

The Anthropomorphic Stele at Monte dos Zebros (Idanha-a-Nova): Contextualization amongst other Diadem-Steles in the Iberian Peninsula

La estela antropomorfa de Monte dos Zebros (Idanha-a-Nova). Su contextualización en el grupo de estelas-diadema de la Península Ibérica

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an anthropomorphic stele found in 1996 at Monte dos Zebros (Idanha-a-Nova, Beira Interior Sul, Portugal). It is a small monolith, incomplete in the lower part and much eroded, particularly on the posterior surface, as a result of exposure to the elements. The monument may be related to a burial mound, probably not of the megalithic type and dating to the Bronze Age, like others in the region. The stele described here has its closest parallel in the stele of Crato, as regards both the shape of the base and the iconography represented. Thus, like that one, it is probably one of the earliest examples in a long continuous series of female steles (indicated by the presence of diadems and “necklaces” and, in a few cases, the female genital organs) produced between the Early Bronze Age and the Late Bronze Age.

KEY WORDS: *Female diadem-stele; Bronze Age; Monte dos Zebros; Region of Beira Interior; Portugal.*

RESUMEN

Se describe una estela antropomorfa encontrada en 1996 en Monte dos Zebros (Idanha-a-Nova, Beira Interior Sul, Portugal), consistente en un pequeño monolito, incompleto en su parte inferior y muy erosionado en la posterior por la acción de los elementos. El monolito pudo estar relacionado con un túmulo funerario, probablemente no de tipo megalítico sino de la Edad del Bronce como otros de la misma región. Su paralelo más próximo es la estela de Crato, tanto por la forma como por la iconografía representada. Por ello, igual que ésta, se trata probablemente de uno de los primeros ejemplos de una larga y continua serie de estelas femeninas (indicadas por la presencia de diademas, collares y, en unos pocos casos, órganos genitales femeninos) que se erigieron entre la Edad del Bronce Antiguo y el Bronce Final.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Estela femenina diademada. Edad del Bronce. Monte dos Zebros. Beira Interior. Portugal.*

SUMARIO 1. Location and circumstances of the find. 2. Description of the stele and its iconography. 3. Comparisons. 4. Sex, chronology, function. 5. Geographic distribution, socioeconomic incidences. 6. Conclusions.

1. Location and circumstances of the find¹

The anthropomorphic stele described in this study was identified by Mário Chambino and Francisco Henriques in a prospective survey carried out on 23rd August 1996 during the archaeological mapping of the county of Idanha-a-Nova. It was found at a site known as Monte dos Zebros in the parish of Zebreira, which has the following UTM coordinates on the Military Map of Portugal

at a scale of 1/25 000, Sheet 294 (Figure 1): PE 586085.

News of the discovery was published in the 1998 Report of the Prospection Survey, undertaken within the ambit of project “ALTEJO – Late pre-history on the right bank of the Portuguese Upper Tagus”, organised by the “Upper Tagus Study Association” and approved by the Portuguese Archaeology Institute. The stele was found at Monte dos Zebros *Locus 2* (*Locus 1* corresponds to

