. Shy girls in couples carrying tall jars on their heads, move like silent, slender shadows between the houses and the fountain. The boys link arms and roam the streets in long, swinging lines, singing quietly in the mild night. One voice begins, and the others follow in polyphonic chorus. The deeper voices seem often to linger on one dark vowel, generally U, which gives Sardinian speech its melancholy, musical undertone.

Lovers sing: *Isteddu accurtu a sa luna; tristu chi é deponne* ("Star near the moon; sad is he whom it strikes"), or compare the eyes of their beloved to the rising moon and themselves to a gentle lamb; their songs are always full of melancholy.

Deep and patient resignation sits like a mask on the faces of the older women squatting on their doorsteps in the evening. They are weary after the hard, poverty-stricken life of the mountain villages, whose strict traditionalism imposes the most oppressive restraints, and they rarely smile.

A widow, for instance, has to veil her face for a year after her husband's death and wear mourning for the rest of her life. No girl who values her reputation may go to the fountain alone. All offences against tradition and morals are sternly punished. A patriarchal way of life has to a great extent made these women the chattels of their menfolk and turned them into beasts of burden who bear the brunt of the daily grinding toil; the men, as shepherds, lead a freer, less wearing life. On the other hand, still older traditions have in other respects given the women a position of unusual importance and power. It is they, to a much greater extent than the men, who are the custodians of the past and thus of the Sardinian personality. This, indeed, sometimes makes them a serious obstacle to economic and social reforms in the under-developed areas. In the mountain areas they generally refuse to accept anything strange and new, and stoutly defend their archaic practices and way of life, the roots of which go back to prehistoric times. In their complicated costumes, their wide, often pleated, woollen skirts, the unusual cut of their bodices, their extremely varied head-dress, a reflection of ancient Mediterranean fashion seems to survive. Their fascinating, brightly-coloured, handwoven carpets and the inexhaustible wealth of patterns in their fabrics echo the stylised stags and doves of the nuragic age, and the palm leaves, lotus blossoms, and fabulous animals of the Mediterranean oriental style of the seventh century B. C.

Many memories of pagan ritual and belief survive in the occult knowledge, magical practices and strange rituals which are the especial realm of Sardinian women. *S'attittidu*, lamentation for the dead, was still practised in the past century, as in antiquity, by wailing women who crept noiselessly into the death chamber and then with a prolonged shriek began the drama of lamentation and despair, which included the tearing of hair and clothes, the scratching of cheeks, and flinging oneself on the ground. Nowadays it is only the deceased's female dependents who pay him these honours. If he was murdered or killed in a blood feud scenes of incredible passion take place at the bier; the wailing rises to a climax in a vow of vengeance, solemnized by the magic rite of dipping fingers in the dead man's blood.

Traces of a barbarous practice attributed to the Sards in ancient literature can perhaps be seen in the function of the *accabbadores* ("killers") who survived in the island into the nineteenth century. According to accounts which can be traced back to Timaeus, men and women over the age of seventy were driven by their sons with whips and cudgels to the edge of a precipice, and pushed over it to the accompaniment of inhuman "sardonic" laughter.

At first sight it seems improbable that such a custom should have prevailed among a people with so pronounced a cult of the dead. Nevertheless it may possibly represent a survival into historical times of a very ancient belief from the religious world

of the megalithic cultures. The killing-off of the old would have been due not to economic motives but much more probably to the belief that the occupants of the stone tombs survived in the condition they were in at the moment of death. Perhaps it was believed that dispatching them before they grew too decrepit was doing them a service.

Ideas of this kind may also have persisted in the grim calling of the *accabbadores*, who appeared like priestesses of primitive times at the bedside of the dying and relieved them of their sufferings with the blow of an axe or by strangulation.

Today there are no more *accabbadores* in Sardinia, but women are still astonishingly active as witches. The fear of the evil eye, which is surely a relic of the prehistoric belief in the powerful eye of the Great Goddess and is still extremely widespread among the Mediterranean peoples, and belief in demons and magic are by no means extinct in the island, and this explains the remarkable position occupied there by witches. Scarcely a single remote village is without its witch, and generally it has several witches of different kinds.

The most harmless of these is the *ispiridada* or *visionaria*, who associates with the spirits of the dead and communicates to the living their wishes, orders, or counsel.

Then there is the *magliaia*, who is versed in many secret practices. She can heal sickness in man and animals, make dangerous magic powerless, avert harm done by the evil eye, brew love potions, and foretell the future. She gives those who consult her amulets against the evil eye – so-called “eye stones”, which are small flints of unusual, sometimes human, shape; as well as olive-shaped onyx pendants, which have to be worn enclosed in small bags containing magic herbs, pieces of paper with magic spells written on them, and silver figurines of demons. The *magliaia* also intervenes when someone fears he is the victim of a *fattura*, which can lead to the gravest misfortunes and disasters, and even death.

A *fattura* can be the work only of a *malefica*, or “wicked woman”, a creature surrounded by the most acute superstitious fear. Her speciality is a kind of pictorial magic, the roots of which lie deep in prehistoric times. A doll representing the person on whom the spell is to be cast is made of dough, wax, or cloth, into which the witch works something that belonged to the person concerned – nail parings, hair, or a scrap of clothing. If the result of the spell is to be an illness, the witch sticks the spine of a cactus into the corresponding part of the doll’s body, in the neighbourhood of the liver, for instance. If the victim is to go blind, she sticks it in his eyes, and so on and so forth. If she stabs the doll through the heart, it means that the victim is to die. When these preparations have been completed, the doll is hidden somewhere in the victim’s house, preferably under the threshold. The magic begins to work, according to popular belief, when the victim steps over it; he collapses, begins to pine away, and suffers from inexplicable pains and other ailments. He can be saved only by finding the *fattura* and bringing powerful counter-magic to work. A *magliaia* is sent for, and she begins by practising divination. She pours water on to a plate, scatters three pinches of salt on



45 Bronze figure of a chieftain  
of the Uta group



46 Bronze figure of a warrior of  
the Uta group

47 Head of warrior from Uta

48 Wrestlers from Uta



47



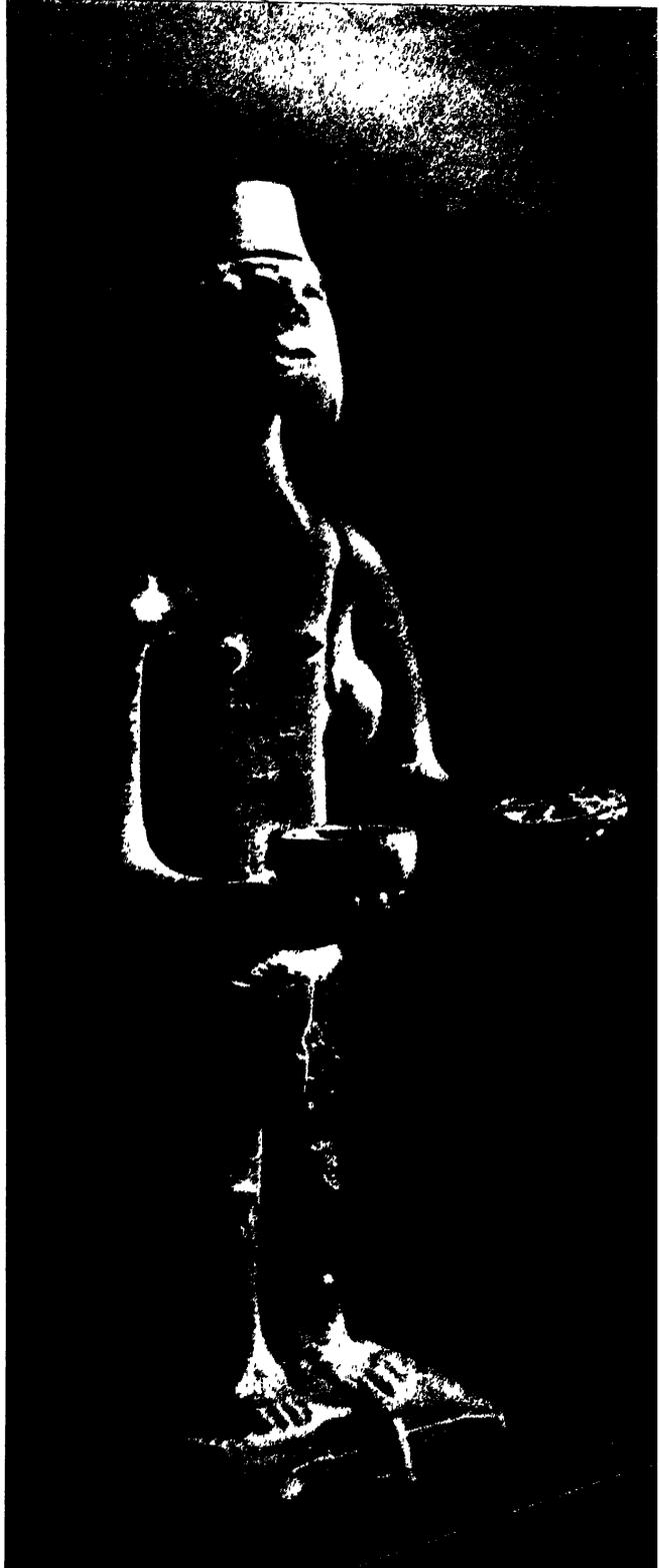
48

49 Woman making an offering, from Sardinia

50 Male figure with bowl, from Sardinia



49



50



it, to the accompaniment of appropriate gestures and secret spells, and drops three drops of oil into the water with her right forefinger. If the oil spreads, it shows that a *fattura* is at work. By this time the *magliaia* is generally in a position to describe the whereabouts of the person responsible for the *fattura*. Gross superstition of this kind naturally often leads to enmities and feuds, besides being an obstacle to proper medical care; the villagers generally have more confidence in the witch than in the doctor.

Everyone tries to be on as good terms as possible with a *malefica*, as she is always able to undo the evil that she does. The touch of her hand is believed to cure sick animals. She is also thought to be able to inflict losses on the peasants by influencing the weather.

Another kind of witch is the *coga*, who represents a survival of the ancient belief in vampires. The *coga's* normal occupation is often that of midwife, but when she has anointed herself with consecrated oil she is able to mount a broom and fly invisibly through the air. A rattling noise is said to accompany her flight. Anyone who hears it must quickly put on an article of clothing inside out, whereupon the *coga* will promptly fall naked at his feet. The object of a *coga's* nocturnal excursions is invariably a newborn child – not an unbaptised child, strangely enough, but a child on the night after its christening. If the mother has failed to hang a cap or vest inside out at the head of her bed (in which the baby also sleeps), or alternatively if she has not placed an up-turned three-legged stool, or in some areas a yoke, in front of it, the witch is able to suck the infant's blood or strangle it unhindered.

The yoke used in this and other connections in Sardinia is still, as it was in immemorial times, strapped to the horns of oxen and is a kind of sacred object. It must never in any circumstances be burnt. Perhaps there is a survival here of the chthonic aspect of the ancient bull-god cult, for in the olden days the sacred yoke was placed under the pillow of those dying in agony to hasten their end.

A number of Sardinian practices preserve memories of ancient blood sacrifices to the powers below. To cure illness it used to be the custom to take a black hen to a place near the cemetery and kill it, to the accompaniment of magic spells, over a small pit into which all its blood had to flow. If a child was born apparently dead, it was the custom quickly to kill a hen outside the house; it was believed that the hen's life then passed into the body of the child. The powers below had, so to speak, been given a substitute for the child's life that they had demanded.

The special and sacred position occupied by women in early times is echoed, not only in the importance of witches in the community, but also in the matriarchy that prevails in the mountain village of Ollolai in the Barbagia. There is a tradition that the village was founded by Berbers, and one is involuntarily reminded of the matriarchy that still survives among the Tuaregs in North Africa.

The women of Ollolai are remarkable in appearance. Their sharp, bird-of-prey faces and light-coloured eyes are surmounted by a tall, dark violet head-dress. Their severe, gloomy costumes are always black, dark blue, or violet. The matriarchy of Ollolai is

very far-reaching. The bridegroom does not choose the bride, but the reverse; and a trial marriage follows. If the bridegroom does not suit, at the conclusion of the trial period he is shown the door. If he is allowed to remain, however, he must always address his wife as *sa merri mea* – “milady”. These practices are all the more surprising in view of the patriarchal conditions which prevail in the Barbagià as a whole.

Thus in the isolated interior of Sardinia there survive social patterns, ways of behaviour, and beliefs whose origin may in some instances date back to the time of the megalithic cultures. Nowhere else in western Europe does the remote past seem so alive as it does in this island. Time passes over it like a shadow while it lies wrapped in ancient dreams.

## *Book IV*      The Face of Antiquity

### *Island of Statue Menhirs*

The links between Sardinia and Corsica are certainly very ancient. The northern extremity of the latter is barely fifty miles from the Cape of Piombino, on the Italian mainland, and settlers of Ligurian or Iberian stock probably came to the island by way of Elba at an early stage. No doubt its original inhabitants had already advanced into northern Sardinia across the narrow Strait of Bonifacio before Aegean mariners appeared on the scene.

The dolmens, great store cists, standing stones and gallery and corbelled structures characteristic of the Copper and Bronze Age megalithic cultures of the Iberian Peninsula and France also occur in Corsica (Plate 61), which may have been the point of origin of the oldest Sardinian megalithic monuments. But, in spite of the relationship which evidently existed between the earliest inhabitants and civilizations of the two islands, developments in each took a very different course.

Corsica, which is 112 miles long, has a maximum width of just over fifty miles, and is the third biggest island in the Mediterranean, is cut up into innumerable valleys and deep ravines by mountain ranges which rise to a maximum height of nearly 6,000 feet. There are no plains of any considerable size, and the mountains rise sheer behind the harbours of the west coast. In primitive time forests, whose remains still make the island the most heavily wooded in the Mediterranean, must have covered it almost completely. It has no valuable raw materials, such as obsidian or metals, which might have favoured foreign trade and thus economic and cultural progress. It remained a barbarous, pastoral country with its face set towards western Europe. In contrast to Sardinia, which was constantly stimulated and enriched by the Aegean world, Corsica never played any substantial part in prehistoric sea traffic, and was probably never colonized to any substantial extent from the eastern Mediterranean. Its natural charac-

teristics predisposed it towards isolation, and not till the sixth and fifth centuries B. C. did it come into contact by way of the Greeks and Etruscans with the advanced civilizations of the Mediterranean area.

The Sardinian nuraghic culture left Corsica surprisingly untouched, though recent work has shown new links between Sardinian and Corsican Cyclopean structures. In the course of their history the Corsicans, like their neighbours, increasingly withdrew from the sea.

The Corsican herdsmen, living in hard conditions and to a great extent turned in upon themselves, built up their own world on the spiritual foundations they had probably brought with them from the area of the western megalithic cultures. From the outset, the cult of ancestors and of the dead seems to have been the dominant factor.

They lacked the unusual gifts of the ancient Sardis, which may have been based on a fortunate mixture of western European, Aegean and African blood. Their talents, which reached their zenith in Napoleon, remain to the present day more military than artistic. But in their early period, under a strong religious impulse, they made a unique contribution to the arts, carrying a power of conviction which the centuries have done nothing to diminish.

Nowhere else did such a fascinating development of menhirs take place; it may perhaps have been the point of departure of an approach to sculpture which later, by way of the Etruscans and the Romans, became part of the western tradition.

### *Valley of Ancestor Gods*

Prosper Mérimée was the first traveller to note the remarkable stone pillars in Corsica. In the twentieth century Corsican statue menhirs were mentioned by the French Major Octobon in a book on such monuments, but systematic work was not undertaken until the stimulus given only a few years ago by the Abbé Breuil, the famous doyen of French prehistorians. The task was entrusted to one of his pupils, Roger Grosjean, a former Air Force captain.

Grosjean's attention was immediately attracted by some stone monuments with primitive faces which had long been known to the local inhabitants and were regarded by them with superstitious awe.

His imagination was gripped by a grotesque stone head eighteen inches high, with big ears and a very naturalistic face, and he suspected the existence behind this monument of an unknown prehistoric culture. He soon discovered not only many megalithic tombs and stone circles and avenues on the island, but also traces of numerous prehistoric

villages and defences indicating, contrary to previously accepted theories, relatively thick settlement in prehistoric times.

Until the autumn of 1955 Grosjean sought in vain for the cultural centre that he thought must lie behind these remarkable carved pillars. Shortly before breaking off his annual excavation season in the island, he was told by Lady Frederica Rose, a visiting British writer, about four mysterious stone statues she had seen near the little village of Filitosa in the Taravo valley, behind the Gulf of Valinco in southern Corsica.

It was evident at first sight that these were important, and more discoveries followed. A rectangular monolith on which the peasants of Filitosa used to sit in the shade of an olive tree turned out to be an especially finely worked menhir nearly ten feet in height. Fortunately it had been lying face downward, so the reliefs on the carefully trimmed granite surface had survived undamaged. It has now been re-erected, and the archaic, triangular face which surmounts it, with a long, naked sword and a sheathed dagger placed obliquely underneath it, can be seen in the flickering shade of the venerable olive-tree at the entrance to the sacred area (Plate 62).

Mention of a "ruined monastery" on a rocky mound near Filitosa put Grosjean on the track of a sanctuary to which numerous menhirs had belonged, and also led to the discovery of the ruins of Cyclopean walls, a round tower and other structures in the neighbourhood.

These discoveries persuaded Grosjean that Filitosa and the whole Taravo valley, where there are many dolmens, had been a centre of Corsican prehistoric civilisation. During the 1956 excavation season he therefore concentrated on this area. The sacred and defensive sites on the rocky mound of Filitosa were laid bare, and the whole valley was searched for prehistoric monuments. More menhirs came to light, sometimes in the most remarkable places. One was in use as a doorstep, and others had been built into walls between fields. One farmyard wall yielded two slabs on which were engraved a pair of bull's horns with rounded tips, similar to those on the Sardinian warrior's helmets. On the 200-foot-high mound a half-destroyed round tower seventy-three feet in diameter came to light, and in the middle of the plateau an artificial mound twelve feet high and fifty feet in diameter. Near it a strange stone head with a sombre face was dug up; this was the upper part of a broken statue menhir which must have been at least eleven feet high. It apparently once stood guard over the mound, armed with a huge sword.

Round the bottom of the hill the base of a megalithic wall made of huge blocks was found.

The results of opening up the artificial mound of stones and earth were unexpected. Instead of the stone chamber tomb that one would have expected, it contained a kind of rectangular altar made of burnt clay standing on a walled-in stone base. The top of the altar was about three feet square. Several levels of ashes indicated the burning of organic matter, and many fragments pointed to the ritual offering of clay vessels. In the base rock, moreover, a channel had been carved.

The excavations also showed that around and above this ritual burial place a tower-like structure had been erected. At the same time battered menhir statues, querns and rubbing-stones had been buried in among the large natural blocks used for the dry-stone walling. This evidence of the advent of a new people with a different type of culture, for whom the sacred stone images of the Megalithic Period no longer had any significance, should receive confirmation by excavations during the next year or two. The existence of some connection between the tumulus and the menhir statues received further corroboration through another discovery.

Higher up the Taravo valley a similar but smaller mound was found on which there was a primitive menhir. In the neighbourhood several menhirs were found, some of them only roughly hewn.

Grosjean regards the Filitosa culture as the final phase of a development in Corsica which began with the megalithic tombs and connected to these the setting up of long, rough monoliths which are often to be found still standing in rows or circles among the luxuriant *maquis*. He believes that a line of development which may have extended over centuries runs from these unworked standing stones by way of the more or less trimmed and dressed menhirs to their final form, which represents almost a transition to proper statues.

The carving of the pillars, the height of which normally varies from six to nine feet, extends from the mere hint of a human form or a stylised face, with the addition of a few symbolic markings, to carvings with three dimensional heads, clearly separated from the shoulders and sculpted in the round. Faces as flat as masks were then carved out of these heads. Moreover, the most advanced kind of statue menhir shows a striving after anatomical detail. A deeply engraved line stands for the spine, shoulder-blades are indicated, and in two instances there is a plain indication of ribs. But the traditional pillar shape is never broken up by any indication of limbs except that in the case of the Filitosa XII statue menhir, the left arm is lightly indicated in relief. Though the pre-historic Corsican sculptors were probably technically incapable of real statuary, the decisive reason for strict adherence to the stele or pillar shape may well have been religious.

The fully three-dimensional heads are often strikingly big; sometimes they are nearly eighteen inches high and almost as broad. In addition to eye holes and generally a prominent nose, the best executed faces have a sharply cut mouth and a pronounced chin. The head is adorned with a kind of page-boy hair-cut, or possibly a head-covering; at the back of the neck this is round or triangular, and from behind the head has a phallic appearance, which may have been deliberate (Plates 63, 64).

The unusual emphasis on the head makes these Corsican carvings seem like predecessors of early Etruscan portraits of the dead; in these too the artist concentrated entirely on the head and treated the body as secondary.

Grosjean had all the statue menhirs found at Filitosa and in the Taravo valley re-erected on and around the sacred hill. Now the huge granite shapes stand solemnly in

the midst of a Mediterranean valley which, with its clear broad lines and its silvery green clouds of olive trees, recalls the landscape of Olympia in the Peloponnese. Heads grow out of pillars which seem to conceal the shape of stylised, imprisoned bodies, faces struggle out of the stone, shadowy empty eye sockets seem endowed with sight. There are smooth columns with nothing but an indentation to show where the head is supposed to begin, and tall slender monoliths on which only slight signs betray that they were intended to represent the human form. All the phases of the development of the statue menhirs are visible here, revealing the creative process by which the magico-religious beliefs of ancient man turned him into a sculptor.

Some of the heads of the Filitosa menhirs, with their sharply defined, grimly staring faces, are masterpieces of intensity of expression. Their effectiveness is increased by an almost complete restriction to essentials (Plates 65, 66).

Swords and daggers are carved on many of the statues, all of which seem endowed with a masculine, warlike spirit, like the Sardinian bronze figurines. Grosjean has christened the armed statues "paladins"; they seem indeed to have been awe-inspiring guardians of the sacred places.

Grosjean believes five of the statues, which have slight hollows in the area of the breast, to be female and one to be a hermaphrodite figure. These interpretations are very uncertain. But there are popular traditions that some of these menhirs were female, and there seem to have been a couple of them at Filitosa, as in Sardinia and on the continent.

The eastern goddess of death seems to have exercised only slight sway, if any, over the hard, male world of the ancient Corsican herdsmen. The horned symbol at Filitosa suggest that the virile bull god may have been honoured instead. But the chief objects of veneration were probably powerful ancestors, whose strength these people perhaps thought they had captured in imperishable stone.

The variety of the statue menhirs speaks against their being representations of a single deity. They were, however, connected with the cult of the dead. The multivalence of prehistoric symbolism is especially relevant to the menhirs. Behind them lies an infinitely complex primitive world dominated by magic, which in spite of its complexity, was conceived of as a unity. Analytic, rational thought lay in the future, and direct emotion prevailed. Reality and fantasy had equal value; dreams were regarded as real events, and reality in its turn was full of secret links with the supersensual. In this context, stone was inevitably a highly multivalent symbol.

These remarkable cult pillars were obviously intended to represent beings of human form, and were certainly sacred monuments. The Filitosa mound may have been the site of a hero cult, where the bodies of those who died in battle were ceremonially burnt. It may have been believed that their spirits, fixed in granite, lived on for the benefit of the clan, which relied on them for fortune in war, fertility and succour.

Another possible interpretation of these mysterious statues is suggested by a passage from Aristotle, who says that in Iberia a host of obelisks representing slain enemies were

put up round chieftains' tombs. A similar practice existed in China, where the spirits of the slain were put in the victor's service in this way after the latter's death.

If this explanation is correct, the grim monuments of Filitosa would be trophies, stone prisoners held in perpetual bondage to their conquerors.

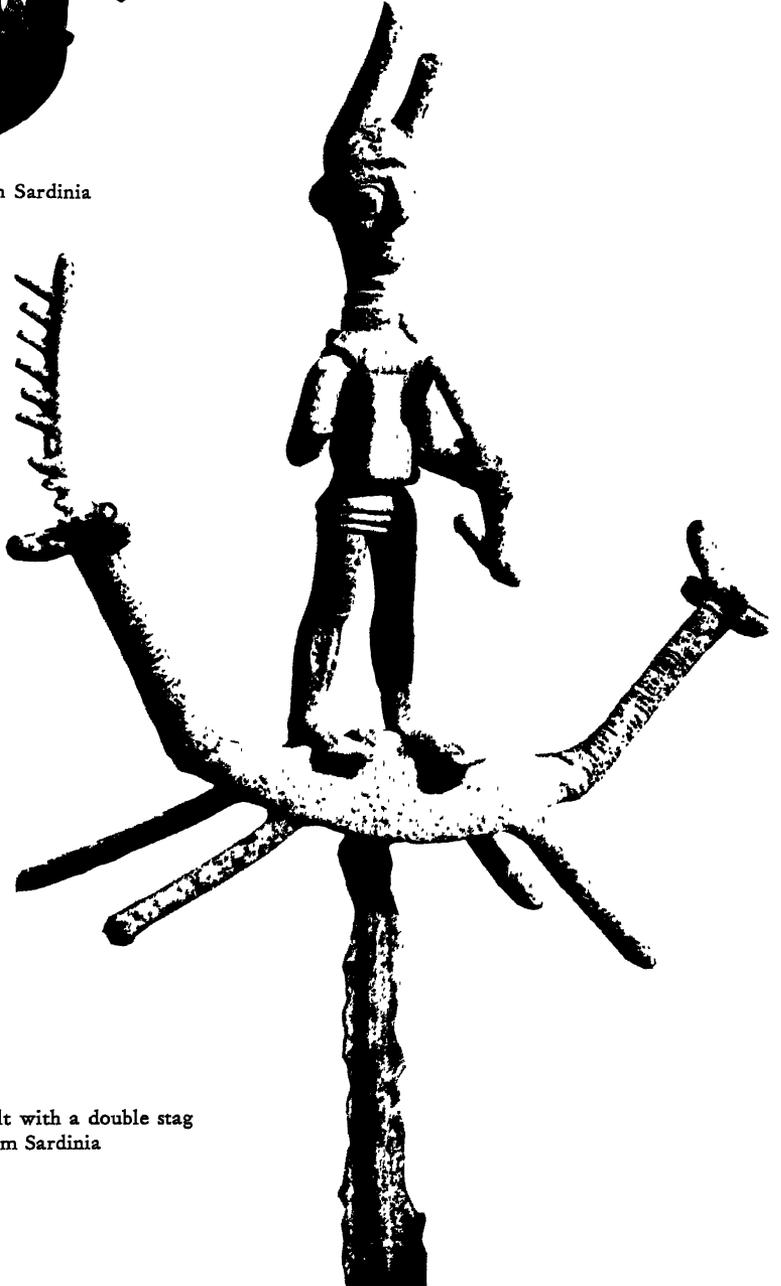
### *Riddle of the Torri*

Roger Grosjean has divided the Filitosa culture into three phases, A, B, and C. The oldest phase, however, does not coincide with the original settlement of the island. Traces of early neolithic dwellings and burials have been found in caves and beneath overhanging rocks which certainly antedate the beginnings of the megalithic culture. It is hard to estimate when the period of the tombs, alignments, and isolated menhirs began. The known tombs, which have been thoroughly ransacked and destroyed by peasants and treasure-hunters, have so far yielded no finds which provide evidence of the age of the monuments and standing stones generally associated with them. The daggers carved on some of the "paladins" resemble Mycenaean daggers of the middle of the second millennium B. C., but at best they provide no more than an upper date limit, for the same weapons are found, for instance, in rock paintings in the Val Camonica in North Italy as late as the Iron Age. Some small, badly preserved fragments of atypical, crude pottery found in the Filitosa tumulus were not usable for dating purposes. But during the past four years excavations devoted principally to the monuments of a previously unknown culture that followed the megalithic period have made it possible with the aid of Carbon-14 tests to date the end of the Filitosa culture to approximately 1,400 B. C.

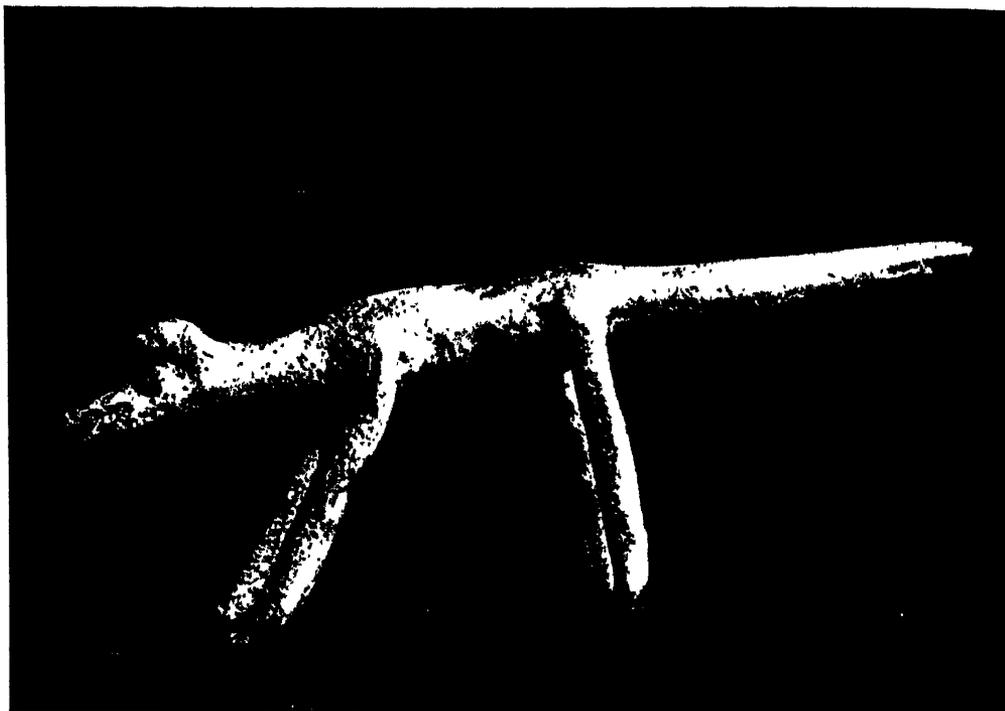
Grosjean now suggests dating the beginning of the megalithic period in Corsica between 2,000 and 1,800 B. C. He estimates that Phase B, that of the gradual development of the standing stones into statue menhirs, began at the earliest in the seventeenth century B. C., and at the latest about 1,500 B. C. In about 1,400 a new people must have landed in southern Corsica who produced no works of art, but built a number of characteristic round buildings of stones ranging in size and including Cyclopean blocks. The *torri*, or towers, left by these people caused Grosjean to christen their culture the Torre culture. Their remains, including approximately thirty towers, traces of settlements and Cyclopean circular walls which have been found in the past four years, throw light on a new and surprising chapter of Corsican prehistory. Four *torri*, which generally survive only to a height of a few yards, have so far been excavated. All were erected at lonely, elevated spots and have collapsed into heaps of rubble overgrown with *maquis* and holm-oak. Sometimes they are surrounded by a Cyclopean enclosure, and are not



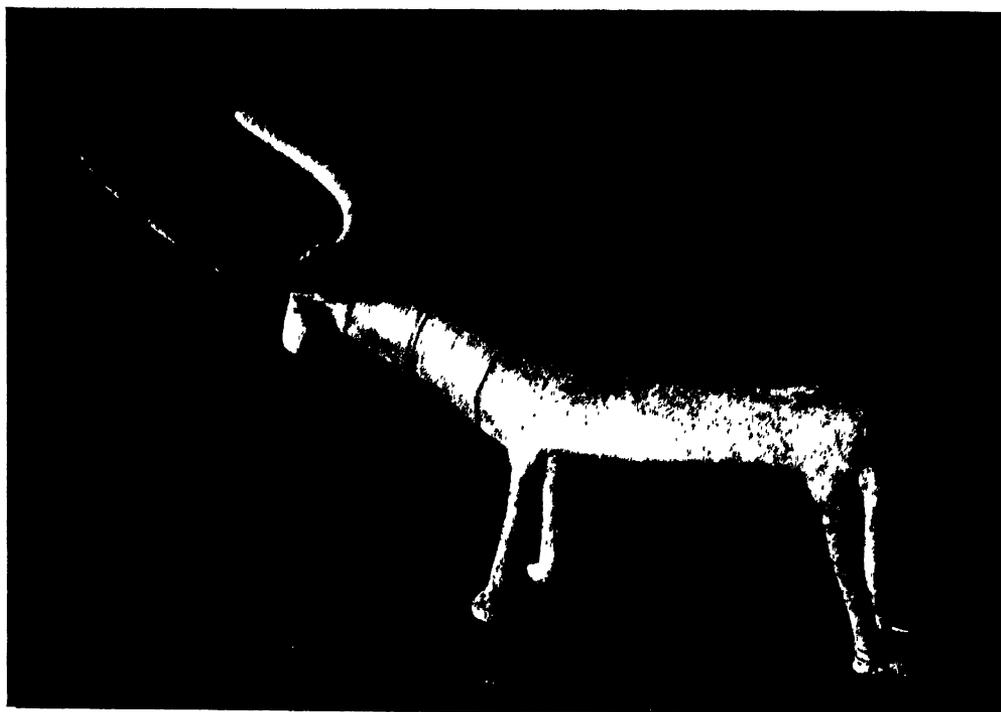
52 Votive ship from Sardinia



53 Votive sword hilt with a double stag and warrior, from Sardinia

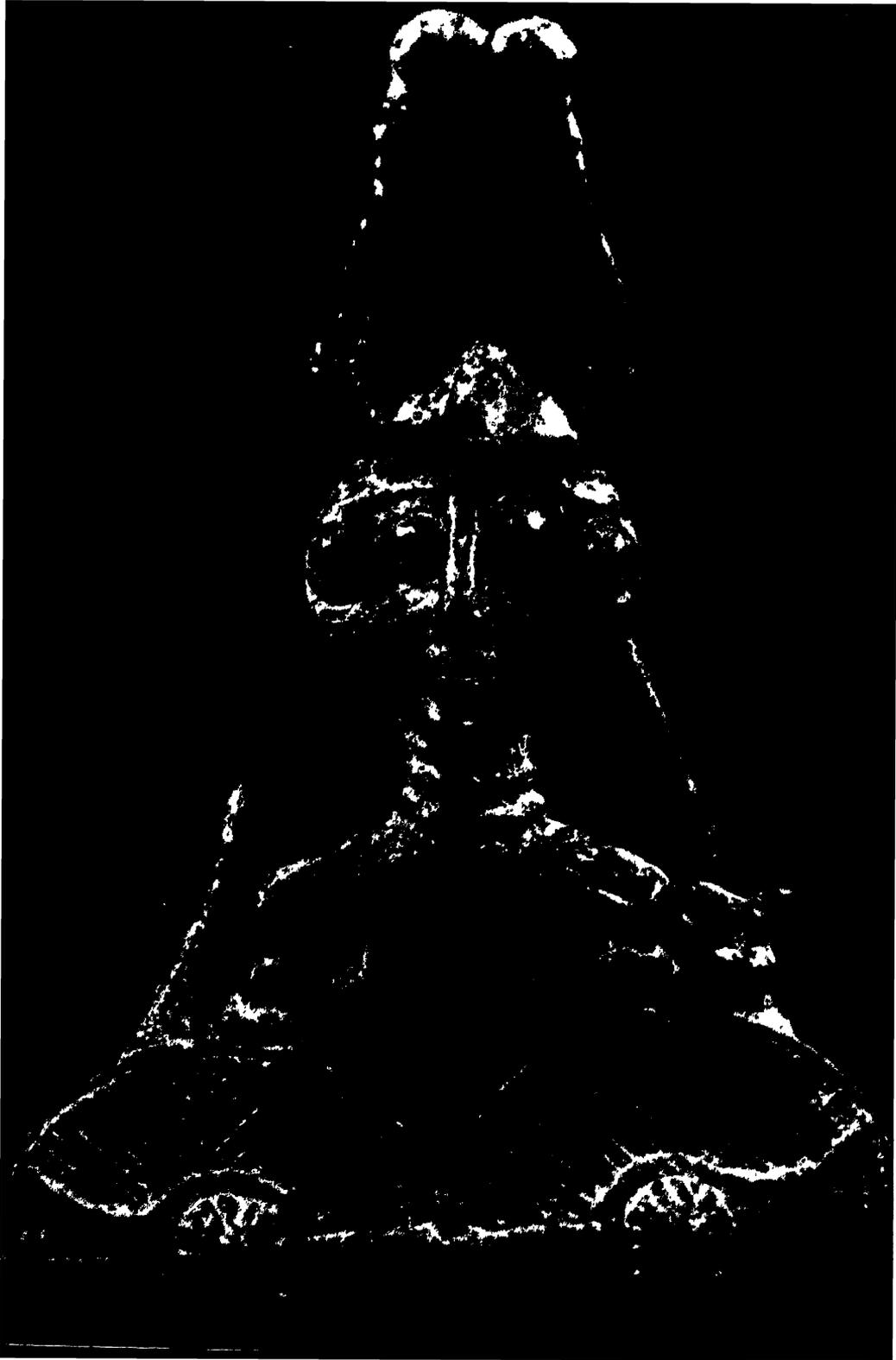


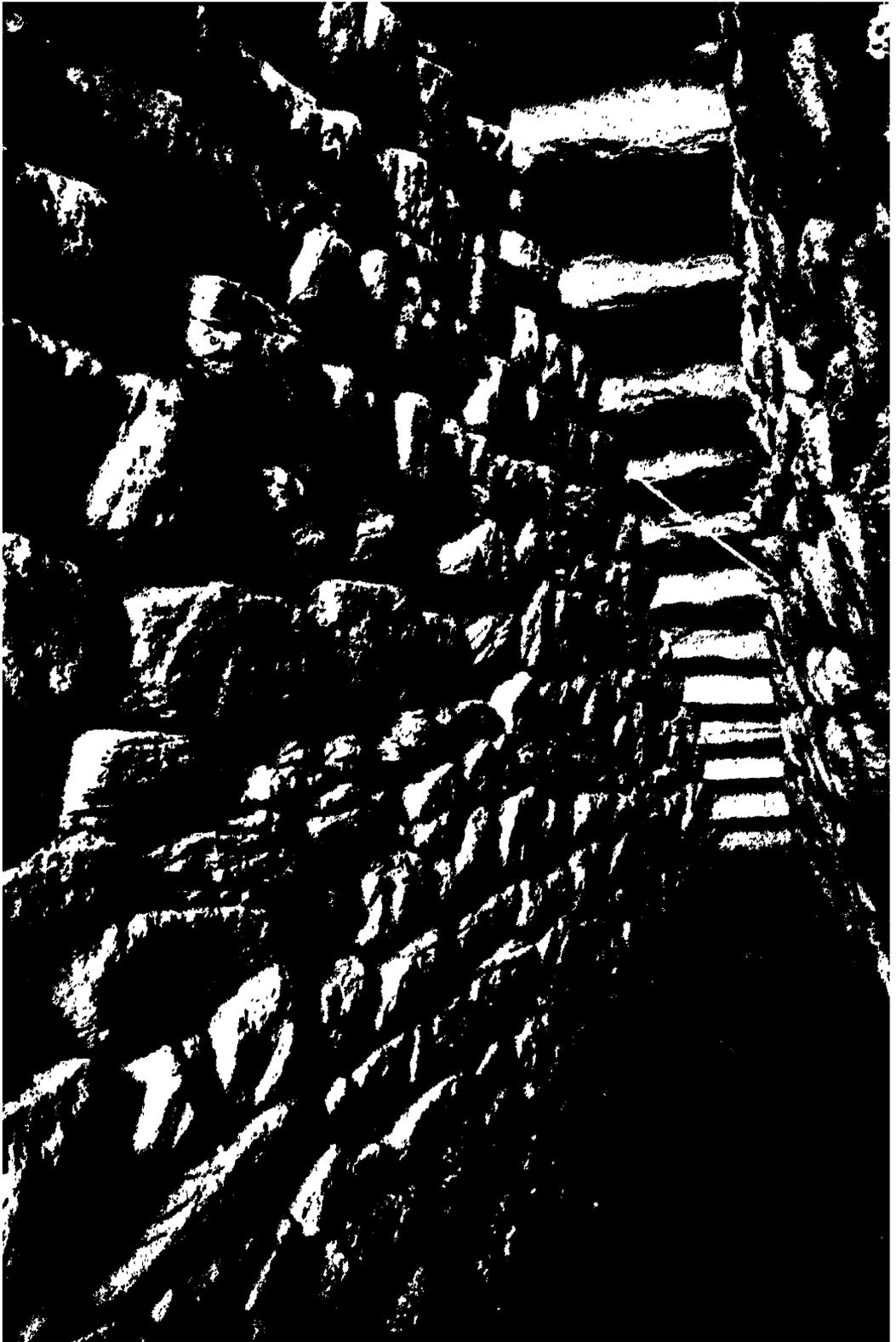
54 Bronze fox  
55 Bronze bull



56 Two warriors in the Abini style ↵









- ◁ 57 Four-eyed and four-armed warrior in the Abini style
- ◁ 58 Stepped roof in the well-house over the spring at Golfo Aranci
- 59 A Sardinian shepherd in front of his stone hut
- 60 *Launeddas* player







62 Statue menhir at Filitosa, showing weapons

far distant from the remains of a settlement of the Torre culture. The first to be examined were the *torri* of Balestra and Foce, which stood on rocky eminences eight and ten miles distant from Filitosa. That at Balestra, a cylindrical structure of middle-sized stones which was once from fifteen to eighteen feet high and twenty-seven feet wide and stood on a round platform forty-five feet in diameter, is reminiscent in plan of many ancient Mediterranean and western European megalithic corbelled tombs. How they were roofed can no longer be established, but Grosjean suggests that the round central chamber, which is reached by a corridor, may once have been covered by a beehive dome made of smaller stones. Two side-chambers covered with slabs lead off the central chamber and end in recesses with corbelled roofs. The floor of the central chamber was covered with a thick layer of ash in which charred bones and potsherds were found.

The *torre* of Foce, a much more complicated structure that must once have been from twenty-one to twenty-five feet high, yielded more definite evidence of funerary use. An entrance corridor leads to the central chamber, off which are three irregularly shaped side-chambers. On the right hand of the corridor is a longish chamber. Pottery sherds and skeletons of the Roman period were found in the top level. At a deeper level at the back of the chamber more human remains came to light under stones, and there were also potsherds dating from an earlier phase. There is a further branch of the corridor leading off to the left, but in this no burials were found. In the central chamber, which is paved with terracotta slabs, charred bones were found, as well as charcoal and some objects that can be regarded as grave-goods including a child's bronze arm-band and a blue glass bead. In the eastern side-chamber more burials came to light: an unburnt skeleton from Roman times and in two places at a lower level semi-carbonized bones which were again weighted down with stones. Here too grave-goods were found, including a bead and a bronze plaque. While this and the northern chamber are roofed with slabs, the walls of the south-eastern chamber narrow towards the top, ending in a false pointed vault. All the chambers yielded a great deal of pottery which had obviously been deliberately broken for ritual purposes, and also rubbing stones which may have been used for crushing red ochre and haematite, pieces of which were found here and in other *torri*. The custom of sprinkling the dead with ochre seems to have been practised by the builders of these monuments.

