

## A SHRINE IN THE NEOLITHIC? ORCA DA LAPA DO LOBO, NELAS (C. 5000-3000 BC)

*UM SANTUÁRIO NO NEOLÍTICO? A ORCA DA LAPA DO LOBO, NELAS (C. 5000-3000 A. C.)*

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### ABSTRACT

The Orca of Lapa do Lobo is already mentioned in a medieval document (1303), as defining one of the limits of the then “Canas de Senhorim” county. In 1905 Leite de Vasconcelos mentions it as a megalithic monument in the place of Lapa of Lobo, near the geodesic landmark of “Orca” and that would have been destroyed by the construction of the current EN-234 (Vasconcelos, 1905: p.313). As early as 1966, Irisalva Moita again refers to it as being lost. Similarly we could not find it during the regional surveys we conducted in the summer of 1985.

It was necessary to wait until October 2013 so that a cut of vegetation on the site would reveal what appeared to be the remains of a tumulus, buried under scrub and very close to the place where, in previous editions of the CMP sheet 211, we can read the place name “Orca”.

During a vegetation clean-up action on April 23, 2014, on the initiative of the County’s Council and with the presence of the regional representative of the DGPC, it was possible to confirm that it looked like a tumulus, which led to its study during four excavation campaigns in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

In this paper we present and discuss the surprising results of these campaigns, namely the existence of a stratigraphically underlying Early Neolithic habitat and the fact that more than a grave site it looks like a “Sanctuary”. Finally we address the regional implications of these findings to our understanding of the regional Neolithic ways of life.

**KEY WORDS:** Megalithism; Mondego Platform; Neolithic; Symbolic Practices

### RESUMO

*Mencionada já num documento de 1303 como definindo um dos limites dos “coutos de Canas de Senhorim”, a Orca da Lapa do Lobo volta ser referida em 1905 por Leite de Vasconcelos como tratando-se de um monumento megalítico sito no lugar da Lapa do Lobo, próximo do marco geodésico da “Orca” e que teria sido destruído pela construção da actual EN-234 (Vasconcelos, 1905: p.313).*

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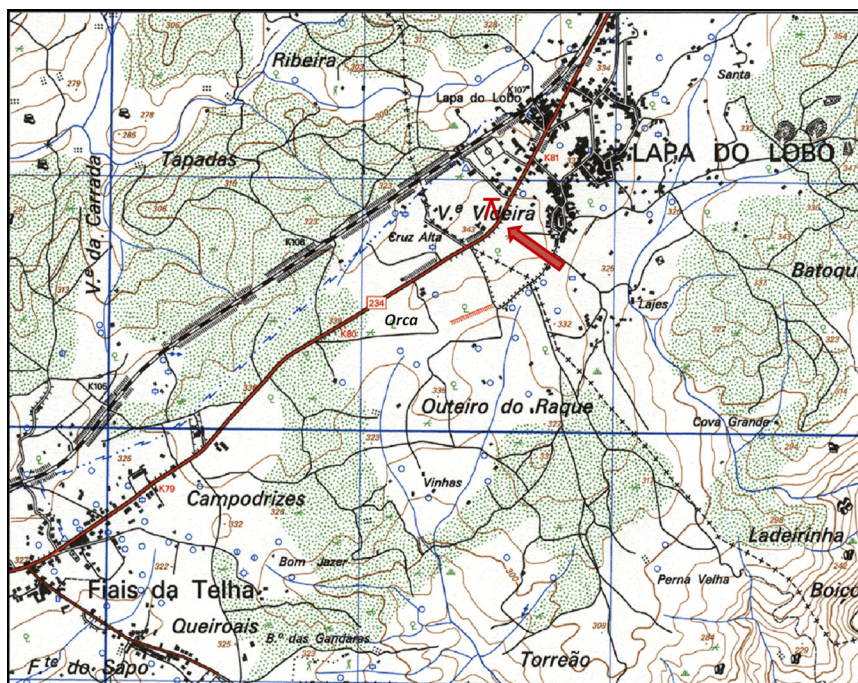


Fig. 1 – Orca da Lapa do Lobo, location in Sheet 211 of the Carta Militar de Portugal, scale 1/25000.