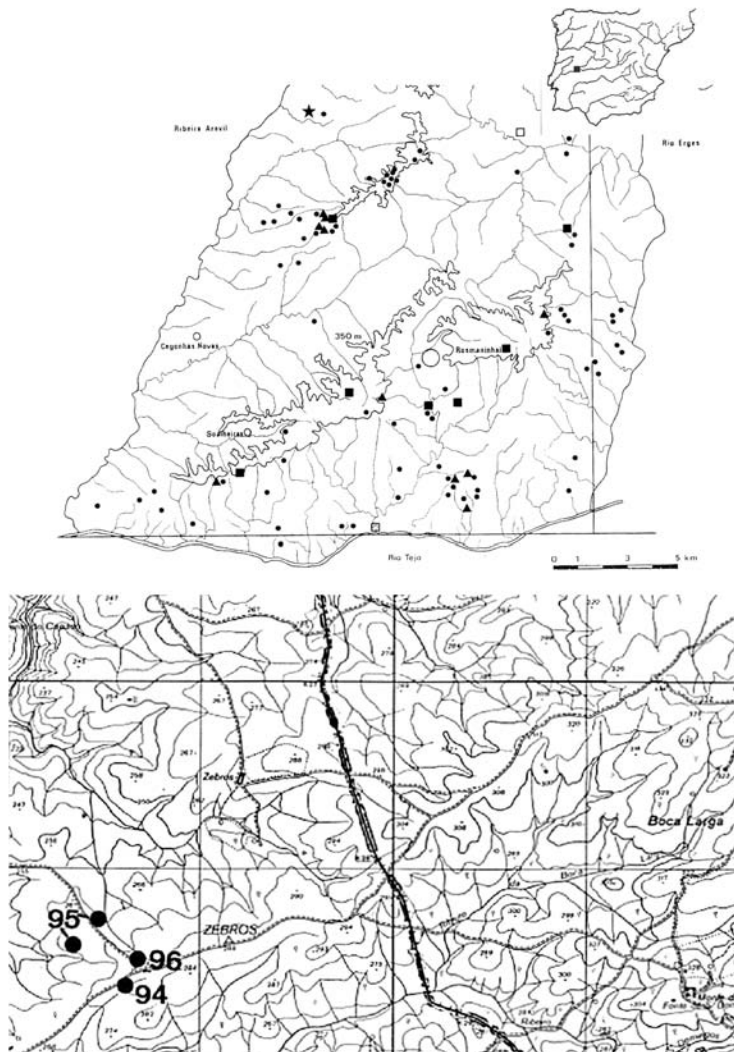


Figure 1.- Location of the Monte dos Zebros stele: (top) location in the Iberian Peninsula; (middle) location in the region of the international Tagus (asterisk*) and respective archaeological context (circles: megaliths and tumuli; squares: remains of dispersed settlement; triangles: menhirs and rocks with graves [according to Cardoso 2008, modified]); (bottom) location on the Military Map of Portugal, Sheet 258, at a scale of 1/25 000, with the surrounding archaeological context: 83: remains from Modern Period; 94: tumulus; 95: Roman materials (two sites); 96: stele of Monte dos Zebros (according to Henriques, Caninas & Cardoso, 1998).

the vestiges of a mound in the vicinity from where some surface remains were collected) (Henriques, Caninas & Cardoso 1998: 10). Indeed, the site where the stele was discovered was probably once a mound that has since been flattened by farming. This is suggested by the abundance of stone blocks, which despite having been dispersed over the arable soil by farming, are nevertheless found in greater concentrations at the site. They include a cluster of small blocks of fine-grained granite, quartz and occasionally schist, which follow the slope of the land towards the north-western quadrant for a distance of some 50 m (Figure 2). There are numerous grooves on the monolith caused by ploughing (proof of the intense farming activity in the area), particularly, though not exclusively, on its posterior surface, which also shows more signs of weathering.

If a mound existed in the area, it would have been small in size, and there are no indications of any monolith suggesting a megalithic monument. Thus, it probably corresponds to a post-megalithic Bronze Age monument, similar to others existing in the region, such as the mound of Amieiro 9 (Cardoso 2008).

The gently-sloping terrain is suitable for cereal cultivation, which continues to take place regularly. The site also includes a ridge, which begins as a long platform stretching in the direction of the River Aravil. The soil, covering schistous substrate, has no outcrops in the immediate vicinity, although a little further east (parish of Zebreira) there are some granite outcrops, with schist outcrops in the south (parish of Rosmaninhal) and tertiary sand-conglomerate in the north and west.

The site offers full visibility in all directions. To the north and northwest can be seen the inselberg of Monsanto (Idanha-a-Nova), the great fault of Ponsul, and, in the distance, the mountains of Gardunha and Estrela; to the west, the city of Castelo Branco on its hill, the Mount of S. Martinho, mountains of Talhadas and crest of Portas de Ródão; to the south, the Cabeço de Monforte and cordilleras of Spain.