Further interesting finds were made during the excavation of the monument at Torre. This stands on a rock which rises to a height of one hundred and eight feet and dominates the coastal plain right across to the Gulf of Porto Vecchio. The regularly built Cyclopean walls and flat-topped round shape of the thirty-foot-wide building give it a greater resemblance to the *nuraghi* of Sardinia than to the other Corsican *torri*. It was found to contain no central chamber, but to have a broad passage with a number of branches. The paved floor in the central portion was covered with thick layers of ash, and a number of floor slabs had been cracked by heat. The biggest surprise here was the discovery at the end of the corridor of a horizontal air channel about ten inches wide running through the six-foot-thick tower wall. Its scorched walls indicated that it was a flue by means

of which a strong current of air from the main entrance was made to fan the flames in the central portion of the corridor. Thus the whole structure can be regarded as a kind of crematorium for the dead of the neighbouring village.

Coins of various periods from 1,760 to the time of Constantine the Great show that this *torre*, like the others, was used again and again. Hence it is not surprising that few remains of the original burials were found. In addition to the many potsherds found at Torre, a small bronze riveted dagger that corresponds to a Middle Bronze Age type was found. It is interesting that this tower continued to be used for burials into Roman times; this certainly suggests its having been a tomb previously.

After the promising results of the excavations at Balestra, Foce, and Torre in 1957 and 1958, Grosjean again turned his attention to the rocky height of Filitosa. After the period of the statue menhirs it seems to have remained a sacred spot dedicated, not to the living, but to the dead. At the steep western tip of the four-hundred-foot-long and hundred-and-twenty-foot-wide plateau in the middle of which the old tumulus stood a *torre* was excavated which had originally been regarded as a defence work erected by the destroyers of the Filitosa culture. This circular structure is from forty-eight to fifty-four feet wide, the lower courses consist of big blocks continued by dry-walling with medium-sized stones. The interior turned out to be a strange maze of passages, chambers, and recesses which apparently served sacred and not profane purposes. Here too the principal chamber is in the middle. The main entrance to the building is on the east side next to a huge granite block of fantastic shape, against which it leans. A recess in a kind of antechamber contains a hearth and many round stones, apparently sling shots. From here a gateway covered by a heavy slab originally led into the spacious principal chamber, but for some unexplained reason it was blocked up from outside, and part of the chamber behind it was walled off and filled with stones. The floor of this walled off area was again found to be covered with thick layers of ash. A hearth was also found here, as well as a conical hewn stone, a proper baetyl. Access to the part of the central chamber which had been left open was by way of a short corridor from the ramp which surrounds the west side of the tower. Here too there were strong traces of burning, and a skull was found. A Carbon-14 test applied to the top layer of ashes gave the date of about 1,200 B. C. Another passage leads from the corner of the central chamber to a rock-cut chamber. The western entrance, besides providing access to the central chamber, opens by way of another corridor into a shaft and a subterranean chamber cut out of another huge rock which marks the boundary to this side of the tower. There is also direct access to this chamber from the outside. Finally, another slab-covered corridor in the southern part of the tower is connected with the eastern entrance and again leads to a chamber cut out of the living rock.

The purpose of this strange labyrinthine building can be only conjectured. Again numerous potsherds characteristic of the Torre culture were found, including plump carinated vessels with handles, and big jars with simple grooved or finger-tip impressed decoration. Metal was not found in the Filitosa monument.

Grosjean believes the tower to have been a religious building rather than a *nuraghe*-style fortress, though its strategic position and the sling shots might seem evidence of the latter. The three entrances providing easy access to the building, the narrowness of the chambers, which could contain fifty men at most, the relics of burning in the central chamber, the skull, and the cult stone are certainly pointers to its religious use.

In addition to this tower and the superstructure of the old tumulus, the destroyers of the statue menhirs built next to the entrance to the Cyclopean enclosure a remarkable walled-in mound to which a broad ramp leads, the remains of which still surround the height of Filitosa. Underneath the mound is a prepared floor, perhaps an old sacrificial site, over which a fifteen-ton boulder had been dragged.

The Torre culture people present us with many riddles. They obviously practised a cult of the dead which called for the erection of imposing burial monuments and collective tombs. But their traditions do not seem to have been the same as those of the founders of the Anghelu Ruju culture in Sardinia, for instance, and included no elements of the Mycenaean culture. The practice of cremation does not necessarily differentiate them from their predecessors in Corsica, for we do not yet know whether the latter practised inhumation or cremation. The layers of ash in the tumuli of Filitosa and Musolo point to cremation, at any rate in the statue menhir phase, but analysis of the ash has yielded no evidence of this.

The *torri* were at first regarded as a development of the Sardinian *nuraghi*, but it now seems possible that they were their predecessors. Excavations have recently been carried out of the "pseudo-*nuraghi*" of northern Sardinia, which had not previously been examined. These are subterranean structures containing galleries, just like the Corsican *torri*, and there is an unmistakable relationship between the two. The "pseudo-*nuraghi*" or galleries were originally thought to be late structures built as hide-outs by Sards taking refuge from the Romans, but pottery has been found in them which is datable between 1,400 and 1,200 B. C., and which resembles that of the Corsican *torri*. Study of these archaic Sardinian structures may thus one day upset all previous theories about the origin of the *nuraghi* without, however, excluding the possibility of Mycenaean influence on their designs. There are still numerous totally unexamined early monuments in Sardinia, such as the huge Monte Accodi near Sassari, a walled-in eminence with a ramp entrance, and it is perfectly possible that future work will show the island's rich culture to be even more complex than it is already.

The discovery of the Torre culture has recently attracted the attention of prehistorians to similar monuments in the western half of the Mediterranean. A connection cannot now be discounted between the Corsican *torri* and the *specchi* of Apulia, which have so far been very little investigated. The *specchi* are either circular stone structures on a platform with a spiral approach, or low towers containing one or more megalithic stone chambers or round cells access to which is gained by way of a corridor. The latter were undoubtedly tombs. Evidence of cremation and remains of angular vessels have been found in them.

The *talayots* and *navetas* of the Balearics may also be proof of the enterprise of colonists of unknown origin who perhaps, like the Mycenaean mariners, landed on the Mediterranean islands after the middle of the second millennium. The *talayots* are round Cyclopean buildings, sometimes with a burial chamber and a corridor, but often without. The *navetas*, which resemble an upturned boat with one squared and one rounded end, were apparently chieftains' graves. They are built of great blocks, and stand out massively in the landscape, like *nuraghi*. The celebrated monument of Es Tudons is forty-five feet long and nearly fifteen feet high. An interesting point is the semicircular enclosed forecourt, repeated in miniature by two slabs right and left of the low entrance, reminiscent of the Maltese shrines and the ancient Sardinian Giants' Tombs. A corridor leads to a ten-foot-high antechamber and from there by way of a narrow passage to the principal chamber, which has a megalithic roof. The *navetas* are generally regarded as ground-level imitations of the similarly designed rock-cut tombs of Majorca, but they may turn out to derive from other prototypes.

Finally the *sesi* of Pantelleria, which are stone cairns containing small burial cells with corbelled roofs and long passages, may also turn out to be relics of the mysterious seafarers who built the Corsican *torri*.

At all events, as a result of the Corsican discoveries the history of the prehistoric colonization of the western Mediterranean coasts and islands turns out to be even richer than before. The monuments of the anonymous navigators who settled in southern Corsica in about 1,400 B. C. are neither so beautifully built as the Mycenaean monuments nor so tremendous as the megalithic tombs and temples, but seem inspired by the same powerful religious impulse, the same highly developed cult of the dead.

Future work will throw more light on the period of the *torri* in Corsica, and will show whether the builders of these strange towers really caused the downfall of the remarkable Filitosa culture. The striking survival of the idea of the statue menhir in the part of Corsica that lies nearest the Ligurian and Tuscan coasts speaks against too early an end of this tradition. It can hardly be an accident that archaic steles with rudimentary faces have been found at the Etruscan Fuplona, which lies opposite Elba. Moreover, there is an ancient tradition that Fuplona was founded by Corsicans. Also something of the idea of the unarticulated statue menhir surely survives in the Etruscan egg-shaped burial pillars which appear for the first time in the seventh century surmounting the tombs of the coastal towns. There are enough indications to show that the Etruscans regarded the dead as being embodied and actually present in these carvings, which may be important for solving the riddle of the Corsican statue menhirs.

Dark memories of the meaning of the statue menhirs still survive in Corsican legends and customs. Generally the menhirs are referred to as human beings turned to stone as punishment for blasphemous acts. There are some menhirs which the shepherds turn once a year to bring good fortune. This may explain the apparent isolation of many of these stones, which in the course of centuries may have been moved farther and farther away from the place where they originally stood.





## *Customs and Legends*

In the course of ages invasions by Greeks, Etruscans, Carthaginians, Romans, Vandals, Goths, Saracens, Genoese, and Pisans made their mark on the island's history, but left the deepest layers of the Corsican mentality untouched. It is not impossible that the islanders, most of whom still live by keeping livestock (a quarter of a million Corsican sheep and goats provide raw material for the French cheese industry), may be closer to the people of western European megalithic times than the Sardinians, who absorbed the traditions of various groups of settlers from the beginning. In prehistoric times, Corsican religious life and culture were more primitive but also more uniform than those of Sardinia. The essence of their religion was apparently always the cult of ancestors and of the dead, and that may explain why they have preserved to the present day so many strange customs, beliefs and traditions connected with death.

The idea of the stone house for the dead still survives, though under Christian auspices. Scattered all over the island are square chapels situated somewhat apart from inhabited places, but nevertheless close enough to them for the link with the living not to be broken. They are the graves of prosperous Corsican families, and no expense is spared in their construction. Inside them the dead are not buried, but remain accessible to their surviving kin. The coffins are often laid one on top of another in recesses in the walls, like luggage in a ship's cabin, or are merely left on the floor. In addition to the bouquets and wreaths of artificial flowers which are such a remarkable feature of French cemeteries, vases of fresh flowers which are always placed at the feet of the dead, whose home is provided with all sorts of decoration and even furniture. In the cemeteries of the bigger towns there are innumerable such houses of the dead. They look like small towns themselves, and the homes of the dead are often much more carefully built and maintained than those of the living.

The tradition of a very ancient burial custom may have survived until well into the nineteenth century among the shepherds of Giuncheto in southern Corsica, who buried their dead in caves or under rock shelters and closed them in with stone slabs. Until the seventeenth century, public meetings in Corsica used to take place in cemeteries, perhaps to ensure the presence of the invisible dead.

Among the Corsicans the memory of dead members of the family, their virtues, deeds, and injunctions, is kept alive with quite extraordinary vividness. People believe in their invisible presence and their continued concern for the family's fate; this can bring blessings on the family but, if a member transgresses, it can also bring down punishment upon them.

Wailing for the dead is still practised in Corsica, as in Sardinia. The *lamenti* and *voceri* improvised in mournful chorus by women at the bierside, punctuated from time to time by the shrill interventions of the chorus leader, cover the whole gamut of emotion from desperate grief to wild passion. The institution of the vendetta which, like banditry,

has been declining in recent years, used to take heavy toll. Many a moving *lamento* has survived from the time when it was possible for all the male members of a family to be wiped out in a short time.

The old belief that the dead need food and drink is also discernible in many Corsican customs. Food is still sometimes taken to a grave on the evening after the funeral, and on All Saints Day a sumptuous meal is prepared for the dead, and jugs of water are placed on the balcony to enable them to refresh themselves. According to popular belief, failure to make the water offerings would be very ill-received, and would result in all sorts of disagreeable consequences.

The very ancient idea of the power of the dead to send rain may lie behind a remarkable practice to which recourse is sometimes had in the event of drought. A child carries a skull across country at the head of a procession, and afterwards the skull is thrown into the water. This practice is also reported from Sardinia.

As in the case of other peoples in the area of the western megalithic cultures, the spirits of the dead play a big part in popular imagination. It is said that before the death of important persons the ghostly *squadra d'Arozza*, the "fraternity of the dead", wanders through the night in the guise of penitents wearing cowl and surplice. Anyone who meets this ill-omened procession must lean against a wall and guard himself with his stiletto; failure to take this precaution would cause him to be surrounded and carried off. He must also be careful to avoid accepting anything from the ghosts; they might, for instance, offer him candles which were in reality bones, or the corpses of young children wrapped in cloth.

All sorts of legends are associated with the Corsican menhirs. They all indicate that they were associated with the idea of a human being.

Two menhirs, one nine feet and the other five feet high, standing side-by-side on the bank of the Rizzanese river, which runs into the Gulf of Valinco, are known not by the normal term of *stantare*, but as the "monk and nun". They are said to have been lovers who fled from monastic life at Sartène and were turned into stone as a punishment when they stopped for their first rest. A legend evidently connected with the cult of the dead is associated with the statue menhir of Santa Maria, near the mountain town of Corte. It is a seven-foot schist column with a flat face on which the nose is indicated by a hollow. The mouth is also cut into the stone, and the chin is very pronounced. Two small hollows have been interpreted as standing for female breasts, and this primitive piece of carving is said once to have been a girl. She is supposed to have had a wager with a young man that she would go to the cemetery at midnight and put a stick into one of the tombs. She did so, but was unable to withdraw the stick, which was held firmly by a dead hand. She promptly died of fright, and was turned to stone.

The menhir of Paccianese, which is said to have been a man who was turned to stone for practising free love, may again recall persecution of pagan practices by the Church. Apparently the primitive fertility cult which was perhaps performed at some menhirs lived on in popular practices in Corsica, as it did in Brittany, for instance.

Islands are like shells, in which the sound of the sea is never stilled. They are isolated, static, firmly rooted in a long-established way of life; the rhythm of their development is not the same as that of continents. Dark echoes of vanished ages still linger in the Corsican soul, and we can recognise in their faces and in their way of life something of the emotions expressed in the faces of the proud statues that have come down to us from primitive times.

## *Book V*      The Land of Silver

### *Settlers from Africa*

Towards the end of the second millennium B. C. Phoenicians from Tyre landed in the south-west of the Iberian Peninsula, probably in the Guadalquivir estuary, and discovered Tartessus, the capital of a flourishing kingdom with immeasurable quantities of silver and copper. The hospitable king received them in friendly fashion, and permitted them to found the settlement of Gades, the present Cadiz. Thus, after a period of isolation, contacts between Iberia and the eastern Mediterranean, which had quite possibly originated more than 2,000 years earlier, were renewed.

Strangely enough, no trace has been found of Tartessus, though we have historical documentation of its existence, and evidence from the period of the first contacts between the eastern and western ends of the Mediterranean survives in thousands of stone tombs and innumerable grave-goods. In spite of many unsolved riddles, we know more about the undocumented prehistory of the Iberian Peninsula than we do about its early documented history.

The animal paintings of palaeolithic caves and the vivid, highly-stylised mesolithic rock paintings showing hunting, fighting, harvesting and religious scenes give us a lively picture of the ancient Iberian hunting peoples. They were apparently transformed into herdsmen and peasants by two separate waves of colonization. Both must have reached Spain and Portugal by sea, and neolithic civilizations make their initial appearance on the coast at about the same time. One is characterized by well fired, fine pottery, with impressed patterns generally produced by cardium shells. The most frequent decorative motifs are parallel lines, zigzag bands, and pinched-up designs. Sometimes the effectiveness of the pattern is increased by red or white incrustation. In its decoration and shapes – particularly the big round or oval jars and the southern Spanish bowls with conical bases – this pottery is reminiscent of North African work and ulti-

mately of that of pre-dynastic Egypt. The stone implements show the persistence of indigenous traditions. The people who made them mostly used caves as dwelling and burial places, a common practice in North Africa. Examination of skeletons shows that they were brachycephalic.

It looks as if the Iberian Peninsula was constantly influenced by North Africa in prehistoric as well as historical times. Southern Spain with its palm-trees, almost tropically fertile areas, lonely bare plains, and desolate mountain ranges burnt by a fierce sun, seems to belong more to Africa than to Europe. The inhabitants, too, with their strange, elemental nature, their deep melancholy and scepticism, their sudden outbursts of passion and cruelty, their fanaticism, pride and family feeling, their mysticism and cold materialism, their primitive nature and their great artistic gifts and sensibility, are hard for Europeans to understand. The conservatism of the southern Spaniards, their archaic conception of honour, which impels them to wipe out an insult with blood, their oriental attitude to women, their generosity and hospitality; all these things may be rooted in an older heritage and may not merely have developed in the long centuries of Moorish influence. From the time when men first left dry land and ventured forth on the sea, the easily visible Spanish coastline may have been tempting, particularly as in prehistoric times North Africa was more thickly populated than it was in historical times.

Henri Lhote, the French explorer, has recently shown that, at least up to the beginning of the first millennium B. C., living conditions in the Sahara were far more favourable than they later became. Arid mountain areas, now labyrinths of inhospitable rock, then supported tropical flora and fauna. The desert was to a considerable extent a fertile, treeless plain, and must have possessed a number of watercourses. Areas through which only the dying race of Tuaregs now wander were inhabited first by hunters and later by many pastoral, cattle-breeding tribes. Memories of these vanished peoples are preserved in thousands of wonderful paintings, laboriously recorded by Lhote and his colleagues, in the caves and on the rock slopes of the Tassili and other mountain ranges in the middle of the desert.

The implications of these exciting finds, whose assessment will take many years, could hardly have been foreseen. They have disclosed an art of great beauty and individuality, extending through many successive styles over thousands of years. The paintings of animals and men not only give valuable information about the way of life and customs of the ancient inhabitants of the Sahara, but also tell us a great deal about their connections with other cultures. The wide influence exercised by Egyptian civilization and religion is revealed in the style of a number of paintings as well as in their subject matter – narrow ships with lofty prows shaped like animals' heads, and slender goddesses with birds' heads. The frequent representations of typically "Mycenaean" chariots along the great highways of migration are also of great interest. These light, four-wheeled vehicles seem to have been used for transport as well as for hunting and war.

Lhote refuses to regard a number of life-sized figures in the rock paintings as the des-

cendants of the legendary people of Atlantis in spite of theories based on their unusual elegance. The "round-heads" who appear constantly in the early periods of Saharan art may perhaps be related to the people of the Iberian cave culture. At all events, his finds show that in neolithic times and earlier North Africa was a possible point of departure or transmitter of cultural influences.

Nevertheless the vital impulses for the development of megalithic cultures in the Iberian Peninsula seem to have arrived less from Africa than from the Aegean. The first wave of colonization from the east Mediterranean probably reached the peninsula in the Almeria area. Here again it is the pottery, together with typically Aegean stone amulets of the eastern Great Mother (Fig. 31), that provides the most certain indication of new events. In contrast with the cave ware, this pottery is mostly undecorated. Big jars with conical bases and rounded flasks occur, as well as many cylindrical or pear-shaped vessels with rounded bases. They have no true handles, but only lugs for cord. At the beginning of this culture metal was not used. Big blades, sometimes retouched and occasionally used as sickles, were found, as well as many microliths which represent a continuation of indigenous mesolithic types. Later various kinds of triangular, leaf-shaped or transverse arrowheads appear. Picks, and handstone axes were used, and marble arm-bands were worn, as well as numerous ornaments made of shells, animal teeth and cylindrical or olive-shaped stone beads. The people of the early Almerian culture lived on the hill tops in small, undefended villages. Their round dwellings with somewhat sunken floors were built on a foundation of dry masonry apparently surmounted by a structure made of clay and straw. The presence of sickles and querns indicates an advanced state of agriculture, which was certainly combined with keeping livestock. A great deal of hunting was also done. These people, so far as can be judged from their remains, belonged rather to the more delicately built, dolicocephalic Mediterranean race. They were buried indi-



31 *Cretan pottery idol*

vidually, or sometimes in pairs, in oval and round pits enclosed or surrounded by slabs, and also in stone cists. The round graves were later covered over with small tumuli.

The Almeria culture spread all the way along the coast to the Pyrenees. Its influence is also discernible in the southern cave culture and across the Straits of Gibraltar in Tangier.

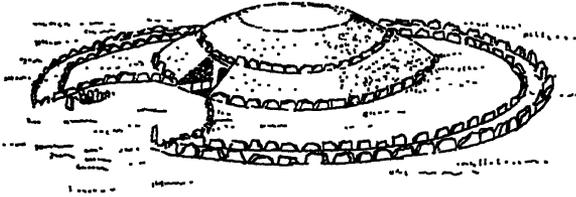
After the neolithic period links with the eastern Mediterranean are continuous. During the rise of the great Bronze Age civilizations of the Near East, new arrivals acquainted with the working of metals reached south-eastern Spain, presumably by the same route. They discovered first the silver and then the copper deposits that lay within easy reach of the sea, and established the first mines in western Europe. Henceforward Iberia seems to have been a kind of Eldorado, an inexhaustible source of metals for the eastern Mediterranean peoples and at the same time a great centre of trade with distant western and northern Europe.

### *Mining Town of Los Millares*

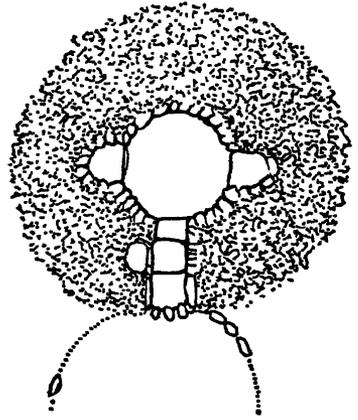
In the third millennium B. C. a small town was founded near Los Millares, fourteen miles above Almeria and only half a mile from the copper mines of Gador. This, and some similar settlements in the neighbouring valley of Almanzora, were perhaps the oldest towns on the mainland of Europe.

The town of Los Millares, which covered about thirteen acres and was surrounded by a wall, lay on a plateau above the valley of the Andorax in a neighbourhood which combines Mediterranean abundance with African desolation. Exuberant vegetation fills the well-watered valley and its shady inlets, but the hills around and the mountains above, which enclose the landscape like thickly-folded layers of stiff red-and-lilac shot silk, have been turned by the sun into a parched desert of soft rock and bone-dry earth. Only the colours are alive in this sterile world – cold, metallic colours which betray the presence of minerals.

The inhabitants of Los Millares were probably less peasants and herdsmen than miners and traders. Long before the Carthaginians filled their empty treasury with Iberian silver, the silver and lead deposits near Purchena in the Almanzora valley were discovered by eastern pioneers, who also found somewhat later the copper deposits in the neighbourhood of Almeria. The favourable situation of the mines only a short distance from the sea may have greatly contributed to the rapid rise of the chalcolithic culture of Los Millares. The fine natural harbour of Almeria, to which the wealth extracted from the mines could be transported rapidly and easily, was no doubt already in use by foreign shipping. Periodic arrivals of eastern Mediterranean mariners ensured continuous con-



32 *Reconstruction of a corbelled tomb at Los Millares*



33 *Ground-plan of a corbelled tomb at Los Millares*

tact with the distant advanced civilizations, and no doubt resulted from time to time in the establishment of new settlers in the area.

Los Millares, in so far as one can now reconstruct it, must have resembled a small eastern Mediterranean town transplanted to the west. Traces have been found of walls and earthworks, an aqueduct that brought water into the town from a spring in the side of a hill half a mile away, a cistern, and rectangular houses built of dry stone.

In close juxtaposition to the town of the living lay that of the dead, built in accordance with religious laws and beliefs which had developed at the other end of the Mediterranean. The foreign colonists, in addition to their knowledge of metals, also introduced the collective stone tomb. Thus the small mining town in the province of Almeria became the centre of the new cult of the dead which was to have such far-reaching consequences in western Europe.

In the necropolis of Los Millares we seem to see, in fully developed form, all the features of the ancient Mediterranean cult of the dead later practised by the Etruscans. The dead were no longer buried in the modest individual graves of neolithic times. Instead they dwelt in permanent houses, more lasting and handsomer than those of the living, hidden under round mounds which both protected them and symbolized their exaltation (Plate 67). This necropolis with approximately seventy-five tumuli must once have been more impressive than the town itself. In view of the limited space available on the plateau, the burial mounds were not very large; just large enough to contain a circular burial chamber measuring from nine to eighteen feet with an entrance passage. Like the tumuli at the necropolis of El Adeimeh in Palestine the mounds were surrounded at the base, and often half way up as well, by circles of stone (Fig. 32). Outside the entrance there was often a semi-circular walled-in forecourt (Fig. 33). Single or double rings of stones sometimes marked off a sacred area round these monuments. When the





culture of Los Millares was at its height, small baetyls, sometimes painted red, were occasionally placed in front of the tumuli in groups of up to twenty. Their height varies between six inches and two feet, but most were about twelve inches high. The Etruscans also placed small stone pillars of various sizes in front of their burial mounds; they apparently symbolized the male dead.

The chalcolithic tombs of Los Millares were mostly dry-walled with an inner facing of slabs, and the roof was generally corbelled. Trapezoid megalithic passage graves also occur, however, as well as rock-cut tombs with passages roofed with slabs, older forms of stone cists and cave burials, and small round graves of masonry and slabs under mounds.

In the highly developed form of corbelled tomb a few steps generally led down to the entrance, which was closed with a slab. Also the passage was frequently separated from the chamber by a slab containing a porthole, and was segmented with connecting doorways. The roof consisted of flat stones or a corbelled vault. In three cases true vaults were found. Sometimes small cells led off both passages and burial chambers. The base slabs were trimmed and dressed. Clay and plaster played an important part in the interior, both for reinforcement of the structure and for decorative purposes. The principal chamber of the *tholos* tombs, the domes of which were apparently supported on stone or timber pillars, was sometimes covered with reddish plaster. Painted ornamentation also occurs; the remains of a zigzag band survive. Many tombs were paved.

The necropolis of Los Millares, which bears witness to the prosperity and civilization of the place, certainly remained in use for a long time. It was excavated by the Siret brothers in 1870; that is to say, before modern methods of scientific excavation were in use. Dating therefore presents great difficulties, and we are necessarily thrown back on deductions and comparisons based on the numerous objects found in the tombs. The present inclination is to date the beginning of Los Millares at about 2,400 B. C. and its end about a thousand years later, roughly contemporaneously with the decline of Cretan sea-power.

The large number of skeletons in the tombs – some contained as many as a hundred – showed that many generations were laid to rest in them. Cremation was not practised; traces of burning in a number of tombs may be connected with sacrificial ceremonies. The wealth and variety of the grave-goods suggest a period of astonishing expansion, when a network of communications seems to have covered the whole Mediterranean.

There was obviously a lively exchange of goods and ideas with the eastern Mediterranean and Africa. Ivory, which presumably came from Africa – though fossilized ivory has been found in Spain – was used for making small ointment boxes and combs which might well be barbarous imitations of Egyptian work. One beautiful comb decorated with geometrical patterns looks like a predecessor of the combs still worn by Spanish women in their hair. A bone dress-fastener has its counterpart in early Troy. Ivory pins with disk-shaped or long, grooved heads were very popular, and occasionally the dead were given bone imitations of the rare and therefore extremely valuable flint

daggers to take with them into the next world. One segment-shaped blade is thought to be an imitation of an Egyptian copper dagger of a type that appeared in the Twelfth Dynasty. Battle-axes that were in use in Egypt between 2,500 and 2,080 B. C. appear repeatedly at Los Millares, and the admirably worked pressure-flaked arrowheads may also perhaps be attributable to African influence.

The number of copper implements which came to light in the tombs is large. The quantity and variety of weapons indicates the warlike nature of the inhabitants of Los Millares, who perhaps controlled a considerable area from their fortified hill. There were daggers with a midrib, flat, rhomboid-shaped daggers, and tanged daggers. In addition to this arsenal there were axes, hatchets, chisels, knives, awls, needles and pins. The extensive trade relations with northern Europe that existed while Los Millares was in its heyday are demonstrated by the presence of beads made of amber, jet and the turquoise-like callais – imports that must have come by sea from the Baltic, Britain, and Brittany. Amethyst beads and ostrich egg-shell bowls must have been imported from Africa.

Handsome alabaster and limestone vessels decorated with grooves and lozenge shapes may have contained rouge and cosmetics. These, too, betrayed Egyptian influence. Plaster was not only popular for interior decoration, but was also used for making pots, which were obviously intended to be imitations of the ostrich-egg vessels (Plate 68).

A reflection of the painted pottery of the early to middle Minoan style is perhaps evident in a thin-walled, highly burnished type of red clay ware on which white patterns were painted. The typically indigenous ware, however, is black and shiny and decorated with a wealth of incised designs with brilliant white incrustations. It appears mostly in the form of a small flattened bowl (Plate 69), which may have been used for ritual purposes, as a sun-like eye motif frequently appears on it.

A few bell-beakers came to light in tombs with porthole slabs, and a relatively late date is therefore attributed to them. These beakers, which spread to Sicily, north Italy, the Rhineland, Bohemia and even distant Britain and Denmark, are drinking vessels,



34a, 34b *Bell-beakers, showing the typical forms and decoration*

bell-shaped as the name implies, without handles, and made of fine red clay (Fig. 34). They are always well smoothed and burnished, and have a very characteristic zoned decoration of patterned or plain bands. The decoration was impressed before firing with a chisel, a comb-like instrument, or a toothed wheel. In Spain the most frequent type consists of zoned hatchings or lattice work. A special kind of bell-beaker, which appears mostly in Old and New Castile, is flatter and broader, while the upper part is more curved, and the decoration, which is generally incrustated white, is richer (Plate 70). The first of these types, which is found chiefly in coastal areas, perhaps developed in the south and south-west of the peninsula, where most sherds have been found. It is this "classic" type which subsequently spread so widely, while the other variety is found almost exclusively within the peninsula.

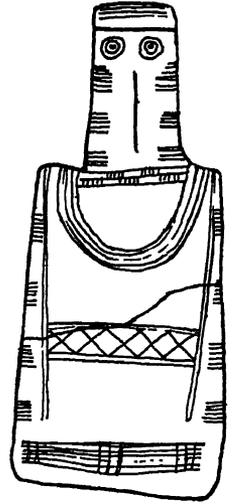
A number of conflicting theories have been put forward about the origin of the bell-beakers, and the priority of the two types is also a matter of dispute. It seems to be established, however, that they were not a typical product of megalithic culture, though they are often found in megalithic tombs. At all events they must have been the work of an exceptionally dynamic group. These people may originally have been nomadic pastoralists who developed this fine ware out of the decorated pottery of the cave culture, but later became mariners and traders spreading the knowledge of metals.

The bell-beaker people may have played no part at Los Millares. But their pottery, which does not appear in Iberia before 2000 B. C., and perhaps even later, gives us valuable clues to the chronology of Los Millares.

More revealing than all the other finds from the tombs of Los Millares are the many stone, bone, and terracotta idols which were buried with the dead. The Great Goddess of the eastern Mediterranean, whose arrival on these shores in neolithic times is attested by the presence of stone amulets, became really evident only with the introduction of collective burial and of metals. Her idols reached the south coast of Iberia in a form that perhaps points to Cyprus as the point of origin of the wave of chalcolithic colonization.

It is possible that Cyprus, whose culture was older than those of all the other eastern Mediterranean islands, played a bigger part in early seafaring than we have actual proof of today. Its rich copper deposits were exploited at a very early stage, and its inhabitants would have the advantage of this technical knowledge in their prospecting, for they must have been a trading and seafaring people from the outset. The Great Goddess, who in the form of Aphrodite later had her principal shrine at Paphos in Cyprus, may from the most ancient times have been the object of special veneration in the island. It is not for nothing that legend tells us this was her birth-place.

In the third millennium the Great Mother was worshipped in Cyprus in the form of abstract flat idols (Fig. 35). A rectangular head is superimposed on a rectangular body; only the nose and sometimes the ears are three-dimensional. The eyes are either holes, concentric circles, or small suns. Perpendicular lines on the cheeks perhaps point to ritual tattooing. A multiple necklace frequently suspended over the breast was apparently a token of the goddess's dignity. Western European representations of her are adorned in



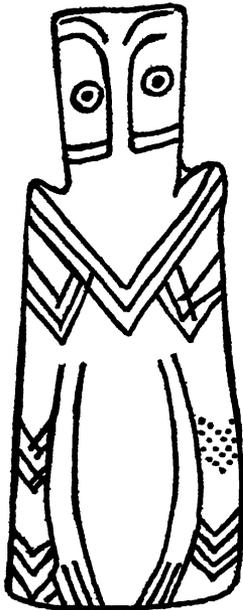
35 *Cypriot pottery idol*

the same way; sometimes this necklace appears alone as her symbol. Engraved geometrical ornamentation on the front and back of Cypriot idols indicates sumptuous clothing and a broad belt. The arms are represented, if at all, only by thin double lines. One statue shows the goddess holding a small child in her right arm.

Objects surprisingly similar to the Cypriot board idols occur in south-west Iberia, and the objects of worship found at Los Millares and the burial places of the Almanzora valley seem to be related to them. In the Iberian idols, abstraction goes even further than it did in Cyprus. Only the goddess's eyes and brows remain, and sometimes also the geometrical decoration of her clothing in the form of zigzag or wavy lines super-imposed on one another (Figs. 36, 37). A number of idols are cylindrical and are made of limestone or even alabaster (Plate 71), but most are made from the bones of horses or oxen. The decoration of these phalanges was carried out with great delicacy (Plate 72, Fig. 38). Apparently it was etched in after the bone had been covered with a coating of resin or wax, through which the pattern was cut with a pointed tool. A sharp liquid then ate into those parts of the bone from which the coating had been removed, and the result was an inlaid pattern. Sometimes the bones were also painted.

Two hundred and fifty phalange idols were found in the necropolis of Los Millares alone; in one tomb there was one for every body.

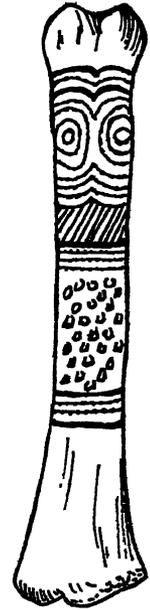
Some very mysterious cult objects made of schist, shaped like sandals and decorated with the same triangular and zigzag patterns that occur on the bones (Plate 73), are found in tombs in south-east, south and west Iberia. Real straw sandals, in a state of complete preservation, as if they had only recently been made, also came to light (Plate 74). Imitation sandals made of ivory were buried with the dead in predynastic



36 Idol from Los Millares



37 Plaque idol from Los Millares



38 Engraved phalange idol from Los Millares

Egypt, and similar grave goods are found in prehistoric North Africa. They must have signified more than an object of everyday use intended to accompany the dead into the next world. Painted or engraved footprints occur in North Africa, France, in the British Isles, and in northern Germany on rocks and the walls of megalithic tombs, or on hollowed stones. Both footprints and sandals may have been emblems of a god. In the abstract art of that time the presence of a deity was often indicated only by single characteristics, such as eyes, necklace or breasts.

Los Millares, and especially its necropolis, throws more light than any other site on the chalcolithic culture of Iberia, the ideas on which it lived, its technical and cultural achievements, and its connections with the external world. There, as in the neighbouring valley of Almanzora and farther west on the south coasts of Spain and Portugal and at the mouths of the big rivers, we find corbelled tombs bearing an unmistakable resemblance to the *tholoi* of Cyprus and Crete as the oldest form of collective burial. Where these tombs occur inland, they can generally be linked with the presence of ore deposits, and it seems likely that they can be regarded as the traditional funerary architecture of settlers from the east, in whose hands lay the exploitation of the silver and copper mines and the trade in metals in general. The Iberian megalithic passage grave with a characteristic round, polygonal, or trapezoid chamber may be a cruder, indigenous deviation from the *tholos* which developed among the pastoral tribes who lived some way inland along the rivers of the plateaux, under the influence of trade relations with the

urban settlements of the metaliferous areas. Alternatively, the megalithic passage grave, the various types of which are found in Palestine in a form which hardly differs from the Spanish, may also have been introduced by settlers skilled in metals.

But, whatever the course of architectural development may have been (and many varied factors certainly contributed to it) the religious beliefs discernible at Los Millares, together with the other characteristics of the chalcolithic Almeria culture, spread over a great part of the Iberian Peninsula and led everywhere to economic and cultural advance and a great increase in population. Numerous settlements arose in ore deposit areas, at keypoints along trade routes, on rivers and fertile plains. A number of them were fortified and were urban in character. The inhabitants of these places buried their dead in megalithic cemeteries. Strangely enough, however, the megalithic culture did not spread to central Spain or the east coast. The boundaries of its expansion ran from Alicante by way of Cordoba and Salamanca to Oviedo. In the north-east it reached Navarra, Aragon and Catalonia, and from there moved into France.

Inland, the megalithic tombs are generally cruder and the building technique and stone-working more primitive. But in the great centres of metal production, monumental tombs were built which architecturally and technically represent the zenith of western European megalithic building.

### *Primitive Basilica*

The small industrial town of Antequera lies at the foot of the Sierra de Torcales on the edge of a fertile plateau. The Romans called the place Anti-Caria. What its Iberian name was, or when it was founded, we do not know. No remains of its prehistory have been found at ground-level, but huge subterranean stone tombs indicate its great age.

Routes connecting the rich territories of Granada, Malaga, and Seville must from immemorial antiquity have intersected on this plateau, which was once, perhaps, the site of an important centre for the trade in silver, copper, and lead from the inland deposits. The present-day metallurgical industry of Antequera may possibly be the modern representative of an ancient tradition dating back to the time when the Iberian Peninsula was not only the centre of the east-west metal trade, but also supplied neighbouring countries with finished products, especially copper weapons and implements.

The rulers of the vanished Iberian city must have been mighty men indeed. The builders of the three huge mausoleums of Antequera must not only have possessed great wealth and exercised power over large numbers of men, but must also have been convinced that the glory of their race would survive the ages.

The country, dotted with spaced-out olive trees whose twisted trunks and drooping

heads of foliage seem to have frozen into stillness in the midst of some graceful, solemn dance, provides many natural tumuli for monumental tombs. Those of the ancient princely families of Antequera lie here under mounds near their city just like the tombs of the Atrides round Mycenae more than a thousand miles to the east.

The Cueva del Romeral, the finest and best preserved corbelled tomb in the Iberian Peninsula, is buried in a mound about thirty feet high (Plate 75). A broad, slightly inclining passage about seventy feet in length, built of regularly laid long stones, leads down to the first chamber. The walls incline slightly inwards, and the roof consists of slabs some of which are twelve feet in length. To walk down the passage the visitor has to stoop, but it rises to a height of six feet where it reaches the megalithic entrance, which gives access to a perfectly circular corbelled chamber about twelve feet in height. Here the walls are of small stones, held together with mortar, rising to a corbelled dome crowned by a block eighteen feet in length and thirty inches thick. From here a trapezoid corridor, carefully built of megaliths and with a dressed doorway leads to the burial chamber. This is much smaller, has a rather low and narrow dome, and is paved with thick slabs. The Cueva del Romeral is one hundred and thirty-five feet long.

After the mausoleum had been completed inside the mound, the deep shafts made during its construction were filled in again and the natural shape of the mound somewhat corrected to make it appear a proper tumulus with the burial chamber approximately in the middle.

The relationship of the Cueva del Romeral to the so-called Treasury of Atreus at Mycenae is striking. The former was much earlier than the latter, but seems to echo, though in barbarized form and on a smaller scale, the same architectural ideas and religious beliefs. The tomb of the mythical Mycenaean king lies at the other extremity of a line which stretches all the way from the western end of the Mediterranean to Argolis. It too, is approached by an uncovered passage, a hundred and twenty feet long, continuing into a thirty foot high, walled ravine which ends in front of a huge trapezoid entrance. Behind it lies a round chamber with a forty-four foot high beehive dome which was once covered like the starlit sky with golden shimmering bronze rosettes. Here, too, the burial chamber is small; a mere appendage of the great hall which probably served for cult purposes. But behind the refined architecture of the tombs of the Atrides one is aware of the more primitive ideas underlying the ancient megalithic burial places. The two lintel slabs at the main entrance – particularly the inner lintel, which is twenty-five feet long and weighs more than hundred and twenty tons – are immediately reminiscent of the western European megalithic style. But the incomparable façade of the Mycenaean tomb shows the immense distance that separated the advanced eastern Mediterranean civilizations from the west. At Mycenae the house-high frontage was adorned by slabs of red, green, and brown limestone and numerous bronze decorations. The eighteen foot high gateway was flanked by half pillars of grey-green stone covered with delicate relief decoration, consisting chiefly of spirals and cherrons. The pediment above it was covered with sculptured dark red marble, glass disks in the centre of running

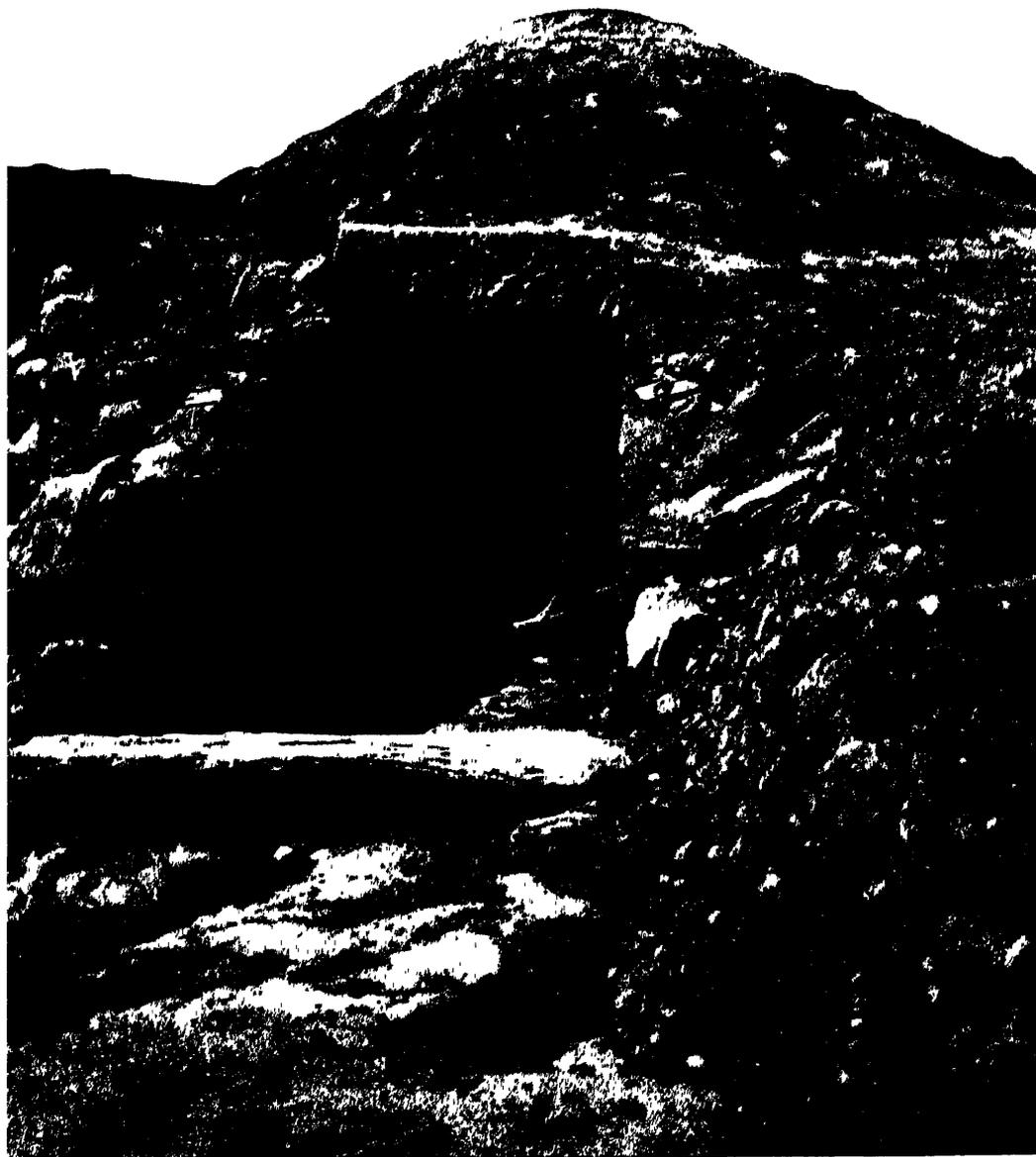
spirals glowed from it like eyes. Ages seem to separate this magnificent façade from the unadorned Cueva del Romeral, but fundamentally the two structures are so alike that the Spanish monument has been used as one of the strongest arguments for the theory of a west-east expansion of this form of memorial to the dead. It has been maintained that the Achaeans were seafarers from the far west who in the course of their Viking expeditions one day occupied the coasts of Argolis and there founded a new kingdom.

