

Chapter 11

THE TOMBS OF THE NEOLITHIC ARTIST-SHEPHERDS OF THE TAGUS VALLEY AND THE MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS OF THE MOUTH OF THE RIVER SEVER

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Abstract: This brief synthesis presents the conclusions of the archaeological studies carried out in the megalithic tombs located on the banks of the Sever River, close to the rock art of the Tagus Valley. Most of these are small orthostatic tombs made of slate that define chambers with passage and which possess mounds that originally were covered with white quartz. Judging by the dimensions of the mounds, the assemblages of votive artefacts and the setting of the tombs within the landscape, the builders of these small dolmens appear to have developed an economy based on herding. In this article we argue that they were these Neolithic artist-shepherds, those who erected the small tombs, who are responsible for most of the rock art known in the Tagus Valley, which they engraved whilst watching over their herds during the summer seasons.

Key words: Megaliths; Neolithic; Rock art; Herding

Resumo: Nesta breve síntese apresentam-se as conclusões dos estudos arqueológicos desenvolvidos nos sepulcros megalíticos situados nas duas margens da foz do Rio Sever, nas imediações da arte rupestre do Vale do Tejo. Maioritariamente, são pequenas sepulturas, obtidas por esteios de xisto, definindo câmara e corredor, com mamóas que, originalmente, seriam revestidas por blocos de quartzo leitoso. Pelas dimensões dos túmulos, conjuntos artefactuais votivos e enquadramento paisagístico os construtores destes pequenos dólmenes parece terem desenvolvido uma economia maioritariamente suportada na pastorícia. Neste artigo deduz-se, assim, que terão sido, essencialmente, estes pastores-artistas neolíticos, que erigiram os pequenos sepulcros, os responsáveis pela maior parte da arte rupestre conhecida no Vale do Tejo, gravada enquanto vigiavam os seus rebanhos, durante a época estival.

Palavras chave: Megalitos; Neolítico; Arte Rupestre; Pastoreio

This paper is the result of more than twelve years of the archaeological study of the megalithic monuments of the District of Cedillo. When prospective fieldwork started in 1994, there were no known references to any megalithic remains in the district. The only available information about the east bank of the Rio Sever were references to the megalithic monuments of the District of Valencia de Alcántara dating from at least the 19th century in Spanish archaeological works (Bueno, 1988). The importance of most of the megalithic burial sites found in the district diverted attention from smaller sites, as is the case in other places: almost all researchers concentrated their attention on the large granite monuments which are highly visible in the landscape and above all they focussed on the wealth and diversity of the grave goods usually found in these tombs. This explains the widespread ignorance about a different dimension of megalithic remains: monuments which were less visible but much greater in number, located half a dozen kilometres north of Valencia de Alcántara. Although the discreet nature of the architecture of the Cedillo and Herrera de Alcántara monuments led to their being ignored over the course of millennia, it is nevertheless strange that following the identification in the mid-1970s, which was very late in the day, of the extremely important Tagus Valley rock carvings and the recognition that they were mainly post-Palaeolithic phenomena, archaeologists did not attempt to understand the context in which they were produced by carrying out prospecting work on the hillsides flanking the river. This

is even odder in view of the fact that Georg and Vera Leisner (Leisner & Leisner, 1956) had published in German in the 1950s the locations of more than fifty megalithic burial sites in the area surrounding the mouth of the River Sever, a tributary of the Tagus, its mouth located just a few hundred metres from the principal rock-carving sites.

Although the artistic manifestations of the Tagus Valley are practically all submerged by the reservoir and there-