*Já em 1966, Irisalva Moita volta a referir-se-lhe como perdido. Do mesmo modo não a conseguimos encontrar durante prospecções efectuadas no verão de 1985. Foi preciso esperar por Outubro de 2013, para que um corte de matos no local viesse revelar o que pareciam ser os restos de uma mamoa, sepultada sob matalgal e muito próximo do local onde, em anteriores edições da folha 211 da CMP, se pode ainda ler o topónimo “Orca”.*

*Alvo de uma acção de limpeza da vegetação em 23 de Abril de 2014 de iniciativa da Autarquia e com a presença da representante regional da DGPC, foi possível confirmar que se tratava de uma mamoa, o que conduziu ao seu estudo de que se efectuaram já quatro campanhas de escavações em 2015, 2016, 2017 e 2018. São os surpreendentes resultados dessas campanhas, nomeadamente a existência de um habitat do Neolítico Antigo subjacente ao monumento e o facto de este se configurar mais como um “Santuário” do que uma sepultura que aqui se discutem nas suas implicações regionais.*

*PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Megalitismo; Plataforma do Mondego; Neolítico; Práticas Simbólicas*

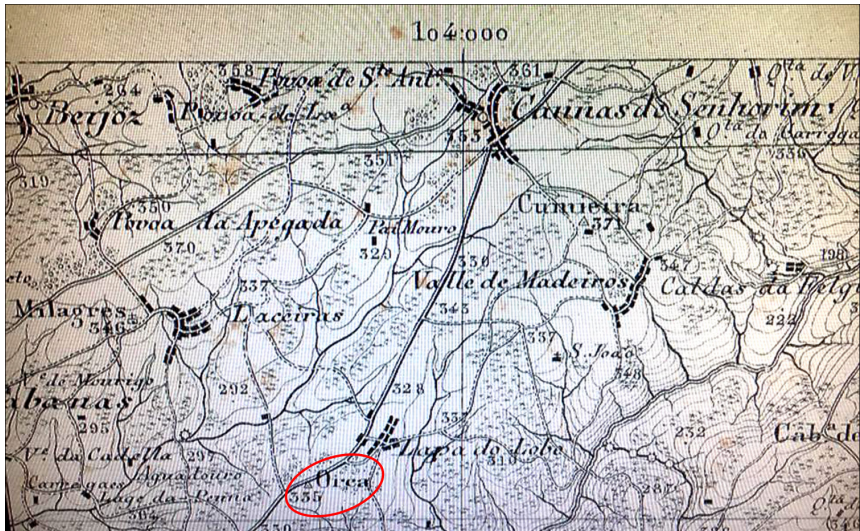


Fig. 2 – Location of the toponim Orca in 1866 Carta Corografica.

## 1. GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING AND SITE BACKGROUND

The Orca da Lapa do Lobo (ORLL – CNS34620) is located in the homonymous village in Central Portugal, on a flat terrain, occupied by olive trees, bordering the 9th July Avenue, part of the EN234 that connects the Counties of Nelas and Carregal do Sal (Latitude 40.470802; Longitude -7.922419 - Sheet 211 of CMP 1/25000, 1992 edition – Fig.1).

The Orca of Lapa do Lobo is already mentioned in a medieval document (1303), as defining one of the limits of the then “Canas de Senhorim” county . Leite de Vasconcelos refers the existence of a megalithic monument in the place of Lapa do Lobo, near the geodetic vertex Orca, concluding that it would have been destroyed by the construction of EN-234 (Vasconcelos, 1905: p.313).

In turn, in 1966, Irisalva Moita describes it as “... Completely destroyed ...” (Moita, 1966).

When, in the summer of 1985, we carried out a survey in the region, for the preparation of our PhD thesis and in the framework of the “Archaeological Study Program for the Middle and Upper Mondego Basin (PEABMAM)”, in vain searching for traces of this monument, we came to wonder if there would be any confusion with the Orca do Outeiro do Rato, relatively close (Senna-Martinez, 1989: p.70).