The second great mausoleum at Antequera, the Cueva de Menga (Plate 76), which has long been known to the local inhabitants and is surrounded in legend, has no counterpart in the eastern Mediterranean. It represents the spontaneous development of the western European megalithic tomb in its purest form. It is a twenty-five-foot-long passage grave built into the calcareous tufa of a natural mound, and the entrance, which is more like a vestibule, is as wide as a garage. Its roof consists of a single slab. On one of the supporting pillars are mysterious engravings – a five-pointed star and crosses in a semi-circle. The burial chamber is marked off from the passage only by two wall slabs inclining inwards. Nevertheless, as the result of its slightly oval shape, the burial chamber creates the impression of being a separate room, not a continuation of the vestibule. Three thick pillars divide it into two parts. At its widest, this subterranean structure is seventeen feet across, increasing in height from eight feet at the entrance to ten in the chamber. The floor was originally somewhat deeper. The roof consists of three huge monoliths on pillars that lean slightly towards the centre. The slabs are all dressed and accurately laid.

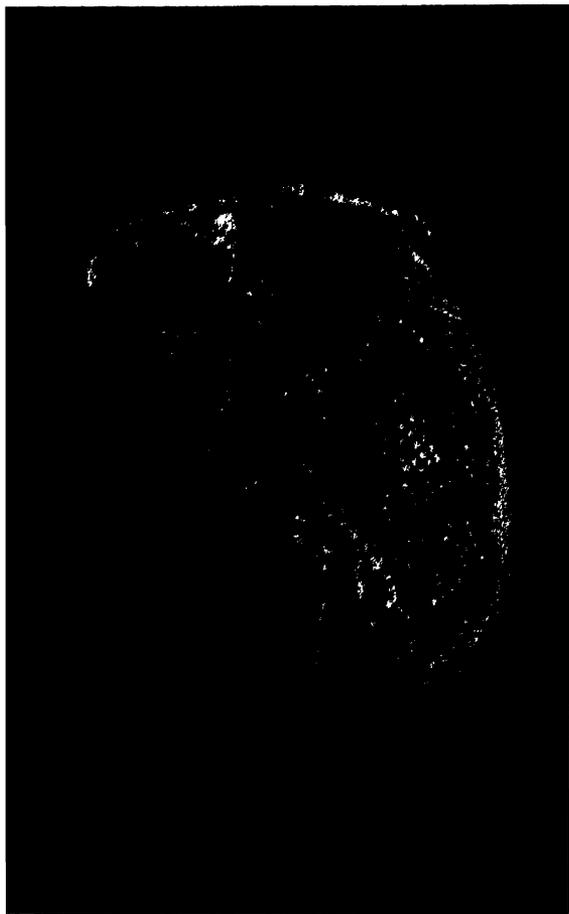
The light streaming in between the pillars cuts up the front part of the tomb into contrasting areas of light and shade, while the back appears to be an abyss of infinite darkness. Thus the empty tomb still seems a sacred place, a prehistoric basilica filled with a presiding spirit.

The megalithic building style – that is to say, standing stones surmounted by huge, immovable roof slabs – was realized here in a simple and grandiose form, going beyond ritually prescribed and purely practical requirements and aiming at harmony and a sense of consecration. The Cueva de Menga, the proud memorial of a vanished race of princes, stands like a milestone at the beginning of the history of western European architecture, marking the birth of a new spiritual world.

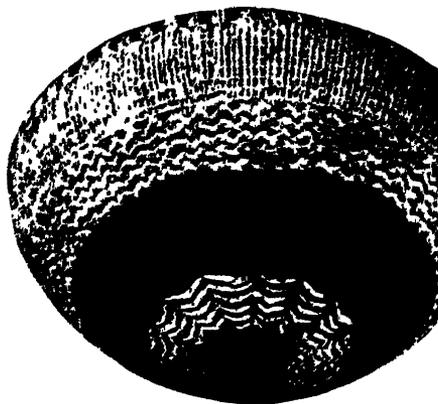
The third of the great passage graves of Antequera, the Cueva de Viera, which is again built into a natural mound, is lower, narrower and less impressive. However, the careful workmanship and fitting of the masonry is astonishing in view of the fact that only stone tools were used. The accurate slotting of slabs into grooves and other technical details such as relieving structures, betray a mastery of the fundamental laws of architecture. At the Cueva de Viera a thin layer of slates, partly bedded in clay, was inserted between the supporting stones and the roof stones. This strange technique was also used in other megalithic tombs. The burial chamber of the Cueva de Viera is square, and noticeable small in comparison with the sixty-five-foot-long passage; there is a porthole



67 Corbelled tomb at Los Millares, with porthole entrance



68 Plaster vessel from Los Millares



69 White-encrusted bowl from Los Milla



70 Castilian bowl in the bell-beaker style

slab, as at Los Millares and the burial places near Granada. The floor is paved throughout.

When one considers the huge masses of stone used in structures such as the Cueva de Menga, the mastery of technical problems displayed by the builders of the great western European megalithic tombs seems scarcely credible, as the science of mechanics was then obviously in its infancy. They confined themselves whenever possible to building materials that were within easy reach and used great natural boulders, but often to procure their megaliths they had to have regular quarries, which they worked with pointed tools, probably also using the method of heating the rock and then suddenly cooling it with cold water, causing it to crack. When they had extracted the rocks they wanted, there was still the problem of transportation.

The blocks of hard limestone, of which the Cueva de Menga was built in the soft tufa of the mound, came from a distance of half a mile. When one considers that the biggest roof slab weighs about one hundred and seventy tons, its transport was a remarkable achievement.

A clue to the way in which the slabs were shifted in Malta and Gozo is provided by the stone balls found at the temple sites, but in the case of the western European megalithic tombs we are thrown back completely on conjecture. Tree-trunks may have been used as rollers, and during rainy periods blocks may perhaps have been pulled and dragged on runners over the wet and slippery ground.

An account from Saumur in central France describes the labour involved 125 years ago in moving the roof slab of a dolmen which was wanted to bridge a river. A clue to its size is given by the megalithic shrine or tomb of Bagneux, near Saumur, which is of about the size, though it does not possess the beauty, of the Cueva de Menga. Eighteen pairs of draught oxen were required to drag it on rollers consisting of oak-tree trunks tied together in fours. The building material for the huge sepulchres of four thousand years ago may have been shifted in a manner not greatly dissimilar.

An example of the labour sometimes involved in the construction of megalithic tombs is provided by the Dolmen de Soto, a sixty-foot-long trapezoid passage grave near Trigueros in the province of Huelva, in the middle of one of the world's richest copper deposits. This site is also notable for the stylised drawings on the walls and for a block on which the goddess's owl-face appears upside down. The great granite slabs used here were brought from twenty-four miles away. The earth for the artificial mound, two hundred and twenty-five feet in diameter, which covers the tomb was also brought from a great distance.

Calculations have been made of the amount of material used in some of the long barrows, the elongated mounds of stone and earth which cover megalithic tombs in the British Isles. It has been estimated that the amount of stone used alone amounted to nearly eight thousand tons, or enough to build five average-sized churches.

Building the Antequera tombs into a natural mound offered a number of technical advantages. At the Cueva de Menga slabs were apparently hauled up the slope to the

edge of a previously dug pit and then carefully lowered down its sides. The surrounding rock provided natural support for the structure.

Where the mound was artificial, erection of the slabs must have been more difficult. Crow-bars were presumably used, and the blocks could be lowered or hauled upright with ropes. An experiment carried out by Thor Heyerdal at Easter Island may provide a clue to the methods used. He had one of the huge fallen stone statues in which the island abounds re-erected by natives, using their own traditional methods and without any modern technical aid. The natives first raised the thirty-ton statue slightly by inserting beams underneath it, and then started patiently inserting first small stones and then bigger and bigger stones until at last they raised it to an angle sufficient to enable them to haul it upright with ropes and crowbars. Twelve men took eighteen days to finish the job.

Similar methods may have been used in ancient times in the erection of megaliths. Boulders for the higher courses of Cyclopean walls have been hauled up earth embankments. Certainly no lifting machinery existed at the time of the megalithic cultures in western Europe.

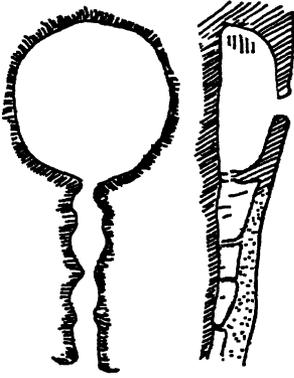
All the basically simple methods in which the place of the machinery of later ages could be taken by sheer strength, man power, and, above all, time, may have been known in the Iberian Peninsula and have spread farther afield.

### *The Creative West*

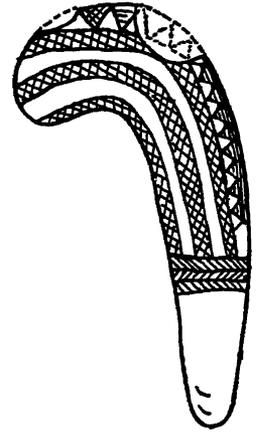
The monumental tombs of Antequera, in which we see the purely megalithic oblong building side-by-side with the eastern-style circular domed tomb, besides representing the high point of prehistoric Iberian architecture, illustrate the variety of forms that developed from the stone collective burial chamber. The farther this style of architecture travelled, the more various and original the tombs became. The causes and processes which lay behind the development of individual types can be only conjectured.

The western half of the Iberian Peninsula is characterized by great natural contrasts. On the one hand it is definitely oriented towards Africa, and on the other it is closely connected with Atlantic Europe. In the south the climate is sub-tropical, and in the north cool and rainy. Thus it belongs simultaneously to two different worlds. There were similar contrasts in the population structure; it was settled by peoples of different origins and nature, and affected by influences from the south and the east as well as from the north. Hence economic and social structures naturally differed in north and south.

The essentially urban coastal cultures, whose starting point was Almeria, spread



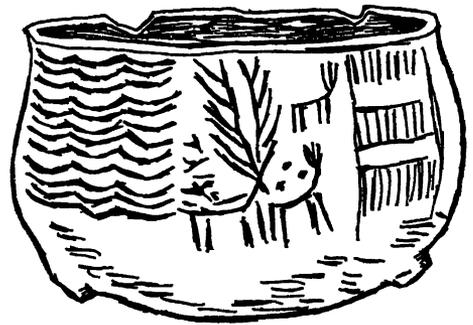
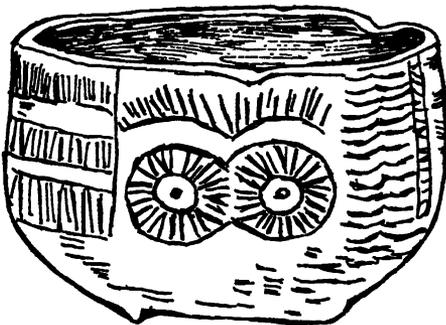
39 *Ground-plan and elevation of a Portuguese rock-cut corbelled tomb*



40 *Portuguese crozier idol*

northwards as far as Estremadura and inland into the metalliferous areas of Andalusia, which extend to the plateau of Alemnaje. Large landowners whose wealth is based on sheep and pig rearing are still the masters of this plateau, which is planted with cork oak and holm-oak. In primitive times conditions may have been similar. At all events the huge sepulchral structures in the south-west suggest concentrations of power in the hinterland, perhaps a feudal society dominated by mine-owners, merchants, and landowners.

The north, however, with its wet climate, mountain ranges and small rivers, seems to have had no urban centres in spite of its tin deposits; instead it was inhabited by peasants and herdsmen, who built their family tombs on their own land. The tombs were dolmens, generally not of any great size, often under mounds.



41 *Bowl from Los Millares with eye and stag motifs*

A large part in the development of tomb-building was naturally played by geological conditions; the nature of the available stone. Rock-cut tombs are generally found in soft limestone or sandstone areas, and slate encourages dry stone walling. The hard and massive granite typical of the plateaux of the Portuguese hinterland favours building with megaliths.

In southern Portugal, natural conditions may have favoured the development of the rock-cut, domed tomb of eastern Mediterranean type to be found at the burial places of Algarve and Palmella at the mouth of the Tagus and of Alapraia on the coast of Estremadura. They were either driven into hillsides or hewn out of the rocky ground (Fig. 39). Long sloping passages lead down to a corbelled chamber from twelve to eighteen feet in height. The roof is crowned with a slab. The passages generally widen out into a series of compartments. The entrances sometimes have carved frames like the Bronze Age rock-cut tombs of Sicily. Sometimes also the entrance is a kind of shaft. The resemblance of all these tombs to rock-cut tombs in Sicily, Malta, Sardinia, and ultimately Crete, Syria and Palestine, is unmistakable.

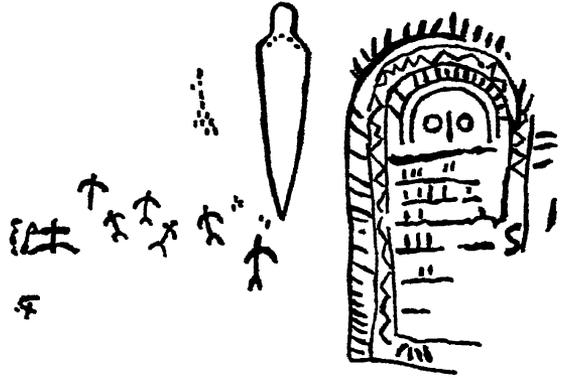
The grave goods resemble those of Los Millares. In the south a great deal of copper came to light; the tombs at the mouth of the Tagus contained more stone implements, in particular magnificent flint arrowheads and spearheads. In spite of the neolithic appearance of these tombs, they are not very early, and were still in use in the Bronze Age. Included in the grave goods were not only a large number of both sorts of bell-beaker, but in addition products of the Bronze Age El Argar culture, which also originated from Almeria and can be dated by finds of Egyptian faience beads to between 1,500 and 1,400 B. C.

The Portuguese rock-cut domed tombs, in addition to golden ornaments (Plate 77) and callais, ivory, and amber beads, also contained numerous bone idols, and a large number of remarkable schist idols from which all human resemblances have disappeared (Plate 78). Only the characteristic geometrical patterns incised into their flat surface identify them as emblems of the goddess. Sandal-shaped objects also occur in these tombs, as well as strange flat stone cult objects, shaped like croziers, decorated with zigzag patterns and hatched bands. These have been interpreted as emblems of a male deity (Fig. 40).

At all events, the crozier, a very ancient symbol of authority, occurs frequently in scenes depicting Syrian and ancient Anatolian religious practices. A Hittite relief shows a god standing on a stag with a crozier over his shoulder, and a stele shows the Canaanite Aliyan Baal with a crozier in his right hand.

But we are entirely in the dark about the god in whose honour the strange Iberian emblems may have been made. Hardly any trace of the veneration of a male divinity exists in the megalithic culture of Iberia. But the axe, which appears in rock paintings and in the form of amulets, apparently had religious significance.

A male figure with raised hands of exaggerated size frequently occurs in rock paintings, and this may point to the cult of a sun god. Similar figures known to symbolize



the sun occur in Swedish Bronze Age rock paintings. Finally, the stags which frequently appear in ancient Iberian rock paintings, and on pottery, may perhaps be connected with a male deity. In the Teutonic and Celtic religion the stag was a sacred animal, dedicated to the sun or fertility god. The eye motif, together with stylised stags, appears on a fine bowl from Los Millares (Fig. 41).

Strangely enough, nothing in the Spanish Peninsula dating from the age of the megalithic tombs points to the worship of the ancient Mediterranean bull god, though the cult of the latter seems to survive today in the bull-fight, which is much more than a mere form of sport; to a Spaniard the bull-fight is a kind of mystic, sacrificial act, a ritual which moves him to the depths of his being. The bloodless bull-fighting practised in Portugal bears a strong resemblance to that depicted in ancient Cretan frescos and carvings.

The numerous ancient representations of bulls in Spain come from periods later than the megalithic. Four mysterious granite bulls – in Cervantes's time there were five – are to be seen grazing in a field near Guisandi in Old Castile, and a magnificent bronze bull's head has been found in Majorca, but these apparently do not antedate the time of the Phoenician colonization.

In the early period in the Iberian Peninsula the power of the Great Mother as dispenser of life and death may have been so great that she overshadowed all other deities. The number of idols found in the tombs seems to point in that direction as, indeed, does the extraordinary expansion of her Iberian cult, which spread so far westwards and northwards.

The transfer of the sacred symbols of the mother goddess from idols and pottery to the walls of tombs, and the transformation of small idols into bigger stone statues, took place for the first time in Europe in Spain and Portugal. These were vital developments in the sacred art of the western European megalithic cultures.

The eye motif, the owl face, chevrons, stylised human figurines, and unintelligible symbols of various kinds have so far, with few exceptions, been engraved or painted

only in stone chamber tombs in north Portugal, Galicia and the Asturias. On the Peña Tu rock near Vidiago in the Asturias there is a big painted and engraved representation of the goddess in the form of a stele rounded at the top (Fig. 42). Rays radiate from the head, and the whole figure is covered with geometrical patterns arranged in vertical and horizontal bands. Only the face is identifiable by the presence of eyes and a stroke for the nose. Next to the goddess there is a carving of a big dagger of the western European type with five rivets, and below it there are some small human figures and some small cavities.

The completely stylised human figures in the later Iberian rock painting and in megalithic tombs such as the Dolmen de Soto have frequently been interpreted as representations of ancestors. On a wall stone at the Dolmen de Soto there is a painting of a woman and child, and a woman and child were found buried beneath it.

The spiral, which plays such a big part in more northern regions, particularly in the megalithic tombs in Ireland, appears only once in a rock carving in north Portugal, accompanied by chevrons. Statue menhirs seem, curiously enough, to have developed principally in the north of the peninsula, though the tendency to figurative representation is in general far greater in the Mediterranean area than in western and northern Europe. A variety of representations of the goddess occur, some of which are plainly reflected in the megalithic cultures of France and Ireland.

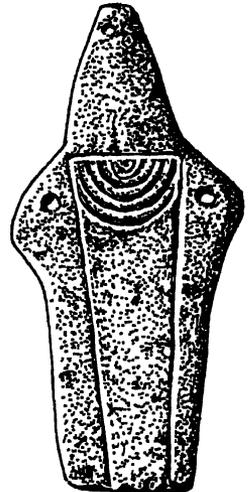
On a carved menhir from the corbelled tomb at Granja del Toninuelo her head is surrounded by two bands of rays (Fig. 43), and the face, arms and hands are like those drawn by children. The picture is completed by the usual necklace and broad girdle.



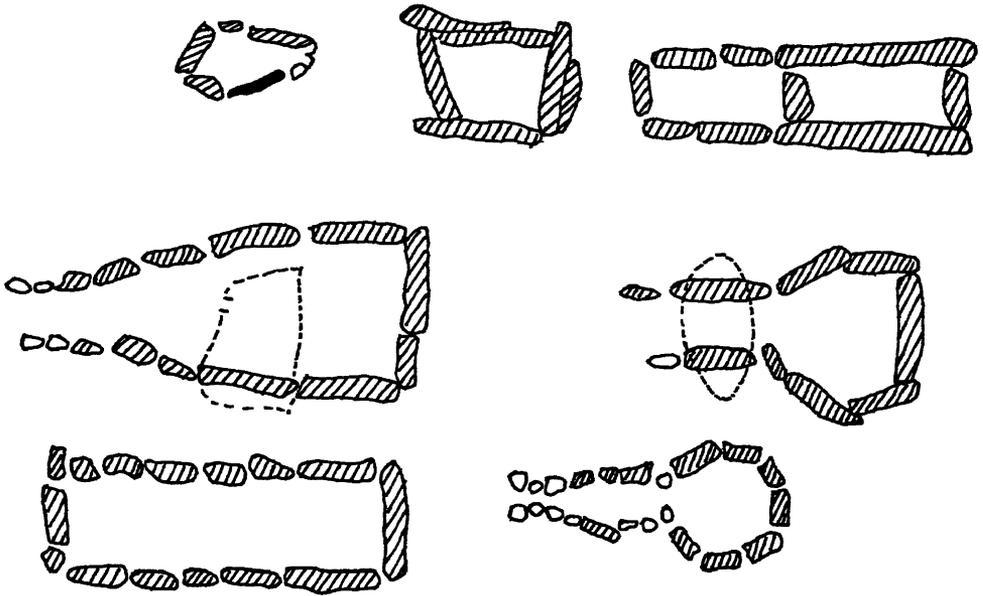
43 *Stele from Toninuelo*



44 *Baetyl from Caceres*



45 *Statue menhir from Boulbosa*



46 *Ground-plans of a selection of Portuguese megalithic tombs*

She is represented in a similar, but even more primitive, manner on an oval baetyl from Caceres (Fig. 44), and on other cult stones.

In the execution of a statue menhir from Boulhosa, which shows a more human outline with conical head and plainly indicated shoulders (Fig. 45) an artistic impulse is evident. On the smooth front of the sculpture only the necklaces are engraved, as well as two vertical lines which suggest a cloak. Eyes and breast are indicated by cavities.

A number of stelæ show the owl face in relief, and for these counterparts exist in southern France.

Just as the simple statues which came to express the religious feelings of the peoples of the neighbouring megalithic cultures were developed in the more agricultural west and north of the peninsula rather than in the urban centres, so, to all appearances, were the big stone tombs which became characteristic of the western megalithic cultures.

The granite uplands behind the central Portuguese coast, where the climate is continental but the flora Mediterranean, create the impression of having been a centre of megalithic development. In prehistoric times these uplands were more thickly populated than they are today. Megalithic tombs are found there at a height of 3,000 feet, but they are isolated, not assembled in big cemeteries. Only occasionally are a few found together near wells and springs, as in Palestine. Their builders, like the pastoral tribesmen of the Holy Land, preferred slopes facing the rising sun and elevated places with a distant view. The tombs were always covered with a mound, generally consisting of stones and earth, but sometimes only of stones laid in regular layers or of sieved earth.

The megalithic passage grave with polygonal chamber predominates throughout the west of Iberia. But there are also tombs with trapezoid, long and broad chambers, as well as primitive massively stepped tombs (Plate 79). Towards the north, the simple stone chambers without passages predominate. These are called dolmens (Plate 80, Fig. 46) and because of their primitive shape and the sparse, apparently neolithic grave goods, used to be regarded as the oldest form in the peninsula and the prototype of all European megalithic tombs. Nowadays, however, they are supposed to be a degenerate form of passage grave; as late, provincial outposts of the highly developed southern culture. Dolmens are also found in north-eastern Spain. They may have been built by wandering pastoral tribes from Galicia and Asturias, while the passage graves in Catalonia were apparently introduced by sea from Almeria.

Corbelled tombs are rarer in the west, but show an astonishing variety of forms. The passage-less, circular type built of small stones occurs as well as slab-built passage graves with a semi-circular or trapezoid forecourt.

In the imposing corbelled tomb of Vale de Rodrigo in central Alemtejo the eastern form was transposed into megalithic terms. The principal chamber, measuring fifteen feet by nine, is trapezoid in shape. It consists of a huge foundation of slabs eight feet in height, topped by a dome of granite and slate slabs which was once twelve feet in height. The ante-chamber and presumably also the eighty-foot long passage were roofed with megaliths. A large number of skeletons were found squatting along the walls, and among the grave goods were slate idols. A stone block in the chamber was perhaps a kind of altar. On its eastern side there were traces of burning, and a number of vessels were standing near.

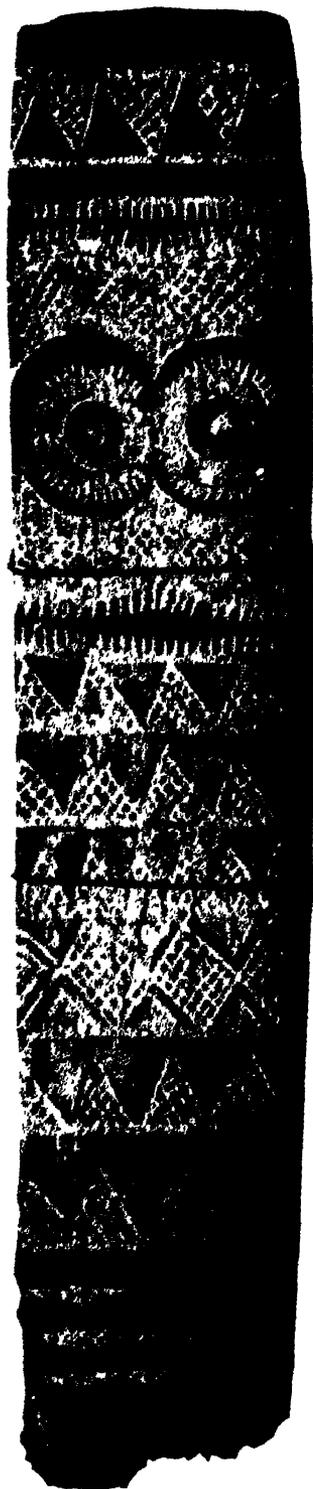
This royal tomb was covered with an artificial oval mound measuring from one hundred and fifty to one hundred and seventy feet across. At its edge, presumably outside the entrance which no longer exists, lay an oval menhir, rising to a point. On it holes, wavy lines, and horse-shoe shapes are carved. This is the only example of its kind in central Portugal. Further north, menhirs are numerous, and sometimes stand in rows.

In the province of Salamanca there are some remarkable circular tombs consisting of a large number of narrow slabs sometimes eight feet in height. These tombs generally measure about twelve feet across, but one of them is twenty-seven feet across. What the roof consisted of is unknown; it may have been made of wooden beams or other perishable material. The grave goods, similar to those of other Iberian megalithic tombs, consists of stone axes, tanged arrowheads, pottery often with symbolic markings, plain ware, and in one instance gold ornaments together with bell-beakers and a Bronze Age riveted dagger. But the builders of these tombs, which occur mostly in the eastern part of the province, seem to have belonged to a tribe that lived in the fertile valleys and not on the heights.

The people who prepared all these stone houses for the dead in the Iberian Peninsula remain shadowy. We do not know where they came from, why they built their tombs in this way and not otherwise, what influences were at work, to what extent independent



71 Alabaster idol of the Almerian culture



72 Phalange idol from Los Millares



73 Sandal-shaped idol,  
from Portugal



74 Straw sandal from an Iberian corbelled tomb



75 Model of a vertical section of the Cueva del Romeral

developments took place, or what the impulse was that led to the long and rectangular shapes which are so far removed from the eastern passage grave.

Perhaps the clue to the riddle lies in the early tumuli in the mountainous area of Monchique at the southern tip of Portugal. These tumuli are small, and are built in a very careful and stable fashion; under them corbelled long stone cists with rounded ends came to light. Hardly any pottery was found; the dead had been buried with red ochre and a few crude stone implements.

These tombs resemble small dolmens, and are near the part of Iberia which faces Africa. They suggest that the long and rectangular shapes of megalithic tombs in western Europe may ultimately derive from stone cists introduced into Iberia from North Africa.

### *Question of Priority*

Nearly a hundred years have passed since the Siret brothers opened the first corbelled tombs at Los Millares. Since then much light has been shed on Iberian prehistory, and its place in the context of western European prehistory has become clearer. Nevertheless the processes which led to the development of the early metal age megalithic culture in the peninsula, the men involved and their connections with other countries, are still matters of acute controversy. Debate about the stone tombs of Spain and Portugal, which had never completely died down, recently sprang to life again, and has already passed through various stages.

The first workers who devoted themselves to the problems of megalithic culture in Iberia were influenced by nineteenth-century evolutionary theories. It seemed possible to think only in terms of a continuous development from the simple, crude dolmens to the complicated passage graves and finally to the artistically built *tholoi*. This seemed justified by the more ancient appearance of the grave-goods found in the primitive stone chambers of Portugal when compared with the chalcolithic finds in the corbelled tombs. In particular, the Catalan archaeologist Bosch-Gimpera regarded the dolmens of the Portuguese hinterland as the germ from which all other forms of western European megalithic tomb had sprung, and he dated them between 3,000 and 2,500 B. C. He attributed the rock-cut domed tombs of Palmella to the middle of the third millennium, and he dated Los Millares even later. A number of distinguished workers, including the Germans Wilke and Obermaier, associated themselves with this view. But it was impossible to remain blind to the striking similarity between the corbelled tombs of Los Millares and those of Mycenae. Hence most prehistorians tended to attribute the former to eastern influence, while the purely megalithic structures were regarded as of

Iberian origin. Another hypothesis was that the princely tombs of the Achaeans derived from the *tholoi* of the Iberian Peninsula, and that behind the ancient cultures of the eastern Mediterranean there lay a still more ancient western culture.

In the 'twenties, when faith in progressive development began to be undermined, the remarkably theoretical approach to the problems of Iberian funerary architecture, which left out of account the fact that life does not advance in continuous straight lines, began to give way to greater realism. The pioneers were a group of British archaeologists, who pointed out that the Portuguese and Galician dolmens might not have been the point of departure of megalithic building, but simply the work of a backward or degenerate culture. The fine corbelled tombs in the south were now held to be the oldest structures; the work of more highly civilized settlers who brought these fully developed forms of architecture with them. The megalithic passage graves were regarded as their primitive Iberian offshoots, and the still simpler structures in the remote pastoral areas were regarded in turn as stemming from the latter.

But this was not the end of the matter. The German archaeologists V. and G. Leisner, after prolonged study of megalithic culture in south-west Iberia, recently revived the view that the corbelled tombs might have developed from the small circular walled chambers buried under tumuli which are contemporary with passage graves in the Los Millares necropolis. They regard the megalithic long shapes as having derived from the rectangular or oval stone cists made by the herdsmen of the western uplands.

One of the pieces of evidence they cite to refute the priority of the corbelled tombs is the presence of two tumuli at a burial place on the right bank of the Guadiana river, containing passage graves and with corbelled tombs subsequently imposed on them.

They consider the grave goods of simple mesolithic type found in the stone cists and the absence of slate idols and other objects characteristic of passage graves as evidence of their great age.

With the Leisners hypothesis that the corbelled and megalithic tombs developed independently in the peninsula, old ideas about a very early western European-African cultural centre, undoubtedly stimulated by theories about Plato's legendary Atlantis, have begun to gain ground again. Professor J. D. Wölfel, of Vienna, who tried some years ago to show that both Mycenaean corbelled tombs and collective burial originated in the west, can certainly claim that both the Leisners' hypothesis and the recent discovery of the Tassili rock paintings support him.

In the last resort however, the question of the prototypes or origin of the different types of tomb in the Iberian chalcolithic culture, whether they are to be sought in Iberia itself or far away to the east, seems to be of only secondary significance.

The various kinds of collective megalithic tomb in Spain and Portugal are important, not so much from an architectural point of view, but because of the light they shed on the nature and beliefs of their builders. They enable us to draw far-reaching conclusions about the life of these vanished people, and to place them in the wider picture of events in the Mediterranean area after the end of the neolithic period.

The idea of collective burial and of the indestructible tomb, the pictures and emblems of the goddess, her eyes that still look at us from the pottery, the idols, rock paintings and statue menhirs are all phenomena which have predecessors in the Aegean and the Near East. In the Iberian Peninsula they begin on the south and west coasts, not in the interior, and then move inland, generally following the course of the big rivers; and, wherever the new beliefs and new ways of building appear, a whole series of other alien phenomena are to be seen at the same time.

When all this began is uncertain. For a number of years now, prehistorians have been tending to favour later dates. Valuable chronological data have been provided in Spain and elsewhere by Egyptian faience beads. They were obviously an article of commerce favoured by mariners between 1,500 and 1,400 B. C., for they were cheap and easily transportable, and could be exchanged for products of much greater value with the unsuspecting peoples of the west. Even in historical times the Iberians had not yet realized the true value of their silver, and gave away huge quantities of it for exotic knick-knacks offered them by Phoenicians and Greeks.

The appearance of Egyptian faience beads in southern Spain roughly corresponds with the beginning of a new Bronze Age culture known by the name of El Argar, the site of the principal finds. Its starting point was again Almeria, from where it spread throughout the peninsula. This culture, in which eastern, perhaps Anatolian, influence was at work, slowly displaced the megalithic culture and its burial practices. The monumental collective tombs of the chalcolithic period gradually gave way to the typically Near Eastern custom of burying the dead in big clay jars and to the native neolithic way of burial in stone cists. In addition to Egyptian beads, products of the El Argar culture, which notably developed the sword, have been found in megalithic tombs, which shows that these were certainly in use after the middle of the second millennium. In remote mountain areas the old cult of the dead may have survived much longer, perhaps to about 1,200 B. C.

But the beginning of Iberian megalithic culture is much more difficult to date than the end. Carbon-14 tests have not yet contributed to a solution of this problem. Recently, however, carbonized relics from a dwelling place and an intact corbelled tomb in Brittany have been examined. The results were very surprising; they showed that the neolithic period and the immigration of builders of *tholoi* with short passages had begun in Brittany as early as the end of the fourth millennium B. C., or nearly a thousand years earlier than had hitherto been believed. This unexpectedly early date brings into disarray the whole chronological edifice carefully constructed by prehistorians on the basis of archaeological finds and comparisons and other evidence. The Carbon-14 test has also been applied recently to establishing the date of arrival in Central Europe of the neolithic Bandkeramik culture which advanced up the Danube; in this case the date has been pushed back to the end of the fifth millennium. So it is possible that the "short" chronology which in recent years has been gaining ground at the expense of the older "long" chronology will have to be revised, and that a considerably earlier date and

a longer duration will have to be attributed to the western European Neolithic Age. The recent tests in Brittany have led to lively discussion and, if they are shown to be correct, new dates will have to be attributed to the beginnings of the Spanish and Portuguese megalithic culture, which is almost certainly older than that of western France. For the time being it is doubtful whether the builders of the corbelled tombs landed on the coasts of Iberia in the fourth or the third millennium. But the Iberian Peninsula can certainly be regarded as a very early objective of prehistoric adventurers. It can also be assumed that Iberian culture antedates that of the western Mediterranean islands, which probably arose as the result of their being ports of call on the long sea voyage to the west when the great waves of Mediterranean colonization took place. Traces of western influence are to be found in very early levels in Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica, and may well point to a highly developed and hence expansive Iberian civilization.

We are still far from a solution of the riddles presented by the great silver and copper country of the west, which was once so irresistible to the metal-hungry peoples of the east. But as an area where peoples and culture met, mingled and moved on again, and as the cradle of megalithic culture in Europe, it seems to hide the answer to many questions about our own remote past. Future research will probably result in discoveries as yet unsuspected.

A multitude of tombs forms the only physical relic left behind by the great stream of primitive life in the Iberian Peninsula but traces of something more still survive in the customs of the people, who often regard the tombs of their megalithic ancestors as sacred, or may even have turned them into chapels (Plate 81).

Something of the dawn of the western world lingers on in the rich declension and musical sound of the Basque language, that last relic of the long-dead pre-Indo-Germanic tongue of the Mediterranean area.

The corbelled domes of the ancient *tholoi* and the megalithic style of building are perpetuated in stone structures erected by Catalan peasants which resemble the *pineddus* of Sardinia, and in the shepherds' huts of north-eastern Alemtejo.

Patterns found on slate idols still recur in Portuguese popular art, and worship of the Great Mother lives on in the cult of the Madonna.

## *Book VI*      The Goddess in France

### *Across the Pyrenees*

France, the immediate neighbour of Spain, soon came under the spell of the new religion and the chalcolithic culture that arose at Almeria. Ice Age hunters and later pastoral tribes had crossed the Pyrenees in both directions ever since palaeolithic times, and with the beginnings of navigation, contacts by sea no doubt began as well.

The earliest neolithic civilization in southern France shows an unmistakable relationship with that of southern Spain. It is known as the Chassey culture, after the site of the most important finds. Its influence extended into Switzerland and northern Italy, where the Cortaillod and Lagozza cultures later developed.

These cultures, like that of Almeria, are characterised by finely levigated polished ware, well fired and generally undecorated. The hatched, chequerboard, and chevron patterns of the rare decorated vessels of the older period, including cylindrical vase-supports and broad-rimmed plates, are strongly reminiscent of the decoration of the slate idols.

The mesolithic tradition of collective burial in caves was continued in neolithic France. One of the biggest of these underground burial places was discovered in 1952 high up on the Pas de Joulé on the borders of Aveyron, where hundreds of skeletons were found in a number of caves behind a subterranean lake. Skulls found here and elsewhere showed traces of a remarkable custom that was widespread in neolithic France. They had been perforated, and round pieces of bone had been sawn out of them. Such trepanning operations were carried out, not only on the dead, but on the living who, as the scarred crania showed, generally survived. These operations may have been a form of treatment for injuries or headaches, but they must also have had magical significance. However that may be, flat pieces of bone sawn from the skulls of the dead were worn as pendants. Ritual mutilation, as among primitives today may have been at work here.

The spread into southern France of the new cult of the dead, accompanied by the knowledge of metals, was most marked in the six provinces of Languedoc, where there are more megalithic tombs than in the whole of Britain.

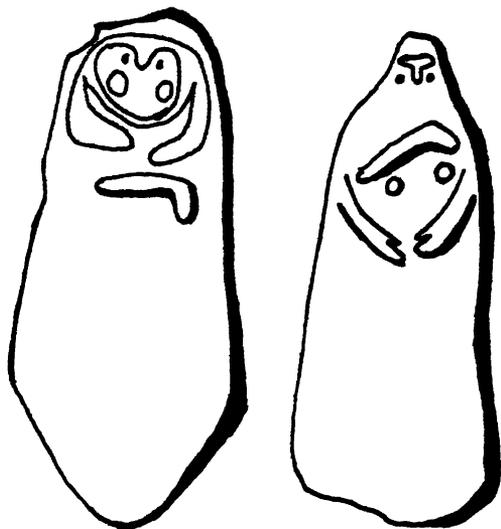
Continual exchanges with the Iberian Peninsula took place across the Pyrenees, presumably transmitted by semi-nomadic pastoral tribes. These people left behind dolmens or gallery graves with grave-goods which are practically identical on both sides of the Pyrenees. They include fine flint blades, arrowheads, which are generally tanged, typically Western archers' wristguards, as well as tanged copper daggers, rings, spirals, and awls. Among the pottery, numerous bell-beakers provide evidence of the links with Spain. Shell, callais and even gold beads occur.

People from the Almeria region seem to have landed and established a settlement on the coasts of Hérault, apparently for the sake of the copper and lead deposits in the departments of Hérault, Gard, and Aveyron. They built numerous passage graves, generally under cairns of stones. Long passages of dry walling lead to the rectangular burial chambers, which are sometimes preceded by a square antechamber. The port-hole slabs are reminiscent of those of Los Millares.

A group of passage graves was discovered near Collorgues nearly eighty years ago. In one of these a large number of skeletons were arranged in a star pattern and over their heads two long roof slabs had been fashioned into crude carvings of the death goddess (Fig. 47). In each the face is indicated only by the T-shaped lines formed by the brow, the nose and the fully-modelled eyes. Breasts and arms are shown in relief, and on one menhir the usual necklace can be seen. An object that might be a boomerang, a hafted axe, or a crook lies obliquely across the body of each figure. The same object appears on another statue menhir from the same burial place, with a horizontal dagger underneath it. There is no indication of breasts or necklace on this carving, which might therefore be a representation of a male being. This counterpart of the female deity appears later among statue menhirs from the area behind the Gulf of Lions.

Nowhere else in western Europe does the form of the megalithic goddess of death step so plainly out of the shadows as in the south of France, where her cult seems to have been unusually vigorous, to have assumed special forms, and to have lasted far into the Bronze Age. About fifty female statue menhirs have so far come to light in Languedoc. In 1951 two stelæ were found in some small tombs surrounded by slabs at Bouisset. On these the goddess appears more owl-like than ever (Fig. 48), and recently a carving in the style of the Iberian stele of Asquera was rediscovered in a castle at St. Bénézet in Gard (Fig. 49). It had been turned up by the plough in a field in 1931, and put in the castle for safe-keeping, where it was accidentally noticed again after having been forgotten for years.

It consists of a slab about two feet high and fifteen inches wide, rounded at the top, and shows the goddess's face and round protruding eyes. The relief that continues the browline and encircles the face may indicate a necklace. The arms grow directly out of the head, and the hands are held before the breast as if in the position of prayer. A



47 *Statue menhirs from Collorgues*



48 *Owl-faced statue menhir from Bouissert*

number of parallel lines on top of the head may indicate the hair-style, or a head decoration.

The circumstances in which the St. Bénézet statue menhir was discovered are typical. Generally these monuments were taken to a farmyard or some other place having no connection with the spot at which they were accidentally discovered, and there they would remain unnoticed until some interested person drew the attention of specialists to them. Except at Collorgues and Fontbouisse, it is impossible to establish any connection between them and any tomb. But it seems more likely that they were erected and venerated independently of any burial place.

The female statue menhirs of Languedoc always have the same basic features, but vary greatly in detail. This may partly be the result of the different periods when they were made and the artists, mental pictures of the goddess must also have come into play.

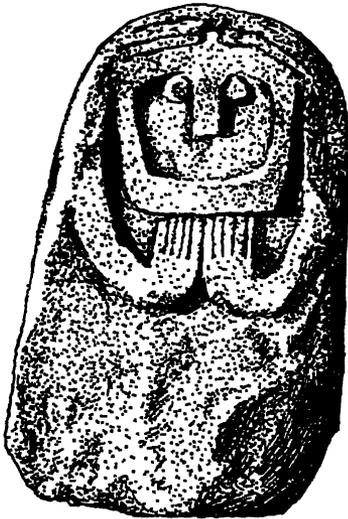
The carving of the goddess that comes closest to a real statue was found at St. Sernin in Aveyron – not in the area of the chalk plateau of Causses, where the ancient tracks are lined by hundreds of crude dolmens in which pastoral tribes laid their dead for more than a thousand years. The numerous statue menhirs of Aveyron seem to have no connection with the megalithic culture of the pastoral uplands, which lasted till towards the end of the Bronze Age and shows relatively little trace of Iberian influence. The strikingly well executed carving from St. Sernin and a few others are probably the cult objects of a more highly civilized people oriented towards the Mediterranean.

But no other western European megalithic statue shows the goddess in such a naturalistic and at the same time daemonic form (Plate 82). She stands before us like a

priestess or sacred queen of some barbaric tribe, frozen into the shape of a sacred menhir, mouthless, with tattooed face, the whole of her dominating presence concentrated in her eyes; even today she is still able to communicate a sense of awe. A magnificent six-stranded chain hangs round her neck. At the back of the stele two big fasteners are indicated, holding together the ornamentation around her shoulders. A cloak falls about her in broad folds, leaving free only part of the front of her body; and round her waist is the ritual broad girdle in which there is stuck a large forked implement. The forearms are held perpendicular and the legs descend directly from the girdle; the hands and feet are, as usual, indicated by a kind of fringe.