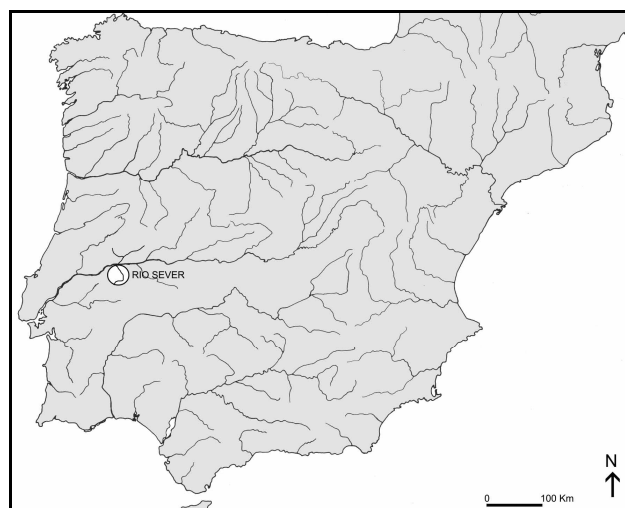


Fig. 11.1. Location of River Sever

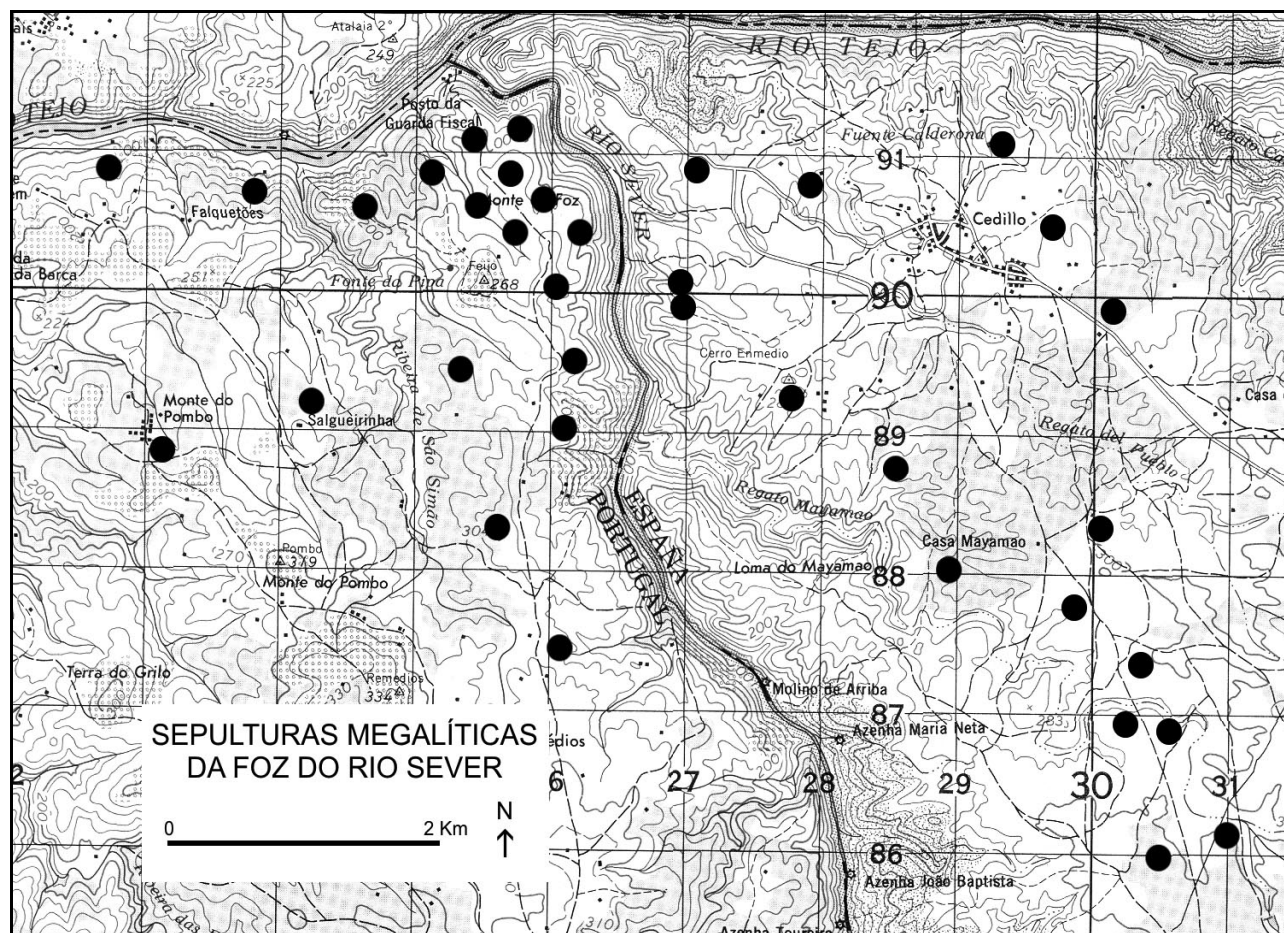


Fig. 11.2. Megalithic tomb of River Sever

fore cannot be re-examined, it seems clear that the artists who created them are buried in the hundreds of megalithic tumuli which flank them on both banks of the Tagus. It seems equally clear that with the development of archaeological knowledge, both about the chronology of artistic styles and the long-term functional use of dolmens, we are now fairly certain of the contemporaneity of the rock carvings of the Tagus Valley and the megalithic tumuli of the mouth of River Sever.

It should be noted that for at least twelve years we have made claims regarding the basis of the economy of the people buried in the small schist tumuli on the hillsides overlooking River Sever: the quality of the soils, the small size of funereal monuments, the poor quality of the collections of grave goods found in them, their specific features, and the characteristics of the few habitats which have hitherto been identified, have led us to the conclusion that the economy of the Neolithic communities which lived here was very likely based mainly on pastoralism and hunting. This seems to be echoed in the recurrent theme of the art carved in the schists of the Tagus, in which scenes of hunting and pastoralism predominate. The natural tendency for shepherds to carve away at pieces of wood, decorate their crooks, and carve in rock their memories of

solitude during long hours of patient herding of their flocks seems to strengthen the link between the Tagus artists and the builders of the tombs of Montalvão-Cedillo. Over the millennia, these pastimes have been an ever-present feature of pastoral life, and could have originated the art of the Tagus Valley. This link seems to make even more sense in view of the fact that no carvings have been found on monuments at the mouth of the Sever; meanwhile, about 20 kilometres up the Tagus valley stream, in the region of Santiago de Alcántara, we would expect to see rock carvings on river boulders but there are none, although there are a very few on dolmen stones. Of course, it should be noted that the soils of Santiago de Alcántara are well-suited to farming, which is reflected in the large size of tombs and the diversity and wealth of the grave goods they contain. In this region, the Neolithic economy would have been mainly based on farming, and pastoralism would have been less important, which is reflected in the small number of artistic manifestations that have been discovered in the region.