It was necessary to wait for October 2013 when, a local co-worker Horácio

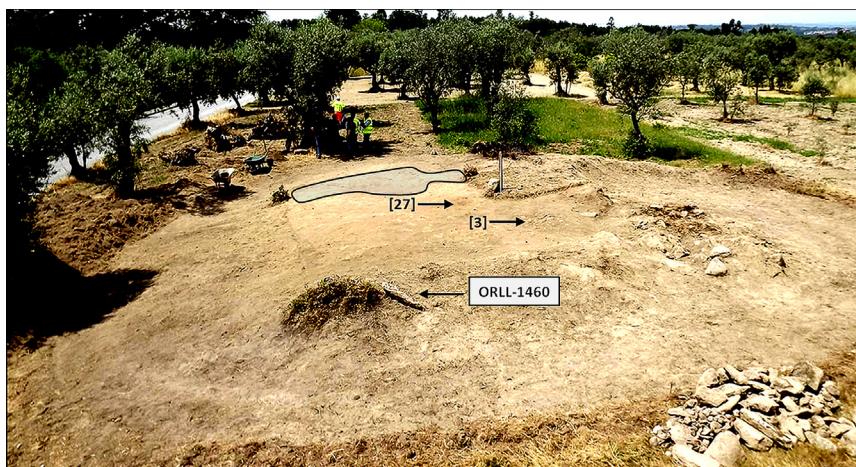


Fig. 3 – Orca da Lapa do Lobo, elevated view from SE at the end of 2014 clean-up: in grisé the remains of the surface carapace; [3] emplacement of pit SU.[2]; [27] emplacement of pit SU.[28]; ORLL-1460 emplacement of the stela-menhir ORLL-1460.

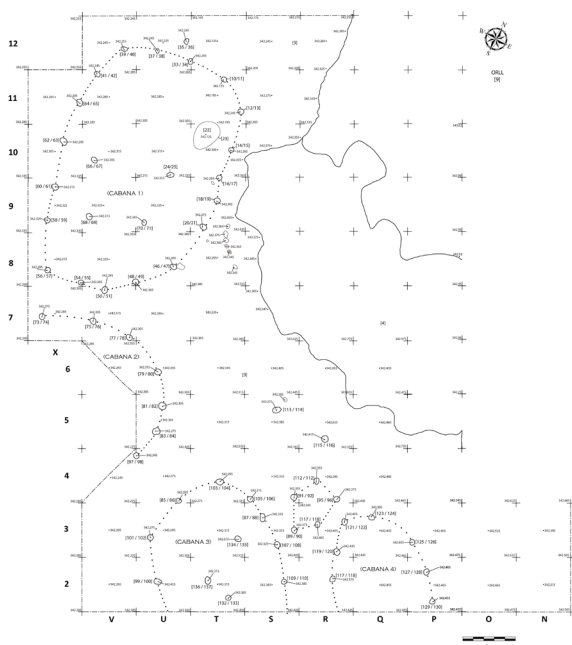


Fig. 4 – Orca da Lapa do Lobo, upper interface of the earth level [SU.9] under the dolmen tumulus, cut by the post-holes of four huts (CABANA 1, 2, 3, and 4) and the base of a fire-pit of Cabana 1, belonging to the Early Neolithic habitat.

Peixoto, relocated it, buried under shrubs and near the place where, in old editions of the Portuguese 1:25000 Military Map (Fig.1) as well as in the Chorographic Chart 1/100000 of 1886 (Fig.2), one can still read the toponym “Orca” referring to the respective geodetic vertex, but lying 700m further east and in the northern side of the road.

In 2014, our colleague Gertrudes Branco (DGPC-DRC), after a vegetation clean-up, was then able to confirm that it was a seemingly ruined tumulus corresponding to the lost monument.

At the Nelas County invitation we began the first of our four excavation seasons in the monument (20015-2018) in July 2015.

## **2. RESULTS OF THE 2015-2018 CAMPAIGNS: THE FIELD DATA**

The archaeological site of ORLL has revealed a long and complex stratigraphic story.

After the 2014 clean-up (Fig.3), we could see that the south-western quarter of the tumulus, as well as its central areas, were well preserved, while most of the northern parts were partially destroyed by previous earth removing which, in some places, reached the inner stone buttress [SU.26]. In the south-western quarter of the tumulus even the covering *carapace* of quartz pebbles [SU.4] was partially preserved. The remaining preserved tumulus surface showed a uniform brown-yellowish earth level [SU.1] that was cut by two pits [SUs.2 and 28] seemingly filled by stones. On the south-eastern corner of the tumulus we found a stela-menhir lying down on its decorated face (ORLL-1460).