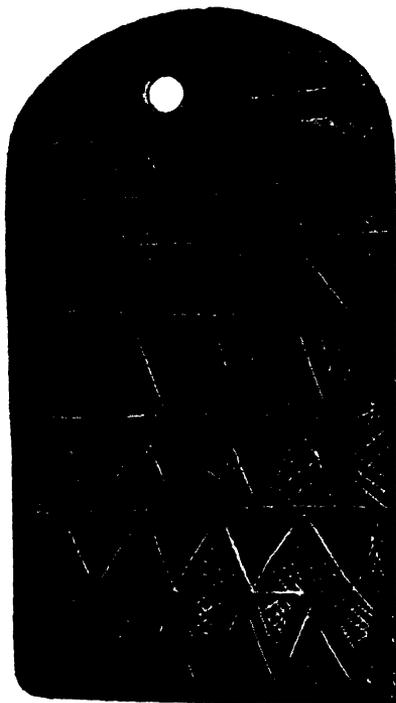
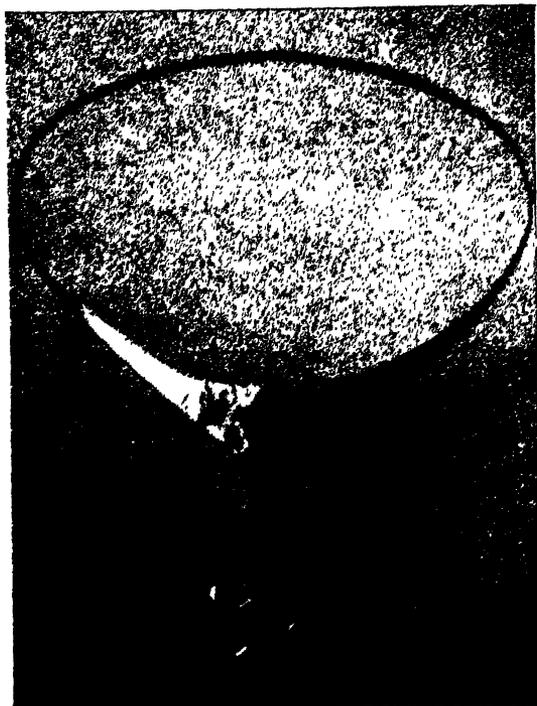
The fine execution of this carving and the heavy necklace may point to a relatively late date. A wide abyss separates this work from the slabs that cover the tomb at Collorgues. But the necklace exactly resembles a bronze necklace from the Balearics that can be attributed with certainty to between the eighth and seventh century B. C. In the Bronze Age crescent-shaped bronze necklaces of this kind, which are known as *lunulae*, are found everywhere, from Britain to the eastern Mediterranean and from Spain to Central Europe. Even in the oldest carvings the goddess is shown with a necklace of several strands. Nevertheless it is possible that the St. Sernin carving was made at a time when the megalithic cult of the dead was in decline, though veneration of the goddess of death continued in the south of France and from there spread to Liguria and even into the Alps that is to say, into regions where no megalithic tombs are known.

Wherever the goddess appears in these areas she is no longer alone, however, but has a male companion.



49 *Stele from Benezet*





77 Early Bronze Age gold ornament from El Argar  
78 Portuguese schist idol

## *Armed God*

The female statue menhirs in the south of France greatly outnumber the male, but the finds at Collorgues show that these also date back to chalcolithic times. The male god is always a warrior, armed with dagger and bow and arrow, and on two occasions he is equipped with a hafted stone axe. The face is generally barely indicated. Important characteristics are a broad plaited girdle which regularly appears on the later statues and a belt worn over the right shoulder and under the left arm, joined on the chest by a ring attachment. A dagger is generally suspended from the belt (Plate 83).

In 1947 a broken male statue menhir was found at the edge of a creek near Saumecourt; apparently it had previously stood on a little hill immediately above. In addition to a dagger, there is a bow and arrow on the right side of the torso, and under it an axe. This is also the only known instance of a male statue menhir which has vertical lines on its side, perhaps indicating a folded cloak similar to that worn by the St. Sernin goddess.

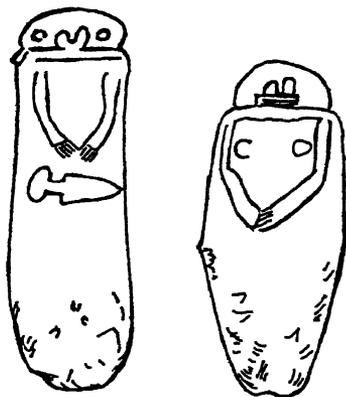
The identity of the armed male figure – it is hard to believe that it was no more than a portrait of the dead – is far more puzzling than that of the female statues. Nothing has been discovered to indicate any connection with Iberia, and the Corsican sculptures give no help. It almost seems as if the worship of this god was limited to the south of France and Liguria.

Indications of the veneration of a divine couple are found in the Ligurian coastal area and the Alps as well as in Sardinia. Nine upright stelæ came to light in an earth mound at Fivizzano near La Spezia, together with traces of burning (Fig. 50). The female statues are characterized by breasts, and one also shows the goddess's typical cheek pattern. The owl-face pattern can generally be made out, though in most cases the eyes are missing. The only limbs indicated are the arms. The male figures have obliquely placed daggers with crescent-shaped handles. A similar dagger is to be seen on one of the "paladins" of Filitosa.

The prototypes of these weapons are among the grave goods found in the royal tombs of Ur in Mesopotamia, and later examples occur at Ugarit in Syria, in Egypt, and in Asia Minor. They were adopted at Mycenae in about 1,600 B. C. and slightly adapted; a carving of one appears on a stele over a Mycenaean shaft grave. Mycenaean trade caused it to travel as far afield as Britain and the remote Alpine valley of Camonica, where it appears repeatedly on rock carvings.

The Ligurian menhirs, according to the shape of the daggers, must belong to the Bronze Age, and the very primitive statues of the Adige valley in the South Tyrol on which numerous daggers are similarly carved may be even later. The South Tyrol menhirs also include female statues with breasts and necklaces of several strands; the female statues were found together with the male.

In France the cult of the warlike god does not seem to have extended beyond the boundaries of Languedoc. But that of the goddess of death spread farther and farther.



50 *Two statue menhirs from Fivizzano*

### *Allées Couvertes and Rock-Cut Tombs*

In France, as in Iberia, the colonists penetrated into the interior by way of the great navigable rivers, and trade always favoured the waterways. The seafaring megalithic peoples everywhere showed a predilection for settling on islands, whether in the sea or in rivers. In the Rhône estuary they landed on an island near Arles – today it is an island no longer – whose strategic position may have enabled them to control the river traffic. A megalithic tomb at groundlevel and four caves driven deep into the rock and covered with slabs underneath oval mounds show that it was the site of a prehistoric settlement.

The long-known “Grotte des Fées”, to which six steps lead down, consists of a seventy-five foot long tunnel, narrower at the entrance but widening out to a breadth of nine feet (Fig. 51). Two chambers lie on either side near the entrance; no new finds were to be expected here, as it has been open for a long time, but another tomb which was intact when opened in 1886 contained a hundred skeletons, some fine bell beakers, numerous callais beads, some gold ornaments, and flint arrowheads.

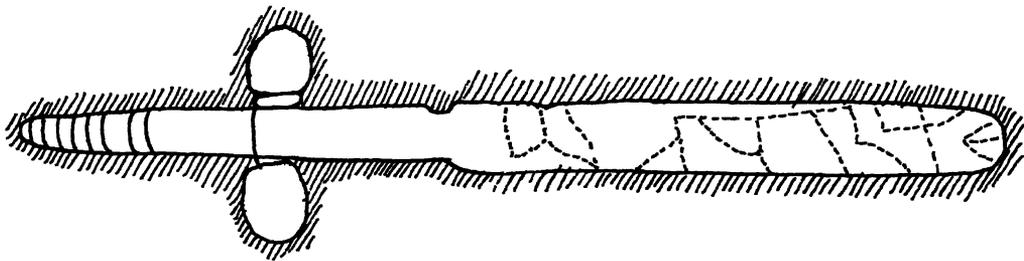
The tombs at Arles have been compared with similar rock-cut tombs in the Balearics, and were assumed to have been derived from these. But they are certainly older than those in the Balearics which do not seem to have been colonized before the beginning of the Bronze Age El Argar culture; and the Balearic culture has many features in common with that of ancient Sardinia and Corsica. An early phase, characterized by long, oval, rock-cut tombs and imitations of the latter in Cyclopean masonry known as *navetas* because of their shape, was followed by a second phase, strongly reminiscent of the nuraghic culture, which lasted into historical times.

The relationship between the grotto of Arles and the Balearic tombs is more likely to have been the result of a colonization of the islands from the mouth of the Rhône than the reverse, for the grave goods in the French tombs date from the chalcolithic age. But where the settlers at the mouth of the Rhône came from is difficult to say. The shape of their tombs suggests eastern rather than Iberian prototypes.

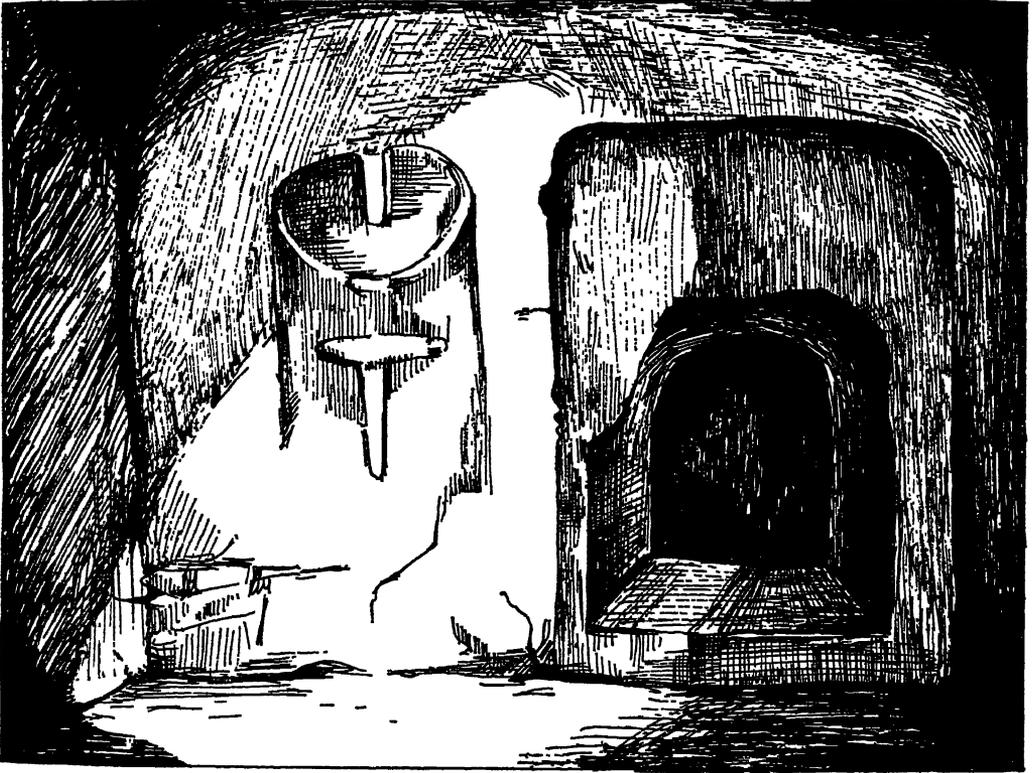
Sunken long tombs of megalithic type, which could derive equally from the Arles type or from Iberian passage graves of the Cueva de Menga type, are widely distributed in France. In the south such *allées couvertes* or gallery graves are to be found not only along the Rhône, but inland from Narbonne to the Toulouse area. North of the Garonne they occur in the area of Angoumois and Poitou on the lower Loire, in Brittany, and in Normandy. The *allées couvertes* of the Paris basin form a special group and here the goddess's features, which are so markedly absent from the rock-cut gallery graves of the south of France, again reappear.

The soft chalk of the hilly country of the upper Marne area favoured the making of rock-cut cemeteries. Nearly a hundred subterranean chambers were hollowed out of the hills. Short passages lead, usually through an oval antechamber, to one or two approximately square chambers with flat roofs which may be up to five feet high. The biggest room may cover twelve square feet. Four fine representations of the goddess in the chalk-cut tombs derive unmistakably from statue menhirs. In each case the shape of a stele rounded at the top is carved into the soft stone (Fig. 52); and the attributes of the goddess duly appear – that is to say, the owl-face, the necklace (either of several strands or a single strand with a yellowy-brown bead painted in the middle), the breasts, and in one case a double shaft hole axe. In one instance a mouth is painted in, and the join between the axe and the handle is indicated in black paint. This may perhaps indicate that statue menhirs were once painted (Fig. 53).

In each case the goddess was standing guard by the entrance to the principal chamber; in her care lay numerous skeletons. A number of the tombs must have remained in use for a long time. Their thresholds were worn by many feet, and in several cases the dead filled them to the entrance.



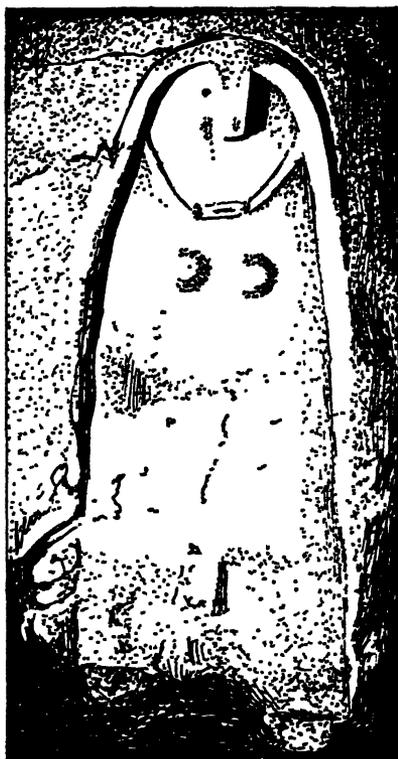
51 *Ground-plan of the „grotte des fées“ at Arles*



52 *Rock-cut tomb at Courjeonnet*

The poverty of the grave goods in the Marne caves – stone axes and flint daggers, arrowheads of mesolithic type, ornaments made of shell, stone, antler and bone, and crude clay vessels shaped like flower-pots – are not comparable with the fine implements and valuable ornaments found in the burial places of southern France. But the artistic and skilfully executed representations of the goddess and the careful workmanship of the burial places show the strength of the new cult in the north of France.

The goddess also appears on the wall slabs of *allées couvertes* in the Seine area in a radically abbreviated form, sometimes reduced to the necklace and the breasts. The long galleries sunk into the earth, segmented by porthole stones and transverse slabs, were perhaps built as the clan tombs of migrants who moved into the interior from the mouth of the Seine; most of them apparently date from the Early Bronze Age (Fig. 54).



53 Relief from rock-cut tomb at Petit Morin



54 Gallery grave with porthole entrance from the Paris basin

The remarkable custom of trepanning was very common in the Paris basin. Scarcely an *allée couverte* but contained a trepanned skull, and many disk amulets made of bone were among the grave goods.

But even more mysterious than the practice of trepanning is the T-shaped symbol that was incised during their lifetime on to the foreheads of a number of women. It bears a strong resemblance to the double axe carried by the goddess in the Marne rock-cut tomb. Perhaps it was a sacred symbol, and those marked with it in this painful manner were priestesses.

The cult of the goddess and of the dead took many forms between the Mediterranean coast and the north, but the centre of megalithic culture in France lay in the west, along the sea-swept coasts of Brittany, which were the scene of a unique religious development.

## *Book VII*      Symbols in Stone

### *Origins of Breton Civilization*

The Gauls called Brittany *Armor*, "the land on the sea". Four-fifths of its borders are swept by the sea, which dominates its existence; and it was by sea that the settlers arrived who influenced its earliest history.

Until the beginning of the Neolithic and the age of the great stone tombs the huge forests that covered the land were practically uninhabited. Hardly any palaeolithic relics have been found, but in the mesolithic period Morbihan, where the climate is mild and living conditions more favourable than in other parts of Brittany, was visited hunters and food gatherers.

Numerous middens, formed of shells, animal and fish bones have been found on the islands of Tévéc and Hoedic, which were then still apparently connected with Cape Quiberon, the long barrier in front of the bay of that name, and the gulf of Morbihan. These relics were left by fishermen and hunters, who may have lived in tents and had no domesticated animals but the dog. Excavation under their hearths brought to light sand-pits lined with stone and enclosed with small slabs, containing the remains of adults and children, sometimes in a crouching position, and sprinkled with ochre. Bone needles showed that the bodies had been buried in their skin clothes. The grave goods included shell ornaments, animal teeth, and microlithic implements resembling those of the southern French Tardenoisian culture. Huge antlers had been placed over and round some of the graves; the stag, the totem animal of many hunting peoples, was obviously sacred to these people; it may have been an emblem of life and regeneration, and hence important to the dead. Thousands of years later the Celtic stag-god Cernunnos was still venerated in France.

An increase of population came in neolithic times. In this phase various influences are discernible, coming from the south of France, the Paris basin, and perhaps also

from the north. Some of the neolithic potsherds resemble Chassey ware. Seaborne immigration from Iberia seems also to have begun. The early settlers, who were no doubt related to the Ligurians and Iberians, probably were small and dark-haired.

New burial practices also appeared. The dead were buried under low, oval or rectangular mounds – *tertres allongés* or long barrows – which could be up to from forty-five to a hundred and fifteen feet broad and from one hundred and twenty to three hundred feet long, and were surrounded by stones. Similar burials dating from this period are found in Britain, northern Germany, and Poland, and it seems possible that northern influence may be involved here.

The Morbihan long barrows – which generally lie in a roughly east-west direction – contained small dry-walled tombs built of medium-sized stones and containing the remains of cremated bodies; stone cists also occur. The sparse objects found in the tombs – fragments of flint and pottery, millstones, and broken axes – are characteristic of the neolithic period in western Europe. These barrows may not antedate the first passage graves. They may have survived side by side with the megalithic tombs and have been preserved in the imposing long barrows of the Bronze Age. The influence of the megalithic cult of the dead manifested itself in the erection of menhirs on the mounds and the taking over of religious symbols.

At the eastern end of the *tertre allongé* at Manio, near Carnac, there is a pillar fourteen feet in height. Near it, excavation laid bare a slab measuring eleven feet by six feet by three, on which an axe was carved. Underneath it was a rectangular, walled-in grave which was obviously the most important on the site. It contained more than fifty smaller graves with cremation burials. When the menhir was uncovered, five carved snakes were found on its base, exactly resembling the snake on the stone block from the Ggantija in Malta; they seem to be dancing a solemn, wavy dance on their tails. In front of the pillar, five polished stone axes had been stuck in the earth with the cutting edge upwards. The snake symbol of the Great Mother and the sacred axe, both of which continually recur in megalithic cultures, were obviously important to the people buried at Manio.

But more decisive than all the immigrations and cultural influences that came to Brittany by land was the arrival of settlers by sea. Their starting-point may have been the west coast of Iberia, and Atlantic navigation evidently held no terrors for them. The protected bays of the Breton coasts, the estuaries which penetrate deep inland like fjords, offered them ideal landing places. Hundreds of passage graves, always near the coast, all the way from the mouths of the Loire and the Vilaine and round the northern coast of Brittany testify to the settlement of a seafaring people as do scattered passage graves in Normandy. The offshore islands were also settled at a very early date.

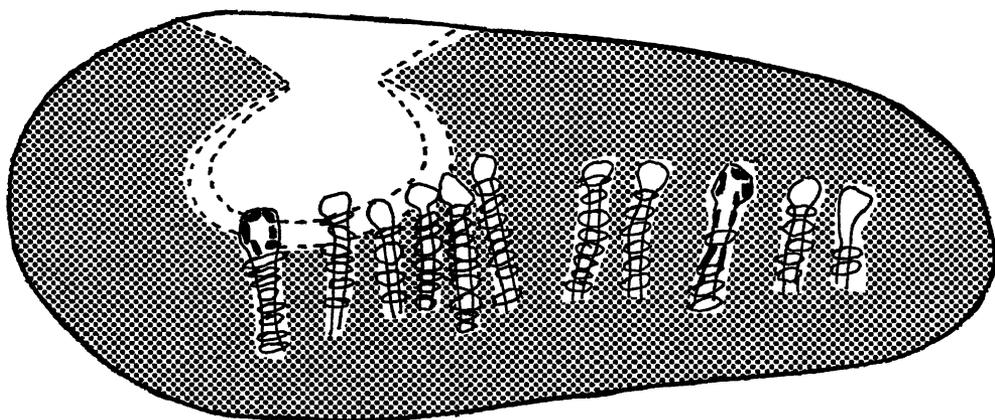
The oldest collective graves of the new arrivals seem to have been typical *tholoi* built of masonry. The tomb to which the Carbon-14 test was applied, resulting as we mentioned earlier in the very early date of about 3,000 B. C., is on the little island of Carn, near Ploudalmezeau. It consists of a circular corbelled chamber with a very short

passage, under a mound about fifteen feet in height and more than ninety feet in diameter. The whole structure of dry masonry was found intact. Apart from the carbonized remains which were used for the test, the chamber contained only a flint blade and thirty-five fragments of a smooth brown and black pottery made with finely tempered clay which is characteristic of the early neolithic period in Brittany.

In 1955, excavations were carried out at an oval mound more than two hundred and fifty feet long and a hundred feet wide at Barnenez South, on the Kernéléhen peninsula, dominating the mouth of the river (Fig. 55). It contained no fewer than eleven graves with long passages and rectangular or polygonal chambers. This time a mixed style of building was found. The corridors and chambers of these tombs, which may perhaps have constituted the burial place of a whole settlement, are generally lined with big slabs, but the weight of the roofing of the passages is borne by dry walls built behind them. Most of the chambers of the eleven tombs have corbelled domes, built in regular courses of small granite and slate slabs.

The most important finds came from a tomb with a twenty-one-foot long passage. The passage leads to a circular chamber which was covered by a corbelled roof, now destroyed. Behind this is a polygonal burial chamber built in pure megalithic style with five big, weight-carrying slabs and one huge roof slab. Two rectangular pillars mark the entrance; on the western pillar there is a carving of a drawn bow which appears to point threateningly at would-be desecrators of the tomb. There are also carvings of triangular axe blades and a cross, apparently standing for a hafted axe.

Inside the chamber there are some light carvings on the walls – wavy lines, which may be ideograms for water, and some yoke-shaped patterns reminiscent of Cretan horn idols and the carvings in the tombs of Anghelu Ruju. Here, they may stand not for horns but for ships.



55 *Ground-plan of long barrow at Barnenez South*



80 Portuguese dolmen

81 A former megalithic tomb transformed into a chapel



82 Female statue menhir from St. Sernin



83 Male statue menhir from Aveyron

The tombs under the barrow of Barnenez South show the various building methods used for collective tombs in Brittany as in Iberia – a mixture of dry walling, megalithic structures and corbelled roofs.

Whether the first settlers from Iberia really reached the shores of Armorica towards the end of the fourth millennium or later is a problem that must be left for the future, but it is certain that by about the beginning of the second millennium Brittany had become a centre of western European megalithic culture, connected on the one hand with the chalcolithic civilization of Iberia and on the other with the megalithic cultures of Britain, and particularly Ireland.

Between 2,000 and 1,800 B. C. another wave of colonization from Iberia apparently marked the introduction to Brittany of the metal age, as is shown by the appearance of new kinds of grave goods – tanged daggers of the western European type and flat copper axes with a strong arsenic content. Golden ornaments, in particular finely worked arm-bands, also occur, and, above all, fine, reddish bell-beakers with a burnished slip and exceptionally regular patterns with white incrustations. The quality of the workmanship and perfect firing show them to be the products of a refined civilization, and very similar specimens are to be found among Galician pottery. All these foreign objects are found side-by-side with indigenous products, and this points with certainty to the arrival of the Iberian bell-beaker people, who played such an important part in the spread of the earliest metal age culture of western Europe. The discovery of gold and tin in Armorica, Ireland, and Britain and the growth of trade by land and sea in the first half of the second millennium may indeed have been due to their initiative.

Important centres of the metal trade may have grown up along the Gulf of Morbihan, “the little sea”. In addition to the ocean route, the tin road mentioned by Diodorus Siculus, which led from Brittany through Gaul to the mouth of the Rhône, was probably already in existence.

With the beginning of the metal age and the increasing wealth resulting from the exploitation of the mines and growth of trade, a concentration of both worldly and religious power must have taken place in Morbihan, resulting in the erection of many unusual megalithic monuments. A ruling caste may have crystallized out, perhaps a hierocracy as it existed later among the Celts. The impressiveness of a number of monuments also suggests that there may have been individual chiefs.

Although the number of monumental collective graves, of which there are several hundreds in Morbihan alone (Plate 84), points to the presence of a big population, surprisingly few remains of dwelling places have been found, though a fortified village, the so-called Camp du Lizo, was partly excavated in 1922.

It lies on a plateau over the River Crac’h near Carnac. Two stone embankments, sloping on the outside, still surround an area of more than six hundred by five hundred feet. At exposed points the inner embankment reaches a width of twenty-eight feet and a height of nine feet. Its vertical inner side consists of a wall of medium-sized blocks. The two embankments are separated by a wide passage-way.

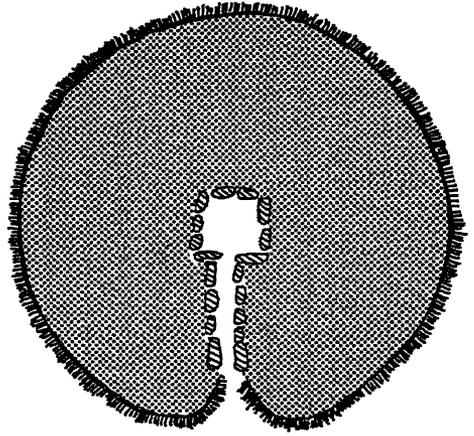
The inhabitants of the Camp du Lizo lived in round or square dwellings built on a foundation of biggish blocks and sometimes containing several rooms. They also used big slabs to build furnaces, with a highly efficient air-shaft system which strikes one as being surprisingly modern. The camp was divided in two by an earth embankment running from east to west, and a passage grave lies roughly at the centre. A number of small flat burial mounds were also found, containing hearths and small stone cists.

The people of the village grew barley, wheat, millet and flax. They cultivated the ground with picks and used primitive ards with stone shoes. They cut their corn with flint blades mounted on wood or bone. Sheep, cattle, and pigs were kept. The pottery was crude and typical of the secondary neolithic culture which developed on Armorican soil, though some fragments of bell beakers came to light. The highly developed stone industry of Brittany, which survived into the Bronze Age, was evident from the quantity of tools found in the camp; the industry may have been encouraged by the presence of valuable kinds of stone and may have been an important factor in the early economic development of the area. The finely worked and polished dolerite axes found in large numbers in Breton tombs and sacred places may have been exported before the trade in metals began; examples have come to light in the Paris basin, in southern England, and in Alsace (Plate 85).

The Camp du Lizo provides a number of clues to the life of the people of Morbihan, but in some ways it makes the tremendous development of megalithic culture in the area even more puzzling. These poor through well defended villages seem a hopelessly inadequate background. It is hard to imagine that a chieftain who erected great menhirs or built a huge stone mausoleum for himself and his family and had it covered by a gigantic mound could have lived in such simplicity. One looks in vain for Cyclopean walls, for a fortress of the nuraghic type, for signs of a big settlement. The idea of applying their astonishing megalithic building technique to profane purposes seems no more to have occurred to the early inhabitants of Brittany than it did to those of Malta.

The people who lavished such untold labour, effort, imagination and care on places of worship and memorials to the dead obviously took no trouble about homes for the living. The area round the Quiberon peninsula and the Gulf of Morbihan is a single huge cemetery, dominated by burial mounds, megalithic tombs and avenues of stones. The size, the multiplicity of form, the decoration and careful execution of many of the monuments and the wealth of the grave goods create the impression that for many centuries the *élite* of Armorica must have been buried in this sacred area, and it is not surprising that this is the area of the great alignments at which a whole people may have gathered for religious purposes.

The oldest monuments, as almost everywhere where European megalithic tombs prevailed, are the passage graves with corbelled or megalithic chambers (Fig. 56). They are always near the sea, preferably on elevated places, islands, or capes, and they may well have been the traditional monuments of the bold seafarers who had once come



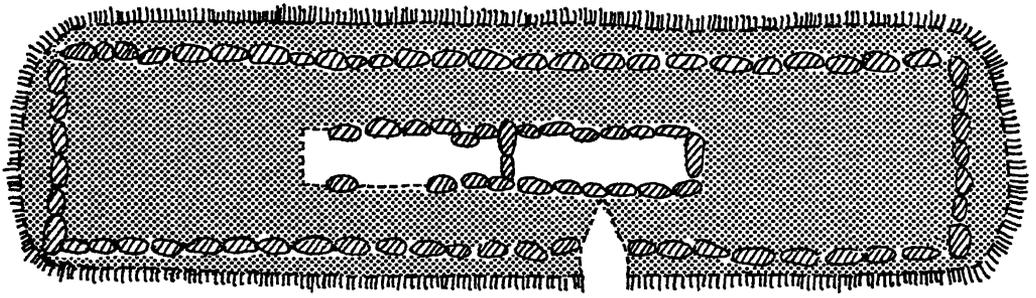
56 *Ground-plan of passage grave at Kercado*

from the south. In the course of centuries their shape varied. Tombs with long or short corridors and square, trapezoid or polygonal chambers gave way to types with several chambers or passages with right-angle bends. The passage is often lower than the chamber, and the tomb is always covered by a mound. With the beginning of the chalcolithic age passage graves gradually fell out of fashion and were overlapped by gallery graves, which remained in use for a very long time, apparently until about 1,200 B. C., and sometimes were of huge proportions (Fig. 57). They were constructed all over Brittany, and often had mounds which served to support the side walls. Sometimes they were enclosed by small slabs and sometimes they stood free. The entrance was generally at one end, but was sometimes at the side. Inside there were often a number of compartments with porthole slabs. In some cases where the entrance was at the side there was also a small vestibule. Emblems of the death goddess – pairs of breasts either carved or shown in relief on the rock, sometimes supplemented by the characteristic necklace – appear in a number of *allées couvertes* in the north.

Chalcolithic or Bronze Age weapons are engraved on some walls.

Related to the gallery graves also are some mysterious monumental structures which contain no grave goods and obviously were not covered by mounds; they may have been shrines. One of these structures is the celebrated “Roche aux Fées”, in the department of Île-et-Vilaine; it is sixty feet long and consists of forty-one blocks. A monumental portico and a low passage lead to a chamber twelve feet wide divided into a number of compartments by projecting slabs. The whole structure is roofed by four blocks, each weighing more than forty tons. It is built of purple slate, which was brought from a distance of about two miles.

At the beginning of the Bronze Age, perhaps about the beginning of the second millennium, elongated mounds were built in the sacred area round Carnac in Morbihan. They were sometimes three hundred feet long, one hundred to one hundred and fifty



57 Gallery grave under long barrow at Kerlescant

feet wide, and from fifteen to thirty-six feet high. They generally concealed a closed chamber built of stone blocks or dry masonry and numerous stone cists. The bodies in them had apparently been partially burnt.

These monuments continued the tradition of lavishing labour on the dead, though they do not contain real megalithic tombs and may have been erected by a newly-arrived ruling group whose burial practices merged with those of the Bretons. Hardly any pottery came to light, but other grave goods – beautifully worked and often unusually big burnished axes and ornaments made of jade and callais and other valuable partly imported stone – surpass anything found in megalithic graves.

Until well into the second half of the second millennium B. C., Brittany was the centre of an intense religious life. The fundamental beliefs and sacred architecture were imported, but the buildings, forms and symbols that developed out of them on Armorican soil were of such force that to the present day they have preserved some of their mysterious power.

### *Island of the Dead*

In the south of Brittany the land retreats, enclosing the sea in a big embrace and forming the *morbihan*, or “little sea”, which gives its name to the whole province.

The Atlantic tides, which rise and fall many feet on the Breton coasts, determine the rhythm of the “little sea”, though this is also disturbed by currents. Near the open sea the Gulf of Morbihan is like a swift river, swirling and eddying round islands and projections of land. Only where lagoons are formed, reflecting the pines and cypresses on the sand dunes, does stillness prevail. Colourful fishing boats rock in the protected

inlets, and there are long beds of oysters in the shallow water. In stormy weather the roar of the ocean reaches this isolated world only as an echo, and the Atlantic breakers exhaust themselves on the natural barriers that protect the gulf. The ships of the ancient forerunners of the Vikings certainly used to lie at anchor here.

A passage nearly half-a-mile wide connects the "little sea" with the endless waste of waters outside. Between it and the shore of Larmor-Baden there lies Gavr'inis, the "Goat Island".

In the evening light, under the deep shadows of the sun, it seems a place of enchantment; one of those islands of the dead to which, according to Breton belief, the spirits of the dead return nightly in the *bag noz*, the ghost-boat. Gavr'inis lies close to the shore, but strong currents swirl round it, and rowing out to it is unexpectedly difficult; it almost seems as if invisible defences have to be broken through in order to reach it. For a time, in spite of all efforts, it seems to grow no nearer, and when you land on the narrow beach, and climb the short, steep slope to the green plateau above, you seem to be entering a forbidden and timeless sacred area. Four thousand years or more ago it became an island of the dead, the last resting place of a princely race. Since then the living seem to have avoided the island, as if it were taboo.

It is still uninhabited. The single farmer who lived there has long since taken his departure; his house is falling into ruin, the doors are wide open, and bit by bit the wind is blowing away the decaying thatch. Long-haired white sheep graze near the ruin, practically motionless against the gleaming surface of the sea. The evening light surrounds them with a kind of halo.

Gorse, growing unchecked, covers the desolate fields with a yellow carpet, and moss deadens the sound of footsteps along the nearly obliterated paths. Tall, weather-worn trees whose life is slowly being sucked away by parasitic growths line the way to the opposite end of the island.

Here a circular mound, about twenty-five feet high and one hundred and eighty-three feet in circumference, rises above the shore. Its upper part, made of loose stones and earth, is artificial. A tremendous amount of sweat and toil must have been expended in thus covering over the stone building that a despot caused to be built deep in the interior. The royal tomb of Gavr'inis was discovered by archaeologists in 1832 (Fig. 58). It was empty. No doubt it had been ransacked long ago.

A paved passage of great well-dressed blocks leads forty feet into the mound to a nearly square chamber whose sides are about eight feet long. It is high enough to allow a tall man to walk upright.

In the flickering candle-light, a fantastic medley of shadowy lines can be made out on the walls – a message carved in stone from a vanished world. Twenty-three of the twenty-nine slabs are covered with engravings – concentric semi-circles, crooks, spirals, wavy lines, triangles, bows, snakes, fern-like patterns, and a thick trellis-work of parallel, vertical, crooked and curving lines forming a lively, harmonious composition (Plate 86).



The roof of the chamber is a single slab that weighs many tons. On the left-hand side of the chamber, three holes as big as a fist, connected internally, were carved out of the granite. Whether anything was fixed in them, and if so, what, is one of the many unsolved riddles of the place.

The meaning of the carvings on the walls has been debated ever since their discovery. In the old days the most hazardous conjectures were made, it was even suggested that the patterns were giant's thumb-prints, or perhaps merely the idle "doodling" of shepherds. Comparison with the various representations of the Great Mother in Spain and France has now given us a more solid basis for understanding them.

It is thought that the principal theme of concentric semi-circles and arcs, which continually recur in various forms, hides the ancient queen of the dead, here reduced to an abstract formula. It looks as if, in the course of her travels to north-western Europe, where love of decoration prevailed over the Mediterranean love of figurative representation, she became less and less naturalistic and ended up by being reduced to a few symbols. To her worshippers these abbreviations would of course be as meaningful as the cross is to us.

In the Gavrinis engravings the process of abstraction has gone very far, having undergone two transformations corresponding to two different basic patterns. Transitional stages towards this are to be found in other, probably older, passage graves in Morbihan.

The Breton manifestations of the Great Goddess, in spite of the great degeneration they have undergone in comparison with their prototypes, continually betray their Iberian origin. In particular, the influence of the style of the rock painting of Peña Tu in the Asturias seems to have reached Armorica by way of the Atlantic. Shapes remarkably like a long shield with a notch in the top edge must derive from Peña Tu. The inside of the shield is sometimes filled with a herring-bone pattern (Plate 87), no doubt betraying the influence of stylised representations of human figures in Iberian rock paintings. They suggest that it is better to search for anthropomorphic ideas behind these signs than to interpret them as imitation shields given to the dead as a substitute for the originals.

The second frequently recurring symbol is the *marmite*, or "cooking-pot". This often has handle-like protuberances at the sides and a small protuberance at the top, which gives it the outline of the squat statue menhirs of Collorgues. The herring-bone pattern also appears sometimes on the *marmites*, and may perhaps stand for the backbone and

ribs. Also the tops of the "cooking-pots" are often surmounted by long and short rays (Fig. 59). A clue to the meaning of these is again given by the picture at Peña Tu and the stele of Toninuelo, both of which show the goddess's head surmounted by rays.

Both "shield" and *marmite* are hidden like problem pictures at many places in the decoration of the tomb of Gavr'inis. Other emblems of the goddess, such as the many-stranded necklace, the owl face, or just the eyebrows alone, are engraved in endless variations. The curvilinear lines on the wall are in places reminiscent of the patterns on Iberian bone idols.

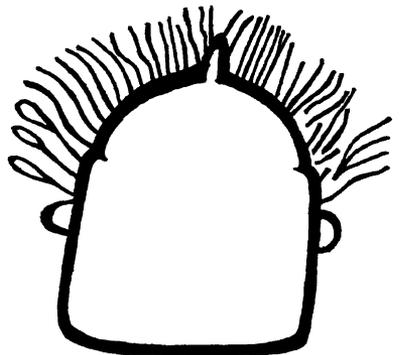
The snake, of which we met five examples on the menhir of Manio, reappears here, with a more distinct head, and there are also examples of the sacred spiral (Plate 88).

In addition to the goddess's emblems, numerous axe blades are represented, long, narrow, and triangular in shape, generally arranged in groups. It is impossible to say whether these are emblems of the male god, of the goddess herself, or are intended simply as weapons for the defence of the dead.

Thus the old symbols of the megalithic cult reappear in the tomb of Gavr'inis in a changed but basically similar form.

The building and decoration of the mausoleum and the digging of the protective mound above it must have taken a long time. Some of the big slabs are not of local stone, and must have been brought here by sea.

In the course of ages the sea has increasingly encroached upon the tumulus. Since it was built, the level of the "little sea" has risen. The little moundlike island of Er Lannic near Gavr'inis was once perhaps connected with it. Two contiguous stone circles used to stand on it like a huge figure 8 measuring several hundred yards from one extremity to the other. At the point where the circles touched there rose a twenty-one-foot high menhir which now lies broken on the ground. The sea has swallowed up the southern stone circle and left exposed only one-third of the other. The menhirs now seem to be engaged in a ceremonial slow march into the depths; at low tide their slim forms are still visible in the water.



Probably the two enclosed sacred areas on Er Lannic once formed part of a sepulchral area which extended from Gavr'inis. At the waterside below the great royal mound there is a half-destroyed megalithic tomb, so no doubt there were other memorials to the dead here which have since been lost.

From the top of the tumulus there is a view over the whole gulf of Morbihan with its wooded, highly indented coastline and many big and small islands. All ships entering the gulf had to pass this monument, in whose depths there perhaps lay a hero of this people of seafarers and conquerors.

### *Royal Cemetery of Locmariaquer*

The Locmariaquer peninsula, on which there stand some of the most famous megalithic monuments in the world, lies between Quiberon Bay and the gulf of Morbihan.

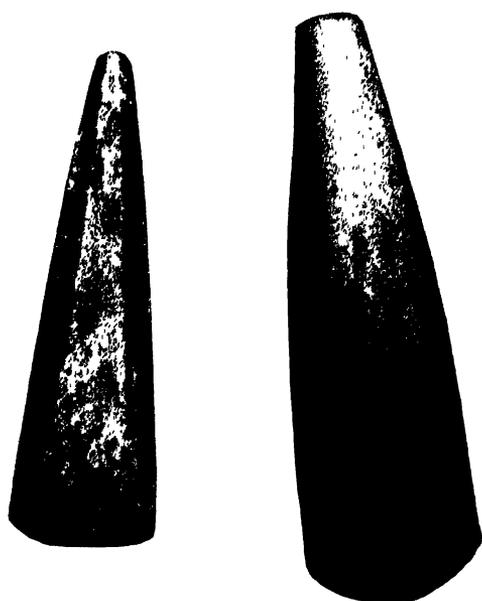
This small tongue of land may once have been the favourite burial place of the rulers of Morbihan, who erected huge mausoleums and monuments here to themselves and their families.

Hundreds of men must have laboured for years building the tomb in the Mané Lud, the "mound of ashes", and the cairn that lies over it, which is two hundred and fifty feet long, a hundred and fifty feet wide, and more than fifteen feet high.

Farmhouses surround, and even encroach on, the "mound of ashes". Generations of peasants have constructed their houses and farm buildings of its brown granite blocks. The burial chamber in the tumulus was for centuries used as a storeroom. The visitor still has to make his way through a cowshed that blocks the entrance of the passage. A long, still partly roofed corridor leads to the big, square chamber, whose roof is a slab twenty-seven feet long, fifteen feet wide and more than eighteen inches thick.

There are carvings on eight of the wall stones, mostly yoke and comb shapes (Fig. 60). The latter are no doubt correctly regarded as representing ships with high, animal-head bowsprits. Vertical lines may stand for the crew. A similar pattern is found in Bronze Age rock paintings in southern Sweden. Axe blades and hafted axes appear on a number of stones, and a small "sun", perhaps standing for the goddess's eye, is carved in the rock.

When the long stone cairn, which was covered by a layer of sea mud, was first excavated in 1863-64, a semi-circle of small menhirs came to light in the eastern part. Skulls of horses were placed on five of them. Roughly in the middle of the hill there was a closed chamber of dry-stone masonry. It contained the remains of a cremation and of another burial. The grave goods were modest; they consisted of a fibrolite axe and flint flakes and pottery. Perhaps the chief of a tribe of horsemen from northern Europe had been laid to rest over a megalithic mausoleum, and there was a remarkable



84 Dolmen of St. Philibert in Morbihan

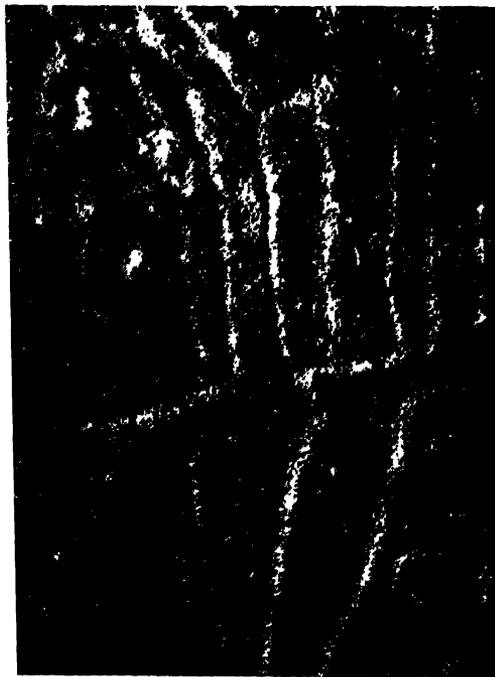
85 Dolerite axes from Einistère



86 Wall decoration from Gavrinis



87 Shield shape with interior design from Gavrinis

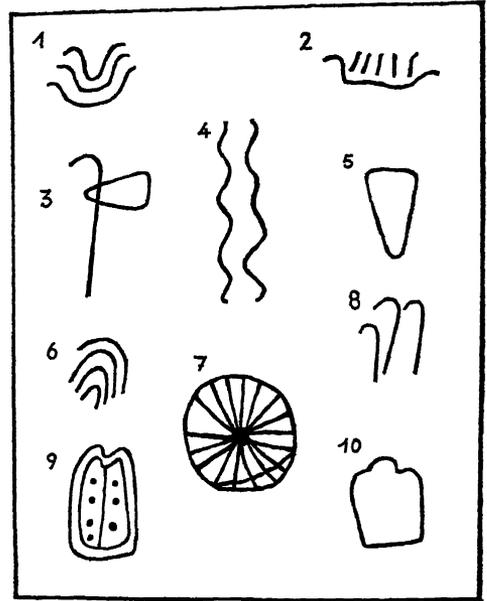


88 Pattern of axes and snakes from a wall slab from Gavrinis



89 Shield shape from the passage grave Coudé at Lufang

60 *Carved symbols from the walls of Breton megalithic tombs*



fusion here of the primitive Armorican cult of stones with the Indo-Germanic practice of horse sacrifice.