All this means that it is very likely that the remains of the artist-shepherds who produced the exuberant art of the Tagus Valley are to be found buried in the small megalithic tombs at the mouth of the River Sever.

11.1. THE LANDSCAPE AND THE BUILDING OF BURIAL SITES

The area through which the final stretch of the River Sever runs up to the point where it feeds into the Tagus is marked by steep slopes and enclosed valleys. Other valleys which are not so deep were carved out on the schistose soils which shape the landscape by streams which now mostly run dry in the summer. Thus, on both banks of the Sever, there is an undulating orography defined by several ridges which run mainly parallel with the Sever and perpendicular to the Tagus. It was the principal and secondary eminences of these ridges that the communities of Neolithic shepherds selected for the building of their tombs, and there are only extremely rare exceptions to this rule. The best example of such an exception is the Charca Grande de la Regañada Dolmen, which though not sited on the crest of a ridge, is visible in the landscape from all directions because it is built in one of the few level zones in the district. One point of interest regarding this monument, probably the largest of its type hitherto identified, is its centrality in relation to ten other smaller tombs which surround it. It is also interesting to note that this dolmen was built in one of the few places with fertile soil enabling some farming to take place. The rest of the landscape, with the exception of the very small valleys, has very thin soils with almost zero farming potential. The vegetation is characterised by dense patches of spotted rockrose (*Cistus ladanifer*) with a scattering of short holm-oaks and a very few cork-oaks. Though it is recognised that nowadays the soils do not present exactly the same characteristics as those of the Neolithic period, there has been very little change. Today, the rockrose is kept at bay by cutting and the land is only suitable for grazing for goats and sheep, on which the economy of the people of Cedillo depends. Mechanical cutters are used to control the naturally-occurring rockrose, but not long ago forest fires performed this task, some of them occurring naturally and others set by Man; evidence of such fires can easily be traced in the ashes and carbon that are found beneath the superficial soils deposited by the wind, detected in the areas surrounding the burial sites. They also contributed to the sparse tree cover that is a feature of most of the Cedillo landscape, associated with the damage caused to most young trees by the animals, especially goats.

The burial mounds of the small megalithic tombs were lined with kerbs made of milky quartz boulders to make them stand out in the landscape but these are obscured by patches of spotted rockrose that naturally envelop them. This plant cover grows up unchecked obscuring the monuments, but in the Neolithic era they would have been visible as the grazing of animals which kept the vegetation down formed the basis of the economy of the communities of the region. The lack of water in the soils, in which springs are rare (the few that exist normally dry up during the summer and autumn), would have forced Neolithic communities and their flocks to remain near the Sever and the Tagus Rivers. Their dependence on these

perennial water-courses seems to be reflected in the concentration of tombs on the ridges nearest the two rivers and a corresponding decrease in the number of sites as we move away from them. Nowadays, from late May, the highest parts of Cedillo district already show signs of insufficient grass cover to provide for flocks, and shepherds move them down to the banks of the rivers where greenery still flourishes. Similarly, the Neolithic shepherds of the Montalvão and Cedillo area would have herded their flocks along the river banks during summers, and with the rivers were at their lowest point, in their long hours of solitude, they carved away at the schist boulders found in the semi-dry courses of the Tagus and the Sever, thus giving vent to their creative energies.

11.2. TOMB ARCHITECTURE

It has long been recognized that the megalithic tomb architecture is characterised by a range of forms reflecting a model which was largely based on myth, or a mythological complex, rather than a real architectural solution. All the tombs which have been excavated in the area of the mouth of the River Sever present three structural elements: the chamber, the passage and the tumulus; however, there are others which have still not been excavated and are thought to be cist-shaped, without no passage and a single uniform tumulus. Nevertheless, this theory will probably be discarded when these sites are eventually excavated. When excavation work started at the very small Cedillo site known as Era dos Guardas, we thought we would find a small chamber with no passage as all the surface features pointed to this; however, what we discovered was a highly regular chamber to which a symbolic passage was attached. The whole monument was enveloped in a tumulus constructed with schist boulders originally lined with a kerb made of milky quartz slabs (Oliveira, 1993).

