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The megalithic phenomenon of northwest Spain: main trends

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What is one to do with megaliths, now that their classification into evolutionary sequences – the mainstay of megalithic study over so many years – seems to offer insufficient insights? Yet in some regions of Europe the great stone monuments provide the major physical evidence from their period. Here is a study of one of the megalithic zones, which seeks to find new insights by asking new kinds of questions.

With some exceptions (Hodder 1984; Shanks & Tilley 1982), studies on Atlantic megalith-building have often restricted themselves either to particular aspects (chronology, architecture or material culture), or social and territorial issues within a strongly functionalist approach. Most Spanish and Galician authors have kept to this orientation as well.

This paper has a different approach, for it offers a general survey of the megalithic phenomenon in an area not well known to European scholars. At the same time we shall try to organize Galician archaeological data in order to appreciate megalith-building from a different standpoint, a standpoint which arises from the fact that megalithic structures are monumental funerary architecture. The upsurge of megalith-building is coeval with the beginning of settled agriculture, of peasant communities and, as a result, of a new kind of relationship between man and his environment (Criado 1988c).

Once the broad implications of the megalithic phenomenon are assumed, we should recognize that the megalithic monumental sense could be expressed with distinct solutions, even in the same area. We would rather talk of 'main trends' than of 'stages' or 'types', stressing a research strategy that intends to understand megalith-building – 'megalithism' – as an event taking shape through different regularities. With that

concept, borrowed from Foucault (1980), we name the implementation of a previous monumental idea through specific forms with a certain strategic value. We can view each megalithic regularity, not as a chronotypological stage, but as a portrait of the lines of force and social power to be found in a community. Our approach should allow us to deal with questions of cultural, ideological and symbolical order which are usually forgotten in megalithic studies.

The geographical setting of Galicia

The extreme northwest of Spain is occupied by the autonomous region of Galicia (FIGURE 1), situated to the north of Portugal and washed by the Atlantic Ocean and the Bay of Biscay; to the east are the Spanish provinces of Asturias, León and Zamora. The total surface area of Galicia is 29,434 sq. km.

The Galician landscape divides into three distinct topographical units: *sierras*, *penichairas* (flattened surfaces), and the coast. The *sierras*, located mostly in the east and southeast parts of Galicia, reach up to 2000 m in height. In the central zone lower mountains extend in a north-south line. Between these and the easternmost chains is a large area of *penichairas*, more or less flat surfaces at an average height of about 500 m. Approaching the coast, the *penichairas* are increasingly altered and eroded by a

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FIGURE 1. The study region.

The lines A'-A and B'-B locate the profiles of FIGURE 2.

FIGURE 2. Topographical sections of Galicia with mámoas density.

great number of small river courses. Finally, the coast line has an extremely jagged profile with *rías*, ancient river valleys flooded during the Flandrian transgression due to structural reasons or tectonic movements (FIGURE 2).

Although differences are found between the low coastal areas and the eastern mountains, Galicia as a whole is placed within the climatic zone of maritime western Europe, characterized by regular rainfall throughout the year and moderate temperatures.

Prehistoric setting: general aspects of megalith-building

Megalithic architecture in this area shows little variety. Just one single standing stone, at Gargantás (Pontevedra), has been studied (Peña Santos 1982). Maciñeira (1929) made known the existence of two stone circles in A Mourela (north of Coruña province), both built with a single line of stones; they might have been destroyed or unfinished megalithic barrows, since similar stone rings have appeared inside some Galician mounds. Other references to stone circles have been shown to be old writers' mistakes, such as those in Monte Corzán (Coruña) quoted by Murguía (1901) and Lorenzo-Ruza (1953); they are in fact field enclosures of the historical period.

The other megalithic structures in northwest Iberia are chamber tombs. Barrows are outstandingly numerous; the local countrymen name them *mámoas*, thinking them to be Moorish works. Compared with other European

megalithic countries, Galician has an extremely high density of megalithic monuments; 800 *mámoas* have been found in systematically surveyed areas whose total surface is just 1200 sq. km (Criado 1988c).