So we started by a clean-up of the previously destroyed parts of the tumulus.

**The Early Neolithic Habitat** – After cleaning the destruction areas of the south-western quarter of the tumulus we discovered, partially underneath it, traces of the first human occupation of the site, represented by evidence (a few post-holes) of a habitat stratigraphically underlying its construction.

As we did previously at Orca do Folhadal (ORFOL – Senna-Martinez and Ventura, 1999), we decided to extend the clean-up of the area where we found evidence of a first hut that encompasses the area outside of the full south-eastern quarter of the tumulus (Fig.4). This was we were able to recover the complete layout of an ellipsoidal hut (Cabana 1) of about 4,6m x 3m, with 19 peripheral post-holes and 3 interior ones, probably to support a thatched roof. In its north-eastern half we found the scorched bottom of a fire pit [SU.22].

As can be seen in Fig.4, we were also able to expose the partial floor plan of another three huts (cabanas 2, 3 and 4) and of a smaller pentagonal structure made with three posts, probably to sustain an elevated silo.

Since the depth of the recovered post-holes averaged only 8cm, we interpreted



Fig. 5 – Orca da Lapa do Lobo, stone artefacts from the Early Neolithic habitat, remobilized into the earth [SU.1] of the dolmen tumulus: 1718- proximal end of a silex bladelet; 1803- quartz cortical bladelet; 1795- scraper; 2774- geometric microlith (triangle) in quartz, shown both sides.



Fig. 6 – Orca da Lapa do Lobo. The stela-menhir ORLL-1460 after it was redressed.



Fig. 7 – Orca da Lapa do Lobo, “idol-like” quartz pebbles from the tumulus carapace: 881, 1233 and 3598, pentagonal type; 1087, 1120 and 1337 anthropomorphic type.

this habitat, as we did with the Folhadal one, as being composed of pole and daub ellipsoidal huts (we actually found some pieces of daub-like burnt clay in the excavation) from which only remained the lower part of the post-holes and the basis of one of the inner fireplaces. The upper two-thirds of the huts floor were surely removed and we found evidence of the removed earth being reused in the building of the dolmen tumulus, together with some Early Neolithic stone artefacts like it happened at ORFOL (Fig.5 – Senna-Martinez and Ventura, 1999: 24) and other nearby megalithic tombs excavated by our team. As no further evidence of this habitat was recovered in the rest of the exposed tumulus periphery, we suppose it extended south-westwards to the area now occupied by olive trees which prevented further excavation to expose it.

So with the ORLL habitat we have the second confirmed finding of an Early Neolithic habitat site having a Middle Neolithic dolmen built over its remains ever found in this region.

**The “Stelae Sanctuary”** – After discovering the stela-menhir ORLL-1460 (Fig.6) we were already aware that something different from a regional standard Middle Neolithic dolmen was awaiting us. So, after exposing the huts of the Early Neolithic habitat we registered and removed what was left of the monument carapace [SU.4] paying close attention to what stones were laying there. That is how we noticed that six of the revetment pebbles we recovered (Fig.7) had shapes that reminded us of the Stelae previously found in several megalithic monuments in Iberia – as in the dolmen of Lagunita III (Bueno Ramírez, Barroso Bermejo and Balbín Behrmann, 2012: fig.14) and systematised by Marta Díaz-Guardamino (2010) – we consider them to be idoliforme pebbles specially chosen by their anthropomorphic shape like in other known cases. The laying place of the stela-menhir also could be significant, perhaps marking the front of the monument. It has the shoulders cut to enhance the head and, in the front, two crude arms can be found in relief (Fig.6) giving it an unmistakable human shape.

As no other disturbances could be found at the monuments surface we excavated next the two pits that cut it, beginning by [SUs.2]. After cleaning up the surface earth filling the pit it became apparent a situation where two granite Stelae were lying as they were left within two small to medium stones circles, thus enabling us to redress them upright to be photographed in what we suppose to be their original position (Fig.8). After registering and securing these first two stelae, as we excavated further down the infillings of pit [SUs.2] we found successive stelae lying down one upon another, complete but sometimes broken into two fragments, either in pairs or alone (33 in total), till the bottom of the pit, as well as three idoliforme pebbles.