Thus, out of the seven monuments that we have hitherto studied on both banks of the Sever: Padre Santo, Fonte da Pipa, and Lomba da Barca on the Portuguese side; and Joaninha, Cuatro Lindones, Era dos Guardas and Charca Grande de la Regañada on the Spanish side (to which we can add Sevillana, at Cedillo, on which we only carried out consolidation work to two upright stones), two main architectural variants have been identified. The first of these, taking in Padre Santo, Fonte da Pipa, Lomba da Barca, Era dos Guardas and Charca Grande de la Regañada, is characterised by a clearly differentiated chamber and passage. The chamber is built in the form of a regular polygon which is almost circular, and a passage is attached which is substantially narrower than the diameter of the chamber. The greater or lesser regularity of the chamber seems due to the size of the uprights that form it, especially the width of the capstone, rather than any planning on the part of the builders. The second type takes in all the other monuments hitherto excavated. The head-stone is regular in shape and the interior space narrows towards the passage, so it is difficult to say where

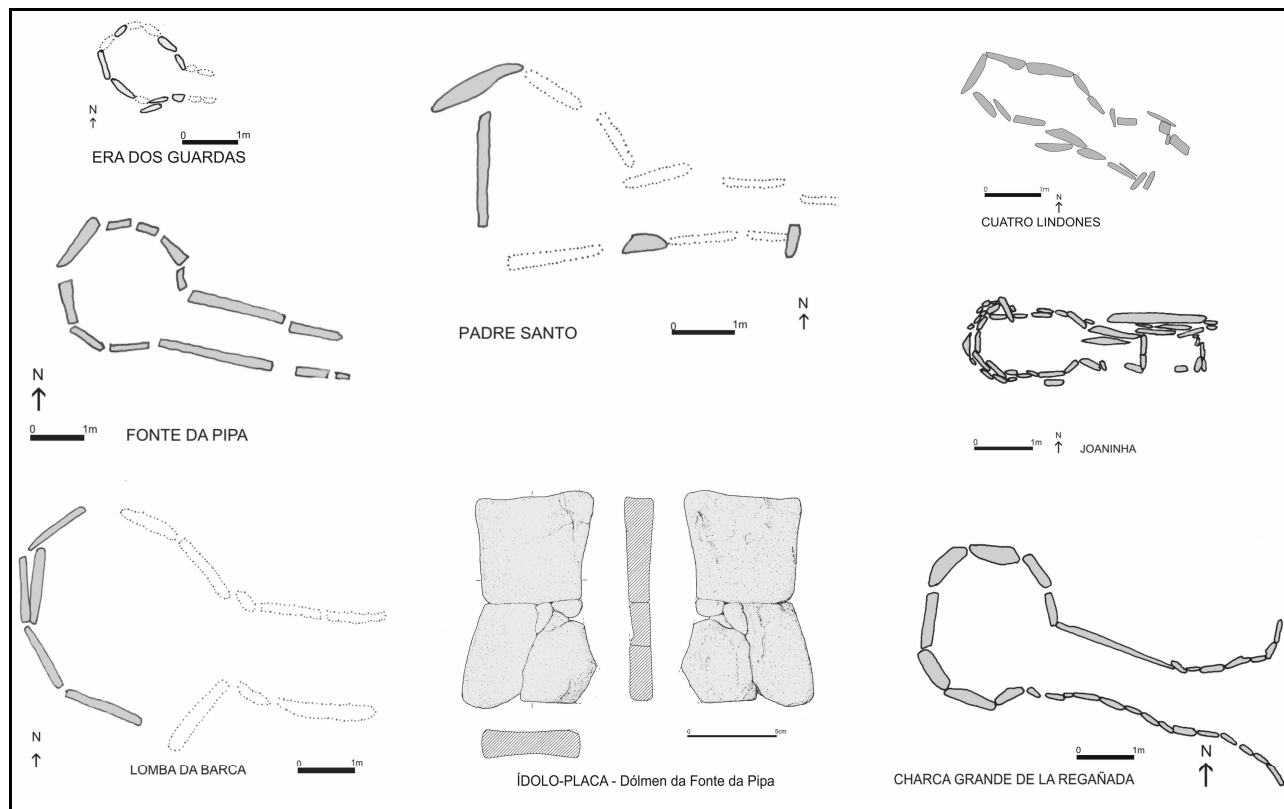


Fig. 11.3. Plans of monuments of the Sever

this begins. This is true both for the horizontal and vertical plane. From the head-stone the height of the uprights gradually diminishes so that they are almost indistinguishable from the natural topography of the land.

With the first type of design, the chamber and the passage are well-defined, mainly by the use of individualized uprights; with the second type, there are multiple slabs of schist or graywacke, which overlap and delimit the funeral space. This feature is particularly well-defined at the Joaninha site.

With both types, the level of the interior floor is generally below that of the surrounding topography. Thus, the builders of these tombs lowered and flattened their floors and made cavities in the underlying rock for the erection of uprights. This feature is visible at the Charca Grande de la Regañada site, with a difference in height between the centre of the chamber and the surrounding land which exceeds fifty centimetres. Similarly, at most sites, as one penetrates the monument through the passage to the chamber there is a slight downward inclination, demonstrating a clear intention on the part of the builders to situate the main tumulus space below the level of the surrounding land.