Accordingly, several thousands of *mámoas* are spread over the whole of Galician territory, often grouped in variable numbers ranging from a couple to a dozen or more mounds. Some monuments, usually the larger ones, occur in isolation.

Nevertheless, not all of the mounds contain a megalithic structure. Some tumuli containing Bell Beakers or metal artefacts lack chambers, while others in north Portugal occur from the first centuries of the 4th millennium (TABLE 1). Even those having a dolmen inside may well present rather a different chronology, going from the middle Neolithic to the Bronze Age, as excavations in north Portugal have shown (Kalb & Hock 1979; Jorge 1985).

An interesting feature is the presence of fires or even hearths located beneath the tumulus (Patiño 1984).

Another unanswered question concerns the actual dwellings of the people who were buried in the megalithic tombs. To date, not a single settlement is known that is archaeologically related to the oldest stages of the megalithic phenomenon. Some authors explain this lack of evidence by the scarcity of survey on terrain with heavy vegetation cover. However, excavations made during the last 10 years have brought to light some settlements that could be

site name	lab. no.	raw determination b.p.	calibrated date BC
unchambered mounds			
Châ de Santinhos 2	GIF-6784	4990±50	3931 (3783) 3705
Châ de Santinhos 2	GIF-6785	4930±50	3782 (3773, 3758, 3704) 3692
Outeiro de Gregos 5	CSIC-659	4780±60	3644 (3622, 3572, 3535) 3387
passage graves			
Châ de Parada 1	ICEN-172	4900±260	3990 (3697) 3370
Châ de Parada 1	ICEN-173	4610±45	3492 (3364) 3345
	average of both dates	4618±44	3495 (3368) 3348
Os Campiños 6	GrN-14328	4300±60	3018 (2915) 2891
As Pereiras	GaK-11821*	4850±210	3938 (3645) 3370
single chambers			
Châ de Parada 4	ICEN-162	5470±45	4357 (4345) 4262
Châ de Parada 4	ICEN-170	5530±300	4730 (4360) 4005
Châ de Parada 4	ICEN-171	5730±130	4780 (4657, 4645, 4585) 4460
Châ de Parada 4	ICEN-169	5420±40	4344 (4333, 4273, 4259) 4239
Outeiro de Gregos 2	KN-2768*	5500±70	4455 (4353) 4335
Outeiro de Gregos 2	CSIC-547	4950±50	3786 (3776, 3744, 3708) 3696
Meninas do Crasto 2	CSIC-656	5260±50	4224 (4210) 4000
Meninas do Crasto 2	CSIC-658	5260±60	4224 (4210) 4000
Meninas do Crasto 2	CSIC-659	5260±60	4224 (4210) 4000
Chan da Cruz 1	CSIC-642	5210±50	4211 (4032, 4026, 4001) 3987
Outeiro de Gregos 3	KN-2765	5200±65	4212 (3998) 3975
Outeiro de Gregos 3	KN-2766	5230±75	4222 (4035, 4018, 4005) 3985
Mina do Simão	CSIC-717	5130±90	4034 (3974) 3814
Mina do Simão	CSIC-716	5050±70	3970 (3933, 3874, 3816) 3781
Mina do Simão	CSIC-715	5010±70	3948 (3786) 3705
As Rozas 1	GaK-11189*	5150±140	4218 (3983) 3790
Châ de Santinhos 1	GIF-6783	4980±50	3906 (3781) 3703
Abogalheira 1	KN-2955	4590±85	3498 (3356) 3135
Meninas do Crasto 4	GaK-10943*	4220±140	3018 (2885, 2794, 2786) 2611
Meninas do Crasto 4	CSIC-660†	3800±50	2390 (2274, 2252, 2231) 2143
Meninas do Crasto 4	CSIC-661†	3830±50	2455 (2308, 2302, 2295) 2204

* indicates that the ^{14}C determination is not wholly reliable, for several reasons (Fábregas A & B).

TABLE 1. Radiocarbon determinations for Galician and north Portuguese megaliths.

The date range shown is 1 SD. Calibrations after Pearson et al. (1986), except † after Stuiver and Becker (1986).

contemporaneous with the last moments of megalithic building (Peña Santos 1984; Criado forthcoming a). Also a detailed analysis of the relationship between burial mounds and landscape has given new information about the patterns of settlement of their builders.