2. Description of the stele and its iconography

This monolith is in fine-grained granite, which was certainly of local origin, given that some of the blocks strewn over the terrain (from the presumed



Figure 2.- Location of find: gently sloping field with broad visibility, with abundant blocks scattered across a stretch of approximately 50 m, configuring a non-megalithic mound, compatible with a Bronze Age monument (photographs: M. Chambino).

burial mound) are of the same kind of stone. Morphologically, the conserved part, corresponding approximately to the uppermost third of the original volume, is characterised by a rounded top and slightly convex sides. The anterior or frontal surface is also slightly convex, while the posterior surface is more markedly so, and also irregular, with many grooves and furrows (caused by ploughing, as mentioned above) crisscrossing about in all directions. This indicates that the stone had fallen over and lay for many years half-buried with the posterior surface largely exposed (although some identical furrows are also visible on the frontal surface, on both sides and even on the top). The two side surfaces are also convex, which means that the median cross-section is asymmetrical and ellipsoidal. Its slightly convex frontal surface is more developed and better finished than the rest, and would therefore have been destined to receive the main iconography (Figure 3).

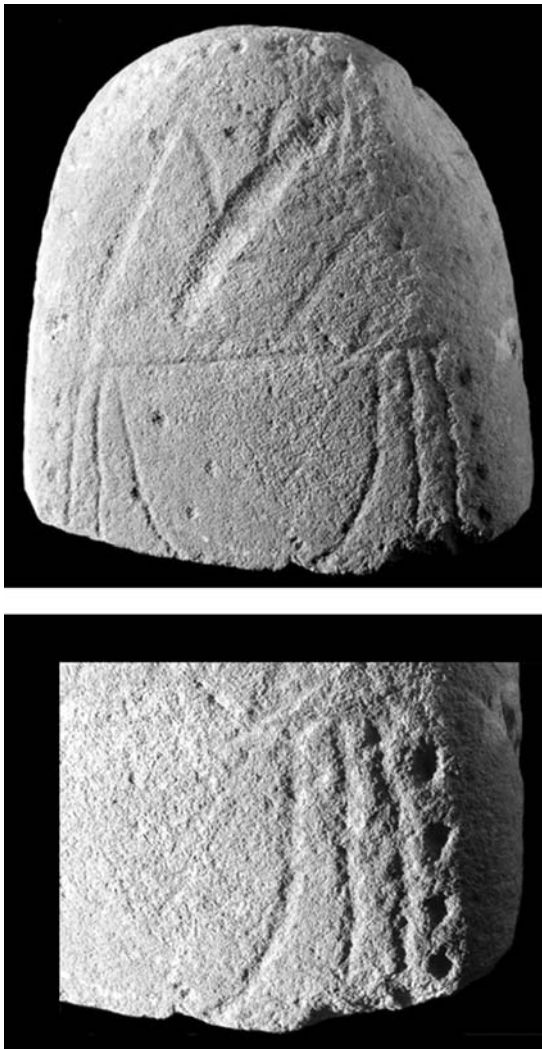


Figure 3.- The Monte dos Zebros stele. Frontal view and detail of technique used (photographs: J. L. Cardoso).

Its present dimensions are as follows:

Maximum present length (i.e. height, in vertical position) – 27.5 cm; the original monolith may have stood around 0.70 m tall at its maximum point.

Present maximum width (less than the original monolith would have been) – 27.0 cm.

Maximum thickness – 17.5 cm.

The morphology of the monolith (it is totally carved, elongated in shape and ellipsoid in cross-section, and its main engraved surface is well-developed, smoothed and slightly convex) justifies it being classified as a stele.

The decorative technique used was fairly deep

pecking, performed with a sharp object. In some cases (particularly for the production of furrows), this was followed by abrasion. As for the punctiform depressions caused by the pecking, these can be categorised into two groups according to size and depth, which are distributed symmetrically over the carved surface. The technique used seems to have been the same as observed elsewhere, i.e. percussion followed by rotative abrasion. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the surface is polished in some of that depressions, particularly the larger ones.