There are several questions as to the way in which the interior space is covered. Hitherto, a single type of *in situ* covering has been recognized. At the Sevillana site, a capstone formed with a schist slab covers the uprights of

what could be termed a passage. All the monuments with an elongated shape would probably have been covered with such slabs. However, with more spacious chambers, this type of covering, although possible, was much more difficult to fashion in view of the fact it is not easy to obtain such large schist slabs as can be had in granite. At the same time, no chamber covering has ever been found *in situ* (one would expect to find such features having either fallen into the chamber or lying broken within it or nearby). We know that the temptation for communities settling in the region at a later date to use such slabs for other purposes would have been great, thus it is somewhat surprising that no evidence of any such slabs has survived. So how would the spacious chambers of these schist monuments have been covered? Besides the obvious assumption that they were appropriated by local people, there are several theories. Hypothetically, the chambers could have been covered with not just a single slab, as with granite monuments, but several slabs placed on the tops of the uprights thus covering the interior space. However, excavation work has never brought any evidence to light in the interior of chambers that can confirm this theory. It would be very strange, to say the least, that no evidence had survived after so many thousands of years from a pattern of reuse of stones which could be identified in other contexts. In view of this fact, and in view of the fact that one can very often find what seems to be man-made grooves at the tops of uprights, we have reached the conclusion that the tumuli were covered with vegetable matter. The possibility of several pieces of

wood being supported on these carved grooves in a cross-pattern above the funereal chamber, themselves supporting small schist slabs, seems to us the best explanation of how larger chambers were covered. Naturally, this kind of covering would not last long; meanwhile, we are certain that these funereal spaces were continuously used and re-visited over the course of hundreds of years, perhaps for more than a thousand years. Taking into account average passage height it is clear that most passages are symbolic constructions which do not provide access for people. So the only way of penetrating the interior of the chambers would be going in over the top, which means that the covering would have to be removed. If a chamber was covered by a large slab, its frequent removal would not only be extremely laborious but it also might jeopardise the stability of the entire structure. The proposition that chambers were covered with vegetable matter seems reasonable, as such coverings would be easily removable and maintained. This explanation would also account for the peculiarity of the presence of passages with a height which can be as little as twenty centimetres; these small passages seem to have a merely symbolic function, mimicking larger monuments whose passages are entirely functional.

In order to construct the tumuli it is clear that the builders first removed the earth from the space chosen as the tomb site and laid overlapping slabs of schist on the rock foundation cushioned with a layer of fine compacted clay. The removal of the earth lent a degree of stability to the whole burial mound that would enclose the funereal space. The large number of blocks of milky quartz found scattered around these tombs, which very occasionally occur as construction features of the burial mound, leads us to consider the theory that following the building of a monument it was lined with a kerb of quartz blocks that would endow it with visibility in the landscape. This effect would be even more marked when the quartz was covered with dew or when it was wet and the sun shone on it, creating the effect of a shiny veneer. It is therefore recognised that the builders of these monuments wanted to mark them out in the landscape, both through their choice of sites and the way in which they constructed the tumuli in the burial mounds. The use of quartz for kerbs which made burial mounds stand out in the landscape seems to have been the way in which the Neolithic communities of the region compensated for the small size of these monuments as compared with granite tombs located in the south of the country. These funereal sites would have been visible from afar not only thanks to their shiny veneer but also due to the likely configuration of perishable materials, which today usually adorn the tumuli of isolated communities in Africa and the Indian Ocean islands.

Besides the basic structure of these tombs, a complex forecourt constructed in front of the façade has been identified, hitherto only at the great Charca Grande de la Regañada monument. As a natural extension to the façade it spreads out and delimits the tumulus. It is recognised

that different ritual practices would have taken place in this space, in spite of it being damaged by recent earth movements by Man and the roots of an old cork-oak. Various fragments of flint blades, cut-stone remains, beads and a flint arrowhead were found among the schist boulders (a few of them lying overturned while others stand upright), and a large number of blocks of quartz. In view of the construction materials used and the artefacts found in this space, it is thought likely that the site provided the stage for a number of ritual practices and, at the same time, the deposit of grave goods. Also, during excavation work at this site, around the tumulus, at the extremity opposite the passage, a structure was identified made up of schist slabs, laid out horizontally in an almost circular shape with an irregular outline and a diameter of around two metres. The slabs that form this structure are set in a layer of clay on the underlying rock. Half of this structure having been dismantled, nothing was found under the slabs. In the small space between the tumulus and this strange structure we found at a depth of about thirty-five centimetres three dung-beetle balls, which had been cut open, fired in a kiln and made into small ceramic containers. Though we have no idea of the function of these enigmatic items, they are no doubt linked to the tomb. We know that most burials were preceded by the preparation of the corpse, involving the reduction of its volume by means of cremation, excarnation and dismemberment; this structure may have been designed for this purpose. Nevertheless, there is no sign of fire and no other evidence was detected on the surfaces of the slabs that form it, nor in the area immediately surrounding the monument.

As regards variations in terms of construction features employed in the building of the monuments of the mouth of the Sever, the stones of the Joaninha site are notable. The floor of this megalithic tomb is completely covered with fine schist slabs, carefully shaped to cover the whole of the interior, and this is especially evident in the chamber. Though this type of floor was also present in the passage, the slabs have been partially destroyed at the south end where the damage caused by farming is most in evidence. The passage of this monument seems to have been extended in length; this observation derives from the identification in the interior of the monument, near the entrance, of two schist blocks placed transversally, eighty centimetres apart, creating a sort of extension to the passage. The space delimited by these blocks is enclosed by the passage uprights, although these are smaller and provide less stability. Thus, this seems to be an extension to the tomb built at a stage later than the original construction.