Megalithic settings

We take it that there was a 'megalithic landscape' and, at least in Galicia, the monuments of

this landscape should be understood as a whole. Relevant evidence ranges from the grave-goods to the general environment where the monuments were built.

Megaliths preserve a socio-symbolic event, signified by a monumental form of expression. A contextual analysis of Galician megaliths reveals that 'monumentality' is created and articulated in a variety of ways, involving tomb location, architectural structure, and grave-

goods. Moreover, we consider 'monumentality' to involve the interplay of a variety of spatial forms structured in terms of discrete oppositions. The morphology and location of the monuments can be understood as the result of dynamic transformations of these underlying spatial structures. From this standpoint, we can offer a general description of trends visible in the northwestern Spanish megaliths; other aspects are dealt with by Fábregas (1988b), Fábregas (forthcoming a), and Rodríguez (1984).

Landscape with monuments: regional approach to mámoas distribution.

Within Galicia there is a opposition between zones with megaliths and those without megaliths. Some general tendencies define this opposition (FIGURE 2):

- 1 Most mounds occur on flat lands at a medium height, between 300 and 600 m; they are more abundant on the flattened ridges of heavily eroded hills and on the high plains near the sierras.
- 2 Mounds are rare in the lowlands bordering the final courses of the rivers or the rías, by the seaside or even on the slopes and bottom of the river basins in the hinterland (exhaustive surveying in recent years in these environments found no mounds: Bello *et al.* 1987; Caamaño *et al.* n.d.; Vázquez n.d.).
- 3 Traditionally it was thought that there were no megalithic barrows at heights over 700 m and in the eastern mountains, but they have been found recently in numbers which equal those in the central part of the country (Criado forthcoming b; Ferrer n.d.). Quite a large group of mounds at heights between 1000 and 1400 m show a clear continuity between Galician and Asturian megalith-building. Also in this area, the mounds are located on the uplands.
- 4 According to palaeoenvironmental and ecological research, the geographical setting occupied by megaliths was characterized by light soils with small areas of mixed oak forest and larger areas of grassland and shrubs (Vázquez *et al.* 1983; Criado *et al.* 1986; Díaz-Fierros *et al.* 1988). The lowlands had heavier soils and more dense forest.
- 5 Wherever barrows are common they occur in large numbers, but their distribution is very dispersed.

'The construction of monumentality': local approach to mámoas distribution

Mound location is strongly linked to monumentality in appearance. The location of mounds shows them to fall in two classes (FIGURE 3). First, there are megaliths for which visibility is a major factor. Secondly, there are mounds, possibly later and smaller, in which the actual location does not follow special conditions of

FIGURE 3. Relationships between mounds and landscape.

visibility. The former were built on prominent hills, sky-lines, and false crests, where the profiles can be viewed from lower places around them; even when they are placed on slopes or valleys, their position is such that the barrows produce a dramatic effect over the landscape. The second type are located in hollow areas and topographical depressions without any concern for local visibility.

'The construction of monumentality': architectural elements

In accordance with our approach we will not deal with megalithic architecture as an isolated phenomenon. For us, the monumental forms of megalithic monuments were just the way to express and to embody spatial considerations and concepts linked to megaliths. So we will not perform a typological-architectural review like the Leisners' (1938; 1956), the method Galician authors have followed (López-Cuevillas 1959; Rodríguez 1983a).

That traditional view of Galician megalithic architecture has proposed an evolution from the simplest architectural level, the small polygonal chambers, to more complex solutions, such as passage graves (FIGURE 4). But because typological approaches forget the meaningful context within which the dates work and signify, these frames fail to explain specific elements. To study the architecture, is necessary to analyse these forms in terms of the spaces which articulate them, and of the interaction between three spatial conflicts:

- 1 Dialectic, inside // outside.
- 2 Dialectic, chamber // mound.
- 3 Dialectic, inside space // threshold.