*Fig. 8 - Orca da Lapa do Lobo. Stelae 271 and 353 in their supposed original places after being redressed.*



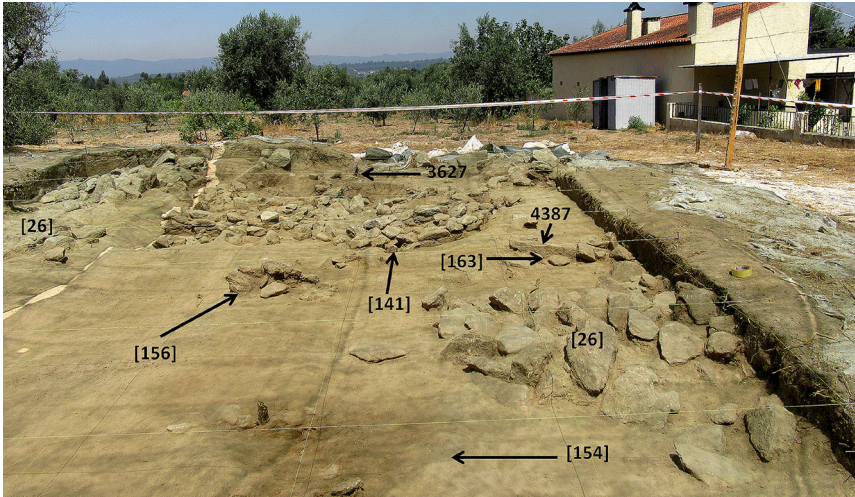


Fig. 9 – Orca da Lapa do Lobo. The second phase interface of the “stelae-shrine” exposed after removal of [SU.1]: [26] the inner buttress spreading like an U and opening to South-East around the shrine area; [141, 154,156] second phase pits with stelae and “idol-like” quartz pebbles; [163] support structure for stele-monolith 4387 in the inner buttress; 3627 stele-monolith fixed into [UE.140].



Fig. 10 – Orca da Lapa do Lobo. Vertical drone photo of the whole site at the end of 2018 fieldwork, showing the reconstructed tumulus and the musealization of part of the Early Neolithic habitat on the lower left corner.

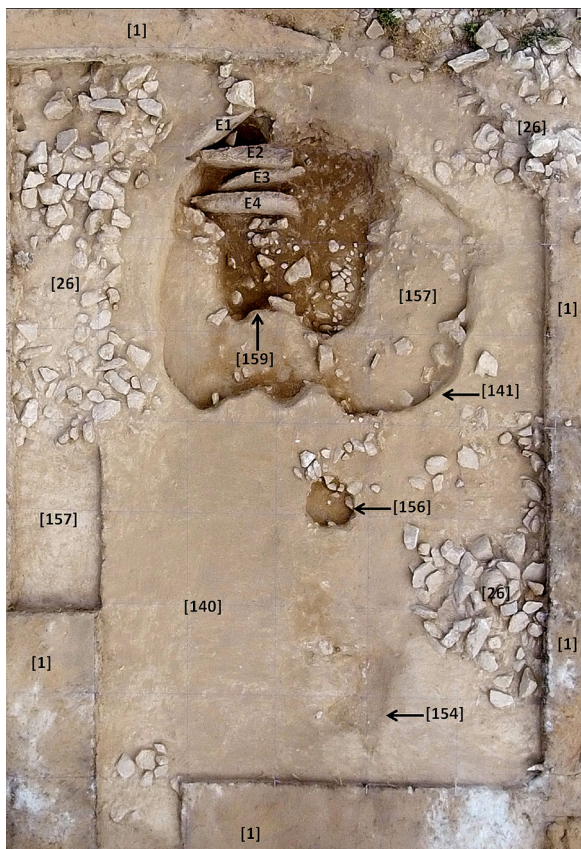


Fig. 11 - Orca da Lapa do Lobo. Vertical drone photo of the central area at the end of 2018 campaign: [157] the third phase interface of the "stela-shrine" exposed after removal of infillings of [SU.141] and [SU.158]; E1, E2, E3, E4 four stone uprights probably from the chamber of the original dolmen