It was found that the direction of the passages of the monuments excavated (those referred to in this paper, because only those figures are accurate) range from 95° to 120°, as follows: Joaninha – 95°, Charca Grande da Regañada – 100°, Era dos Guardas – 115°, Cuatro Lindones – 115°, Padre Santo – 95°, Fonte da Pipa – 120°, and Lomba da Barca – 115°.

11.3. DATINGS

The contemporaneity of schist and granite megalithic monuments is suggested by the following factors: geographical proximity, great similarity in terms of architecture (despite the difference in scale), and a degree of similarity between the collections of grave goods found (although each type displays its own specificities). Before the excavation of the Joaninha Dolmen in the district of Cedillo, the only dated samples originating from schist monuments in the mouth of the Sever area had been obtained from carbon taken from the Lomba da Barca Dolmen in the district of Nisa. This carbon was dated 950 ± 80 years BP, which, even if translated into calendar years, certainly represents a very late stage for the desecration of the monument. Because other tombs excavated on the Portuguese bank were greatly damaged by the plantation of eucalyptuses, no datable materials could be obtained. Thus, before taking organic matter from the Joaninha site, we were in a position in which there were no absolute chronometric values available. The radiocarbon dating of the two samples taken from the Joaninha monument provided the following figures: 3840 ± 170 and 5400 ± 210 years BP, respectively. These samples involved the collection of carbon at two different levels and for separate structures. The first of these, Sac-1381: 3840 ± 170 years BP, is the dating provided for a number of carbon fragments collected from the base of the monument in the transition zone between the chamber and the passage, which is covered with a great deal of compacted earth, which displays no sign of desecration, and this is where most of the artefacts were gathered. The carbon is derived from ashes and was taken from earth that covered the slabs that formed the floor of the funeral space. Under these slabs, between the fine layer of earth that separated it from the underlying rock, another collection of carbonized wood fragments was taken, associated with small ash stains, and the following dating was obtained: Sac - 1380: 5400 ± 210 years BP (Oliveira, 1997).

Though we have only two datings, they are extremely important, as they are the only ones hitherto available for the sites in the mouth of the Sever area and, in some measure, they were taken from site which do not seem to have been desecrated and also they clearly provide parallels with the dates already available for larger monuments constructed in granite and situated in the Sever basin.

The first dating obtained for the Joaninha Dolmen, Sac - 1381: 3840 ± 170 years BP, in terms of temporal context, coincides with those of Samples 1 and 3 taken from Cabeçuda Dolmen in the district of Marvão, a monument with a regular polygonal chamber and a short passage, with the following datings: 3650 ± 110 years BP and 3720 ± 45 years BP, respectively. The first sample derives from carbon taken from inside a small silo in the chamber-floor where open ceramic receptacles with smooth surfaces were found. The second was taken from

roasted acorns gathered from beneath the overturned chamber uprights, also where smooth ceramic receptacles were found. There are also chronological parallels with Sample 1 taken from the Castelhanas Dolmen, a granite monument with a regular polygonal chamber and a short passage, while there is a degree of difference between them, although this not very significant, especially when the margins of error are taken into account. This sample (OXA-5432), which was dated 3220 ± 65 years BP, was taken from burnt human bones found along with undecorated semi-spherical containers, flint arrowheads with a convex base and fragments of schist plaque.

The second sample from the Joaninha dolmen (Sac - 1380: 5400 ± 210 years BP) (Oliveira, 1997) was taken from beneath the slabs of the base of the monument, where no artefacts were uncovered, and seems to fall within the set of dates which are commonly considered as being extremely ancient, now applied to the granite monuments of the area under analysis. These samples, taken from monuments in the district of Marvão, such as the Castelhanas Dolmen (ICEN-1264: 6360 ± 110 years BP), the Cabeçuda Dolmen (ICEN-978: 7660 ± 60 years BP) and the Figueira Branca Dolmen (ICEN-823: 6210 ± 50 years BP), involved carbon collected from the sandy soils at the base of the chamber, where no artefacts were found, probably resulting from the digging of cavities for the erection of uprights or, as is the case of the Figueira Branca Dolmen, carbon from an unstructured hearth identified at the base of the tumulus. In this last example, the carbon sample was taken from a site at which a broken millstone and smooth pottery fragments were found.

The datings obtained at the Joaninha site seem to bear out the theory of the contemporaneity of the use of the two types of megalithic sites situated in the Sever basin. On the basis of the data collected, this temporal parallelism seems to be more significant for granite monuments with a short passage than those with an extended passage. The only dated sample hitherto available for this region associated with monuments with an extended passage was obtained at the site of the Coureleiros IV Dolmen in the district of Castelo de Vide, dated 4240 ± 150 years BP (ICEN-976).