Inside // outside

The dialectic inside // outside has its first representation in the relationship between the monument and its surrounding space, for the mound is the best way to show up monument location. Although it has practical functions also, the extraordinary size which the barrows sometimes attain must be explained in terms of 'non-functional' symbolic connotations. In accordance with the two kinds of relationship between monuments and their surrounding space, those barrows which are conspicuous are usually very large in size, 18–35 m diameter. The others, in which visibility was not an important feature, are smaller 8–12 m. diameter, and lower.

Other elements, found in both groups, also show inside // outside opposition. These are stone-rings surrounding the periphery of mounds and/or stone layers on their surface. Also it would be possible to recognize practical functions here, but at the same time, some specific features linked to these architectural elements point to a symbolic significance: stones of the mound were sometimes carefully selected by special attributes like colour or brightness. Some mounds covered by white quartz blocks could have been visible from a good distance.

Chamber // mound

The next spatial level is the relationship chamber // mound. Through time there is some kind of struggle for predominance between both elements. Sometimes mounds are the most important element; the chamber, closed inside them, is invisible outside. In other occasions the chamber becomes important, growing in size, and showing the capstone above the mound. This trend seems enhanced towards the end of the 4th millenium, when the mound decreases in size, the chamber enlarges to 7 and 8 m. long, and an important part of the chamber rises out of the mound.

There follows an important shift during the last stage of Galician megalith-building, towards the middle of the 3rd millenium. Now chamber and mound lose their importance, decreasing in size, the forms become simpler, and the chamber is found inside the mound. This break with old tradition parallels the change in visibility conditions and monument // space relationship. A similar trend has been suggested for Northern Portugal (Jorge 1988).

Inside space // threshold

Another field of spatial 'fight' inside monuments is emphasis of the inside space// threshold opposition. In some cases access is not important; megalithic chambers lack entrances altogether or, even if they do occur as in some early passage-graves they are short and not prominent. As the chamber // mound dialectic is weighted towards the mound at this period, gates or passages are completely secluded within the structure of the monument. The inner architectural space is closed.

In other cases the space starts to open towards the outside through a gradual development of

PASSAGE GRAVES		SIMPLE CHAMBERS		
GROUP 1	PASSAGE DISTINCT FROM THE CHAMBER IN PLAN AND SECTION		GROUP 1	POLYGONAL CHAMBERS

	INTERMEDIATE FORM		GROUP 2	RECTANGULAR CHAMBERS
GROUP 2	PASSAGE DISTINCT FROM THE CHAMBER IN PLAN. STEPPED ROOF
GROUP 3	CHAMBER AND PASSAGE WITHOUT DISTINCTION IN PLAN AND SECTION

FIGURE 4. Typology of Galician megalithic tombs (after G. Leisner 1938).

accesses. Different articulations between chamber and passage can be viewed as hesitant solutions to this spatial tension. This tendency rises to a climax when long passage graves appear, and when some kind of courts are found in front of the chambers. In some of the biggest and most complex megalithic monuments in Galicia, dry-stone walls continue the passage across the mound. Sometimes they are associated with little stone pavements and a great amount of grave goods are found. Also, it has been here, in excavations conducted during the last years, that stone idols with anthropomorphic figurations have been recovered, as in the Parxubeira passage grave (Rodríguez 1989).

Again the last stage implies a complete change of orientation, as the later monuments turn into closed spaces, albeit in a completely different way from those belonging to previous stages.

Inside monuments: megalithic material culture

Grave-goods signify 'monumental sense' in the lowest space of the megalithic monument, the

inner and non-architectural space. So they should be integrated in our contextual approach.

The objects recovered fall into two main groups, stone and pottery (Fábregas & Fuente 1988).

In flaked stone, three types of tools must be singled out (FIGURE 5): microliths (mostly trapezoidal), unretouched blades, and triangular arrowheads. Raw materials used are flint, quartz and schist. Despite its scarcity, flint accounts for a significant percentage of all those pieces, no doubt because of its better flaking characteristics.