Excavations in the chamber were also undertaken, though there seemed little hope of new discoveries at a site that had been known for generations. In a pit under the paving near the entrance there came to light broken pottery, a spinning whorl, a jasper bead, flint fragments, and charcoal. Nearly half a century later, excavations at the same place yielded a small treasure of five thin gold bands, six beads, a fine callais pendant, and some flint arrowheads. Some fragments of bell-beakers showed the passage grave to be relatively late.

The roof slab over the chamber at Mané Lud is far from being the biggest stone used in the monuments of Locmariaquer.

Over the round chamber of the neighbouring passage grave of Mané Rutual there lay an eighteen-inch-thick block, thirty-five feet long and fifteen feet wide. The walls had collapsed under it, and it had broken in two.

New walls have been built to support it, and it has been restored and put back in place. This has once more revealed the shield-like design that practically fills its underside. The cairn that once covered both the tomb and the long corridor has disappeared.

The monument, which looks more like some mythological structure than one made by human hands, seems to have remained in use as a place of worship until a very late period. At all events Roman offerings such as coins, statuettes and pottery were found in it, in addition to some very minor relics dating from the time of its construction.

There are carvings on the walls as well as on the roof of the burial chamber. Two of them are interesting representations in relief of a big pick with a broad haft on which there is a kind of handle or loop, presumably for suspending it. At the lower end there is a projection at right-angles to the haft. An almost identical implement appears on a block in the stone-chamber tomb of Penhape on the neighbouring Ile des Moines, as well as in megalithic tombs elsewhere. It may be a metal implement of some kind, perhaps a copper pick used as a plough. In primitive times agricultural implements tended to become sacred emblems of the fertility cult that went hand-in hand with the cult of the dead.

Hafted axes with similar handles or loops also appear on a stele found at Mané er Hroek, another of the big tombs of Locmariaquer. Mané er Hroek, or the "fairy mound", is an oval tumulus made of stones; it is three hundred feet long, a hundred and eighty feet wide, and more than thirty feet high. This mound dates from a later period than the other monuments, and surrounds a single, slab-covered chamber built of dry masonry. In the chamber enclosed in this small mountain only one person was apparently buried, no doubt a king powerful enough to have such a monument built for himself. There was no trace of his body, but some of the precious objects intended to accompany him to the hereafter remained. They included more than a hundred polished axes made of valuable kinds of stone, nine callais pendants, a large number of beads made of the same material, and a wonderful disc ring of brightly polished jadeite which in daylight is as transparent as glass.

An engraved stele found in the tumulus has now been put in the chamber. The *marmite* symbol, this time without "handles" at the side but with a small protuberance at the top, and filled in with yoke shapes, shafted axes, and snaky lines, is obviously the central motif. Over and under it are variously-shaped big and small shafted axes. In this Bronze Age tomb the old megalithic customs were still in use.

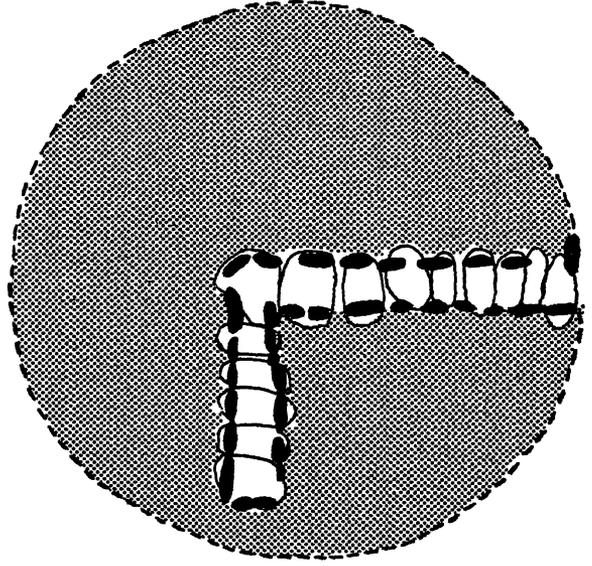
When the Mané er Hroek monument was erected it may have been intended to tower above the burial mounds of all earlier monarchs and to put them in the shade. At its eastern side there were two menhirs nearly as high as the monument itself. Today they lie broken at its feet.

The superstitious awe associated with the tumulus survived into the twentieth century. It was said to be watched over by a demon who was sometimes described as a youth, sometimes as a bull. He was called Paotr or Kohlé er Hroek. Supernatural powers were also attributed to the menhirs.

Another of the Locmariaquer tombs lying still nearer the sea than the Mané er Hroek is the Dolmen des Pierres Plates, so called because of the flat roof-slabs of its corridor. This tomb, which is sixty feet in length, is in a number of respects one of the most remarkable monuments of megalithic Brittany. It is one of the four angled graves of Morbihan (Fig. 61). One-third of the way along the corridor there is a side chamber, and then the corridor makes a right-angle turn to the left.

The round cairn which once covered it has vanished and the tomb has been much restored. Daylight penetrates between the roof slabs and illuminates the numerous

61 *Angled grave*



pictures on the walls. A whole series of variations on the shield theme are carved into the stone. There are long “shields” with an indented top edge and “cooking-pots” without “handles” but with a small protuberance at the top.

The “shields”, of which there are a number, are divided into two compartments and surrounded by a number of lines which appear to form an ornamental border. Big empty circles and small circles with a point in the centre and a number of symmetrically arranged holes in both compartments complete the recurring pattern, which at first sight certainly resembles a decorated shield. But closer examination of the individual variations on the theme makes it clear that to regard all these circles as ornaments or shield buckles is an over-simplification. They are much more likely to stand for the goddess’s magic eye; the bigger circles may perhaps stand for her breasts.

A *marmite* from the north of Brittany shows, not only a small halo of hair and “handles” or ears, but also a threefold necklace, and under it two circles standing for the breasts. There could hardly be a plainer indication of the meaning behind the “cooking-pot”.

Two pairs of big circles in a *marmite* on the Dolmen des Pierres Plates may also stand for breasts. Here there is a direct link with the gallery graves in northern Brittany, where carved on a stone there is an example of two pairs of breasts one below the other. Small hollows with and without circles could stand for eyes; at all events on one carving at the Dolmen Coudé at Lufang, not far from Locmariaquer, there is no doubt that

they are eyes. Here the "shield" bears an astonishing resemblance to an ugly-looking cuttlefish (Plate 89).

The fact that the "shield" and the *marmite* occur together at the Dolmen des Pierres Plates suggests the possibility that the Great Mother reached Brittany by two separate routes, and consequently sometimes resembles the idol of Peña Tu and sometimes the statue menhirs of the south of France.

It is hard to feel one's way into the irrational magic-dominated world of ideas that lay behind the engravings of the Dolmen des Pierres Plates and Gav'r'inis. At the former multivalent symbols are combined into a practically impenetrable jungle. Nowhere does the megalithic religion present us with such a multitude of bewildering symbols as it does in the tombs of Morbihan.

The Table des Marchands, another tomb in the Locmariaquer area, shows other mysterious signs. This, as its name implies, looks like a huge table; a great slab, six feet thick, twenty-one feet long and twelve feet wide is uncannily balanced on a few standing stones about nine feet in height. It was covered by a circular cairn one hundred and twenty feet in diameter, part of which existed until last century, and it has now been covered again by a great pile of earth.

The big circular chamber is like a primitive chapel. At the back is an almond-shaped, carefully hewn stone which is nine feet in height, a kind of idol protecting this shrine of the dead. Nearly the whole of its surface is taken up by a *marmite*, surrounded by short, slightly bent, rays or flames. A smooth vertical line runs down the centre, with a small sun emitting rays about halfway up. To the right and left four rows of finely worked crooks appear in flat relief. On the base of the big stone slab are a number of small cavities and snake and yoke-shaped engravings underneath the *marmite*.

Many interpretations of these symbols have been attempted. It has been suggested that the crooks represent a field of corn with ripe ears hanging in the life-giving light of the sun, that the pick on the roof represents an implement used for ploughing, and that the whole thing is connected with a sun and fertility cult.

Tempting though such an interpretation may be at first sight, there is much that can be said against it. A quasi-naturalistic representation of a sun-baked cornfield would be in sharp contrast to all other engravings in the dolmens of Brittany, which are highly abstract. The crook motif constantly occurs in totally different contexts, and it therefore seems more reasonable to regard it as one of the most important symbols in the Armorican megalithic religious vocabulary, a token of spiritual and temporal power as it is on the statue menhirs in the south of France and the crozier idols in Portugal.

A burial mound was subsequently built in the immediate neighbourhood of the Table des Marchands which surpassed in extent even that of Mané er Hroek. It covered an area of nearly four hundred by one hundred and fifty feet, but it has been completely overgrown by gorse and is now almost totally destroyed. Only a king could have had at his disposal the organization and labour necessary to dig such a mound, and to erect at its foot a monolith which exceeds most of the Egyptian obelisks in weight, if not in height.

The people of the area have always tended to regard the stone monuments as the works of supernatural forces, and this granite pillar has long been given the popular name of Men er Hroek, or "fairy stone". It now lies on the ground, broken into four. It is a real menhir, elliptical in shape; the upper part is somewhat narrower, and it is rounded at the top. It is very well hewn and finished. The biggest of the four pieces measure sixteen feet by twelve at the elliptical surface of fracture. The weight of the whole is estimated at about three hundred and fifty tons, almost double that of Cleopatra's Needle in London, which is practically the same length.

When the Men er Hroek fell the earth must have shaken as if there had been an earthquake. Whether it was struck by lightning, or was destroyed by men who in a mood of religious fanaticism desired to eliminate this symbol of pagan antiquity, or whether it collapsed while in course of erection, are questions to which we do not know the answer. Another mystery is that of the methods used to transport and erect this tremendous monument. As an indication of the difficulties, one may recall the erection towards the end of the sixteenth century of the obelisk in St. Peter's Square in Rome, which is not nearly so heavy as the Men er Hroek. Pope Sixtus V entrusted the task to Domenico Fontana, who employed eight hundred men and seventy horses; and even then the task took a year to complete.

The method used to erect the Men er Hroek was probably to build a high earthen mound to support the colossus at an angle; it could then be lowered into a prepared hole, at the same time being pulled vertical by ropes. Horse-power as well as man-power must certainly have been used, as it was thousands of years later in Rome.

The necropolis of Locmariaquer presents us with many riddles. Among them is the question whether this biggest of all menhirs was conceived by its builders as a towering throne for the spirit of a deified king, or as a huge, eternal body which the powers of the dead would mystically enter. It may, like the Egyptian obelisks, have been regarded as the seat and symbol of the sun god. At all events this broken giant represents the peak of a development of the menhir that was unrivalled outside Brittany.

### *Riddle of the Menhirs*

The biggest still standing stone pillar in Brittany is the thirty-six foot high menhir of Kerloas, near Plouharzel in Finistère. It is hewn into a regular, oval shape, tapering at the top. Its lower half is nine feet wide, and its weight is in proportion. The Men er Hroek surpasses by far all other such monuments in Brittany, but pillars between twenty-one and thirty feet in height are no rarity.

It can be shown that some of these monoliths were transported over distances of up

to nearly two miles. Presumably rollers were used to shift them. Generally stone was used from a site as near as possible to the place of erection. Near the thirty-foot Men Marz at Pontusval in Finistère the place can be seen from which the menhir was extracted from the rock by the usual prehistoric method of heating, followed by douches of cold water. Rocks protruding from the earth were often dealt with in this way. A flat surface of fracture can be plainly made out on many menhirs. Easily accessible boulders lying on the surface were used whenever possible for the unworked or slightly worked stones of the big avenues.

The menhirs, or *penlvoans* (pillars) as the Bretons call them, are generally set deeply in the soil and supported and wedged in with stones. Some, however, have flat bases, and were originally balanced only by their own weight.

The finest of the classical Armorican giant menhirs stands in an orchard at Champ Dolent near Dol (Plate 90). It is nearly twenty feet high and is carefully rounded and trimmed; it stands like a challenge to mortality surrounded by apple-trees which blossom, bear fruit, and die as transiently as the human race.

Among the most striking phenomena produced by the ancient megalithic religion is the process of aggrandisement which the menhirs underwent in Brittany and the extension of their religious significance. This is an excellent illustration of the inexhaustible strength and dynamism of the new beliefs, which in the course of their age-long travels from east to west continually found expression in new forms.

Apart from the power of these beliefs, nowhere else in Europe is the multivalence of prehistoric religious symbolism – which it is exceedingly difficult for modern men to understand – so evident as it is in Brittany. The menhirs still belong to the broad domain of the cult of the dead, but at the same time are beginning to shake free and to develop into independent symbols of forces, perhaps deities, only indirectly connected with that cult.

It is remarkable that in France the menhirs should have undergone two parallel developments; in the south it developed in the direction of the anthropomorphic statue, while in the west it grew into the colossal pillar and was widely used in great places of worship. It can be assumed that in prehistoric times France was the spiritual centre from which the monolith cult spread to central as well as to northern Europe and the British Isles.

The Armorican menhirs fulfilled at least four different functions, whose deeper meaning can still be only conjectured. The one thing that is certain is that all the thousands of stones, big and small, are religious monuments.

The oldest menhirs so far found in Brittany are those on *terres allongés*. With the exception of the menhir of Manio which we mentioned above, hardly any engravings have been found on these other than hafted axes and crooks. Small cupmarks occur on them more frequently than engravings. The purpose of the stones standing at or on tombs in Brittany can be roughly conjectured, but it is far harder to see the purpose of the numerous isolated menhirs and the stone avenues.

The isolated pillars often occur near springs, wells, rivers and brooks, and they are rarer on hills than in valleys or on slopes. The still surviving predilection for pillar-shaped signposts decorated with block-like primitive figures of Christ is perhaps a last relic of the ancient menhir cult. Crucifixes were first erected in Brittany only in the ninth century. Before that, stones were still venerated there, though under different auspices, the Christianized Celtic menhirs for instance (Plate 91).

Excavations at the site of isolated menhirs has often yielded pottery and flint flakes, axe blades and grindstones, and occasionally also offerings dating from later times. Thus the stones were always felt to be sacred. But whether they represented a definite god, or were boundary stones like the later Greek Hermes pillars, or perhaps were dedicated to the memory of religious events, like the stone pillars in the Bible, or to the memory of heroes, are questions that remain unsolved. The extent to which some of the Breton menhirs are phallic in character is a matter of dispute; they were certainly regarded as possessing special powers, and may therefore have played a part in the fertility cult. But it is certainly not correct to regard them collectively as indicating a definite cult of the phallus in Brittany, though certain former popular practices there might seem to point in that direction.

Though the monoliths played an important religious role from the beginning of megalithic culture in Brittany, the greatest development of the menhir seems to have taken place relatively late. The huge pillars and alignments apparently do not antedate the beginning of the Bronze Age.

### *The Stone Host of Carnac*

In the middle of the second millennium, the country round Morbihan and the neighbouring Gulf of Quiberon seems to have reached the culminating point of its economic and cultural development, and then to have continued flourishing for a very long time.

We may never know whether the strong hand of a tyrant lay behind the astonishing open-air places of worship that arose in the neighbourhood of Carnac, or whether all the strands of Armorican spiritual and temporal life were controlled by a hierarchy. These sanctuaries may indicate the development of a new religious ritual which stimulated a whole people to labour in its service.

To find parallels to the grandiose remains in Morbihan one has to look to Egypt or the heart of Asia. The area of the "alignments", as they are called, still exercises a strange powerful magic though their religious meaning has long since passed into oblivion. A feeling of religious awe pervades the soul in front of them.

. Carnac, with its friendly houses and streets, the Church of St. Cornély, the hotels,

and the fashionable beach below seem petty and insignificant in the presence of the hieratic blocks of granite which cover the forest-encircled heath behind the little town.

North-east of it three areas, including nearly three thousand stones and a number of tombs dating from the most varied periods, make up a sacred area which must have been much more compact than it is now and must have extended altogether for five miles (Plate 92).

The farmhouses of Menec, the little locality just outside Carnac from which the first alignment takes its name, are situated inside a big semi-circle of seventy slabs placed close together, into which most of the rows of pillars protrude. Strangely enough, the semi-circle does not lie directly facing the alignments, but seems displaced sharply to the right.

A fantastic army of 1,099 menhirs, in eleven roughly parallel rows and forming a column about a hundred yards in breadth, seems to be advancing upon this sacred place, which is big enough to contain about a thousand people. The most distant stones, lost in the vegetation more than 1,200 yards away, are barely two feet high, but they increase in size as they approach the semi-circle. Some of those nearest to it are twelve feet high and broad in proportion. There is something menacing about this relentlessly growing army of crude, greeny-grey granite boulders; they seem almost like living things endowed with a mysterious will-power of their own.

The crest of the neighbouring Mont St. Michel, which is one of the biggest burial mounds in Europe – it is three hundred and seventy-five feet long, one hundred and eighty feet broad and thirty-six feet high – provides a fine view of the two alignments of Menec and Kermario, though the latter vanishes from view in the shadow of the pinewoods. The sight of these menhirs makes intelligible the legend that they were Roman soldiers turned to stone by St. Cornély in retribution for having persecuted him. St. Cornély is a legendary figure in whom the most varied ancient religious memories survive, and is highly venerated by the Bretons.

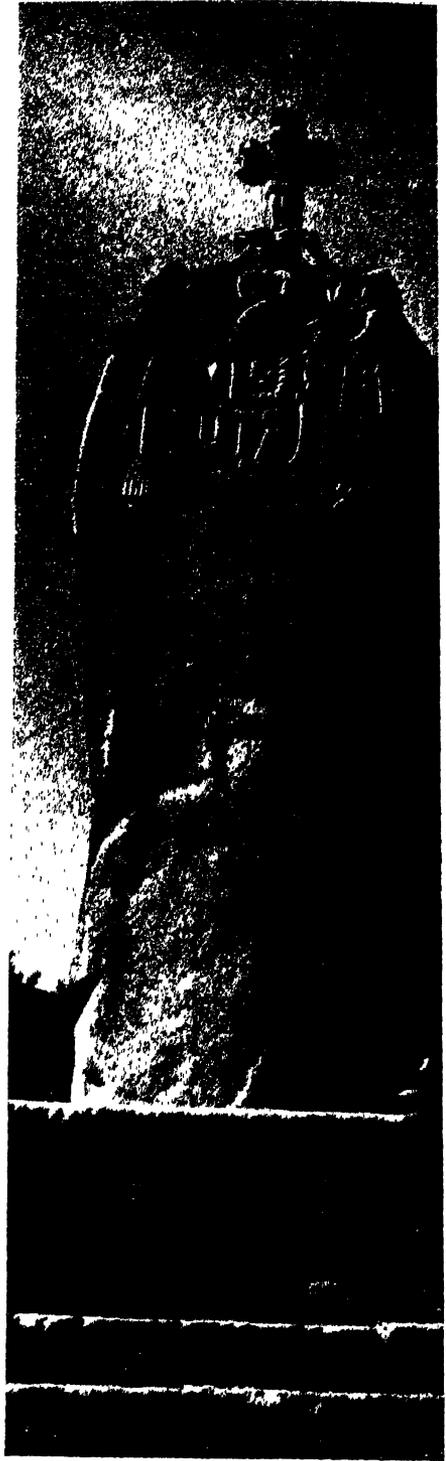
In other stories about the stones of Carnac they are regarded as endowed with and enveloped by mysterious life. The ghosts of the dead, for instance, are said to haunt the avenues at night, and it is claimed that the menhir of Krifol, who is said to have been a young man, can be heard weeping and lamenting all the way from Menec.

Othe menhirs are said to have fertility in their gift. In the nineteenth century childless couples still sought aid from the menhir of Kherderf, north-east of Menec. On certain nights favourable to such magic they would go to the miraculous stone and remove their clothes, while their parents kept guard. Then the man had to chase the woman round the menhir until he caught her and she gave herself to him; union in such circumstances was held inevitably to result in pregnancy. In this century women still went secretly to one or other of the menhirs of St. Cado near Ploemel to rub themselves against a certain part of the stone. This was regarded as a sure method of ensuring early pregnancy.

When mist hangs over the heath on moonlit nights in winter, it must be very easy



90 Menhir of Champ Dolent



91 Christianized menhir of St. Duzec



to believe that the uncanny host of menhirs is on the move. There is still a popular belief that on Christmas night St. Cornély's curse relaxes somewhat, enabling the stones to move and quench their thirst in the neighbouring streams. But woe to anyone who met them, for he would be crushed to death by the perambulating colossi.

Thus in Brittany, as in Corsica, the menhirs are still associated in the popular mind with former living beings whose strength survives in them.

About three hundred and fifty yards from the myth-surrounded alignments of Menec stand the strange shapes of the Kermario menhirs. Some of these are more than twenty feet tall, and moss and lichen have left strange marks on them so that they look much more like natural rocks than man-made monuments.

A stone circle seems to have been attached to these alignments too, but all that survives is a big passage grave on the southern side.

The Kermario menhirs are arranged in ten rows, mounting a gentle slope. The gorse which blooms at their feet lights up the whole sombre, rainy countryside. The silent stone procession advances past a ruined mill, down into a valley and then up the other side to the plateau of Manio. More than a thousand stones make up the 1,200 yard-long avenues, and those at the end of them are only twenty inches high; they seem to be gradually sinking into the earth.

About four hundred yards to the north-east there lies the Kerlescan site, where five hundred and fifty-five pillars still stand. Here the stone army is drawn up in thirteen rows, each nine hundred yards long, forming a column about one hundred and forty yards in width. The village of Kerlescan lies in the middle of them. Beyond the village there is a two-hundred-yard-long break in the column. Of the stone circle belonging to it thirty-nine blocks remain. On the north side of the circle there is a long mound in an enclosure of slabs; it contains a gallery grave, and a tall menhir stands guard over it.

The three alignments of Menec, Kermario and Kerlescan run roughly from north-east to south-west. This is not by any means a standard arrangement, however. The mile-and-a-half long stone avenues of Kerzerho, near Erdeven, somewhat farther from Carnac, are aligned from south-east to west, and the numerous smaller alignments scattered throughout Brittany run in the most varied directions. Each of the three rows of one hundred and forty menhirs which survive at Lagatjar at Camaret in Finistère has a different direction.

These facts make all the theories put forward since the nineteenth century about the astronomical significance of the alignments look very shaky. Fascinating as is the idea that they were a kind of huge calendar, or series of lines marking the rise or descent of the sun to the summer or winter solstice or the course of certain stars, there seems to be no foundation for it.

But the alignments and stone enclosures can be regarded as places of assembly and worship used by large numbers of people who moved along the avenues in procession, attended sacrificial ceremonies in the sacred enclosures, and perhaps engaged in sacred

dances or games. These rites may have been associated with the cult of the dead or perhaps of the sun.

Hardly any finds have been made inside the stone circles, as no burials were made there, but in the immediate neighbourhood big monuments to the dead are usually to be found. Whether the Mont St. Michel of Carnac was associated with the Menec alignments it is impossible to say. Three big chambers and nineteen stone cists came to light in the great Bronze Age long barrow; all were built of dry masonry and covered with corbelled slabs. Numerous ceremonial jadeite axes and magnificent disk rings, necklaces, and callais pendants attest the power and wealth of the princes who were buried here, perhaps accompanied by their wives and retinue. The discovery of the bones of oxen in two stone cists was of interest, as showing that the sacrifice of oxen formed part of the funeral rites. This suggests the possibility that the ancient Mediterranean bull cult was adopted here and the many yoke-shaped engravings in the tombs may point in the same direction.

The methods used by the makers of the alignments remains mysterious. Prehistorians are of the opinion that these alignments were not put up gradually over a long period, but that the enterprise was conceived, planned, and executed as a whole.

But where was the centre at which this great enterprise was planned and from which the orders came? No sign has yet come to light at Carnac of any important settlement which could be remotely compared with the great cities of the Egyptian or other early cultures, whose rulers could set whole armies of slaves to work on their sacred edifices.

In comparison with the Egyptian monuments those of Brittany look crude and primitive, but they are among the biggest and most awe-inspiring places of worship in prehistoric Europe. Herodotus tells us that it took 100,000 men two years to build the pyramid of Cheops. The Breton alignments are not comparable with the pyramids, but large numbers of men must nevertheless have been required to prepare, transport, and put in position those thousands of stone blocks. The fact that the population of Brittany at that time was probably only about 100,000 makes the problem still more baffling.

The alignments would be easier to explain if each pillar represented an individual monument. If each were erected by a single family as a memorial to the dead man or as a dwelling-place for his spirit, the astonishing extent of the stone avenues would be the result of a long-continued process.

But, in spite of the destruction wrought by time, the obvious uniformity and regularity of the avenues and their sacred enclosures speaks against any such theory. The age of single pillars cannot, of course, be established with any certainty. Offerings from the most varied periods have been found at their feet, and they were still venerated in historical times. The long duration of the Bronze Age in Brittany, which came to an end only with the appearance of the Celts, naturally makes it all the more difficult to date the Armorican monuments.

## *Powerful Spirits of the Dead*

After the last century of the second millennium B. C. no more megalithic tombs or menhirs were built in Brittany. But the old mounds were often re-used by new cults after the primitive religion had been driven out, and none of the later settlers in Brittany seem to have been entirely unaffected by the beliefs which left an imperishable mark on the Armorican landscape and the minds of its inhabitants.

The sensitive and imaginative Celts must have partially adopted into their druidical doctrines, and thus preserved, some of the ancient traditions and practices of what was to them a remote and legendary past. They regarded the megalithic tombs as sacred spots, the burial places of gods or heroes; and they even adopted some of them as tribal shrines. The old worship of stones did not cease. Supernatural powers were still ascribed to the menhirs, from which the *lec'hs*, the finely worked funerary pillars of the Celts, may perhaps derive.

Lucan tells us that according to the druidical doctrine death was not the end, but the middle of life. There may be a survival here of ancient ideas taken over from megalithic beliefs about death. Thus the druidical cult, which survived far into the Christian era in Brittany, may have kept very ancient traditions alive.

The people of Brittany still preserve a deep attachment to a world of ideas that has little to do with Christianity but corresponds in a number of respects to the nature of Armorican man.

The thought of death and the hereafter is continually in Breton minds, and the great hosts of the dead are felt to be ever-present among them. These people of the western extremity of Europe, living at the edge of a wild ocean that engulfs both land and men, lack the Mediterranean clarity and gaiety of southern France as a counterweight to their hereditary preoccupation with death.

In the long, misty nights of autumn and winter, filled with the roar of the sea and the howling of the wind, the Bretons hear the voices of the dead and the siren calls of human and animal-shaped demons who are the caricatures of long-vanished gods. L'Ankou, who is death or the herald of death, appears to them in many guises. They understand his messages and divine his coming in dreams and in visions.

Memory of the ancient cult of tombs on the many islands lingers on in Celtic names such as "Island of the Big Tomb", or the "Island of the Seven Sleepers". Many stone monuments are still surrounded with awe to the present day, and the destruction of a menhir is regarded as sacrilege. There are innumerable legends and stories about the dolmens, as all the megalithic tombs are called.

Most peoples among whom they occur ascribe their megalithic monuments to a mythical race of giants, but the Bretons regard them as the dwelling-places of dwarfs, called Kerions or Korrigans, the first inhabitants of Brittany, who lived in caves in the rock and in stone houses. They are said to have been very small, but endowed with

tremendous strength; they could lift huge boulders as if they were pebbles. They are believed to have been clothed in white linen, and to have been accomplished weavers as well as great sorcerers. They are thought now to have died out almost completely, but sometimes can be seen on the Sabbath and at certain phases of the moon, when they dance round dolmens or in certain fields. These places are indicated by dark patches in the grass, on which it is advisable not to tread.

These and similar stories are told in the evenings in the old thatched houses of Brittany consisting of one single big room in which the peasants are born, live and die.

There are also innumerable stories about *spontails*, ghosts of the departed that haunt certain places. All sorts of more or less dangerous mischief is attributed to them. They are said to jump on the backs of those abroad late at night, and they make the latter carry them some distance, or throw them into the water. They often appear in the guise of fire-breathing bulls and horses – this may perhaps be a memory of a prehistoric bull or horse cult – which lure people into the sea and frighten fishermen and make them go mad. There are still old men and women who claim to have encountered *spontails* and others who have foreseen death and disaster.

Thus a strange medley of memories survives in the Breton belief in ghosts. Sometimes a popular custom associated with some prehistoric monument casts a shaft of light on the darkness of the past.

Until a few years ago wives of seamen in the Carnac and Quiberon area used to go secretly by night to the “house of St. Rochus”, a corbelled tomb at St. Pierre on the Quiberon peninsula, on one of the stones of which there were seven cupmarks said to be the hoof-prints of St. Rochus’s horse. The women tapped these with a hammer to obtain favourable winds for their husbands’ ships or a change in the weather.

When the tomb was restored, the stone with the cupmarks in it was, put out of the womens’ reach, so they chose another stone in the wall and knocked the ritual cups in it. Though their appeals were directed to St. Rochus, the practice no doubt concealed very ancient beliefs about winds being the spirits of the dead who could control the weather. Perhaps the wives of megalithic seafarers said the same prayers and went through the same motions at ancestral tombs.

A number of free standing megalithic tombs popularly known as “hot stones” are pointers to the practice of a fertility cult at ancestral tombs. At certain phases of the moon girls who wanted husbands had to sit on or slide down these tombs naked. The tombs at Locmariaquer are reputed to have been particularly effective; and at the beginning of May they were adorned with kerchiefs and coloured ribbons by young women whose aspirations had been fulfilled.

Until the last century the Church fought vigorously and with varying success against pagan and often obscene practices associated with the megalithic monuments. When the Christianization of the latter by the placing of crosses or sacred images on them did not suffice, they were sometimes incorporated into Church ceremonies. Thus every spring the clergy of Carnac march in procession with the girls of the town round the

dolmen of Croez-Moken, which is now adorned with a cross but was once a "hot stone" which enjoyed especial popularity.

The desire to eliminate pagan ritual may have led to the building of the little church of the "Seven Saints" near Vieux Marché in northern Brittany. Underneath the crude granite building is a big megalithic tomb in which there stand seven very primitive wooden figures of various sizes which are said to have appeared there miraculously. This is yet another instance of the "seven sleepers" who were objects of veneration both in Brittany and Sardinia.

The superstition associated with prehistoric finds in Brittany is probably significant. It is not uncommon for a polished axe blade or object of adornment to be turned up by the plough, and the peasants generally ascribe magical powers to these things. One of the most precious possessions of the little museum of Carnac, an ampoule shaped chalcedony pendant, was bequeathed to it by an old peasant woman, who during her life-time kept it as an amulet and occasionally lent it to adolescent girls. When hung round the neck it was believed to have a favourable influence on their development.

The most coveted objects however were *men-gurun*, or "thunder stones", as polished axes were called. These prehistoric implements were believed to fall from heaven with the lightning, and were held to possess extraordinary magic powers; in particular they were thought to provide protection against lightning. At one time practically every old peasant's house in Brittany had one of these objects preserved under the hearth, the clay floor, or in the fireplace. They were also thought to be effective against diseases of animals and other hazards of a peasant economy.

This remarkable identification of axes as "thunder stones" also occurs in the north European megalithic cultures, and is perhaps one of the strongest pieces of evidence in favour of the view that veneration was paid to a weather god who hurled thunderbolts and whose emblem was the axe. If this view is correct, the representations of axes in Breton stone tombs and the exceptionally fine big axe-blades of jadeite, serpentine and nephrite found in them would be the sacred emblems of a deity ultimately identical with the bull god.

The round querns with which corn was once ground, heavy stone hammers, and small stone blocks bearing slight traces of working used to be associated with a grim ritual which again forms a remarkable link between Brittany and Sardinia. Every village had such a collection of *mels beniguets* or "consecrated hammers", generally kept in an old chapel. The *mel beniguet* was used to accelerate the departure to the next world of old men and women who failed to die in spite of their infirmities. They were dispatched at a solemn ceremony at which the whole village took part. We have a full description of such an event dating from 1830.

The voluntary victim was one Matho-Talen, aged 85, living in a hamlet in the area of Pontivy, who had been paralysed for ten years. He instructed his daughter to ask the sacristan of the chapel of St. Maltro for the *mel beniguet* which was kept in a secret niche there. It was accordingly brought to his house, where the neighbours were already

assembled, and was handed to the oldest of the women present. She then approached the old man, made the sign of the cross three times, held the *mel beniguet* over his head, and said in a loud voice: "Matho-Talen, for the last time commend your spirit to God, for this will release you from the terror of death and the burden of life." Then she touched the old man's finger with a palm branch that had been dipped in holy water. The old man roused himself a little and made the sign of the cross, while all those present fell tremblingly to their knees and started reciting the prayer for the dying. The woman then gently lowered the stone on to his brow, raised her right hand, and cried in a piercing voice: "In the name of the Holy Trinity, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, rest in peace, Matho-Talen, thanks to the consecrated hammer which releases the aged. You have lived well!" No sooner had she said these words than the old man with his last strength whispered: "Thank you, Oh Lord", and died.

Sinister ceremonies of this kind, in which an ancient ritual broke sharply through the bounds imposed by fifteen centuries of Christianity, seem to have been not uncommon in Brittany. There are a number of *mels beniguets* in the museum at Carnac with which a large number of skulls were presumably cracked. In cases of protracted death people still say: "He could do with the consecrated hammer." The killing of the aged in this fashion strikes us as barbarous, and yet a last survival of these prehistoric practices even survives in the bosom of the Church. It will be recalled that it is the custom after a Pope's death to tap his head three times with a silver hammer.

It may also be significant that in Brittany, as in Sardinia, the agents of death were women. Perhaps they unwittingly performed a function that was once the prerogative of the priestesses of the goddess of death.

In Brittany, as in Sardinia and Corsica, professional wailing women, and men, survived until the middle of last century; they used to follow funeral processions, weeping and wailing and wearing articles of clothing belonging to the person who had died.

It is only in our own day that the power of their old traditions is beginning to fade among the taciturn and phlegmatic Bretons. The sepulchral monuments of their ancestors remain as a permanent feature of their landscape. Against the dark background of the pinewoods the weather-worn, moss-covered dolmens stand out like great stone ribs among the taciturn and phlegmatic Bretons. The sepulchral monuments of their ancestors had been placed there by nature, not by the hand of man; and in some mysterious way they seem to embody the deepest essence of Brittany – the primitive, eruptive, granite foundation concealed by a thin layer of vegetation and civilization.

## *Book VIII*      A Thousand Years Before Ulysses

### *The Colonization of Ireland*

The Finistère peninsula, on whose coastal hills the seafarers of primitive antiquity were laid to rest in their corbelled tombs, may have been one of the jumping-off grounds from which the megalithic culture reached the British Isles.

The feats of navigation by which links were established running all the way from the eastern Mediterranean to the Shetlands strike us today as incredible. Apart from the real hazards to the navigators of the third and second millennium B. C., these advances into the unknown must have seemed full of mythical terrors. The *Odyssey* gives us a picture of what such expeditions were like, poetically transmuted into adventures involving fabulous gods and demons. In documents as late as the Carthaginian Hanno's description of his journey to the west in the fifth century B. C., unusual experiences were still distorted into the sinister and the supernatural. Such feats could have been undertaken only by the most determined seekers after adventure. The preference that these pioneers showed for islands is evidence of their deep attachment to the sea. The Scillies, Orkneys and Shetlands are relatively richer in megalithic tombs than the rest of Britain, though they had neither mineral wealth nor particularly favourable living conditions to offer. There is even a big stone tomb on the isle of St. Kilda, fifty miles out in the Atlantic, now abandoned as too remote for habitation.

Megalithic culture in Britain was largely confined to areas near the coast, but in Ireland it penetrated deep inland. About a thousand megalithic tombs and a number of stone circles and alignments still remain in the Emerald Isle. The variety of these monuments may indicate several waves of settlement, partly from France, partly from still farther afield.

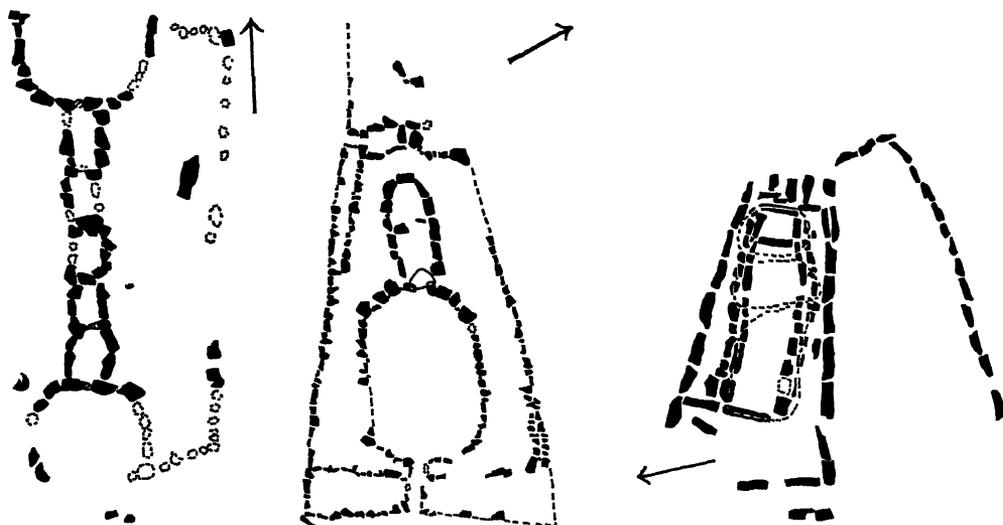
A group of mysterious origin who landed on the west coast of Ireland and spread north and east left behind more than two hundred remarkable monuments, the so-called

“horned cairns”, whose construction bears an astonishing resemblance to that of the Giant’s Tombs in Sardinia. They consist of galleries generally divided up into at least two chambers by segmented slabs. The roof slabs sometimes rest on the beginnings of a corbelled vault. A forecourt is generally formed by a semi-circular row of blocks built into the front of the rectangular or trapezoid mound. Variations of this “horned cairn” pattern show that they were a combination of burial place and shrine. One of these monuments at Cohaw, Co. Cavan (Fig. 62), has a forecourt of this kind at both ends, and these were certainly used for ritual purposes; and another at Creevykeel has an elliptical courtyard, completely surrounded by the mound. Access is by a narrow pathway (Fig. 63).

The grave-goods, including round-bodied carinated vessels of typical western neolithic type, and leaf-shaped flint arrowheads, indicate a relative early date for these tombs, probably about 2,000 B. C. This excludes the derivation from the Giants’ Tombs which was formerly attributed to them, as these were erected in about 1,200 B. C. at the earliest.

Less mysterious than the origin of the builders of the horned cairns is that of another group which seems to have come from the area of the Paris basin. At any rate the megalithic building style that is introduced points in that direction. Bell-beaker people perhaps took part in this colonization movement and the discovery and exploitation of the copper deposits in south-western Ireland may have been their work.

These colonists of the early metal age are recalled in the south, west, and north of Ireland by from three to four hundred horse-shoe and wedge-shaped long barrows

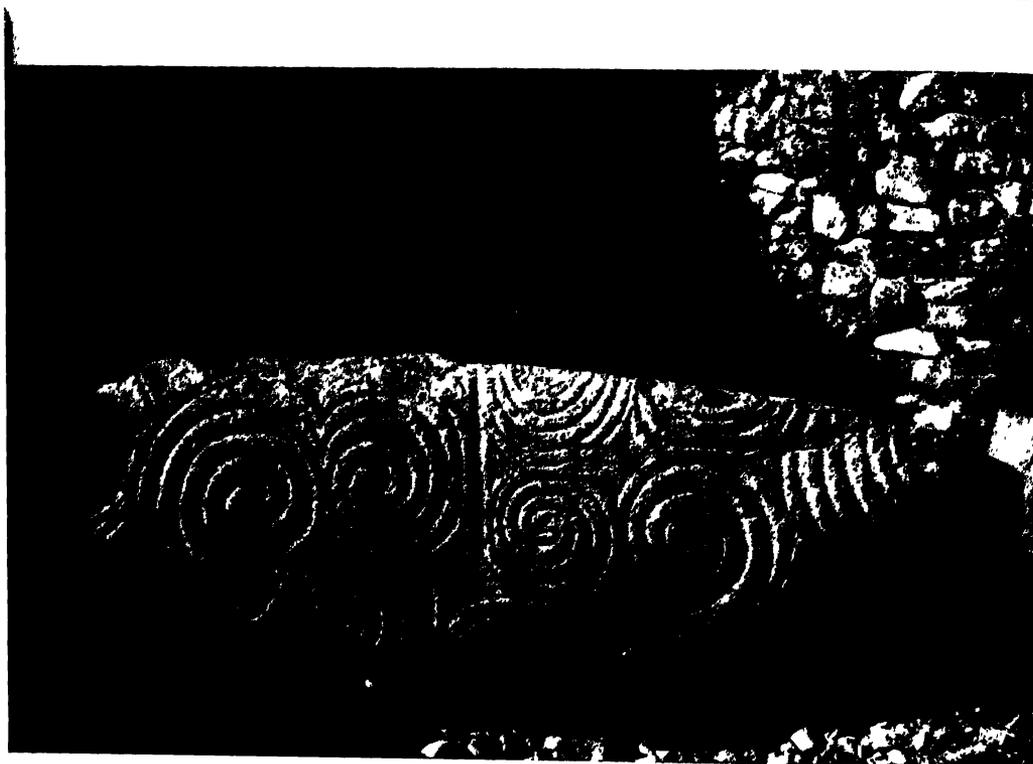


62 *Horned cairn of Cohaw*

63 *Tomb at Creevykeel*

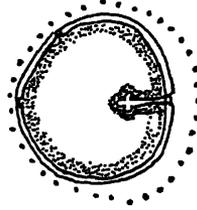
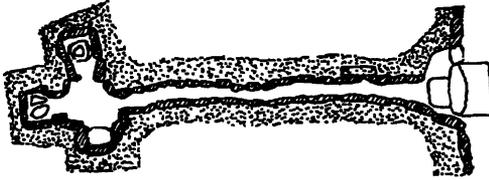
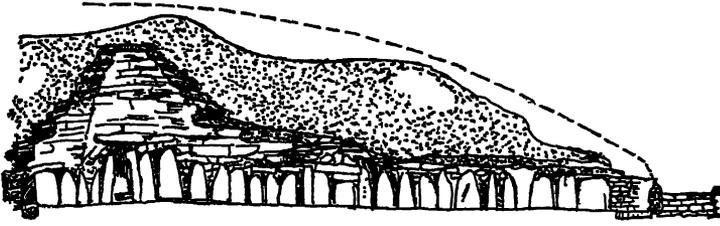
64 *Tomb of Labbacallee, showing the entrance porch*





94 The megalithic tomb of New Grange

95 Block with spiral decorations outside the entrance to New Grange



65 *Elevation and plans of corbelled tomb of New Grange*

with gallery graves roofed with slabs and walled by a double row of standing stones. In the south the entrances, which always face westwards, are set back somewhat, resulting in a kind of porch (Fig. 64). Bell-beakers among the grave goods make it possible to date these gallery tombs; the oldest date from about 1,800 B. C.