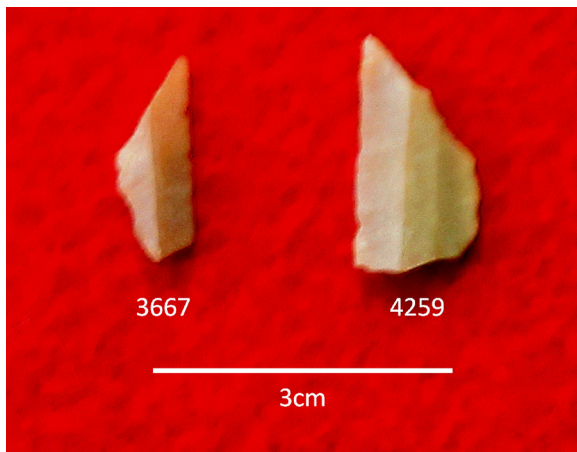


Fig. 12 - Orca da Lapa do Lobo. Geometric Microliths, trapezes

From the other pit [SU.28], a very shallow one, only one stele was found (2199). In order to further understand what the central layout of the monument was we then started to excavate the upper level of the tumulus [SU.1] which we proceeded to remove in a square area of 8m X 6m.

Thus we exposed what we interpreted as the upper interface [SU.140] of the “stelae-shrine” building middle phase featuring (Fig.9):

- Three new pits [SUs.141, 154, 156] filled with stones making support structures for stelae and “idol-like” quartz pebbles (49 stelae and 11 “idol-like” quartz pebbles, in total).

- The upper part of the inner buttress [SU.26] with a supporting structure [163] for the stele-monolith 3627, and another stele-monolith in the top northwest of the excavated area (3627).

- Another stele (3982) was found laying in the surface of [SU.140].

So we excavated the infillings of the new three pits, starting by [SU.141]. We were thus able to recover:

- From pit [SU.141] infillings [SUs.139, 142, 144, 146, 148, 150]: 42 stelae and 11 “idol-like” quartz pebbles.

- From [SUs. 153, 155] six other stelae.

The bottom of pit [SU.141] is constituted by the superior interface of a new earth level [SU.157] into which a smaller pit was cut [SU.159] filled with brownish-dark earth [SU.158] containing five stelae and five “idol-like” quartz pebbles. At the lower interface of [SU.158] we found a layer of small to medium quartz pebbles and granite stones, and protruding from it the upper part of four stones upright, probably from the previous megalithic chamber but rearranged to be one in front of another from what would have been the back of the chamber (Figs.10, 11).

**The Middle Neolithic Dolmen** – Accordingly to the situation at the end of campaign 4(2018), it seems that, probably in the Middle Neolithic, a megalithic monument (the Orca) is constructed that seems to have had a small polygonal chamber without corridor. To the use of this funerary space may correspond to two geometrics made on flint blade fragments, and recovered this year in [SU.158] in a probably remobilized situation (Fig.12).

### **3. THE STRATIGRAPHIC STORY OF THE SITE OF ORCA DA LAPA DO LOBO AS WE UNDERSTAND IT AT THE END OF CAMPAIGN 4(2018)**

In this archaeological site we are facing a complex story that we are trying to reconstruct from the recovered stratigraphic sequence:

- In a first moment an Early Neolithic habitat occupied the site, in a situation similar to what we found at Orca do Folhadal, Orca 2 do Ameal, and Orca 2 de

Oliveira do Conde (Ventura, this volume).

- Then, somewhere in the Middle Neolithic, a megalithic monument was built over it with probably a small polygonal orthostatic chamber. To it would belong the four orthostats we found remobilized at the end 2018 campaign, and the two geometric microliths made on flint blade fragments.

- In a third moment, what initially would have been a burial monument was transformed into an “ancestor’s sanctuary”. The chamber was dismantled and the four orthostats were rearranged, one packed against the other, in where the headstone of the chamber would have been. Then the tumulus was raised three times with successive earth levels accumulation, each corresponding to the structuring of a pit in the middle of the monument, with “stone nests” built to support granite stelae and/or “idol-like” quartz pebbles (Senna-Martinez and Carvalho, this volume). In the middle tumulus rising, the central pit was complemented with two smaller ones with equal function and, in the upper phase with one more with identical function.