In recent years Criado (1980) submitted a sample of microliths and blades to microwear analysis, using optical magnifications from 12.5× to 160×, and Fábregas used higher-power optical microscopes, ranging from 200× to 400×. The flint shows such great post-depositional damage, that any evidence of use had been altered. Nevertheless morphological features, mostly edge-angle of the flint artefacts, rule out their use for heavy duties; the cutting of

FIGURE 5. Flint from Chan de Armada and Chan de Castiñeiras (Pontevedra); idol from Axeitos (Coruña); Bell Beaker from Veiga de Vilavella 242 (Coruña) and undecorated pot from Vilamarin (Orense).

soft materials like plants or meat, appears their most probable function. Besides, there is a chance that microliths were used as transverse arrowheads or barbs.

In ground stone, a larger array of objects is present: axes, adzes, long chisels, spheres, mace-heads, and double axes are the main items. Axes and adzes amount to a little more than 50% of the whole, probably showing the importance that wood-working or forest-clearing for agricultural purposes had acquired in this period, a phenomenon also indicated by pollen analyses (FIGURE 6). The long chisels and hoe blades are a characteristic element of Galician megalithic contexts. The very elongated shape (up to 30 cm long by just 4 cm wide), together with the rather soft material they are made of, invites us to consider them as non-functional implements (FIGURE 6). These pieces seem to occur, significantly associated with

mace-heads or double axes, within mounds containing stone cists or undefined structures which are generally considered to belong to a late phase (FIGURE 6) (Vázquez 1979; Rodríguez 1983a; Fábregas 1983; 1984). All these objects, virtually absent elsewhere in the Iberian archaeological record, have close parallels elsewhere in the Neolithic of western Europe, particularly in its final stages.

On the contrary, ground-stone spheres are relatively common in the South Portuguese megalithic culture, particularly during Leisner's 'Style III' (Leisner 1965).

Querns and grinding-stones occur in almost every megalithic grave, not only as a part of the tomb's furniture but as constructional elements, either built into dry-stone walls or as part of the tumulus.

Other objects may be classified under the definition of ritual or votive items. There are several dozens of cobbles engraved by percussion or incision with abstract patterns from Cova da Moura (Coruña), closely resembling those found on idols from the south of Iberia and considered to be representations of facial tattoos (FIGURE 5). In a few cases these stones are worked to show anthropomorphic features (Parxubeira passage grave: Rodríguez 1989). In every occasion these decorated stones are placed close to the entrance of the passage, which again fits with similar finds in the Millaran circle.

Most pottery has no decoration and simple forms. The typical shapes are small- to medium-sized vessels with flat or round rims, open mouths and a plain or convex basis (FIGURE 5). Other vessels have a wider shape and a projecting rim. Finally, there are large bowls with thickened rims and slightly closed mouths. Only a small proportion of megalithic pottery has any decoration at all; the decoration can be grouped into incised, painted and impressed, the latter mostly on Bell Beakers. Apart from some isolated fragments, the bulk of incised pots come from just two tombs from the north of Galicia (Monte Pirleo 5 and 2-Lugo), one with an undefined structure, the other a passage grave. In the first were found a small bowl, a vessel with carinated shape and a tetralobed bowl, all showing decorative patterns consisting of zigzags, grooves and radiating circles. These motifs have clear parallels in Chalcolithic sites of south Portugal and southeast

FIGURE 6. Axe and battle-axe from Rabo de Lobo (Coruña); chisel from Veiga das Mámoas and mace-head from Rechaba (Coruña).

Spain. Besides, both the carinated and the four-lobed pots are quite similar to others occurring in the Millaran circle of southeast Iberia. The red-painted pottery points again to the southern parts of the Iberian peninsula (Fuente 1988).

Bell Beakers occur very often, particularly in passage graves and in small mounds. It seems that Beaker-bearing people were the actual builders of some of those burial mounds. The Beakers are of two varieties, International (classical and linear), and Geometrically Dotted, the last related to later and derivative Iberian Beaker groups (FIGURES 5–7) (Criado *et al.* 1982). In one case, from Parxubeira, the decoration has been applied with a shell, forming waving lines (Rodríguez 1989). Other examples come from recent excavations of open-air sites, illustrating the link between these habitats and megalithic monuments (Criado forthcoming a; García-Lastra 1984).