At the same time, it is interesting to note how the age of the carbon (Utc-4452: 6022 ± 40 years BP) gathered from the cavity in which the menhir of Meada, in the district of Castelo de Vide, was erected, is approximate to the dates of the megalithic monuments presented here, which are regarded as being extremely ancient (Oliveira, 1997a).

The older dating provided for the Joaninha monument confirms that the first stage in the construction of these tombs occurred in the early Neolithic era and that they were used up until the beginning of the Chalcolithic period. It is associated with a series of datings with a degree of significance for this small hydrological basin; in previous papers a more detailed analysis of this has been

provided. The difference between the two carbon-datings for the Joaninha monument show that these tombs had an extended functional life, just like other tombs outside the area examined in this paper.

11.4. ARTEFACTS AS A REFLECTION OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

The type of economy practiced by the Neolithic communities is reflected in the range of artefacts unearthed in the tombs. Among the large number of funereal items identified at the large sites on soils suited to farming, there is a large number of ceramic items. These were essential features of life in settled farming-based societies and would not have been used much by communities which were always on the move, such as those whose economy was based on pastoralism. The latter mainly used receptacles and containers made of animal or vegetable matter which are subject to decay and have therefore not survived. At the sites of the mouth of the Sever ceramic artefacts are either absent or present in small numbers. Thus, the almost complete absence of ceramic items at these sites points to the existence of predominantly pastoral communities. The corpses buried in the tomb may have been accompanied by some containers that once served as utensils but because these were made from organic materials they did not survive: such artefacts, made of skin, wood, or horn, would have formed part of the equipment of shepherds herding flocks. These were placed in their graves with their corpses, rather than ceramic receptacles which would have indicated the existence of more settled communities.

Millstones are other artefacts which are found in large numbers in the monuments situated on soils better suited to farming. Scattered in burial mounds, sometimes used as wedges for large boulders, or even as grave goods, lots of over fifty such items can be found at a single site, for example, at the Cabeçuda Dolmen in the district of Marvão. However, this rarely occurs with the small tombs of the mouth the Sever. Of the various sites studied in the region, only the Joaninha site, that of Era dos Guardas, at Cedillo, and that of Lomba da Barca, near Montalvão, have supplied a millstone. However, a close link between the millstone found at the Lomba da Barca site and the funereal monument was not established: it was found on the surface, ten metres from the dolmen, leaning against an old holm-oak tree. It had long served and continued to serve as a seat for the shepherd who watched his flocks sheep and goats.

Out of all artefacts, the millstone is certainly that which bears the closest relationship to farming practices, and its absence from the megalithic remains of the mouth of the Sever is significant.

Among the collections of grave goods taken from the tombs in the schist zone, of note are the large number of robust polished stone tools found; however, adzes/hoes

rarely occur. Large axes predominate, generally only their cutting edges polished and quadrangular or rectangular in cross-section. At the sites in areas with good farming potential, fewer polished stone implements are found: equal numbers of adzes/hoes and axes occur, while some monuments, especially those with an extended passage, provide a larger number of adzes/hoes. Though most of the polished stone implements are closely related to the existence of farming, it is naturally adzes/hoes that were used on a daily basis by those whose principal economic activity involved tillage of the land. Comparing the axes found at the two types of sites, they differ in terms of weight, cross-section and above all, the width of the cutting edge in relation to the total length of the tool. The axes found in areas most suited to farming are small, tooled to a higher standard, with a generally rectangular or elliptical cross-section, and have long cutting edges and a narrow bevel, and were suitable for cutting wood. However, most of the axes gathered at the monuments at the mouth of the River Sever are not suitable for this purpose; their features indicate that the purpose of the cutting edge is not so much achieving a perfect cut but rather inflicting injury, and they therefore served mainly as weapons. The shepherd was much more exposed to danger than the farmer and usually carried weapons for self-defence. This also points to the existence of an economy mainly based on pastoralism characterizing the communities of the mouth of the River Sever. They had little excess capacity in terms of produce to trade with on a regular basis in order to obtain raw materials like flint, which did not exist in the region. This lack of trading capability seems to be confirmed by the small number of flint arrowheads and blades found at these burial sites, especially when compared with megalithic remains found in soils better suited to farming.

Another megalithic artefact *par excellence* which is worthy of mention because of its absence in the collections of tomb goods found at sites at the mouth of Sever is the decorated schist plaque. Hitherto, no decorated schist plaques have been identified at these sites, but two pieces which have been identified as variants of common schist plaques have been uncovered at the Fonte da Pipa site, north of Montalvão. These two polished sandstone items, one of them intact, are nearly parallelepiped in shape, undecorated and not carved, and slightly concave on both sides. Possibly representing the schematic forms of sandstone and grès plaques, which normally feature anthropomorphic decoration, they are similar to the unusual collection of grave goods found at the Horta da Coudelaria de Alter Dolmen.

There are a range of possible explanations for the absence of schist plaques at the sites located at the mouth of the River Sever. One of those which best fits the interpretations presented above is associated with the same likely reason for the very small number of flint artefacts found. We now know that there existed centres for producing artefacts and networks for the distribution of schist plaques and that obtaining these luxury funereal

artefacts would necessitate trade; assuming the economy of the communities of the mouth of the Sever was poor, little excess produce would have been available for commercial exchange, so these artefacts would have represented an unaffordable luxury to these communities, and the same thing is true of flint artefacts.