The zenith of megalithic culture in Ireland was reached with the arrival of settlers who built passage graves. It is not impossible that these seafarers came from the Portuguese coast. They may have been attracted by the almost Mediterranean-type hilly country round Dublin, in which a surprisingly southern type of vegetation flourishes under an overcast northern sky, and perhaps also by the rich pasture land, which is still a paradise for cattle, sheep and horses.

The builders of the passage graves settled principally on the uplands best suited for stock-breeding. Their cemeteries, consisting of monumental tombs with long corridors and chambers, roofed sometimes with slabs, sometimes with beehive domes, occur on the tops of the three-thousand-foot mountains of Wicklow. But the centre of their culture, the style of building and ritual which left the deepest marks in Ireland, lay in the broad, fertile valley of the Boyne, north of Dublin. There barbarous stone palaces survive under huge mounds, and their tortuous primitive symbols still look down from the walls. There too is the corbelled tomb of New Grange, one of the biggest ever erected (Plate 94).

## *The Tomb of New Grange*

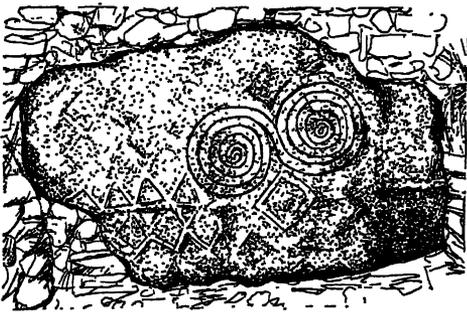
A mound forty-five feet in height and two hundred and sixty-five feet in diameter covers the tomb of New Grange. The mound has now subsided a little, under its covering of grass and shrubs, and has melted into the undulating landscape. Trees have established themselves at its edges and on its slopes, and the roots have forced their way down into the cairn. At midday black-faced sheep gather in the shade (Fig. 65).

Stone slabs form an enclosure round the bottom of the mound. On some of them are the magic symbols of the goddess of death (Fig. 66). A few yards farther out there was a ring of thirty-five menhirs, of which twelve remain today. Inside this sacred area the burial cairn of a forgotten ruler, built of strikingly light-coloured stone, once stood like a landmark. A menhir is said to have then crowned its summit. A built-in slab over the entrance serves as a lintel. Its edge is decorated with a border of horizontal lozenges, resulting in a wainscoting effect. Obliquely in front of the entrance is a finely-carved block from which the goddess's spiral eyes gaze admonishingly. As in the temples of Malta, her magic eyes forbid unauthorized entry (Plate 95).

A dark and in places very narrow passage leads sixty feet into the cairn. The walls consist of slabs which have no structural function and the roof is supported by dry walls behind them. These are built of stones of varying size, and also serve the purpose of holding back the rubble of the cairn. The purpose of the trimmed slabs seems to have been decorative. Here and there zigzag lines occur and on one block there is a pattern resembling a tall fern (Fig. 67). Curved lines are also discernible in the flickering lamplight. The narrow passage suddenly widens into a chamber, over which a dome of big corbelled blocks rises steeply to a height of eighteen feet (Plate 96). The face of the goddess disguised as a triple spiral looks down from the wall (Fig. 68). From this central chamber there are entrances into three side-chambers arranged in a clover-leaf pattern. The roof slab of the northern chamber is covered with a thick, engraved pattern of eyebrows, eyes, and zigzag lines. Perhaps this was the site of the most important burial, which had to be closely guarded.

When the cairn was opened in 1699 there was a big flat stone basin in the central chamber with eight small conical baetyls standing around it. All that remains today are some similar vessels in the side-chambers (Plate 97). They may have been containers for the ashes of the dead. At any rate, remains of cremations were found in some of them.

The great corbelled dome is like an uncouth and barbarous Mycenaean *tholos*. The sacred symbols engraved on the walls and roof are reminiscent of Gavr'inis, as well as of the decoration of the southern Spanish phalange idols and ritual sandals. The fern-like carving could derive from stylised antlers of the kind that appear on Los Millares pottery, but the spirals which hardly occur in Brittany or Iberia, point to Malta and Mycenae. The clover-leaf pattern, which is even more pronounced in a passage grave at the burial place at Carrowkeel farther west, recalls the early Maltese



66 *Spirals on an outer wall stone at New Grange*



67 *Wall stone at New Grange with fern pattern*

shrines (Fig. 69). Another tomb at Carrowkeel, which has an oval room preceding the clover-leaf chamber, bears an astonishing resemblance to the later Maltese shrines (Fig. 70).

The Irish passage graves which are unquestionably attributable to the Boyne culture, are all dominated by the emblems of the goddess of death. These are even more abstract than those in Brittany and are almost completely confined to facial motifs. The eyes appear in endless variations; they are represented by little dimples surrounded by a circle, by shapes resembling suns or flowers, and by concentric circles or spirals. The owl face rarely occurs, though there are examples in the side-chamber at New Grange and on two wall stones of a megalithic tomb at Knockmany near Ballygawley (Fig. 71), where there are also two carvings of the sacred snake. But no axe, or any other weapon, occurs. Ship motifs, horns and crooks are also absent, and the goddess's form occurs only once on an upright block found in the central chamber of a tomb at Fourknocks opened in 1954; there she appears as a kind of statue menhir with a grotesque, birdlike face (Plate 98).

In strange contrast to the impressive architecture and rich decoration of the big

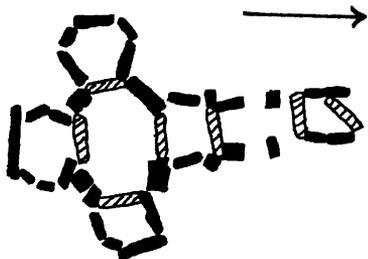
passage graves of the Boyne culture is the poverty of the grave goods. The same applies to other megalithic tombs in Ireland. Finds in the passage graves include crude pottery, bone needles with mushroom-like heads, and stone beads and wedge-or axe-shaped pendants. In the later passage graves crude but imaginatively decorated food vessels were found – these not very deep pots have an indented profile (Plates 99, 100). There were also vessels with incised or cut-out patterns inspired by imported bell-beakers (Plate 101).

Metal however has not yet been found in a megalithic tomb, though bronze tools were probably sometimes used for carving reliefs and by the middle of the second millenium, when the New Grange tomb was built, Irish goldsmiths were able to beat gold into thin sheets decorated with incised and engraved patterns. At this time crescent-shaped lunulae (Plate 102), which were worn round the neck like golden collars, came into fashion, as well as big, shield-like pendants (Plate 103). These ornaments are decorated with the same sacred symbols that appear on the walls of the tombs. Numerous gold “sun disks” (Plate 104) also occur; these were perhaps rather later than the lunulae, and were the outcome of new religious beliefs which in the Bronze Age fused with the older megalithic ideas.

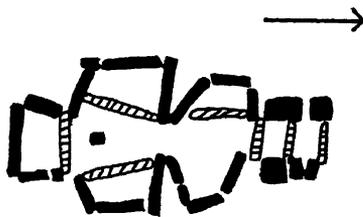
But none of these things occur in the monumental tombs. No gold treasures like those of Mycenae and Troy were buried with the princely race laid to rest in the tumulus of New Grange. Not even a small copper dagger accompanied them into the next world, though native copper was already being exploited and there was an extensive trade in gold.



68 *Triple spiral from  
New Grange*



69 *Clover-leaf passage grave at Carrowkeel*



70 *Passage grave at Carrowkeel showing the double oval form*

There may perhaps have been ritual reasons for the puzzlingly primitive nature of these megalithic grave goods. It is in the religious sphere that conservatism is always strongest. Flint sacrificial knives, for instance, continue to be used exclusively in cultures long familiar with the working of metals. Among the Romans the plough with which the sacred boundary furrow was ploughed when a new town was founded had to be of pure copper, though iron had been in use for centuries. Thus, when the adherents of the ancient Irish cult of the dead put these simple, primitive objects in the graves of the departed they may have been acting in accordance with their traditions.

The same conservatism may account for the continuation in the megalithic tombs of the indigenous practice of cremation, though in other countries inhumation was generally the rule. The remains found in Irish megalithic tombs have nearly always been cremated, and sometimes skulls are found without bodies.

These people must nevertheless have believed in a physical survival of the dead, for there could be no other explanation for these tremendous tombs which were built to last for eternity. We know from ancient Indian, as well as from late Teutonic sources, that cremation did not exclude the idea of resuscitation. Sometimes the object was to avoid the slow process of decomposition and thus enable the dead man to be reintegrated more quickly into a new, immortal body. That some such idea lay behind cremation seems to be more probable than that the objective was to free the soul from the shackles of the body; the latter was an idea that probably did not come to northern Europe until very much later, with Christianity.

Valuable clues to the ritual practised at passage graves were obtained from excavations on the other side of the Irish Sea, in Anglesey, which was settled by Boyne culture people.

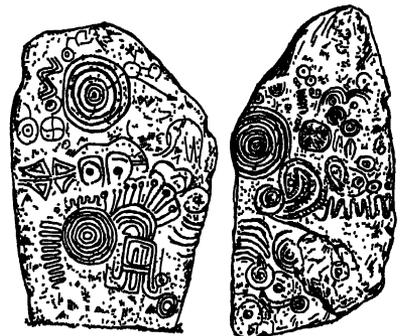
That it was thickly populated in primitive times is shown by the presence of more than fifty megalithic tombs, of which the remains of about twenty survive. The passage grave of Bryn Celli Ddu was excavated in 1928. It had been covered with a circular mound more than fifty yards in diameter, which also contained various other interesting installations. The ring of stones that surrounded it stood in a wide ditch, behind which twelve holes were arranged in a horse-shoe pattern. Long upright stones had

been placed in some of these; two of them contained the remains of two cremated bodies and in two others human bones were also found. Immediately behind the polygonal stone chamber of the tomb a shaft four-and-a-half feet deep had been dug. This contained relics of burning, covered with uncarbonized hazelwood. After the deposition the shaft had been filled in and covered with a slab. Next to it lay a longish block decorated with zigzags, curves, and spirals. The chamber is relatively small and contained a trimmed pillar. From it an eighteen-foot-long corridor leads through a trilith gateway to a curved forecourt. Here again traces of a complicated sacrificial ritual came to light. Opposite the entrance lay the crushed skeleton of an ox; between it and the entrance there had been a partition of posts and stones. Hearths were found on either side of the entrance. In front of one of them was a pit with cremated remains. Rubble had later been heaped over all the remains in the forecourt.

The Bryn Celli Ddu excavations showed that the stone tomb originally lay within a kind of sacred area in which various ritual practices were carried out before the whole place was covered by the mound. This discovery is of great importance to the interpretation of Stonehenge.

The burials at Bryn Celli Ddu and the monumental Irish corbelled tombs show the extent of the synthesis of native and foreign elements that took place in the Boyne culture, the beginnings of which may date from the early Chalcolithic Age. Indigenous death practices were continued and adapted to new beliefs and the worship of a new god, and a massive, fundamentally eastern, type of sepulchral edifice was erected over bodies cremated in the northern fashion. Where the initiators of this process came from can be only conjectured. There are too many inter-connections and possibilities for any certainty in the matter to be possible. But corbelled tombs such as those of the Portuguese necropolis of Alcalà, or even the Cueva del Romeral, could indirectly have been prototypes of the Irish tombs.

That megalithic culture in Ireland was characterized by the cult of the dead and veneration of the female god is evident enough, but whether or not the bull god with



71 *Wall stone with carvings from the passage grave at Knockmany*

his lightning axe ever came to Ireland is completely uncertain. The engravings on walls and stones include none of his symbols. Only the axe-shaped pendants, perhaps the unusual shape of the horned cairns, and the oxen sacrificed in the forecourt at Bryn Celli Ddu might be pointers to him and, perhaps more than those, all the mythical bull figures and rituals connected with bulls that occur in Irish legends.

### *Legends and Traditions*

The myth and legend of Northern Ireland is haunted by bulls gigantic in size and daemonic in nature. The principal theme is cattle-raiding, bulls often appear as independent personalities, and there are many points of resemblance with Homeric legend. In the epic of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* there is a terrific battle between Donn of Cuailnge (“the brown bull of Cuailnge”) and the Finnbennach (“white horn”). There is said to have been room for thirty men on the brown bull’s back, and both he and his enemy are supposed to have once been swineherds of the king of the elves of Munster and Connaught, possessing magical powers.

The battle is on a mythological scale. The two contestants race through the whole of Ireland in a single night, and fill it with the din of their titanic struggle. Next morning Donn of Cuailnge appears in triumph carrying the dead body of his enemy on his horns, and he scatters bits of it throughout the land. When the women and children of Cuailnge start weeping for Finnbennach, the bull bursts into a terrible rage and massacres them. Then he leans back with his shoulders against a mound and dies of a broken heart.

In addition to these tremendous bull figures, a goddess of war appears in this epic, and she shows distinct traces of the underworld. Her name is Morrigan, or the Marsh Queen, and she appears in many guises – as a corpse-eating crow, as a cow who intervenes in the battle between the two bulls, and as a lame, one-eyed old woman. She also sits on a pillar in the form of a bird and warns Donn of Cuailnge when danger threatens. This last may perhaps be a survival of a very ancient belief that the souls of the dead settle on menhirs in the form of birds.

Memories of the megalithic goddess of death may also lie behind the legends about the witch An Caillech of Beare, an area in the west of County Cork. The mountain-crest which is the site of the passage-grave of Lough Crew, with its many stones covered with eye signs, is named after her. One of the cairns there is known as the Witch’s Grave, and its decorated threshold stone is called the Witch’s Seat.

An Caillech often appears in the legends with her apron full of stones, which she scatters around her. This is said to have been the origin of many Irish cairns.

All these traditions may reflect the former paramourcy in Ireland of the ancient Mediterranean deity. The remarkable feature is that in the course of ages she was transformed into a witch while a god-like aura continued to surround the bull, both in folk-tales and epics. Heroes are flattered by being called "fine, angry bulls" and the king is called the "bull of Ulster". A "speckled bull" who is both miracle-worker and dispenser of food often appears in the legends.

The Ulster cycle also includes a clear reference to a bull cult in the form of a remarkable method of divination which plays an important part in the choice of a king. A chosen druid eats the flesh and broth made from a white bull, and is lulled to sleep by incantations sung by four other druids. In his dreams he sees the future king. This rite shows the sacred nature of kingship directly associated with a bull cult.

Prehistoric veneration of stones and prehistoric beliefs connected with death have left an even deeper imprint on the people of Ireland than have the prehistoric gods. The spirits of the dead are believed to turn into elves, whose power over disease and death shows them to be descendants of ancestral spirits; and menhirs are often regarded as bewitched human beings, or giants, or as being endowed with a mysterious life of their own.

Irish stone sanctuaries do not compare in size with those of Brittany, but the religious function of the circles, avenues, and individual menhirs was probably the same. At Punchestown, Co. Kildare, there is a tall, carefully hewn and polished menhir at the foot of which a stone cist tomb was found. Single and double stone circles occur with especial frequency in the area of the Boyne culture.

The Celts, who settled in Ireland in several waves, seem partially to have taken over and continued the indigenous religious practices, including the veneration of stones, just as they did in Brittany. That at any rate is the conclusion to be drawn from the numerous stones rounded at the top and covered with spiral ornamentation typical of the La Tène culture.

In Ireland, which never came under Roman influence, druidic doctrine, influenced by the primitive indigenous religion, survived uncontaminated until the island's conversion to Christianity, and many of its beliefs may have survived deep into the Middle Ages.

When St. Patrick landed in Ireland to convert it to Christianity, the cult of stones still seems to have been flourishing there. By his orders the pagan monuments were either overthrown or consecrated. The legendary life of the saint contains a description of the destruction of the national sanctuary of Cromm Cruaich, the "chief idol of Erin", which is said to have been adorned with gold and silver and surrounded by twelve other idols. When St. Patrick had destroyed the chief idol, the rest sank up to their necks into earth. This legend evidently refers to a stone circle with a big menhir in the middle.

A dark memory of the former oracular functions of menhirs may survive in the peculiar Irish popular belief in "speaking stones". One of them was said to have been



96 Looking up into the dome  
at New Grange



97 Stone sacrificial bowl in a side-  
chamber at New Grange



98 Statue menhir from megalithic grave  
at Fourknocks



99, 100 Irish food vessels from Irish megalithic tombs

101 Irish variety of bell beaker

able to say in which direction a cattle thief had fled; another is said to have pronounced judgment when a man was accused of crime. Food offerings used to be made to menhirs, and it was believed that hunger resulted from touching them.

Curative powers were ascribed in particular to menhirs with holes through them and the porthole slabs of megalithic tombs. Creeping through the holes was said to be a cure for rheumatism and measles. Similar beliefs are often associated with French megaliths.

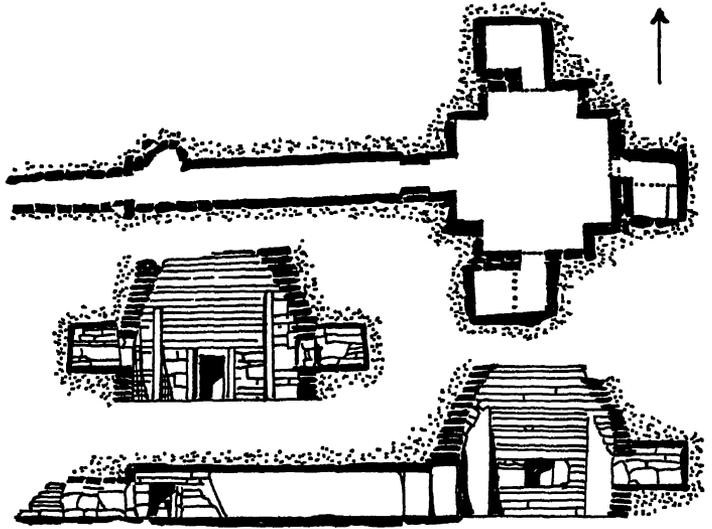
Customs associated with the holed stone of Doagh point to the ancient fertility cult associated with ancestral tombs. Marriage contracts were arranged at the foot of the stone, and couples used to hold hands through the hole to signify their betrothal. Sometimes the girl would have the engagement ring put on her finger through the hole. Pregnant women used to throw articles of clothing through the hole to ensure an easy delivery.

The survival of such magical practices and beliefs, in Ireland as in Brittany, brings the present remarkably close to the ancient past. Only now is the great under-current beginning to subside, and with it the last relics of prehistoric building traditions. Until two hundred years ago, archaic structures of dry stone walling with corbelled vaults still had a sacred significance in Ireland, and, as in Sardinia, the beehive domes introduced to the Emerald Isle more than three thousand years earlier with the first passage graves were often erected over sacred springs. The little church of St. Gallarus in southern Ireland and the round, windowless stone monk's cells of the monastery built on the island of Skellig Michel show how naturally and spontaneously mediaeval Irish ecclesiastical architecture adhered to ancient building tradition.

The peasants of the Dingle peninsula still build *clochans*; round or square corbelled farm-buildings with unusually thick walls consisting of courses of dry stones – a survival which conjures up the vision of a prehistoric world when, long before the Christian message of salvation reached its shores, the harbingers of another religion of eastern Mediterranean origin landed in Ireland.

### *Island at the End of the World*

More than eight hundred years ago in the course of a raiding expedition to the south, the crew of a Viking ship landed on Mainland, the biggest of the Orkney Islands. In the middle of the flat landscape they noticed a circular mound as tall as a house on an oval space enclosed by a wide trench. No doubt they promptly suspected that it contained some secret. They do not seem to have wasted much time looking for an entrance to the huge mound, which measured forty yards across, but dug straight down until they



72 *Plan and elevation of the corbelled tomb at Maes Howe*

came to a stone vault made of big slabs. Breaking into the solidly constructed three-thousand-year-old-tomb was probably no light task. What its desecrators found there we do not know. They left three carvings on the walls of the octagonal stone chamber buried inside the mound – a dragon, a walrus, and a knotted snake – and to these they added in runic characters their names, the date 1150, and an account of their adventure in which they mention the finding of a treasure.

Thus the tomb of Maes Howe came down to our own time empty and half destroyed. Nevertheless it is the finest prehistoric sepulchral building in the British Isles. Thousands of miles from the Aegean, under a cloudy sky and a feeble sun, it evokes a vision of Mediterranean brilliance and indestructible strength (Fig. 72).

The elegance of the corbelled dome which once rose at least nineteen feet in well-calculated proportions over the fifteen-foot square central chamber is still evident. The regularly hewn slabs do not rise in steps, for the edges are bevelled, as in the Cueva del Romeral, resulting in a smooth curve. Big pillars at the corners of the chamber support the dome. The dead may have been laid to rest in the three side-chambers, whose entrances are raised above the floor of the central chamber. The doorways were closed by big blocks. A megalithic corridor leads thirty-six feet through the cairn into the open. A number of the slabs used at Maes Howe are eighteen feet long.

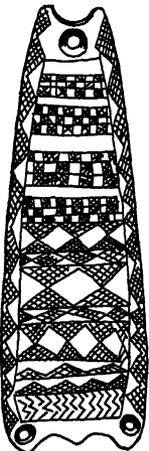
All the traditions of a distant homeland must have been alive in the prince who caused this burial monument to be built. We do not know where he and his retinue and architect and craftsmen came from, or what caused them to settle in Orkney, at the edge of the inhabited world in the midst of a perpetually stormy sea agitated by fierce tides and currents which still make navigation in these waters dangerous. Skeletons found in unplundered passage graves were of people of the graceful, long-skulled,

Mediterranean race, and there was also a brachycephalic type who were perhaps representatives of the bell-beaker culture.

Connections with the Boyne culture are certainly evident, but these pioneers in the Orkneys do not seem to have come from Ireland. Their refined building technique, the exclusive practice of inhumation rather than cremation in the three tombs of the Maes Howe group, the custom of laying the dead on benches along the tomb walls, and finally a rock-cut tomb on the island of Hoy which, with its passage and oval chamber, exactly resembles the Iberian, point rather to a direct connection with the Iberian Peninsula, hazardous though this idea might seem. The goddess from Almeria appears in a tomb on the Holm of Papa Westray in the form of eyebrow and eye symbols of the Portuguese kind. That her sway extended to the even more distant Shetlands is shown by the finding of a bone amulet on which the holy triangle motif and zigzag lines of the Iberian slate idols is scratched (Fig. 73).

To reach the Orkneys these intrepid seafarers may equally well have sailed up the Channel and along the east coast of England and Scotland, or by way of the Irish Sea, the Hebrides and Duncansby Head, which is separated from Mainland only by the ten-mile-wide Pentland Firth. On the southern side of the Moray Firth in Scotland there are about thirty passage graves, the Clava group. The best of these, with their beehive domes and carefully fitting base slabs, could equally well be in the necropolis of Los Millares.

However the Orkneys came to be colonised, at the time when Maes Howe was built Mainland seems to have been the centre of a thickly-settled empire, as is shown by the number of megalithic tombs. Was the archipelago inhabited by self-sufficient communities of herdsmen? Did a pirate state arise there which controlled the Pentland Firth? Was Mainland a centre of trade in these northern waters? The size and the advanced building technique of the tombs point to prosperity and power, but the grave goods were sparse.



73 Bone idol from the Shetlands

Very simple pottery of the Western European type, undecorated and with simple rims and bowls with an ornamental collar similar to those in the Hebrides were found and, at two sites, beakers, axes and stone battle-axes. Copper and bronze did not occur, but on one occasion a small quantity of gold was found with a cremation burial in a stone cist near Maes Howe. Perhaps only the ransacked grave contained objects of value.

Though the grave goods were modest, huge sacrificial feasts were held in honour of the dead, at which venison was the principal dish. The remains of thirty-six stags came to light in a single grave. The Orkneys were not treeless as they are today, and offered good hunting.

The megalithic culture there must have been of long duration. In the course of time the sepulchral architecture bore strange fruits, and the clear outline of Maes Howe degenerated into fantastic shapes with many side-chambers. In addition to circular mounds, elongated mounds appeared; these were sometimes straight and sometimes curved. The latter, with their forecourts recall the gallery graves on the mainland of Scotland.

The origin, history and end of the island empire remain obscure, but a stroke of fortune has enabled us to catch a glimpse of the everyday life of the period of the great megalithic tombs.

A hundred and ten years ago, a tremendous winter gale blew away the grass covering of Skara Brae, a high sand dune on the south of Skail Bay, and disclosed beneath it a huge prehistoric midden from which the ruins of stone walls protruded. Repeated excavations and restorations, which were completed in 1930, resulted in the emergence of a neolithic village which looks as if it had been just abandoned by its inhabitants.

Today these primitive dwelling-places lie open to the sky between thick walls built of flat stones, but once the village consisted of seven big buildings interconnected by covered passages, like a great molehill. The stone buildings were surrounded – and sheltered from gales and cold – by a hill formed of ashes, sand and the kitchen refuse of many generation, which in the course of ages fused into a kind of clay-like mass. From a distance only the corbelled roofs, open in the middle to let the smoke escape, can have been visible. The people may also have used tent-like shelters made of animal skins.

The houses are practically square, and the walls, which are a yard thick, are made of dry stones, worn flat by the sea. These are as carefully fitted as those of the island's corbelled tombs. The entrances consist of low, narrow tunnels and, once inside them, time seems to have lost its power. The rooms are in the state they were in more than three thousand years ago. A natural catastrophe, perhaps a gale which set the dunes in motion and threatened to submerge the subterranean village, must have caused the inhabitants to take to sudden flight. They left all their belongings behind, and never returned; the gale may have cost them their lives. It was left to the archaeologists to remove the sand from the rooms in which this little community spent its life. Obviously as there was little timber on the island, all the furniture had to be made of stone, and

it has therefore survived the ages practically undamaged; it looks in fact as if it had only recently been used (Plate 105). The stone seats round the hearths, which always occupy the middle of the single room, are slightly worn by use. Along the walls, which never exceed eighteen feet in length and have no sharp corners, are beds consisting of slabs of various sizes let into the floor; these were no doubt filled with straw. Above them are recesses for the sleepers to keep their belongings in. In every house there is a big stone "cupboard" on three legs with a horizontal slab in the middle dividing it into two, and small stone boxes made watertight by clay are let into the floor; these were apparently containers for water. Vaulted cells in the walls, with primitive drainage systems, appear to have served sanitary purposes.

Half-finished tools and utensils on which the inhabitants were working when they abandoned the village lay on the floor, and sharp needles of walrus bone, flint tools, and crude pottery were found. Small stone vessels still contained relics of red, blue and yellow paint, which may have been used for painting the body. The people of Skara Brae lived by keeping sheep and cattle, and they also collected shells.

No sign of any imported objects came to light at Skara Brae to indicate any connection with the outside world. The little community lived in its subterranean village in a state of complete self-sufficiency. Only the careful construction of the houses and their clean and massive shapes point to an ancient building tradition which perhaps travelled from the sun-baked, busy world of the Mediterranean to the loneliness and emptiness of the far north. But Skara Brae, with its stone rooms in which the hearths seem only just to have cooled, does not help to solve the riddle of the people who transplanted their foreign gods and corbelled tombs to Orkney.

*The Melting Pot of Southern Britain*

When the builders of megalithic tombs landed in south-west Britain at the beginning of the second millennium B. C. they found already established there neolithic cultures formed by the presence of western and northern European elements and an indigenous mesolithic population.

The easily accessible, park-like, Jurassic and chalk downland of Wessex and Sussex, which never exceeds nine hundred feet in height, had already attracted pastoral peoples who came from the Atlantic and Channel coasts of France, as well as from areas farther north. These apparently led a semi-nomadic life, but religious and social bonds existed between them, and at certain times of the year, probably in autumn, they assembled with their herds and flocks in camps, generally on hills, which they surrounded with earthworks and trenches. One such camp, on Windmill Hill, was excavated more than a hundred years ago, and the oldest neolithic civilization in Britain was named after it. Finds at Windmill Hill showed that these assemblies in causewayed camps were probably the occasion for slaughtering cattle for the winter, marking and castrating them, preparing their skins, and so forth. Markets and religious ceremonies may also have been held, and it is possible that human sacrifice and ritual cannibalism took place. Human bones, usually those of infants, have been found to have been deliberately broken, perhaps to allow the marrow to be sucked out, and the abundance of skulls may point to head-hunting. Similar customs appear to have existed in the early days of the Swiss Cortaillod culture, the round-bodied pottery of which, made in imitation of leather bags, seems to be related to the oldest pottery of the Windmill Hill culture.

A vigorous flint industry characterized the neolithic period in southern Britain. Many flint mines with shafts up to thirty feet deep have been found next to working sites. At one such site at Grimes Graves a shrine came to light which yielded interesting clues to the religious beliefs of the time.

A small limestone figure of a stout pregnant woman stood on a stone pedestal to the right of the entrance to one gallery, and to the left of it there was a realistically carved phallus. There were also a number of stone spheres – also perhaps sexual symbols – similar to those continually found at prehistoric sites all the way from the Near East to northern Europe. In front of the female idol was a triangular altar made of flint blocks, and on it was a stone bowl. In front of this were seven picks made of antlers.

The female figure bears a strong resemblance to late palaeolithic sculptures, and has nothing to do with the megalithic owl-faced goddess of death. But the site at Grimes Graves demonstrated the existence of a fertility cult, perhaps designed to assure the productivity of the flint mine.

Light has also been shed on the burial practices of the peoples of the Windmill Hill culture. Near the flint mines and causewayed camps long barrows were often constructed, generally from ninety to three hundred feet long. An exception is the long barrow of Maiden Castle in which, apart from burials, the remains of a chopped-up body were found, looking as if it had been dismembered and cooked for a sacrificial meal.

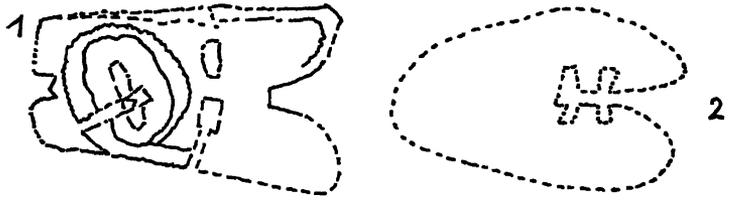
The dead seem to have been buried in the long barrows only after the decomposition of the flesh. The bodies must previously have been kept elsewhere until they had become skeletons. Traces of burning on the bones may indicate that the process was sometimes accelerated by cremation, and the mounds may cover the sites where the bodies were previously kept in a temporary wooden or turf structure. As in the case of the cairns in Brittany, menhirs seem to have played some part in the cult of the dead. They are often found built into or near the long barrows.

Grave goods are rare, but complicated rituals, as well as sacrificial feasts, took place in honour of the dead. Remarkable approaches, rather like racing tracks, often lead to the long barrows; the most celebrated of these is at Stonehenge. It takes the form of a two-mile-long sunken track, a hundred yards wide and with a low earthwork and trenches on either side. One end of the track is rounded and somewhat elevated as if to make it possible to survey its whole length.

In addition to the impressive collective tombs, in which the number of burials ranged from two to forty, there were a few individual graves in trenches.

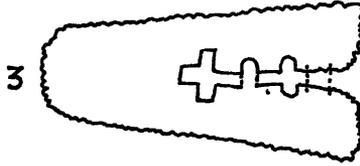
With the arrival of the megalithic culture, the clear, massive outlines of the great stone tombs stand out against the barbarous background of the many levels of the Windmill Hill culture. They were the emblems of a new age, whose religious and cultural traditions, in conjunction with indigenous traditions and those of the bell-beaker people, were to lead to monuments of timeless value.

The relationship between the oldest British megalithic tombs, known as the Severn-Cotswold group from the area in which they occur, and similar tombs on the west coast of France between Morbihan and the Vendée, point to settlers who originated from the latter. They seem to have landed on the shores of the Bristol Channel and from there made their way to the chalk areas of Gloucestershire and northern Wiltshire.



74 *Plans of three Severn-Cotswold tombs*

- (I) *Ty Isaf, Breckenockshire*
- (II) *Parc Le Breos Cwm, Glamorgan*
- (III) *Stoney Littleton, Somerset*



From the beginning they built big chalk rubble mounds which were at first pear-shaped but might later become trapezoid or rectangular (Fig. 74). A forecourt was always cut into the wider end. This led to a big chamber, or to a gallery with several pairs of side-chambers which were always built of huge blocks. In later monuments the burial chamber was usually placed to one side of the mound, or at its narrower end, but the ritual forecourt was still preserved, together with a false entrance to the tomb.

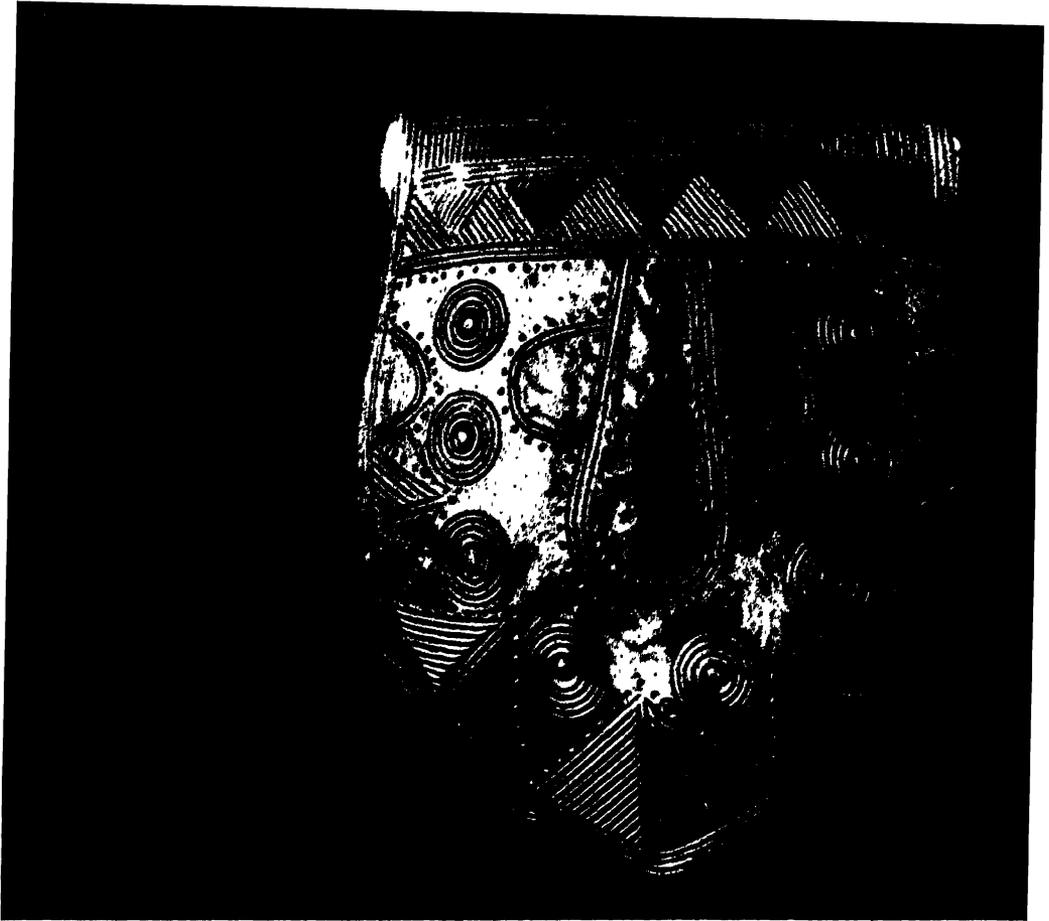
Monuments of the Clyde-Carlingford type in northern Britain and Ireland and south-west Scotland were perhaps offshoots of the Severn-Cotswold type.

With the idea of the indestructible tombs of great stone blocks the settlers introduced all the technical knowledge required for megalithic building, and thus created the conditions which made possible the building of Avebury and Stonehenge.

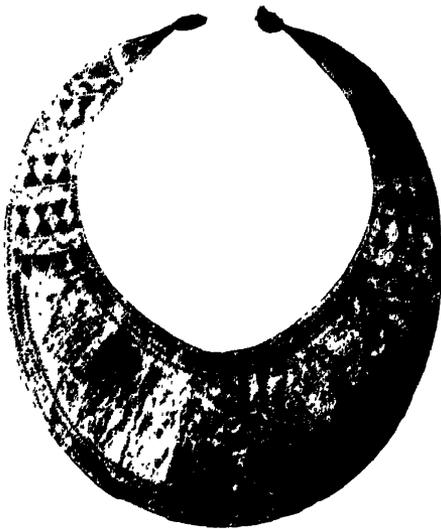
### *Avebury*

In the gently undulating country round the village of Avebury, monuments of primitive antiquity stand like relics of a vanished continent. Silbury Hill, the biggest tumulus ever built in prehistoric Europe, rises up like a great smooth, upturned bowl in a grassy hollow by the roadside. This mysterious monument is one hundred and thirty feet high and five hundred and fifty feet in diameter. About twelve and a half million cubic feet of rubble and earth had to be shifted in order to build it.

Shafts and tunnels have been driven in vain into its flanks in the hope of discovering its secrets. We know neither when nor for whom this great monument was constructed.



103 Shield-shaped gold pendant from the Bog of Allen



102 Gold lunula from Killarney



104 Gold "sun disk" from Ballina



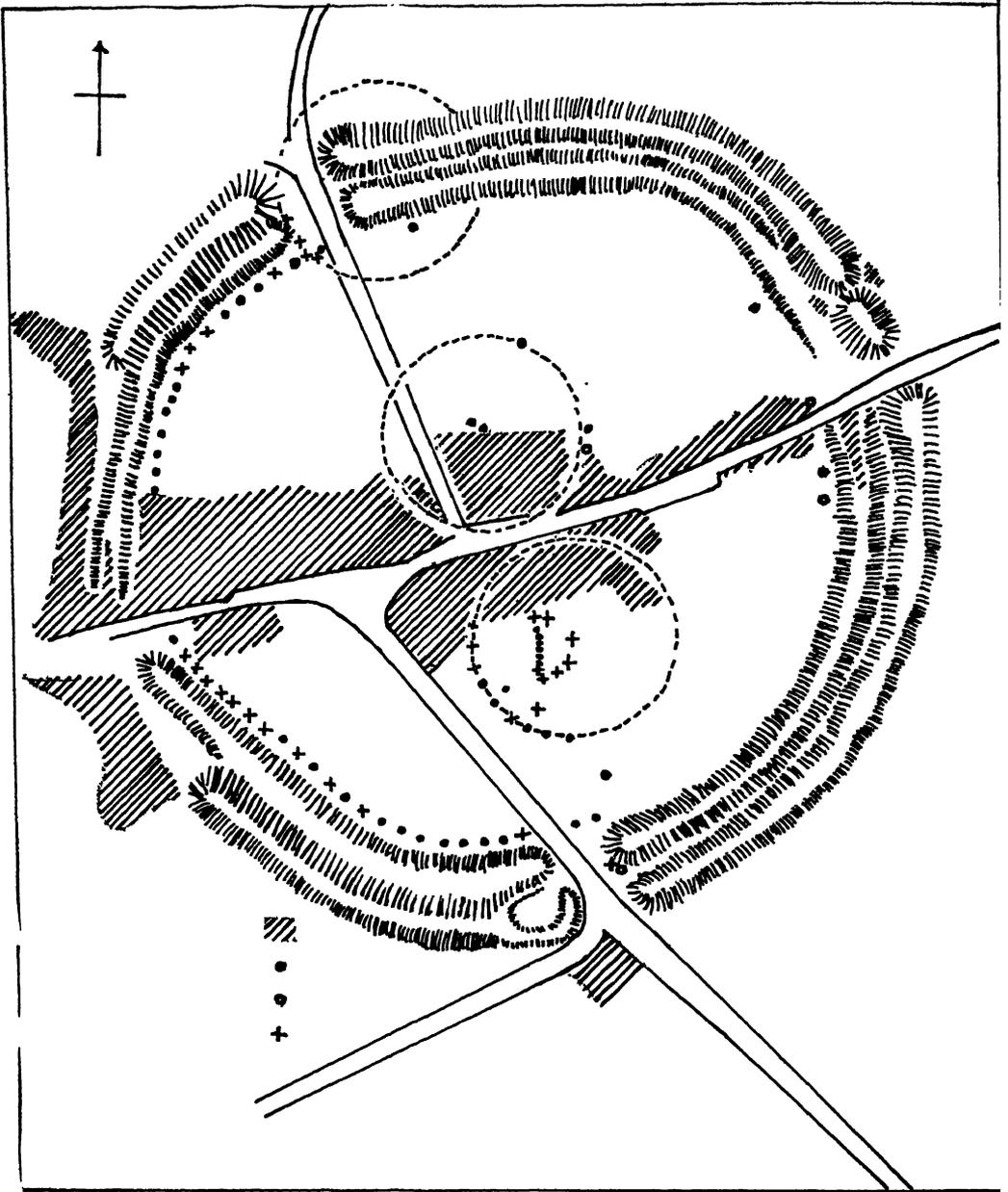
The only clue is that the Roman road makes a *détour* round it; it is therefore certainly pre-Roman. More than a century ago some primitive digging tools made of antlers came to light on its flat top, and these point to an early date for its construction. Its proximity to the Avebury sanctuary may also be significant. It still seems perfectly possible that Silbury Hill may contain the undisturbed grave of the most powerful king who ever ruled in prehistoric Britain. A whole people must have laboured long to build his monument.

Within sight of Silbury Hill, the three hundred and forty foot long barrow of West Kennet looks like a narrow embankment on a ridge. Excavations a hundred years ago were not completed, and when work was resumed in 1955 and 1956 four intact chambers came to light which had previously been overlooked. The restored tomb is one of the most impressive megalithic monuments in western Europe (Plate 106). Its size and its many chambers make it seem more like a shrine. The entrance, in the middle of a *façade* of tall blocks, is behind several isolated slabs with which the semi-circular forecourt was blocked after the last burial. A forty foot long, eight foot high gallery leads to a chamber preceded by four side-chambers, two on each side, which are reminiscent of the transverse nave of a church. They were filled to the roof with the bones of a total of thirty skeletons, over which stones and rubble were heaped. Strangely enough, there were fewer skulls than jaw bones; the former may have been preserved as objects of a special cult.