We could talk of several theoretical stages defined by the presence of particular elements, bearing in mind that some of them may last through different phases (FIGURE 7).

An initial chronological stage can be defined by the presence of axes, adzes, geometric microliths and flint blades, and perhaps by some of the simplest, undecorated forms of pottery. Portuguese influx would be decisive in the start of megalithic culture in Galicia, so it would have taken place during the last third of the 5th millennium BC, according to the ^{14}C dates obtained in north Portugal and south Galicia (Fábregas 1988b; Patiño *et al.* 1984).

From the last third of the 4th millennium a steady process of enrichment can be observed, with evidence of contacts with the Millaran and south Portugal Chalcolithic circles. Galician megalithic tombs are much more fully furnished, with votive adzes, stone balls, pendants, idols, arrowheads, and red-painted and symbol-decorated pottery.

By the middle of the 3rd millennium a west European influence can be traced from the occurrence of such weapons as double axes, mace-heads and double adzes, together with very elongated adzes and chisels. In the end of the 3rd millennium we can see the spread of Bell-Beakers, first the International and then derivative types, with which the proper megalithic burial starts to give way to a funerary tradition under tumuli alone.

The settlers in their setting

The settlers' number

Galician megaliths make small requirements of their builders. The latest research has shown that the biggest mounds would have needed around 5000 man-hours of work, with the heaviest megalithic slabs weighing between 10 and 12 tonnes. This means a reduced man-work mobilization (Bello *et al.* 1985). Moreover, the stone-quarries were usually near the monuments, between 100 and 300 m. away. The very fact that builders often preferred to use a poor building material found locally, rather than bringing the slabs from farther away, may indicate a resolve to minimize construction costs (Bello *et al.* 1984b).

The monuments' small size and extreme density go with a dispersive settlement pattern. That would fit historical and present-day Galicia, where traditionally the land is divided in tiny parcels, and the whole countryside is full of scattered hamlets.

Environment and subsistence

Recent palaeo-environmental research, spatial distribution of monuments and Chalcolithic open-air site excavations hint at the general economic background of megalithic groups.

It has become clear from pollen analyses of Chalcolithic sites (Aira *et al.* 1984; Aira *et al.* 1985; López 1984a; 1984b) and of palaeosoils beneath mounds (Criado *et al.* 1986) that the megalith-builders cultivated crops, in spite of traditional approaches that considered the megalithic communities to be pastoralists or even hunter-gatherers (Sierra *et al.* 1983; VV.AA 1979).

The monuments' distribution pattern shows that megalithic settlement was mostly linked to land which is more suitable for a Neolithic agrarian technology – open vegetation, light soils, and topographical and pedological conditions favouring drainage. These conditions were found mainly on the uplands (Bello *et al.* 1984a; 1987; Criado 1988b).

It is therefore significant that major concentrations of monuments are related to the best land in the uplands (Bello *et al.* 1983).

The tools known from megalithic groups and the geographical conditions of their situation suggest that cultivation was by shifting agriculture. Modern research has pointed that

FIGURE 7. A general view of the megalithic 'regularities' defined in the text.

slash-and-burn agriculture might have been less important in temperate Europe prehistory (Rowley-Conwy 1981; Jorge 1984) than some scholars had proposed. Yet this practice was a traditional land-use in Galicia until 20 years ago and one whose balance of labour requirement and output made profitable. We could think that this was so in recent Galician prehistory. Its major problem would be that the ecological characteristics of the Galician environment could lead to land degradation.

Human impact on the landscape caused conversion of grassland areas into heathland, the clearance of forest zones, the beginning of peat formation and erosive episodes, although was no 'ecological' catastrophe (Criado *et al.* 1986).

The last two points are important for the understanding of the small and sparse megalithic settlement of Galicia, since periodic abandonment of fields to avoid land exhaustion would have been necessary to ensure the reproduction of the traditional socio-economic formation.

Trends and chronology

The different features we have dealt with separately show some regularities in combination (FIGURE 7):

There are monuments in which a strong hegemony of the mound and its location over the surrounding external space is paramount. Inner elements, both internal architecture and material culture, were not so important. This could mean a complete predominance of the symbolic denotations of megaliths.