The presence of two sandstone plaques at the Fonte da Pipa monument, one of the schist burial sites situated furthest from the mouth of the Sever, where better resources were available and where the soils were more suitable for farming, could provide evidence of a more prosperous economy with regard to the community that built it and, consequently, sufficient excess produce in order that luxury funereal artefacts could be obtained.

Although only highly fragmentary evidence is available and only a small number of funereal monuments have been studied, everything seems to point to the fact that the economy of the Neolithic communities that built the tombs in the mouth of the River Sever area was poor and based mainly on pastoralism, which was naturally reflected in the quality and number of grave goods and the very small size of most of the tombs. These aspects also portray a society which was less complex, less organized and less pyramidal than those based on farming and consequently more settled. It was these shepherds of the mouth of the Sever area who produced the large number of carvings on the schist boulders which are now largely submerged by the waters of the Fratel Reservoir. This they did especially in summer-time, while herding their flocks along the banks of the Tagus in search of pasture.

11.5. CONCLUSION

Though the scant evidence of settlements of the builders of the megalithic burial sites of the mouth of the River Sever has never previously been studied, as a result of the information gathered from excavations it is now possible to reconstitute some aspects of the society, economy and rituals of the communities that lived in this region during the Neolithic era. On the extremely thin soils of the area, the economy of these communities was mainly pastorally-based, while in the better-drained valleys they were able to grow some crops, complemented by hunting and fishing. Pastoralism, however, forms the basis of the economy, as is still the case nowadays in the region. Herding their flocks in constant nomadic movement, the Neolithic people of the mouth of the Sever did not live in an organized fashion in cohesive structured communities that would have provided them with the manpower needed for the construction of large collective tumuli. Their small-scale burial sites built with schist blocks, which two or three people could easily transport and raise, were organized in necropolises along hillcrests which stood out in the landscape. Burial mounds were lined with kerbs made blocks of white quartz which contrasted with the green and brown hues of the vegetation. The poor economy meant very little excess produce and the people

of the area established few contacts with the traders that could have supplied with them luxury items, such as flint and schist blocks. The absence of this type of artefact or its presence in small numbers as well as the virtual absence of ceramic recipients and millstones at burial sites indicate that the Neolithic people of the area survived almost entirely thanks to pastoralism. Practising transhumance during the summer and autumn, they herded their flocks along the banks of the Tagus and the Sever in search of the pasture which was unavailable in the dry uplands at that time of year. While the animals moved slowly along the banks and spacious river-bed of the Tagus, the shepherds would patiently turn the flat polished schists they encountered into memorials of their sojourn. In a cycle of artistic activity, the ancient men of the mouth of the Sever carved and re-carved the schist slabs with images of their experiences of nature or and hopes; still today, shepherds carve with their penknives decorations on crooks or the horn containers in which they carry their provisions, with one eye on their flocks.



Fig. 11.4. Charca Grande de la Regañada – General view from the west: the tumulus following excavation



Fig. 11.5. Charca Grande de la Regañada – General view from the north: the chamber and passage



Fig. 11.6. Charca Grande de la Regañada – General view of the structure identified west of the tumulus



Fig. 11.7. Charca Grande de la Regañada – View of the structure after partial dismantling



Fig. 11.8. Charca Grande de la Regañada – General view of the monument with the structured forecourt in the foreground

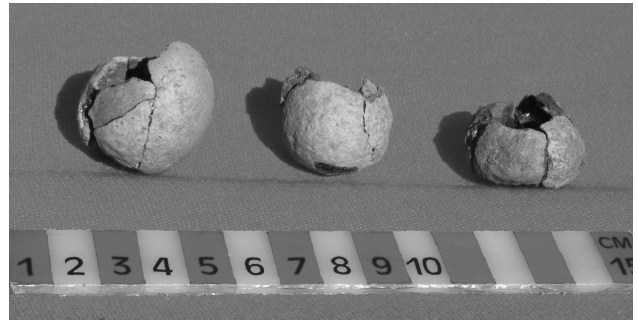


Fig. 11.9. Charca Grande de la Regañada – Three dung-beetle balls made into ceramic containers found in the monument tumulus



Fig. 11.10. Fonte da Pipa – View of the monument before the start of excavations



Fig. 11.11. Fonte da Pipa – Idol-plaque *in situ* near the head-stone



Fig. 11.12. Fonte da Pipa – View of the excavation of the monument



Fig. 11.15. Lomba da Barca – View of the excavation of the monument



Fig. 11.13. Fonte da Pipa – General view of the dolmen after excavation



Fig. 11.16. Lomba da Barca – View of the excavation of the tumulus



Fig. 11.14. Lomba da Barca – Monument viewed from the North



Fig. 11.17. Lomba da Barca – General view of the monument after excavation



Fig. 11.18. Padre Santo – General view of the monument from the south



Fig. 11.19. Padre Santo – General view of the monument from the north