Pottery belonging to the early Windmill Hill culture was found at the lowest level, and indicates an early date for this tomb. In the upper levels, many fragments were found of vessels characteristic of the secondary neolithic culture developed by the indigenous mesolithic population in contact with the more advanced intrusive cultures, as well as remains of bell beakers, charcoal, animal bones, and bone needles. Immediately under the corbelled vault of the north-western chamber lay an intact bell beaker. The many layers of refuse piled on the bones may have been relics of ritual sacrificial feasts. At all events the tombs remained open for a long time and were in continual use. Only when the chambers were filled to the roof was the entrance closed by several twenty-ton megaliths.

A counterpart to the West Kennet long barrow is provided by the neighbouring, still bigger, East Kennet barrow, which rises like an island of trees out of the broad flat meadows. A megalithic tomb undoubtedly lies concealed in its still little-known interior. Here, as at Locmariaquer, the leading clans seem to have chosen a sacred area for their last resting place. This quiet countryside with its modest villages may in primitive times have been much more thickly populated than it is now and as the biggest religious centre in the country, its shrines and burial monuments may have drawn pilgrims from the whole of Britain.

The greater part of the village of Avebury, with its small cottages and its weather-beaten church, stands on what was once sacred soil. An earthwork nearly four thousand years old, which once rose to a height of at least fifty feet from a deep and wide ditch

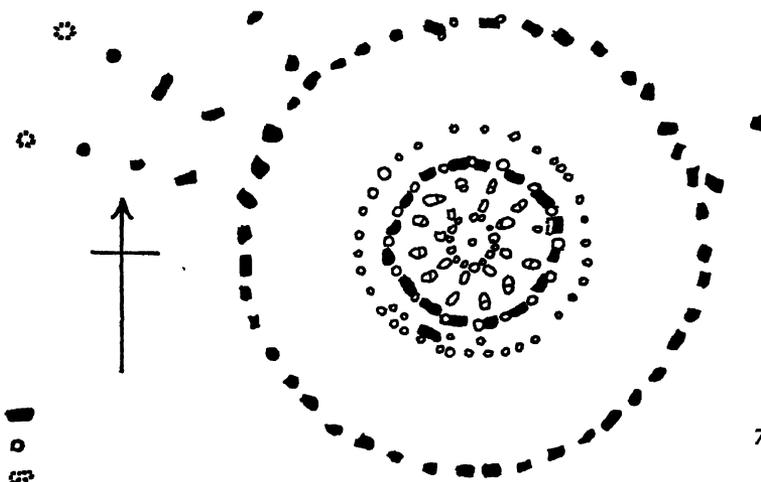


75 *Plan of Avebury*

which served as protection for the sacred area, now shelters the people of Avebury, who in the course of centuries have no doubt often built the venerable stones of the inner circle into their houses. A ring of one hundred stately menhirs once surrounded an area of special sacredness in the middle of the site, but half of these are now missing.

Two small stone circles at the centre may have been the "holy of holies" (Fig. 75). Dr. William Stukeley, who wrote an illustrated description of Avebury in 1723 when it was in a much more complete state, says that three tall menhirs stood in close proximity in one circle, while in the other there was a monolith twenty-one feet tall. Excavations have shown that the Avebury site is younger than that of West Kennet; it dates from the period of the Secondary Neolithic culture in Britain, when further invasions had again changed and enriched the picture of the oldest cultures and their religious beliefs and practices. The first of the new arrivals seem to have been bell-beaker people who came from the Low Countries by way of the Channel coasts, and later there may have been some influence from the war-like battle-axe tribes of north-east Germany. The new ruling group that evidently established itself in this period preserved elements both of megalithic and Windmill Hill burial customs. They practised only individual burial, but on the other hand they seem to have taken over indigenous cults and developed them further. Perhaps the imposing site at Avebury, in which the tradition of shrines surrounded by earthworks had merged with the custom of erecting stone circles and avenues, represents a peculiarly British synthesis of numerous religious traditions.

Here, as in Brittany, the bell-beaker people seem to have erected menhirs. A fine stone avenue still leads from the stone circles of Avebury towards the top of a hill on which the so-called "sanctuary" lies (Fig. 76). Today this is visible only as a reconstruction with little cement pillars. It once consisted of six concentric circles of post-



76 *Plan of the Sanctuary, Avebury*

holes with another post-hole in the middle, and it may originally have been roofed with timber; later it was partially rebuilt in stone.

The different sanctuaries in the Avebury district enables us to follow the process of development that led to the incomparable structure of Stonehenge.

## *Stonehenge*

At first sight the lonely grey outline of Stonehenge looks small and lost in the undulating plain. When one approaches, however, it stands out gigantically and crowns the whole landscape, which has no fixed point or outline other than these huge standing stones. The sacred stone circle, symbol of eternity without beginning or end, has long since been broken, but even in its mutilated state the shrine still suggests mysterious power and a cosmic sense of life (Plate 107).

The building of Stonehenge, which from the beginning was based on a system of concentric circles, spread over about five hundred years. It represents a fusion of western European religious beliefs from the Neolithic, Megalithic and Early Bronze Age, fixed in a pure, final stone town.

The Sarsen giants of the sacred area are enclosed by a circular ditch and earthwork. This is now slightly flattened, but the original perfect circular shape can only have been made by some device such as rotating a length of cord from a central point. Inside the earthwork we can see today an outer ring which once consisted of thirty uprights, each about fifteen feet high and six feet broad, connected by a continuous architrave of slabs about three feet thick. Seventeen of the pillars remain standing, and ten still have lintels; these were held to the top of the uprights and to each other by mortice and tenon joints. The slabs are very carefully worked, and are slightly curved to follow the circular pattern of the structure. The supporting pillars are less symmetrically dressed and are better smoothed on the inside than on the outside. An astonishing feature is that some of them broaden slightly towards the base. This corresponds to the *entasis* of the classical Greek column, the purpose of which was to correct the optical illusion which makes completely straight pillars seem concave.

Inside the ring was another circle, which has now almost completely disappeared, of about sixty smaller unhewn stones of spotted dolerite, "bluestones", which must have come from the Prescelly Mountains in north Pembrokeshire, about two hundred miles away. These appear to have belonged to an older version of Stonehenge and to have been re-used after the erection of the sandstone outer ring. Inside these two rings are five huge sarsen triliths arranged in the horseshoe pattern, probably connected with the cult of the dead, which is found in the arrangement of stones in some cairns of

megalithic tombs. Towards the centre the pillars increase in height from about eighteen to more than twenty-one feet. Their bases are sometimes as much as eight feet deep in the ground. The trilithons of the horseshoe, the open end of which faces north-east (one of them was re-erected in the 1958 restoration) are even more carefully worked than the blocks of the outer ring. The pillars are again slightly convex, and the transverse blocks are not only slightly curved, but are broader at the top than at the bottom. This again is evidence of advanced building technique, for it prevents them from seeming smaller at the top.

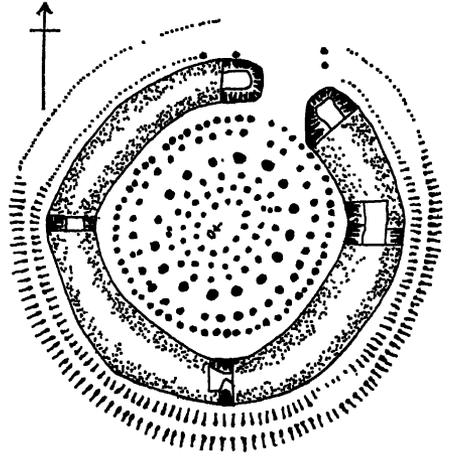
Inside the trilithons is a horseshoe of bluestones. This heart of the sanctuary consisted of nineteen well worked obelisk-shaped dolerite blocks more than six feet high, of which six survive. Some have traces of tenons at the top, and it therefore seems that they must have supported slabs. The biggest of the dolerite blocks at Stonehenge is the so-called Altar Stone, which is more than fifteen feet long and lies on the ground about fourteen feet from the central trilithon of the big horseshoe.

A broad processional avenue, marked off by low earthworks and ditches, leads from the main entrance at the north-east down to a dry valley and then to the River Avon. At the side of the avenue lies a dressed slab about twenty-one feet long which perhaps was one of a pair of uprights. This is the route by which the bluestones were presumably brought to Stonehenge after their initial transportation by sea. Standing at the beginning of this avenue is a crude sandstone block, the Heel Stone about sixteen feet high and eight feet thick, and surrounded by a small ditch. It has been established that this block belongs to a phase earlier than that of the construction of the avenue.

Since the last century, Stonehenge has been thoroughly excavated, and a great deal is now known about the long and complicated history of its construction. The first sanctuary seems to have been built in about 1,900 B. C. With its circular earthwork and ditch, it exactly resembles other neolithic henge monuments. The Heel Stone was also erected at that time, and the entrance to the enclosure was marked by two uprights. Five yards inside the bank a circle of fifty-six holes, the so called Aubrey Holes, was dug. These ritual holes were between two and five feet wide and up to four feet deep, and in most of them remains of cremated bodies, late neolithic potsherds, flint implements and long bone pins were deposited, both in the primary and subsequent fillings. These holes were not graves so much as places of sacrifice, perhaps intended to establish contact with the powers of the underworld. The remains they contained may have been human sacrifices; at all events an infant skeleton with a broken skull was found at Woodhenge (Fig. 77), near Avebury, and human sacrifice still survived in the religion of the Druids.

Numerous burials dating from the oldest period of Stonehenge came to light in pits outside the sanctuary. Hence in the first centuries of its existence it was certainly dedicated to the cult of the dead.

The erection of a double circle of eighty-two bluestones which, strangely enough, was never completed and has now totally disappeared, appears to have been the work of



77 *Plan of Woodhenge*

the bell-beaker people, whose invasion of southern England probably did not take place before 1,750 B. C. Their presence at Stonehenge is shown by fragments of their typical pottery.

With the sarsens that took the place of the bluestone structure in about the middle of the second millennium, the sanctuary was completely renewed on a monumental scale (Fig. 78). This seems to have been a splendid demonstration of the power, wealth, and cultural progress of the masters of early Bronze Age Wessex. The period was characterized by extensive trade connections, and Ireland was one of the principal European centres for the winning and working of metals. Markets for the exchange of goods with the continent may have developed at Avebury and Stonehenge by way of which Irish bronze axes, halberds, and gold ornaments found their way deep into Central Europe, while the products of the related Early Bronze Age cultures of central and northern Europe came to Britain by the same routes. An aristocratic warrior class, which must have developed out of the bell-beaker and battle-axe peoples, then prevailed in southern Britain. These people of the so-called Wessex culture can be regarded as the builders of the third phase of Stonehenge. Their circular burial mounds, in which they were buried in individual graves with their warlike equipment of bronze weapons and their gold and amber ornaments, line the southern horizon of the plain that lies around the sanctuary.

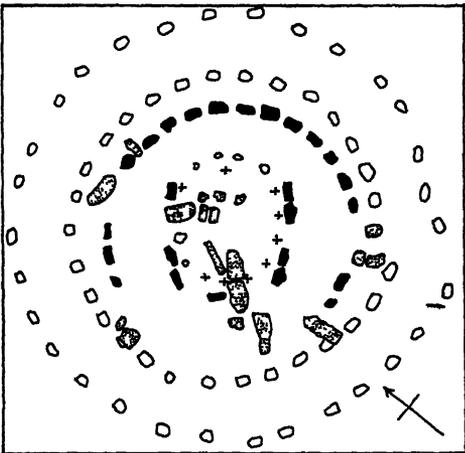
The uniformity of the sarsen construction points less to a collective enterprise than to a single powerful will behind the work. It must have required an immense amount of man-power and highly efficient organization. Transporting blocks weighing up to fifty tons to the site from the Marlborough Hills twenty miles away was in itself a tremendous task, which must have required either enormous numbers of men or an extremely long time. The lowest estimate is that it must have taken 1,500 men five and a half years. The preparation of the uprights, made of stone considerably harder than

granite, must also have been very difficult. The high level of the stone-working and the architectural refinement evident in many details perhaps provide the biggest puzzle of Stonehenge, for which there is no prototype in western and northern Europe. Only the slab-covered stone ring built round the shaft tombs of the masters of Mycenae is reminiscent of the Wessex sanctuary, both in appearance and in the technique of pegging the lintels to the uprights. The idea of a master-builder who may have designed and carried out the work at a king's orders does not seem so completely out of the question when one considers the long sea journeys made by the men of the megalithic culture, the wide extent of Mycenaean trade, demonstrated, among other things, by some grave goods of the Wessex culture, and the traces of Mycenaean and Aegean influences in the Early Bronze Age cultures of the Mediterranean and its hinterland.

In 1953 when carvings of a long dagger with a crescent-shaped handle and four axe blades with cutting edge upwards were discovered by chance on one of the sarsen pillars of Stonehenge, it was suggested that this might be the mark of an Aegean architect. This dagger, which could equally well have been a symbol of power or a religious emblem, appears repeatedly, as we have already mentioned, in areas to which Mycenaean influence extended. Not only does it appear a number of times at Stonehenge, but it also occurs on a stone of an Early Bronze Age tomb in Dorset.

The axes, which were also found carved on other sarsens at Stonehenge, are similar to Irish bronze axes with the splayed cutting edges which were in use between 1,600 and 1,400 B. C.; hence they confirm the attribution of the third version of Stonehenge to about the middle of the second millennium. The axe cult to which they point is another connection between Stonehenge and the Mycenaean world.

The religious significance of Stonehenge has been the subject of lively discussion for centuries. The fact that the entrance points approximately to the spot where sun rises on midsummer day has been used as an argument for a sun cult, and a quotation from



78 *Plan of the final stage of Stonehenge*

Diodorus Siculus seems to support this. He wrote: "Hekataios and others report that above the land of the Celts in the ocean an island lies under the Great Bear which is not smaller than Sicily and is inhabited by the Hyperboreans . . . . Its inhabitants venerate Apollo more than any other god. An enclosed sacred place is dedicated to him and a magnificent round temple with many rich votive offerings . . ."

This description fits Stonehenge surprisingly well. As the Greeks identified Apollo with the sun, it would seem to suggest sun worship at Stonehenge. What is uncertain, however, is whether Hekataios was really referring to British Isles.

At all events, there is a good deal of evidence pointing to a connection between the cult of the dead in the earliest period of Stonehenge and the sun worship of the bell-beaker and battle-axe people indicated by finds of gold disks with crosses in the middle. The sun is a very ancient symbol of death and resurrection, and its worship is therefore easily reconcilable with the cult of the dead. Nevertheless the sanctuary, round which the ancient neolithic long barrows and the Early Bronze Age circular mounds are grouped, may well have been primarily dedicated to the dead. Ritual dances may have been held in their honour inside the sacred stone circles, and perhaps sacrifices were made; the trampled earth round some tumuli of the Wessex culture points to such practices. The popular belief that the pillars of Stonehenge are dancers turned to stone for desecrating the Sabbath may contain the memory of an ancient ritual.

The final version of Stonehenge seems to have survived at least into Roman times; it may have remained the venerated national shrine of Britain even after the Celtic invasion. Its destruction was not the work of time, but was obviously the result of violence. Whether it was destroyed by the Romans, who conducted a bitter struggle against the religion of the Druids, or whether the damage was done in the Middle Ages to prevent the continuation of secret pagan practices at the spot, remains as mysterious as the identity of its builders. Stonehenge stands alone on the threshold of two ages and embodies both the essence of the old cults of the dead and the dawn of a new religious world.





*The Megalith Builders in Northern Europe*

The earliest Danish dolmens, which have often lost their mounds, stand out like squat, thickset mushrooms surrounded by massive rings of boulders in the flat landscape of Zealand. They used often to be regarded as the prototypes of the European megalithic tombs, and this theory still has its supporters. There is certainly something fascinating about the idea of daring Scandinavian seafarers who set out to raid the distant Mediterranean over three thousand years before the Vikings and from practically the same area. There are in fact weighty arguments pointing to an independent development of the oldest Danish dolmens.

In the Neolithic and Early Bronze ages, a concentration of unusually creative forces seems to have been at work in Jutland, Schleswig-Holstein, and the neighbouring islands, with results discernible over a wide area in northern Europe. The development of the stone chamber tomb went its own way from the beginning, and in pottery and stonework, and later the working of metals, objects of remarkable beauty and great technical perfection were produced.

Denmark has been credited with the invention of pottery as well as with the European primacy in megalithic tomb construction. The shell middens of the mesolithic coast cultures already contain pointed cooking pots produced by the coil method, and flat clay bowls which were presumably used as lamps. But doubt is now cast on the great age of these vessels, as the hunting and fishing tribes of the coast of Jutland have been shown to have continued their primitive, nomadic existence long after other population groups had gone over to a sedentary, peasant way of life.

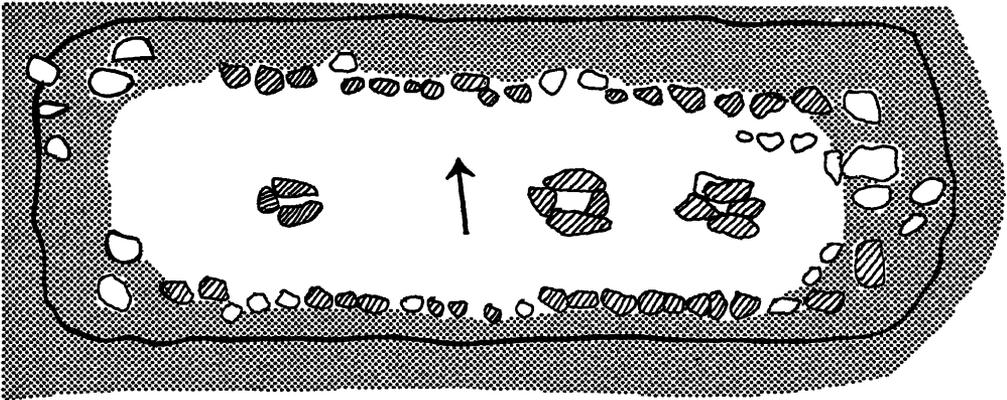
The pottery, as well as agriculture and stockbreeding in Schleswig-Holstein and Jutland, is now attributed to settlers who arrived in the first half of the third millennium or earlier and brought with them their own ware characterized by big beakers

with funnel necks. The mesolithic tribes in this area had unceremoniously buried their dead in their huge kitchen middens, but the new arrivals laid them in trenches in the earth, over which small mounds were often heaped, with implements, pottery, and ornaments. Similar burial practices, and pottery related to the funnel-necked beakers, have often been found in east Germany and Poland as far as the upper reaches of the Vistula.

In a later phase of this funnel-necked beaker culture whose original home may have been far away in the south-east, stone cists appear in Zealand side by side with the simple earth burials. The cists are about six feet long, eighteen inches broad, and eighteen inches deep and were made of four slabs with a block on top. These may have been for the members of a higher class which had developed in the new neolithic village communities. Round or elongated mounds – the latter are known as *Hünebedden* – covered these well built graves, which were surrounded by an enclosure of big stones. The floors were covered with a layer of burnt flints, the walls were carefully filled in with small slabs, and the blocks were tilted slightly inwards to take the weight of the roof stone (Plate 108). The grave goods of these *dysser* as they are called in Denmark show no radical change in the native culture, but rather a development of it. In addition to finely worked pottery, including funnel-necked beakers with cord impressed and deep punctured decoration (Plates 114, 115, 116), collared and globular flasks and lugged amphoræ were found. The flint and stone industry included finely executed thin and later thick-butted flint axes, as well as greenstone axes and clubs. There were also handsome amber ornaments, necklaces of several strands of cylindrical beads separated by perforated spacer-beads, and heavy pendants with delicate incised patterns (Plate 119).

The early stone tombs seem more like sarcophagi than dwellings for the dead, and contain only one or a few bodies. But they soon grew to imposing chambers with an entrance at one end half-blocked by a stone slab and finally they developed into imposing polygonal chambers (Plate 108). At the same time the tumuli increased in height to from twelve to fifteen feet with a diameter of from sixty to seventy-five feet. The *hünebedden* later reached astonishing proportions, with lengths approaching four hundred feet. They generally did not exceed from eighteen to thirty feet in width, but at Munwolstrup there is a long barrow fifty-four feet wide lying inside a nine-foot-high enclosure of heavy blocks. These barrows often contain several chambers, though sometimes there is only one (Fig. 79).

Though the first stone tombs were almost certainly not the work of newcomers, their development may have been stimulated by beliefs and ideas that came from abroad. It is not for nothing that the oldest forms are found near the sea, on the Baltic coasts of Jutland and the Danish islands. Sea traffic in this area must already have been active. Dug-out canoes, rafts, and perhaps boats made of skin had been in use since mesolithic times; the tradition which was later to produce the Vikings had already begun. Baltic amber – which, because of its beauty and perhaps also because of the magic powers



79 *Plan of a Danish dyse*

attributed to it, was more highly valued than gold – and the precious flint must have attracted traders at an early date. Beads and an ornamented copper disk from an inhumation of the dolmen period show that foreign goods, and with them foreign ideas, had already found their way to Denmark.

A find in a settlement of the oldest stone tomb culture at Troldebjerg on Langeland points to the appearance of new religious beliefs. Here, as in other settlements of the period, a one hundred and eighty foot long community house came to light in addition to a number of round buildings. The community house was built on posts, with wicker walls plastered with clay, and divided up into a large number of small rooms, each with its own entrance. In a pit inside this building a clay vessel and an axe were discovered; the latter was placed with its cutting edge upwards, as in the mound of Le Manio in Brittany. Among sacrificial offerings, which were mostly found in swamps, magnificently worked axes often came to light, as well as pottery, amber beads, and animal bones. Veneration of the axe symbol had therefore already reached northern Europe at that time.

From Denmark the primitive little dolmens and later the big stone tombs spread by way of Schleswig-Holstein along the Baltic coast to Szczecin (the former Stettin) and Rügen. South of the Elbe they spread as far as Hanover. Megalithic tombs also spread into south Sweden, where huge and impressive constructions were built notably in the area of the mouth of the Götaelf.

About 2,000 B. C. or earlier with the first passage graves in North Jutland and the islands along its flanks, a new phase of the northern megalithic period began in which it attained remarkable heights, no doubt fertilised by cultural and religious influences from abroad. Beside the polygonal dolmens, which were never real collective tombs in spite of their size, oval chambers with passages appeared in which up to a hundred bodies were buried. This can safely be regarded as a sign of the expansion of the western

European cult of the dead, whose emissaries reached Jutland either by way of the English Channel or in the course of the wave of colonization which may have travelled round the north of Scotland down into the North Sea. While the round Danish and Swedish passage graves, with their long corridors and occasional side-chambers, remained true to their south-west European prototypes, north Germany developed its own type of megalithic tomb, with exceptionally long chambers which in some cases reach a length of ninety feet, and short passages leading from the middle of the long sides (Plate 109). Such T-shaped structures also occur occasionally in the north of Scotland.

In the passage grave period, the links with the British Isles and even more distant lands become more frequent. A hoard found at Bygholm in Jutland contained besides four stone axes, three copper spiral arm-bands and a copper dagger with a central rib which corresponds to the type found in Central Europe. The first gold articles also appeared in this period, including lunulae of Irish type.

It looks as if it was only after the influx of new ideas and skills that all the talents of the northern stone tomb people came to fruition. Their pottery reached a high point with large, well-shaped vessels, decorated with white or red incrustation in deeply incised geometric designs. In this the typical Northern feeling for form, which makes the ornamentation of the pottery always dependent on its shape, is already discernible.

In the "refined style", small works of art were made of the most attractive forms, with close-set lively designs impressed with the edge of a cardium shell or with a fine toothed bone comb. The beauty and regularity of the decoration and the faultless firing of these thin-walled funnel-necked beakers, flasks, and amphorae with broad handles, the high footed Danish "fruit stands" of oriental look and the small pots and basins of this incrustated dark brown highly polished ware put it among the most exquisite products of the prehistoric potter's art (Plates 112, 113).

The flint industry had a period of similar brilliance, perhaps stimulated by the beginning of competition from metals. The blades of the thick-butted axes became thinner and thinner. Sometimes they show hollow grinding and have splayed cutting edges; they were polished until their smoothness rivalled that of metal. Efforts were obviously made to oust the foreign copper axes with flint imitations which had the advantage of greater hardness. Towards the end of the passage grave culture, artistically shaped double axes were made which look more like ceremonial weapons than weapons of war (Plate 117).

In the last phase of the passage grave culture, the owl face and radiating eyes of the Great Goddess occasionally appear on pottery, whose cruder shapes and coarser, more hurried decoration betray a steady decline from the height of north European megalithic culture (Plate 111).

The northern countries had already been disturbed in the older passage grave period by inroads of warlike, mobile tribes of horsemen and herdsmen who probably advanced in successive waves from the area of the Black Sea. Their principal weapons were battle-axes, which were generally more or less boat-shaped. The numerous broken skulls

found in the later burials in the passage tombs, and the arrowheads and spearheads remaining in the skeletons, point to fierce battles with the invaders. Many of the stone tomb builders of north Germany may have retreated before them into the Ems area and northern Holland.

The invaders did not build megalithic collective tombs. They buried their dead individually, and put into their graves tall, curved beakers, battle-axes, and big flat amber disks, and in the case of women, long bead necklaces. Where they conquered the indigenous population, they used the passage graves for their own burials, after throwing out the skeletons of their builders.

While the oldest northern European megalithic culture declined and ultimately disappeared as a result of the incursion of the battle-axe people, its offshoots in north-west Germany and Holland flourished.

### *The Stone Bridegroom of Visbeck*

When the builders of the great stone tombs of Schleswig-Holstein advanced across the Stader Land, the Bardengau and the Lüneburg Heath to the edge of the range of hills at Osnabrück, they met peoples still living at the mesolithic stage. With their superior culture they must have had no great difficulty in becoming masters of an area well adapted to the keeping of livestock. Their monuments in this area seem to express their pride and consciousness of power.

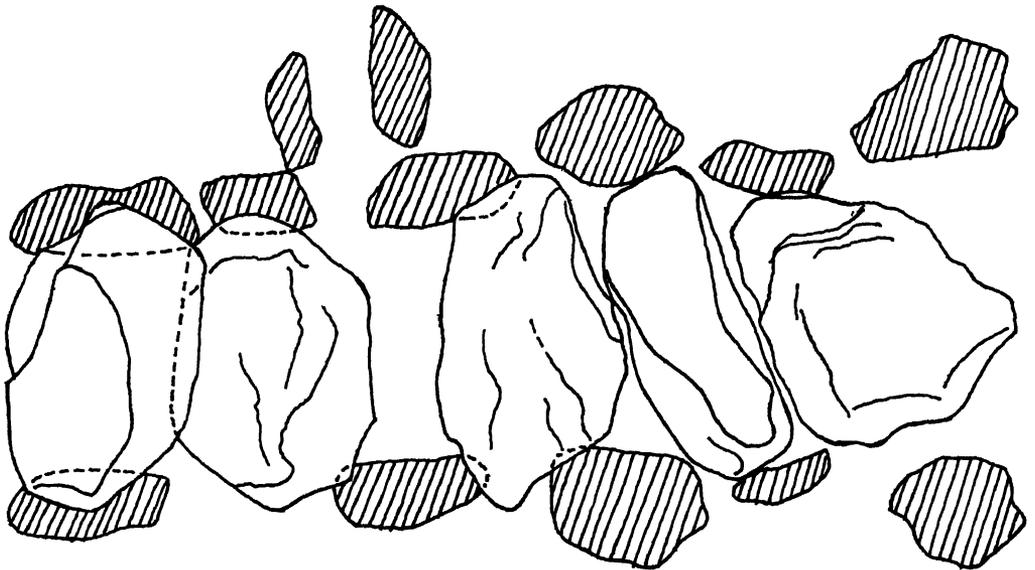
The so-called Bridegroom of Visbeck lies on the Ahlhorn Heath in a setting of tall beech trees, like the carcass of some huge animal that has sunk into the ground and is slowly turning to earth and grass. In the course of four thousand years the three-hundred-and-fifty-feet long enclosure of great stone blocks, smoothed on the outer side, has failed to preserve the long, low mound from decay. At its eastern end there stands a strikingly tall block with a triangular top. This is the "bridegroom", a stone sentry standing guard over the dead. The burial chamber for which this enormous earthwork was erected is now exposed at its western end; its length of thirty feet seems small against this background. Might it have been intended as the first of a series of tombs for a family that thought of itself as immortal? Was it the mausoleum of a prince whose greatness was to be demonstrated by this huge *hunebed*?

In the green shade of the quiet wood not far from the Bridegroom of Visbeck there lie the moss-covered stone blocks of five more megalithic tombs; these are rectangular in shape, with a short passage. The so-called "sacrificial stone", with a single huge capstone is virtually a dolmen. It looks as if the inhabitants of a big settlement were still gathered in death round the tomb of their chieftain.

The area round Osnabrück, with its gentle hills and broad valleys, and its big farms surrounded by old oak trees, must have been just as thickly settled in the megalithic period as it is today, and perhaps even then its inhabitants were farmers. At the edge of the town there still lie the "devil's stones", that is to say a fine passage grave surrounded by pine trees and surmounted by a sandy, oval mound; on a rise above the darkly flowing Gretscher river tall trees surround the Hermann Stones (Fig. 80).

The trend towards exaggeration which characterizes the sepulchral and sacred architecture of the last phase of megalithic architecture also appears in the later *hunebedden* of the Ems area and northern Holland, the last offshoots of northern European megalithic culture. The longest surviving passage grave in Germany is on the Hümmling near Werlte; it is eighty-one feet long and runs from east to west, with a short entrance passage on the southern side. It is roofed by fourteen huge blocks.

The fifty-four *hunebedden* in the Dutch provinces of Drenthe and Groningen are nearly as impressive. These, too, are surrounded by enclosures of stone blocks, but the oval mounds which surmounted them in so far as they are not propped up by the structure within, have perished in the course of ages. With their squat, heavy wall and roof stones, the tombs now like dark-brown primitive monsters stranded in the midst of the plain, which is as flat and endless as the sea; relics left behind by the receding flood of time. Light now penetrates the wide interstices between the blocks, which are trimmed on the inside and were once filled in with dry masonry to form impenetrable



80 *Ground-plan of the Hermann Stones*



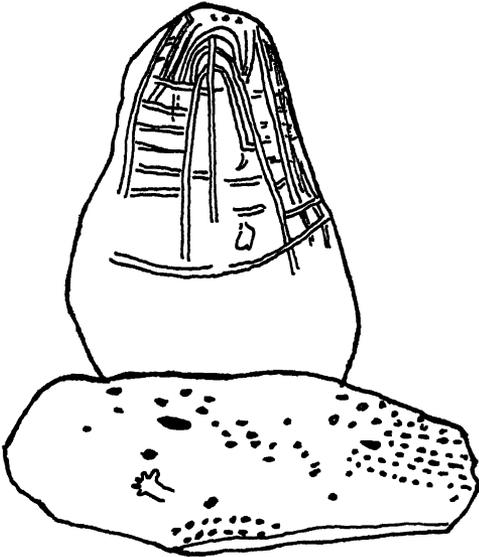
108 Danish *dysse*

109 Passage grave at Reinfeld, Schleswig-Holstein



110 *Hunebed* at Havelte, Drenthe

111 Detail of vessel with eye motif from the later Danish passage-grave period



81 Stone bowl from barrow grave at Beldorf

walls. The short entrances on their long sides, surmounted by great slabs, sometimes recall crude trilithon gateways. The paving slabs inside show the care that was lavished on these homes for the dead (Plate 110).

The great cycle of megalithic cultures, which gave unity of religious beliefs to peoples separated by vast areas of land and sea, closes in the Upper Ems area, where the crude, northern passage graves of heavy stone blocks mingled with the derivatives of the elegant western European *allées couvertes*. The imitations in the Ems area of these gallery graves look like crude and provincial editions of the narrow sixty-foot and sometimes ninety-foot-long half-sunken stone cists of Westphalia and Hessen, which, with their thin slabs, separate antechambers and porthole slabs, are immediately reminiscent of the tombs of the Paris basin. An echo of the symbolism of distant Iberia appears in the delicate shadow-play of the engraved lines which cover the walls of the great gallery of Züschen, near Fritzlar, and form patterns recalling stylised antlers or ferns. There are also schematic representations of oxen ploughing. Sometimes as many as two hundred bodies were buried in these huge stone cists in western and central Germany, with which the development of megalithic tombs in this area ended. The last were apparently built in about the middle of the second millennium, and remained in use for a long time. They may have served as the collective tombs for whole settlements, while the passage graves were family tombs of big farmers.

Menhirs never established themselves in the north, but they did so in central Germany, where individual specimens still survive. Place names and traditions indicate that there were once many of them. On the site of the present St. John's Cemetery at Osnabrück

a pyramid-like twenty-foot-tall block once stood in a stone circle, and there was a similar stone circle round a menhir near a megalithic tomb near Lingen. A mysterious, single stone near Osnabrück, a triangular flat block several yards high, standing in a clearing in the woods and known as the Süntelstein, may once have belonged to a similar cult site.

### *Cupmarked Stones and Thunderbolts*

Towards the end of the neolithic period, the northern European area gradually settled down. The megalithic people, after exercising power and cultural influence for many centuries, receded into the background. The inroads of the battle-axe people may have contributed indirectly to the wide expansion of megalithic culture in eastern and western Germany, which was partially the work of defeated and fugitive groups. The strength of the first colonists of the Jutland peninsula was certainly diminished by these migratory movements. During the transition from the neolithic to the first metal age, people who buried their dead in individual graves evidently gained the upper hand in the north European countries and islands. Perhaps there was a repetition here of what happened in the passage grave period, namely a meeting with elements from the late western European megalithic culture, the results of which are to be seen in the long stone cists of northern Jutland, Zealand, and especially south Sweden. These, with their soul holes, seem to be completely western European. In the pottery of this period, whose decadence foreshadows the end of the incomparable brilliance of the northern European potter's art, flower-pot shapes are often found, recalling the secondary neolithic ware in the west.

The incursion of the battle-axe and single grave peoples overwhelmed the ancient megalithic culture and religion, but the invaders themselves were changed in the process. The primitive Mediterranean world made up of the cult of the dead, the earth mother and the bull god, encountered the more mundane outlook of the semi-nomadic horsemen from the east, with their virile, warlike gods. Memory of the clash between them survives in the nordic myth of the struggle between the godlike Vanirs and Aesirs.

At the beginning of the Bronze Age, about the middle of the second millennium, the struggle was over, and the various tribes and cultures had been fused into a unity, a new people – the future Teutons, whose creative genius was fed both by ancient Mediterranean tradition and the dynamism of the people of the eastern steppes. The Vanirs, the gods of the megalithic death and fertility cults, had been reconciled with the Aesirs, and both were now venerated alike. In the Teutonic myths which have come down to us; the Aesirs appear as gods of heaven like Odin and Thor and, remarkably enough, are also described as “spirits of the dead rushing through the air with the winds”. This can

perhaps be regarded as a result of a late fusion of beliefs, when deified ancestor-figures of the megalithic period merged with the heavenly god of the battle-axe peoples.

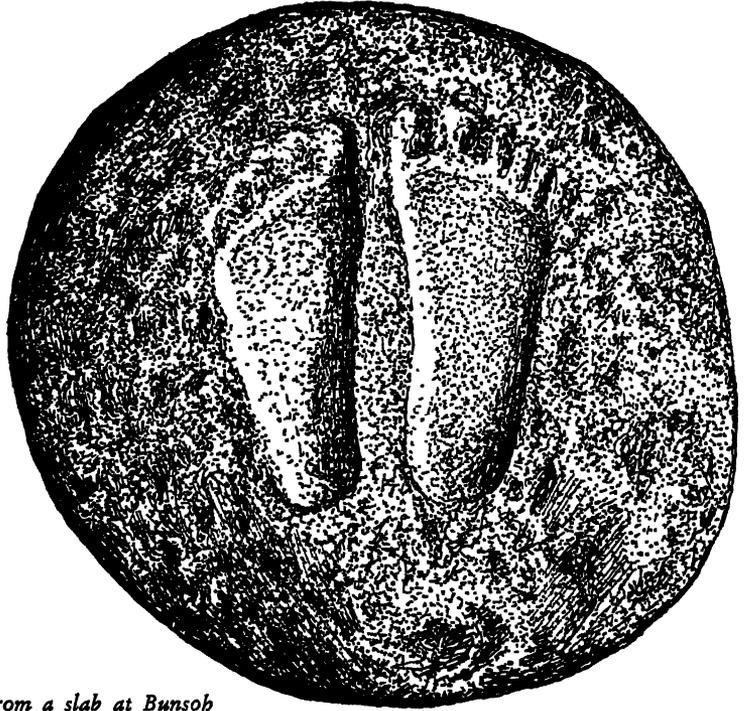
With the ascendancy of the individual grave people, the old practice of collective burial receded. The long stone cists of western European type were the last collective tombs; simultaneously with and subsequently to them small stone cists appear, containing one body only. But the influence of the old cult of the dead manifested itself in the Bronze Age in a proliferation of tumuli, the careful burial of the dead in stone sarcophagi, and in valuable grave-goods. Burials often took place in the sacred mounds or on the roof slabs of the old megalithic tombs.

But in the later Bronze Age, worship of the Great Mother of the living and the dead was by no means extinct. At all events, in a tumulus dating from that period at Beldorf in the Rensdorf district, an upright stone came to light. It was tapered at the top and dimples had been engraved on it as well as the degenerate but unmistakable pattern of the female statue menhirs of western Europe. At the foot of this stone lay a slab, resembling an altar stone, on which more dimples were carved, as well as the outline of a footprint similar to those occur on the walls of megalithic tombs in Brittany and Britain. So here once more the ancient goddess of the dolmens appears, surrounded by her sacred emblems and carefully concealed in the earth (Fig. 81). But the megalithic cult of stones persisted in the form of a magical practice which spread in the Bronze Age as never before, namely the carving of cupmarks on stones.

The oldest known example occurs on a rock beside a late palaeolithic burial in a cave in the Dordogne. It was obviously related to the the cult of the dead. Similar marks constantly recur in megalithic tombs from primitive times onwards, both in Asia and Europe, in caves and shrines, on rocks and menhirs. There is no doubt that their purpose was religious, but their meaning remains mysterious; it may have been as multivalent as that of the menhirs.

The cupmarks vary in size from small dimples to quite big cavities, and attempts have been made to connect them with the sacred process of making fire with flints, or with the boring of the shaft hole of the sacred axe, though they are certainly older than the veneration of the latter. They have also been regarded as containers for libations such as blood or milk, though they are often to be found on the undersides of roof slabs of megalithic tombs, or on vertical surfaces. When the dimples are surrounded by circles or rays in megalithic tombs, they might well be interpreted as standing for the eye of the mother goddess, or for the sun. On the inner surface of a stone that covered a stone chamber at Bunsöh (Plate 121) there came to light, besides cupmarks, four-spoked "sun" wheels, hands with fingers lengthened like rays, and footprints – the old symbols next to those of the sun cult of the north European Bronze Age (Fig. 82).

But the cupmarks and dimples may not always have been sacred signs. They may often be relics of a kind of sympathetic magic practised at the sacred stone, or the consequence of extracting stone dust, to which special powers were ascribed. Frequent grooves and grinding marks between the hollows point in the same direction. In the



82 *Carving of footprints from a slab at Bunsob*

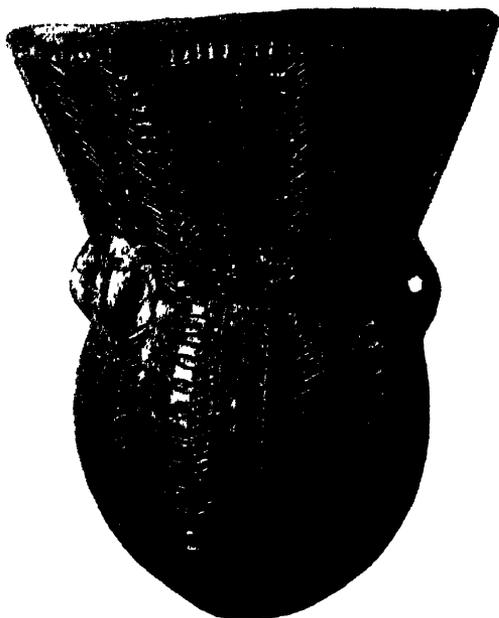
Iron Age there was another striking multiplication of cupmarked stones at urnfields and in fields in the old dolmen area. They may have been intended to promote the fertility of the fields.

The practice of carving cupmarks, which goes right back to the dawn of prehistory, and the belief in their magic power survived into the present century in some remarkable customs which certainly contain clues to prehistoric beliefs. At Eckernförde it was the custom for passers-by to put coins in these cavities, and the same practice occurs in southern Sweden, where the cupmarks are called "elf mills". In Sweden fat or honey was also smeared in such holes. In France dust scraped from certain stones in megalithic tombs was swallowed by sterile women. Reference has already been made to the weather magic practised by the wives of Breton seamen at the Quiberon corbelled tombs.

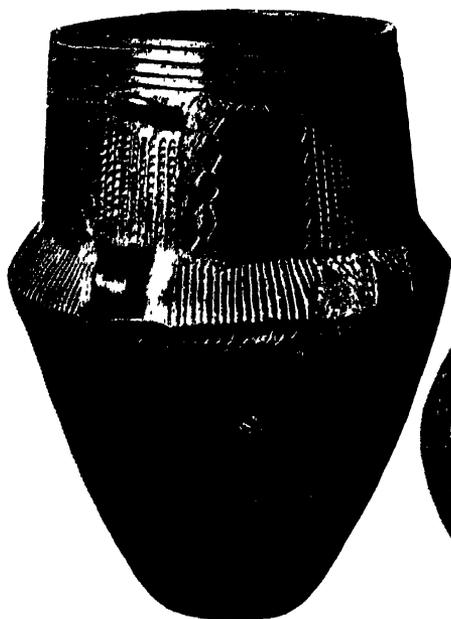
Popular superstition about cupmarked stones was so deeply rooted that the Church was sometimes forced to take them under its wing; hence the many dimples and grooves in the walls of mediaeval churches (Plate 120). Stone dust from church walls plays an important part in German and Swiss popular medicine. When St. Gothard's Church at Brandenburg was built, two sandstone blocks were built into the wall of the gateway for people to carve small holes and grooves in. At a wedding it was the custom to bore dimples and sharpen knives at the church portal stones; this was believed to bring good luck to the bridal couple, and the stone dust was supposed to guarantee them a large family.



112 Sacrificial vessel from a Danish megalithic tomb



113 Funnel-necked beaker from Gadeland, Schleswig-Holstein



114 Vessel found in grave at Denghoog on the Sylt



115 Flask from Hörst, Eckernförde



116 Collared flask of the Danish megalithic culture



117 Battle-axe of the North European megalithic culture



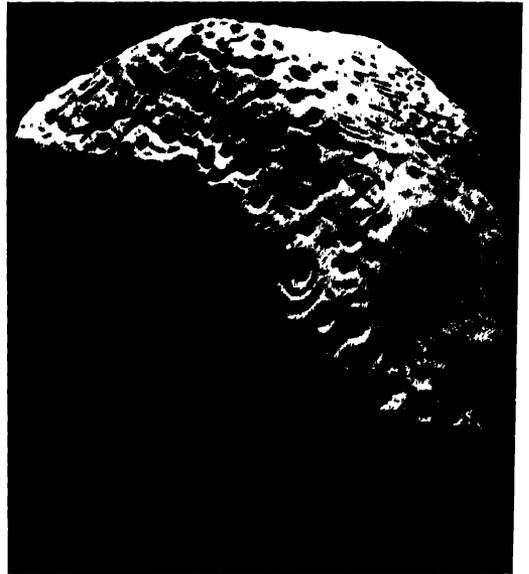
118 Chalcolithic flint dagger from Schleswig-Holstein



119 Amber pendant of the North European megalithic culture



120 Church wall of St. Sebaldus, Nuremberg, with grooving and cup-marks



121 Cup-marked stone from Bunsöh

Just as belief in the magic influence of sacred stones and the power of the dead survived the ages, so did memory of the ancient axe cult persist in northern Europe. It outlived the megalithic culture, and traces remained among the people until modern times. It was certainly older than the incursions of the battle-axe people, as is shown by the finds at Troldebjerg, and it seems to have reached its peak in the transition period between the Neolithic and the Bronze ages, when the battle-axe of the individual grave people receded before the incomparable flint ceremonial daggers in which the northern European art of stone working celebrated its last and greatest triumph (plate 118). Yard-long necklaces were adorned with amber double-axe pendants; a hoard of offerings at Hordum in Thy included five big amber axes with shaft-holes, and on a stone bowl at Schülldorf near Rensburg there is a representation of a shafted axe which exactly resembles Breton axes. Thor, the Teutonic god of thunder with his iron hammer, may have entered into the heritage of the ancient Mediterranean bull god.