Other monuments show a progressive enrichment of the graves, with an increase of chamber size, chamber complexity, and emergence of the chamber from the mound, together with the development of threshold areas. These show a remarkable array of solutions: some tombs have just an incipient corridor whereas others display a more complex structure, with longer passages and courts, which point to the rising importance of ritual ceremonies held outside megaliths. The development of courts and the presence of idols about monument entrances are consistent with this fact, and similar conclusions for Irish passage graves have been expressed by Eogan (1986). This may perhaps indicate a greater emphasis on the *practical* ways (i.e. rituality) to produce ceremoniality and symbolic signified.

In this last regularity, there is no longer a pre-eminence of the monuments over the landscape, as mounds decrease in size, chambers appear again inside barrows, and neither threshold elements nor chamber space are important. This loss of monumentality at all spatio-architectural levels is paralleled by a sharp increase in *material culture* monumentality in certain tombs, as rich grave-goods include well-decorated Beakers and display items such as battle-axes and mace-heads.

These regularities must be looked upon not as chronological stages, following a unilinear regional evolution, but like *lines of force* that may be perceived in different places at different times. The issue is not the temporal meaning of these trends, but their social scope: the symbolic deployment of space made up through these different kinds of megaliths represents significant patterns of tension and articulation which take their place within a more general framework involving the ideological construction of specific strategies // alternatives.

The first combination or regularity could be understood as though the general location of the monuments in their surroundings sufficed to signify culturally the environment and to construct a social landscape. The second and third regularities could express some closing of the social group upon itself, perhaps caused by the growth of external or internal pressure. An increase of exchange with other areas is shown by the presence of items like the large flint blades, possibly brought from outside, and also by the appearance of Beakers and idols which are found in Portugal and central and southern Spain. The latter may be related with an endogenous growth visible in the spread of some megalithic monuments (sometimes large) into the lowlands, what are much more productive, but require a distinct agrarian technology, probably with some kind of ard and/or use of livestock for manure and important *secondary products*. This agrees with the general dynamic in Late Neolithic England (Bradley *et al.* 1978; Bradley 1984; also Sherratt 1981; Harrison 1985). The process of intensification could have caused important tensions within the traditional socio-economic formation, leading to the initial development of inequality inside these groups. In such context, the build-up of complexity in burial ceremoniality would be a way to smooth these conflicts and to negotiate

the balance between the different strategies of power and ideology inside the group.

It is possible that the fourth regularity meant a further stepping up along those previous lines. The abandonment of the external elements of monumentality and the parallel stress put on the material culture and grave-goods, probably functioning as effective symbols of individual power, might point to a crisis in the symbolic framework of traditional values, leading to their replacement by a system in which personal authority played a much greater role. Perhaps the old rites and ceremonies could no longer support the socio-economic formation; instead tensions arose which led to the appearance of weapons as a major component of burial furniture.

We might say that under those regularities there are, among other things, different treatments of *death* and *the dead*, which in its turn would reflect the changing relationships between the individual and the society within megalithic communities. Thence, comparing with the first regularity, a greater *individualization of death* could be perceived through the second and third regularities. On the other hand, the fourth regularity represents a stress on individualization of the dead greater than in the previous solutions. This trend is possibly linked to the steady rise of a power based more

upon individuals than on the whole community (Clastres 1981; Criado 1989).

Chronological problems are not a major concern of the present paper. The ^{14}C dates available from Galician and north Portuguese monuments (TABLE 1), though still few, seem to suggest that the general evolutionary tendency of Galician megalith-building fits quite well with the regularities defined: the oldest megalithic tombs in Galicia consist of single chambers, while the monuments with large corridor appeared linked to later dates, and the barrows representing the fourth regularity go together with recent archaeological materials and chronologies (v.g. Meninas do Crasto 4; see a detailed account of this topic in Fábregas forthcoming a & b). In any case to draw attention to any evolutionary tendency is misleading, for the important thing is not the appearance of evolution but to explain why in some cases or particular areas one regularity is kept throughout the centuries, while in other regions a different one is chosen.

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