As seen in Figs. 9 and 11, the rearrangement of the chamber orthostats, the central pit and the two complementary ones, belonging to the middle tumulus rising, are in alignment NW-SE as the axis of a regional megalithic monument would be.

The modern place name of the local, “Cruz Alta”, hints at a Christianization of a previous sacred place, of an ancient “memory place”. So what do we have in this site?

Our proposed interpretation is as follows: (1) the Middle Neolithic dolmen was built in a chosen high place in order to be central to the settlements and other contemporary monuments dispersed around it; (2) at the end of the Middle Neolithic or the beginnings of the Late Neolithic the chamber of the dolmen was rearranged in order to transform a previous “place of memory” (for the first lineage ancestors?) into an “ancestors sanctuary” where further rituals would be practiced by laying new ancestors representations (the granite stelae and the “idol-like” quartz pebbles) in successive moments. In this way the place would function as an axis mundi for the surrounding populations to con-gregate. This could have happened in a simpler but not so different way from the South-western Portugal’s enclosures (Valera, 2016).

#### **4. CONCLUDING...**

So, once again we face a situation that can validate our previous assumption that “... the megalithic monuments would take on a multifunctional and organizer character of the life of these communities that would absolutely surpass the role of a simple formal area of deposition of the dead...” (Senna-Martinez,

1996: 72; Senna-Martinez, López Plaza e Hoskin, 1997.: 671).

This assumption is both right for the first megalithic monuments of the Mondego's Platform, almost always of modest dimensions, and the later Late Neolithic big dolmens with large chambers and corridors differentiated in height. In both cases we think dolmens constitute, at the same time, first funerary architectural monuments and true anchors in the landscape for populations that, on the other hand, maintain a great seasonal mobility.

Our hypothesis that the food-economy with acorn-intensive recollection and roasting, proved regionally, by archaeologically recovered data, from the Late Neolithic to the Late Bronze Age (Senna-Martinez and Ventura 2000b, Senna-Martinez and Pedro 2000) can be associated with the whole old peasant societies (from the Early Neolithic to the Late Bronze Age) of our work region – recently discussed and reinforced by Ventura (this volume) – can probably help to explain the behavior behind their symbolic practices.

We think that the Neolithic saw a change both of territorial behavior and territorial awareness for which the implantation of the megalithic necropolis would provide the legitimatizing of increasing territorial appropriation of space. Acorn recollection probably being one of the critical economic resources behind it. This practice can thus justify the frequent founding of manual grinding stone quern parts incorporated into megalithic structures (as in the present case of ORLL) or even, as in the case of Orca de Pramelas (Senna-Martinez and Valera, 1989), deposited as an offering.

Fall acorn and other winter fruits gathering and processing seems to go together, in several Iberian regional areas, with the period (fall and winter) when building of megalithic tombs took place, either we agree with the solar hypothesis for their orientations (Hoskin, et al. 1998; Hoskin, 2001) or take into consideration other proposed astronomical orientations (Silva, 2012).

As we argued before in more general terms (Senna-Martinez, 2014), most of the symbolic components associated with life and death in the Mondego's Platform Neolithic can be viewed as part of the symbolic of the agricultural cycle as metaphor for life and death (Williams, 2003) as well as closely connected to the lineage system responsible for these communities biological and cultural reproduction. These symbolic expressions probably reflect a long trend world view, we can call Neolithic, and that we think characterize this first stage of the Prehistory of Peasant Societies.

Besides seeing the the seasonal cycle of activities being stabilized, the Late Neolithic also saw some changes in the interrelation of the living with the dead (Senna-Martinez and Ventura, 2008). The perception of the ancestors/dead as “protective entities” seems to be reinforced in the Late Neolithic to take into

account the increased effort in the construction of the great monuments. The Late Neolithic dolmens, all endowed with complex entrances and atrium, would welcome (as in other regional areas) an increased number of bodies, materialized in the clear increase of the artefactual assemblages deposited with them. The parallel growth of complexity between the socio-economic and symbolic aspects of society could then perhaps find a particular regional expression in the case of Orca da Lapa do Lobo, with the transformation of an early dolmen into a “sanctuary” for the local lineages ancestors.

Canas de Senhorim, Calberlah-Allerbüttel, and Mörfelden-Walldorf, August 2018

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