In Scandinavian peasants' houses prehistoric stone axes continued into our own time to be buried under the floor or the threshold with the cutting edge upwards, just as in primitive times, as a protection against storms and lightning; and cattle were made to walk over an axe to preserve them from harm and witchcraft. According to popular belief, no witch could pass a threshold under which there lay an axe with the cutting edge upwards, and the dim memory of the generative power of the eastern weather god, who fertilized the great earth mother by flinging his lightning axe, survived in some remarkable marriage rites. Among the Teutons at one time a hammer was laid in the bride's cap, and in Esthonia the practice of laying an axe under the nuptial bed in order to have strong and healthy offspring survived into the twentieth century.

Thus, traces of the period of huge stone tombs which played such a vital role in the early history of Europe, when the Old World was for the first time united by a new religion which spread from Palestine to Scandinavia, remain indelibly engraved in the landscape and in the minds of the people, though the meaning of the ancient monuments has been forgotten and men have frequently destroyed the handiwork which their forefathers built for eternity.

In the past one hundred and fifty years, the superstitious awe which previously protected the legend-surrounded *hunebedden* and cupmarked stones of Germany has gradually given way to the matter-of-factness of the technical age. During this time, between eighty and ninety per cent of the burial monuments which had hitherto defied the ages and the forces of nature, as their builders hoped they would, have been destroyed by the hand of man. Only about nine hundred tombs have escaped destruction. But more have survived in Denmark – nearly four thousand, in fact. In the whole of Europe there may still survive at most fifty thousand megalithic monuments; only a fraction of the legion of huge stones which were early man's answer to the fate of mortality.

This book was inspired by the sense of awe and wonder produced by the gigantic stone monuments from the mysterious past which have survived to the present day, and by admiration of man's capacity to achieve the apparently impossible in the service of an idea.

Tombs, places of worship, and edifices of great crude blocks erected since the neolithic period are not confined to the Mediterranean area and western and northern Europe. They also occur by the Black Sea, in the Caucasus, in Abyssinia and the Sudan, and even in central and southern India, where between 200 B. C. and about A. D. 50 thousands of megalithic tombs were built which resemble those built long before in Europe. In the eighth century the rulers of Japan still built great mausoleums of huge slabs, and in Madagascar huge cult stones are erected at the present day. The present study is not concerned with the complex problem of all these megalithic cultures, which arose in the most various countries and periods; it is confined to the attempt to trace certain definite religious and cultural processes which were once of great importance to the development of the European spiritual world.

In writing this book, use has been made of the latest work on cultures in which megalithic structures occur, as well as of older works. I recall with gratitude the immense amount of encouragement, advice, and guidance I have received in the course of my work and travels since 1949. These could scarcely have been completed without the friendly aid given me in my Sardinian studies by Professor Filippo Magi, director of archaeological research in the Vatican and the areas subject to the Holy See. I am similarly grateful to the director of the National Museum at Cagliari, Professor G. Pesce, to Professor G. Lilliu, and my numerous Sardinian friends for their great interest and encouragement. I would also like to thank Miss Nancy Sanders and Penguin Books Ltd. for permission to reproduce part of the Gilgamesh Text from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 1960.

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Castel Cles, Summer, 1960

# Plates

- 1,2 Skull with human features moulded in plaster, from Jericho from the time of the plaster-floor people: 1) full view, 2) profile
- 3,4 A small limestone model of a temple, from Mgarr: 3) side view, 4) seen from above. Length 1 3/4 in. National Museum, Malta
- 5 The outer wall of the Ggantija, built of grey coralline limestone
- 6 Aerial view of the Hagar Qim temple complex
- 7 Façade of the Hagar Qim temple complex
- 8 Altar slab, originally painted red, from Hagar Qim. Height 29 in. National Museum, Malta
- 9 Seated figure, from Hagar Qim. Height 10 in. National Museum, Malta
- 10 Headless stone figure, from Hagar Qim. Height 19 in. National Museum, Malta
- 11 Female figure with bell skirt, from Hagar Qim. Height 10 in. National Museum, Malta
- 12 Head of female statue, from Hal Tarxien. National Museum, Malta
- 13,14 The "Venus of Malta" 13) front view, 14) back view. Height 5 ins. National Museum, Malta
- 15 View of the ruins of the Mnajdra with the sea in the background.
- 16 Corbelled walling in the front of the Mnajdra oval
- 17 Trilithon gateway at Mnajdra with pitted decoration made with a drill
- 18 Entrance to front chamber of the Hypogeum, Hal Saflieni
- 19 Inner chamber of the Hypogeum, Hal Saflieni, with an imitation of a corbelled vault
- 20,21 "Sleeping Lady" in terracotta from the Hypogeum, Hal Saflieni: 20) front view 21) back view. Length 4 1/2 in. National Museum, Malta
- 22 Relief-decorated altar, from Hal Tarxien
- 23 Carinated bowl from Hal Tarxien decorated with applied studs and white paste inlay. Height 6 1/8 in. National Museum, Malta
- 24 Large, handled biconical vessel, from Hal Tarxien. Height 20 in. National Museum, Malta
- 25 Sacrificial altar with shrine and niche, from Hal Tarxien
- 26 Flint sacrificial knife, from the altar niche shown in Pl. 25. Length c. 6 in.
- 27 Limestone phallic idol, originally painted red. From Malta
- 28 Approach to the "Holy of Holies" in the central temple at Hal Tarxien

- 29 Barrier slab with spiral eye motif, from Hal Tarxien
- 30 Spiral eye motifs in the passage way to a side-chamber of the middle temple at Hal Tarxien
- 31 Left-hand side-chamber of the middle temple of Hal Tarxien
- 32 Reconstruction of a terracotta figurine of a priest, from Hal Tarxien. Height c. 24 in. National Museum, Malta
- 33 Terracotta disk-shaped idol, from the Tarxien cemetery phase. Height 7 in. National Museum, Malta
- 34 Rock-cut tombs at Pectenadu, Alghero
- 35 Rock-cut necropolis of Sant' Andrea Priu
- 36 Entrance slab with spirit-hole, from a Sardinian Giant's Tomb at Gastigadu near Macomer
- 37 Female menhir at the Pedras Marmuradas
- 38 Marble idol of the Great Mother, from Senorbi, Cagliari. Height 16½ in. National Museum, Cagliari
- 39 The Succoronis *nuraghe*; a *nuraghe* with the characteristic truncated-cone shape near Macomer
- 40 The Losa *nuraghe*
- 41 Passage in the Losa *nuraghe* with arched roof formed by courses of corbelled stone
- 42 View of the inner chamber in the *nuraghe* of Sant' Antine
- 43 Fragment of nuraghic vessel showing daemonic female figure, from the temple at the spring of Sant' Anastasia de Sardara. National Museum, Cagliari
- 44 Black burnished jar with design of concentric circles, from the temple at the spring of Sant' Anastasia de Sardara. National Museum, Cagliari
- 45 Bronze figure of a chieftain of the Uta group. Height 15 in. National Museum, Cagliari
- 46 Bronze figure of a warrior of the Uta group. Height 9½ in. National Museum, Cagliari
- 47 Bronze head of warrior in the Uta style. Height 2½ in. National Museum, Cagliari
- 48 Bronze group of wrestlers in the Uta style. Length 6 in. National Museum, Cagliari
- 49 Bronze figure of woman making an offering, from Coni near Nuragus. Height 7 in. National Museum, Cagliari
- 50 Male figure making an offering, found near Ursulei. Height 5 in. National Museum, Cagliari
- 51 Bronze of a woman with a dead warrior on her lap. Height 4 in. National Museum, Cagliari
- 52 Bronze votive ship, from the Spienna *nuraghe* near Chiaramonti. Length 10 in. National Museum, Cagliari
- 53 Bronze votive sword hilt with double stag and warrior, from Abini. Height 5½ in. National Museum, Cagliari
- 54 Bronze fox, from Santa Vittoria di Serri. Length 4 in. National Museum, Cagliari
- 55 Bronze bull with ringed throat decoration, from Santa Vittoria di Serri. Height 3 in. National Museum, Cagliari
- 56 Two bronze warriors in the Abini style. Height 5½ in. National Museum, Cagliari
- 57 Warrior with four eyes and four arms, from Abini. Height 7½ in. National Museum, Cagliari
- 58 Stepped roof from the well-house over the spring at Golfo Aranci
- 59 Sardinian shepherd in front of his stone hut
- 60 *Launeddas* player
- 61 Megalithic tomb in Corsica
- 62 Statue menhir with a long sword and a sheathed dagger of Mycenaea type, from the late phase at Filitosa
- 63 Head of a menhir from the late phase of the Filitosa culture
- 64 Statue menhir seen from the rear and showing ribs and phallic hair-style, from Filitosa
- 65 Head of a statue menhir from Filitosa
- 66 Statue menhir seen from the rear and showing the plainly indicated shoulder-blades, from Filitosa
- 67 Corbelled tomb with porthole entrance slab at Los Millares
- 68 Plaster vessel, from Los Millares. Archaeological Museum, Madrid
- 69 White encrusted bowl, from Los Millares. Archaeological Museum, Madrid
- 70 Castilian bowl in the bell-beaker style. Archaeological Museum, Madrid

- 71 Alabaster idol of the Almerian culture. Length c. 8 in. Archaeological Museum, Madrid
- 72 Phalange idol, from Los Millares. Archaeological Museum, Madrid
- 73 Sandal-shaped idol. Archaeological Museum, Madrid
- 74 Straw sandal, from a corbelled tomb. Archaeological Museum, Madrid
- 75 A model of a vertical section through the Cueva del Romeral
- 76 The chamber of the Cueva de Menga
- 77 Gold ornament, from the Bronze Age Argaric culture. Archaeological Museum, Madrid
- 78 Portuguese schist plaque idol. Archaeological Museum, Madrid
- 79 Portuguese stepped grave
- 80 Portuguese dolmen
- 81 North Spanish megalithic tomb converted into a chapel, near Oviedo
- 82 Female statue menhir, from St Sernin. Fenaille Museum, Rodez
- 83 Male statue menhir, from Aveyron. Fenaille Museum, Rodez
- 84 Dolmen of St Philibert in Morbihan
- 85 Dolerite axes, from a Breton megalithic tomb. Lengths: left c. 6 in., right 7 in. Musée Préhistorique Finistérien
- 86 Wall carving, from Gavriinis
- 87 Shield shape filled with a herringbone design, from Gavriinis
- 88 Pattern of axes and snakes from a wall slab, Gavriinis
- 89 Shield shape, from the Dolmen Coudé at Lufang. Carnac Museum
- 90 Menhir at Champ Dolent
- 91 Christianized menhir of St Duzec. Height 8 m.
- 92 Alignments at Menec, Carnac
- 93 Dolmen of Mané Kerioned, near Carnac
- 94 The megalithic tomb at New Grange
- 95 Slab with spiral ornamentation outside the entrance to New Grange
- 96 Looking up into the corbelled dome at New Grange
- 97 Stone sacrificial bowl in a side-chamber at New Grange
- 98 Statue menhir from the megalithic tomb at Fourknocks
- 99,100 Irish food vessels, from megalithic tombs
- 101 Irish variant of the bell-beaker
- 102 Gold lunula, from Killarney. Diameter  $7\frac{1}{2}$  in. National Museum of Ireland
- 103 Shield-shaped gold pendant, from the Bog of Allen. Length 3 in. National Museum of Ireland
- 104 Gold "sun disk", from Ballina, Co. Mayo. Diameter 5 in. National Museum of Ireland
- 105 Interior of a house at Skara Brae
- 106 The megalithic tomb at West Kennet, looking from the passage into the chamber
- 107 Stonehenge after the 1958 restoration of the trilithons
- 108 Danish *dysse*
- 109 Passage grave at Reinfeld, Schleswig-Holstein
- 110 *Hunebed* at Havelte, north Holland
- 111 Detail of a vessel with spiral eye motif, from the end of the Danish passage grave period. National Museum, Denmark
- 112 Sacrificial vessel from a Danish megalithic tomb. National Museum, Denmark
- 113 Funnel-necked beaker from Gadeland, Schleswig-Holstein. Landesmuseum, Schleswig-Holstein
- 114 Vessel with incised and impressed decoration, from a *hunebed* at Denghoog on the Sylt. Height  $9\frac{3}{4}$  in. Landesmuseum, Schleswig-Holstein
- 115 Ribbed flask from Hörst, Eckernförde. Landesmuseum, Schleswig-Holstein
- 116 Collared flask, from the Danish megalithic culture. Height  $5\frac{1}{4}$  in. National Museum, Denmark
- 117 Stone battle-axe, from the North European megalithic culture. National Museum, Denmark
- 118 Schleswig-Holstein: pressure flaked flint dagger from the Chalcolithic period. Landesmuseum, Schleswig-Holstein
- 119 Amber pendant from the North European megalithic culture. National Museum, Denmark
- 120 Medieval church wall with groovings and cupmarks, at St. Sebaldus, Nuremberg
- 121 Cup-marked stone from Bunsöh

# Illustrations in the Text

## Figures

- 1 Chieftain's tomb at Eynan
- 2 Plan of Jericho
- 3 Pottery head of idol from late neolithic Jericho
- 4 Stele from Asquera showing the Mother Goddess figure
- 5 Egyptian rowing boat
- 6 The underside of a platter from Syros with a picture of a ship
- 7 The oldest Maltese sculpture — a crude limestone head
- 8 Jar in the early Maltese temple style
- 9 Plan of the oldest temple of Mgarr
- 10a Plan of the second temple of Mgarr
- 10b Plan of the temple of Kordin III
- 11 Plan of the southern temple of the Ggantija
- 12 Plan of the northern temple of the Ggantija
- 13 Reconstruction of a model of a temple façade of the later type
- 14 Pottery plate with a decoration of bulls from the Hypogeum
- 15 Plan of the temples at Hal Tarxien
- 16 Conjectural reconstruction of the façade of Hal Tarxien
- 17 Pillar cult scene on a gold ring from Mycenae
- 18 Plan and elevation of a tomb at Anghelu Rujù
- 19 Potsherds from the cave of San Michele Ozieri
- 20 Plan of the largest rock-cut tomb of Sant'Andrea Priu
- 21 Rock-cut tomb of Sant'Andrea Priu with reconstruction of roof beams
- 22 Plans of ancient Sardinian Giants' Tombs
- 23, 24 Interior of a *nuraghe* showing steps and corbelled chambers
- 25 Ground-plan of a nuraghic fortress
- 26 Looking up into the dome of the *Losa nuraghe*
- 27 Ground-plan of the nuraghic temple of Santa Vittoria di Serri
- 28 Conjectural reconstruction of the temple at the spring of Sardara
- 29 Section of the temple at the spring of Sardara
- 30 Ground-plan and elevation of the temple at the spring of Golfo Aranci
- 31 Cretan pottery idol
- 32 Reconstruction of a corbelled tomb at Los Millares
- 33 Ground-plan of a corbelled tomb at Los Millares
- 34a, b Bell-beakers showing the typical forms and decoration
- 35 Cypriot pottery idol
- 36 Idol from Los Millares
- 37 Plaque idol from Los Millares
- 38 Engraved phalange idol from Los Millares
- 39 Ground-plan and elevation of a Portuguese rock-cut corbelled tomb

- 40 Portuguese crozier idol
- 41 Bowl from Los Millares with eye and stag motifs
- 42 Wall paintings at Peña Tu
- 43 Stele from Toninuolo
- 44 Baetyl from Caceres
- 45 Statue menhir from Boulhosa
- 46 Ground-plans of a selection of Portuguese megalithic tombs
- 47 Statue menhirs from Collorgues
- 48 Owl-faced statue menhir from Bouisset
- 49 Stele from Benezet
- 50 Two statue menhirs from Fivizzano
- 51 Ground-plan of the "Grotte des Fées" at Arles
- 52 Rock-cut tomb at Courjeonnet
- 53 Relief from rock-cut tomb at Petit Morin
- 54 Gallery grave with porthole entrance from the Paris basin
- 55 Ground-plan of long barrow at Barnenez South
- 56 Ground-plan of passage grave at Kercado
- 57 Gallery grave under long barrow at Kerlescant
- 58 Ground-plan of royal tomb of Gavr'inis
- 59 *Marmite* symbol
- 60 Carved symbols from the walls of Breton megalithic tombs
- 61 Angled grave
- 62 Horned cairn of Cohaw
- 63 Tomb at Creevykeel
- 64 Tomb of Labbacallee, showing the entrance porch
- 65 Plan and elevation of the corbelled tomb of New Grange
- 66 Spirals on an outer wall stone at New Grange
- 67 Wall stone at New Grange with fern pattern
- 68 Triple spiral from New Grange
- 69 Clover-leaf passage grave at Carrowkeel
- 70 Passage grave at Carrowkeel showing the double oval form
- 71 Wall stone with carvings from the passage grave at Knockmany
- 72 Elevation and plan of the corbelled tomb at Maes Howe
- 73 Bone idol from the Shetlands
- 74 Plans of three Severn-Cotswold tombs  
(1) Ty Isaf, Brecknockshire  
(2) Parc Le Breos Cwm, Glamorgan  
(3) Stoney Littleton, Somerset
- 75 Plan of Avebury
- 76 Plan of the Sanctuary, Avebury
- 77 Plan of Woodhenge
- 78 Plan of the final stage of Stonehenge
- 79 Plan of a Danish *dysse*
- 80 Ground-plan of the Hermann Stones
- 81 Stone bowl from grave barrow at Beldorf
- 82 Carving of footprints from a slab at Bunsöh

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# Index

Page numbers in italics refer to illustrations in photograph and line. All references are to *page* numbers only; plate and figure numbers are not used.

- ABINI: shrine of, 146, 152; style of art, 146, 149, 174-6  
Achaean tombs, 218  
Aegean influence, in Iberia, 192, 219  
Aeolian Islands, 72, 100; pottery, 111  
Aesirs, 306  
Agriculture: origins, 14-17; Jericho, 27; Britany, 238  
Ahlhorn Heath, 301  
Ain-es-Zerka, 31  
Alcalá, 272  
Alemtejo plateau, 209, 214, 220, 235  
Almanzora valley, 193, 200  
Almeria: mariners from Cyclades in, 62; mining centre, 64; culture, 67, 192-3, 208, 210, 214, 219, 221, 215  
Anatolia, 28, 45, 56, 61  
Ancestor cult, 11  
Anghelu Ruju, 95, 115-17, 122, 234, 115  
Anglesey, 271  
Antequera (Anti-Caria), 202-4, 207-8, 216, 225  
Apulia, 41, 183  
Arabian Peninsula: burials, 45, 46; 51-2; isolation, 48, 51; cultural centre, 51  
Aragon, 202  
Aristaeus, 113  
Aries, 22, 229, 229  
Arpachiya, 134  
Asphodels, 124  
Asquera, 57  
Atlantis, 192, 218  
Augustus, Emperor, 51  
Avebury, 284, 287, 289-90, 288-9  
Aveyron, 221, 222, 223, 236  
Axe cult, 210, 311, 310  
Bahrein, 51  
Balearic Islands, 42, 68, 184, 229  
Balestra, 181, 182  
Ballina, 285  
Bandkeramik culture, 219  
Barbagia, the, 158, 165  
Barnenez South, 234, 237, 234  
Basque language, 220  
Beduins, 31, 35, 45  
Beersheba. *See* Tell Abu Matar  
Bega tribes, 45  
Beldorí, 307, 305  
Bell-beakers, bell-beaker people, 198-9, 237, 267, 270, 289, 198, 206, 276  
Benezet, 224  
Berbers, 55, 122  
Blood-feuds, in Sardinia, 157  
Blood sacrifices, in Sardinia, 165  
Bog of Allen, 285  
Bohemia, 198  
Bonusó, 153  
Boulhosa, 213, 212  
Boussier, 223  
Boyne culture, 267, 269-71  
Brandenburg, St. Gothard's church, 308  
Bridegroom of Visbeck, 301-2, 305  
Britain: contacts with Iberia, 63, 198; burials, 77, 283-4, 289-94, 307, 288-9, 292-3, 295-6; tin deposits, 237; cultures of the south, 282; pottery, 287  
Brittany, 188, 220, 274; burials, 61, 69, 233-4, 237-44, 247-54, 257-8, 268-9, 307-8, 234, 239-40, 242-3 245-7, 249, 255-6, 265; contacts with Iberia, 63, 198, 233; origins of civilization, 232-3; cult of the dead, 259-62  
Bryn Celli Ddu, 271-3  
Bugibba, 96  
Bulls, bull-god, bull-fighting, 211, 272-4  
Bunsöh, 307, 310

- Burial sites and customs. *See under separate countries, also* Dead, cult of the; Dolmens; Menhirs
- Byblos, 61, Queen of, 32
- Bygholm, 300
- CABECO DE ARRUDAS, 16
- Caceres, 212
- Camonica, valley of. *See* Val Camonica
- Camp Dolent, 252, 255
- Camp du Lizo, 237-8
- Canaanites, 31, 42
- Capo Graziano ware, 111
- Carbon-14 test, 22, 27, 61, 219, 233
- Carmel, Mount, 10
- Carn, island of, 233
- Carnac, 237, 239, 253-4, 257-8, 260, 256
- Carrowkeel, 268-9, 271
- Carthaginians, 28; practise infant sacrifice, 21; colonization by, 187
- Cataban, 51
- Catalonia, 202
- Cave paintings, 190-2
- Cedar wood, 61
- Celts, 237, 258, 259, 274
- Central Asia, 10
- Cerveteri, 118
- Chassey culture, 221, 233
- Cheops, pyramid of, 258
- China, 56
- Cholan plateau, 34, 35
- Christianity: and cult of the dead, 12; spreads into Europe, 67-8; and sleeping at tombs of saints, 122; symbolism of water, 152; in Sardinia, 157; in Corsica, 187; in Brittany, 259; Christianization of megalithic monuments, 260-1; in Ireland, 274
- Cilicia, 15, 40
- Clava group of graves, 279
- Clyde-Carlingford group of tombs, 284
- Cohaw, 264, 264
- Collective burial, 19, 45, 47, 67, 221, 283
- Collorgues, 222, 223, 227, 242, 223, 236
- Cornély, St., 254
- Corradino, 76
- Corsica, 68, 228; colonization of, 62; ancient isolation, 167-8; burials, 168-72, 188, 179-80, 185-6, 195-6; the *torri* (towers), 172, 181-4; customs and legends, 187-9
- Cortaillo culture, 221, 282
- Courjeonnet, 229, 230
- Creerykeel, 264, 264
- Crete, 35, 38, 133, 146; pottery, 56, 58, 121; importance of its civilization, 68; cult of the dead, 81-2, 201, 210; building technique, 87; art, 90, 100, 211
- Crimea, 10
- Croez-Moken, 261
- Cro-Magnon race, 55, 113
- Cromm Cruaich, 274
- Crozier, symbol of authority, 210
- Cueva de Menga, 204, 207-8, 225
- Cueva de Viera, 204
- Cueva del Romeral, 203-4, 272, 278, 216
- Cuneiform texts, 52
- Cupmark stones, 306-8, 311, 320
- Cybele, 32
- Cyclades, 67, 100, 124; colonization of, 61; ships of, 62
- Cyprus, 56, 67, 146; cult of the dead, 81, 201; metal deposits, 142; and origins of Chalcolithic colonization, 199; worship of Great Mother, 199; pottery, 200
- DAEDALUS, 113
- David, King, 45
- Dead, cult of the: Mediterranean area and northern Europe, 10; Egypt, 10, 47; Etruria, 10; Palestine, 16, 21, 24-7; Transjordanian, 42; Jordan, 48; Sumer, 52; Cyprus, 81; Sardinia, 114; Corsica, 187; Ireland, 272  
*See also* Dolmens; Menhirs, *and under separate countries*
- Denghoog, 309
- Denmark, 47, 198; burials, 297-302, 305-6, 311, 299, 302-5; pottery, 297-8, 300, 309
- Dingle peninsula, 277
- Djoser, Pharaoh, 48
- Doagh, 277
- Dolmen Coudé, 249-50
- Dolmen de Soto, 207, 212
- Dolmen des Pierres Plates, 248-50, 249
- Dolmens: etymology, 33; Palestine, 34-7; Transjordanian, 40; Egypt, 47; Israel, 48; Jordan, 48; Malta and Gozo, 111; Sardinia, 121; Corsica, 167, 169, 179, 185-6; Iberia, 209, 214, 218, 214, 226, 235; Brittany, 244, 247-51, 262, 245-6, 249, 265; Denmark, 297-302, 302-3
- Dolerite axes, 238, 245
- Domu s'Orcu, 141
- Dordogne, 307
- Dorgali, 158
- Dreams, originate from the dead, 122
- Druids, 294
- EAST KENNET, 287
- Easter Island, 208
- Eckenförde, 308, 309
- Egypt: burials, 10, 34, 47-8, 227; symbol of authority, 45; pottery, 73; art, 219
- El, the "great bull", 133
- El Adeimah, 36-7, 40, 194
- El Argar culture, 210, 219, 228, 226
- El-hin, 31
- El Metaba, 34
- Ems area, 302, 305
- Er Lannic, island of, 243-4
- Estonia, 311
- Etruscans, 168; cult of the dead, 10; colonization by, 64, 113, 140, 187; pottery, 141, art, 144, 145, 149
- Evil eye, 160
- Eye motif, 211
- Eynan, 17-20, 31, 47, 18
- FATHER-GOD, of Sardinia, 133
- Fertility cult: Palestine, 16; Arabia, 46; Sardinia, 133; Brittany, 260; Ireland, 277; Britain, 283  
*See also* Great Mother
- Filfolá, 70, 82
- Filitosa, 169-72, 184, 227; 180, 185-6, 195-6

- Finistère, 263, 245  
 Fishermen of mesolithic period, 56  
 Fivizzano, 227, 228  
 Flint industry, 282  
 Foce, 181, 182  
 Fonni, 154  
 Fontbousse, 223  
 Fourknocks, 269, 275  
 France, 67, 203, 213; pottery, 56; burials, 68, 221-4, 227-31, 223-4, 228-9, 236; metal deposits, 142  
*See also* Brittany  
 Fufluna. *See under* Populonia
- GADELAND, 309  
 Gades (Cadiz), 190  
 Gador, 193  
 Galicia, 212, 214, 237  
 Gallura, the, 121  
 Gard, 222  
 Gavriinis, 241-4, 250, 268, 242-3, 246  
 Genoese, 187  
 Germany: megalithic culture, 302, 305-6; cupmarked stones, 311  
 Ggantija, temple of the, 78-82, 87, 105, 233, 44, 80  
 Ghar Dalam, 72  
 Ghassulian culture, 29, 38  
 Giants' Tombs, 121-3, 184, 264, 123, 131  
 Giara di Gesturi, 140, 150  
 Giara di Serri, 145, 150-2, 151  
 Gilgal, 31  
 Gilgamesh, 9-10, 13, 53  
 Giuncheto, 187  
 Gold, 63, 270, 280  
 Golfo Aranci, 153, 155, 177  
 Goths, 187  
 Gozo, 207; geology, flora and original settlers, 70-1; temples and burials, 71, 76-82  
 Gracchus, Titus Sempronius, 141  
 Granja del Toninuelo, 212-13, 212  
 Great Mother (Goddess), worship of: Mesopotamia, 53; role in early eastern religions, 57, 57; symbolism, and sacred emblem, 58; Malta, 78, 81, 91, 93-8, 102, 108; Sardinia, 114, 116, 123-4, 133, 141-2, 132; Iberia, 192, 199, 211; Cyprus, 199; Brittany, 233, 242, 250; Denmark, 300; in later Bronze Age, 307, 305  
 Greece, Greeks, 168: use of inflated animal skins, 56; pottery, 56, 58; colonization by, 63, 113, 140, 187; and asphodels, 124; trade, 219  
 Grimes Graves, 282  
 Grindstones, 21, 23
- HADRAMAUT, 51  
 Hagar el-Mansub, 32  
 Hagar Qim temples, 82, 87-9, 92, 99, 105-8, 49-50, 59-60, 65  
 Hal Safflieni, Hypogeum of, 77-8, 80, 82, 93-8, 107, 116, 97, 103-4  
 Hal Tarxien, 71, 88, 90, 96, 98-102, 105-8, 111, 66, 98, 100, 109-10, 119, 125-8  
 Havelte, Drenthe, 304  
 Hekataios, 294  
 Helwan, 16
- Hérault, 222  
 Hermann Stones, 302, 302  
 Hermon, Mount, 18, 34  
 Hessen, 305  
 Hierakonpolis, 147  
 Hirbet Keraziye, 33-5  
 Hoedic, island of, 232  
 Holland, *hunebed* in, 302, 304  
 Holm of Papa Westray, 279  
 Hordum in Thy, 311  
 Hörst, Eckenförde, 308, 309  
 Huleh, Lake. *See* Eynan  
 Hümmling river, 302
- IBERIAN PENINSULA, 47, 55, 61, 67, 171, 269; pottery, 56; mariners from Cyclades in, 62; and maritime trade, 63; burials, 68, 77, 202-4, 207-14, 217-24, 215-16, 225, 235; metallurgy, 142, 193-4, 197; North African settlement in, 190-2; Almerian culture, 192-3; rock paintings, 190-2, 210-12; contacts with France, 222; colonization from, 233, 237  
 Ilumquh (moon goddess), 51  
*Incubatio*, practice of, 122  
 Infant sacrifice, 21  
 Iolaum, plain of, 113  
 Iolaeus, 113, 122  
 Iraq, 15, 56  
 Ireland, 279; gold deposits, 63, 237; burials, 77, 263-4, 267-72, 264, 266-7, 269-72, 275-6, 285; sleeping at tombs of saints, 122; tin deposits, 237 colonization of, 263-4, 267; legends and traditions, 273-4, 277  
 Israel, 16, 48  
 Italy: pottery, 56, 58, 111; colonization of the south, 62; Chassey culture, 221  
 Ivory, 197
- JACOB'S LADDER, 31  
 Jeremiah, 32  
 Jericho, 19-30, 39, 40, 81, 89, 20, 25-6, 28  
 Jordan, 16, 30; Ghassulian culture, 29, burials, 41, 48; wallbuilding, 41  
 Joshua, 22, 31  
 Jutland, 297-300, 306
- KERCADO, 239  
 Kerions or Korrigans, 259-60  
 Kerlescan, 257, 240  
 Kerloas, 251  
 Kermario, 254, 257  
 Khasekhem, Pharaoh, 48  
 Kherderf, 254  
 Khirokita, 81  
 Knockmany, 269, 272  
 Killarney, 285  
 Kordin III, temple of, 77  
 Krifol, 254  
 Kültepe, 28  
 Kurum Hattin, 41
- LARBACALLEE, 264, 264  
 La Ferrassie, 34  
 Lagozza culture, 221  
 Languedoc, 222  
 La Tène culture, 274

- Lebanon, 61  
 Libyans, 122  
 Liguria, 227  
 Lipari, 71, 72  
 Locmariaquer peninsula, 244, 247-51, 260, 287  
 Los Millares, 193-4, 197-202, 707, 210-11, 217, 222, 268, 279, 194, 201, 205-6, 209, 215  
 Losa, 136, 139-40, 137-9  
 Lucanus, 259  
 Lufang, 249-50, 246
- MACOMER, 156, 178**  
 Maes Howe, 278, 279, 278  
 Magic. *See* Myth, magic, religion  
 Maiden Castle, 283  
 Mainland (Orkney Islands), 277  
 Malaga, 202  
 Malta, 67, 68, 207; colonization of, 62; geology, flora, original settlers, 70-1; temples and burials, 71, 73, 75-8, 82 *ff.*, 210, 268, 43, 76-7; metals, pottery, architecture, 72-4, 79, 74-5; oldest sculpture, 74; phallic idol, 120; Invaders period idol, 129  
 Mané er Hiroeck, 248, 250-1  
 Mané Kerioned, 265  
 Mané Lud, 244  
 Mané Rutual, 247  
 Manio, 233, 243, 252, 299  
 Marib, 51  
 Maritime trade, 58, 61-4, 100-1, 298  
 Marmite symbol, 242-3, 249-50, 243  
 Marne burials, 229-30  
 Mastabas, 48  
 Matho-Talen, 261-2  
 Mdina, 94, 107  
*Mels benignets* ("consecrated hammers"), 261-2  
 Menec, 254, 257-8, 256  
 Menhirs: definition, 12; and the "masseba" of the Old Testament, 31; Sardinia, 124, 133, 131; Corsica, 167-72, 184, 188, 179-80, 185-6, 195-6; Iberia, 212, 213, 212; France, 221-4, 227-31, 223-3, 228, 236; Brittany, 232-4, 243-4, 251-4, 257-8, 255; Ireland, 268-9, 274, 277; Britain, 289; Germany, 305  
 Mesara, plain of, 61  
 Mersin, 40  
 Mesopotamia, 16, 19, 30, 58, 81; influence on Palestine, 38; creation myth, 152; burials, 227  
*See also* Sumer  
 Metals, metallurgy: first knowledge of, 63; Sardinia, 142-3; Iberia, 62, 192, 202; France, 222; Brittany, 237; Ireland, 270  
 Mgarr, 75, 105, 43, 76-7  
 Minaea, 51  
 Mnajdra, 91-3, 84-6  
 Monchique, 217  
 Mont St. Michel, 254, 258  
 Monte Accodi, 183  
 Monte Arcosu, 144  
 Morbihan area, 232-3, 237-40, 244, 253  
 Mugharet el-Wad, 17  
 Mugem, 16  
 Munwolstrup, 298  
 Musta, 74
- Mycenae, 35, 133, 269, 270, 293; burials, 54, 80, 217, 218, 268; builder-kings of, 69; gold ring from, 105; influence on Sardinia, 134; Treasury of Atreus, 203; trade, 227  
 Myth, magic, religion: early Palestine, 16, 21, 23-4; Egypt, 47; new beliefs and early megalithic burials, 68-9; Malta and Gozo, 71, 74, 77; Sardinia, 122, 150-4, 158-60, 165-6; Iberia, 202; France, 221-4, 227-30; Brittany, 240, 254, 257, 259-62; Ireland, 273-4, 277; cupmark stones and thunderbolts, 306-8, 311
- NATUFIAN CULTURE, 16-19, 22**  
 Navarra, 202  
 New Grange, 69, 267-8, 270, 266-7, 269-70, 275  
 Nile Valley, 16, 19, 30  
 Nora, 113  
 Norax of Tartessos, 113, 134  
 North Africa: burials, 45, 46, 77; Egyptian ships along coasts of, 61; pottery, 56; settlers from, in Iberia, 190; culture, 191-2  
*Nuraghi*. *See* under Sardinia  
 Nuremberg, church of St. Sebaldus, 310
- ODYSSEY, 263**  
 Olbia, 113  
 Ollolai, 165-6  
 Orkney Islands, 263, 277-81, 278-9  
 Osna brück, 301-2, 305-6  
 Otranto, 111  
 Ozieri, 116, 118, 117
- PACCIANESE, 188**  
 Palestine: early agriculture, 15, 16; Natufian culture, 16-19; worship of stone idols, 30-2; burials, 33-6, 134, 210; Ghassulian culture, 38-9; independent centres of civilization in, 39; pottery, 73  
 Pantalica, 107  
 Pantelleria, 184  
 Paphos, 199  
 Paris basin burials, 229, 232, 305, 231  
 Patrick, St., 274  
 Paul, St., 152  
 Pedras Marmuradas, 131  
 Peña Tu, 212, 242, 211  
 Perdu Cossu, 133  
 Pessinus, 32  
 Petit Morin, 67, 229, 231  
 Pertenadu, Alghero, 130  
 Phallic symbols, 32, 97, 133, 120  
 Phoenicians: style of building, 42; ships, 62-3, 68; colonization by, 64, 113, 140, 154; art, 144; in Iberia, 190, 219  
 Pictorial magic, 160, 165  
 Pisans, 187  
 Poland, 56, 298  
 Pontusval, 252  
 Populonia, 64, 184  
 Portugal: North African settlement in, 190; burials, 210-14, 217-24, 209, 213, 226, 235  
 Pottery: Jericho, 27-8, 28; Ghassulian ware, 38; Mediterranean area, 56; Malta, 72-4, 89, 94, 96, 74-5, 110; S. Italy and Aeolian

Islands, 111; Sardinia, 117, 141-2; Corsica, 183; Almeria, 192; Iberia, 198, 198, 206, 209; Cyprus, 200; Brittany, 244; Ireland, 267, 270, 276; Britain, 287; Denmark, 297-8, 300, 309  
Punchestown, 274  
Pyramids, 48, 258

QRENDI. *See* Hagar Qim  
Querns, 21, 261

REINFELD, 303  
Ritual mutilation, 221  
Rizzanese river, 188  
Roche aux Féés, 239  
Rochus, St., 260  
Rock paintings, 190-2, 210-12, 218, 244  
Rowing boat, Egyptian, 61  
Rugm el-Melfulf, 35, 41-2

SABA, 51  
Sadara, 152, 153-4  
Sahara, 191  
St. Bénézet, 222-3, 224  
St. Cado, 254  
St. Duzec, 255  
St. Gallarus, 277  
St. Kilda, 263  
St. Pierre, 260  
St. Sernin, 223, 224, 236  
Salamanca province, 214  
Samarra, 56  
Samothrace, 87  
Sanr' Andrea Priu, 117-18, 121, 118, 122, 130  
Sant' Antine, 140-1  
Santa Maria, 188  
Santa Vittoria di Serri. *See* Giara di Serri  
Saracens, 187  
Sardinia, 67, 68, 100, 187, 227, 228, 261, 277; *nuraghi* (fortresses), 42, 114, 133-41, 135-8, 147-8; colonization of, 62; burials, 77, 78, 113-23, 210; earliest settlements, 112-14; worship of the Great Mother, 123-4, 133, 141-2, 132; pottery and metals, 141-3, 148; art, 142-6, 149-50, 161-4, 173-6; religion, and water cult, 150-4; survival of old ways of life, 154-8; customs among women, 158-60, 165-6; Monte Accodi, 183  
Sardus, 113  
Sardus Pater cult, 133  
Saudi Arabia, 52  
Saumecourt, 227  
Schleswig-Holstein, 297, 299, 301, 303, 309-10  
Schülldorf, 311  
Scilly, Isles of, 263  
Scotland, 280  
Serra Orrios, 136  
Severn-Cotswold group of tombs, 283, 284  
"Seven Saints", church of, 261  
Shepherd's crook, as symbol of authority, 45  
Sherdani people, 113  
Shetland Islands, 263, 279  
Ships: seaborne trade, 61-4, 101, 61-2; Mediterranean ports, 68  
*See also* Maritime trade

Shub-ad, Queen, 53  
Shukbah, 16  
Sicily, 67, 71, 72, 75, 100, 111, 198; pottery, 56, 58; colonization of, 62; settlers from, in Malta, 71; Stentinello culture, 72; burials, 78, 95, 210  
Silanus, 133  
Silbury Hill, 284, 287, 289  
Sinai Peninsula: Natufian culture, 16; *nawamis* (stone tombs), 35, 36, 134; metal deposits, 142  
Skara Brae, 280, 281, 286  
Skellig Michel, island of, 277  
Skulls, cult of, 24-7, 25-6  
Sleeping at ancestral tombs, 122  
South Africa, 56  
Spain. *See* Iberian Peninsula  
"Speaking stones", 274, 277  
Stag-god (Cernunnos), 252  
Stentinello culture, 72  
Stonehenge, 69, 272, 284, 290-4, 293, 296  
Succoronis, 137  
Sumer, cult of the dead, 52-4  
Sun cult, 293-4, 307  
Süntelstein, 306  
Susa, 38, 56  
Sussex, 282  
Sweden: rock paintings, 211, 244; megalithic culture, 306  
Switzerland, Chassey culture in, 221  
Syria: Natufian culture, 16; shepherd's crook symbol, 45; pottery, 56, 73; burials, 210, 227  
Syros, 61-2, 62  
Szczecin (Stettin), 299

TABLE DES MARCHANDS, 250  
Táin Bó Cúailnge, 273  
Tamuli, 124  
Taravo valley, 169-71  
Tardenoisian culture, 55, 232  
Tartessos (Tarshish), 63, 68, 190  
Tassili rock paintings, 191, 218  
Tell Abu Matar, 39  
Teleilath el Ghassul, 38  
*See also* Ghassulian culture  
Tell es-Sultan, site of Jericho, 19, 22  
Tell Duweir, 27  
Tell Halaf, 38, 56  
Tell Khafaje, 152  
Tepe Gawra, 53-4  
Téviec, island of, 232  
Tharros, 144  
Thespiades, 122  
Thor, 311  
Tiryns, 134  
Tisnin, 52  
Tombs of the Children of Israel, 34-5  
Tombs. *See under separate countries, also*  
Dolmens; Menhirs  
Torre culture, 181-3  
Torri of Corsica. *See under* Corsica  
Trade: Natufian culture, 16; Palestine, 29; maritime, 61-4, 100-1, 298  
*See also* Metals  
Transjordanian, 40-2  
Trepanning, 221, 231

Trigueros, 207  
 Troldebjerg, 299, 311  
 Troy, 58, 61, 197, 270  
 Tuaregs, 55, 122  
 Tuscany, 142  
 Ty Isaf, 284  
 Tyrol, 227  
  
 UGARIT, 227  
 Ur, 53-4, 227  
 Uta style of Sardinian art, 144-6, 161-2  
  
 VAL CAMONICA, 172, 227  
 Vale de Rodrigo, 214  
 Valetta, 107  
 Vampires, 165  
 Vandals, 187  
 Vanirs, 306  
 Vatican, prehistoric, 151  
 Vendetta, in Corsica, 187-8  
 Venus of Macomer, 115, 123-4  
 Venus of Malta, 91, 83  
 Vetulonia, 145  
  
 Vikings, 241, 277, 298  
  
 WADI DHOBAL, 40  
 Wadi en-Natuf, 16, 19  
 Water cult, 152-4  
 Wessex, 282; culture, 292  
 West Kennet, 287, 289, 295  
 Westphalia, 305  
 Wicklow, 267  
 Windmill Hill, 282, 283  
 Witch's Grave, 273  
 Women, and ancient customs: Sardinia, 158-60, 165-6; Brittany, 262  
 Woodhenge, 291, 292  
  
 XEMJIJA, 75, 94  
  
 YARMUK VALLEY, 28, 41  
 Yemen, 51  
  
 ZEALAND, 297, 306  
 Zebbug, 73, 74  
 Züschen, 305

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