As regards the organization and distribution of motifs across the surface of the monolith, the following larger representations can be identified on the anterior or frontal surface (Figure 4):

- a diadem or headdress on the upper part of the monolith, achieved using fine radial incisions, possibly made with a silex, or more probably, metal blade (a completely different technique from the other two mentioned above);

- eyes, represented schematically using two points, with a third central point of undetermined significance in the central portion corresponding to the nose;

- the nose, made by two converging sub-vertical lines, interrupted by a large shallow groove of modern origin, which prevents us from knowing if those lines joined together lower down, and if so, how;

- the mouth, corresponding to a short horizontal segment, independent of the lines representing the nose.

The face, schematically represented in this way, is separated from the trunk by a horizontal line, which develops into three closed curved lines, tracing widening arcs. These correspond to the “necklaces”.

It is also worth mentioning the lines of punctiform depressions of various sizes, which develop around the main design on the front surface as if to highlight it, as they are ordered by size in accordance with the place where they are found. Thus, on both sides of the necklace and outside it are punctiform depressions that extend downwards towards the part of the piece that is today missing. Outside these lines, and without accompanying them, there is an arc of more than twenty such depressions of a similar size to those already mentioned, which go all around the schematic surface of the anthropomorphic representation. Finally, there are more, larger than



Figure 4.- The Monte dos Zebros stele. (Top) drawing of the conserved part; (bottom) representation of existing iconography (drawings: B. Ferreira).

the others, which extend vertically down both sides of the monolith. The lines formed by these depressions may correspond to the top of the headdress or diadem, as they are arranged around the edge of the lines that represent that; however, they stretch beyond it, which suggests they may possibly have a different meaning.

As is usual in this type of stele, the posterior surface, which is more irregular, is not decorated. However, there are some exceptions to this rule. For example, the Crato stele has a snake finely engraved on its posterior surface (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 2004a), which had initially gone unnoticed by the various authors that had previously written about it. This symbol represents the subterranean world, and thus a belief in telluric forces and the death/regeneration duality (Cardoso *et al.* 2001/2002). Thus, its presence on the monolith suggests that it was from a burial monument, similar to others of an undoubtedly funerary nature, such as the remarkable menhir at the dolmen of Navalcán, Toledo (Bueno *et al.* 1999). However, even if this is correct, the fact that this relationship continued for several more millennia means that the occurrence of the serpent on the monolith at Crato does not in itself help date it to any specific era.

3. Comparisons

In this section, the decorative elements of the stele will be analysed in turn and compared with other similar pieces found in the Iberian Peninsula. The most important iconographic feature that justifies it being included in the “diadem stele” group is the representation of a diadem or headdress that frames the anthropomorphic facial representation on top and on both sides. Thus, it will be compared principally with steles that display this type of adornment, although other adornments, such as necklaces, will also be taken into account.

1.- Support: this consists of a shaped convex-topped block, the front of which has been carefully smoothed. The monolith would not have stood taller than 0.70 m in total. Thus, it may be compared to other small rounded monoliths, such as the example from Crato (Vasconcelos 1910), also in granite. Both are distinguished from the ovoid monoliths (labelled “pebble idols” [*ídolos-guijarro*] by M. Almagro-Gorbea) common in the neigh-

bouring province of Cáceres, which may include a single example from Portuguese territory, that of Quinta do Couquinho (Moncorvo), also published by Leite de Vasconcelos (Vasconcelos 1910).

There is a reference to a fourth example in Portugal from A-de-Moura (Guarda), which consists of a wholly moulded intact block 1.02 m high, 0.41 m wide on average and 0.20 m thick in the middle (Silva 2000). Finally, there is the stele of N. Sr^a. da Esperança (Arronches), accidentally discovered by Breuil while he was on his way to the shelter of that name containing rock paintings, published by him (Breuil 1917). This differs from the others mentioned in that it is executed on a plaque that is not very thick.

2.- Eyes: amongst the anthropomorphic steles of the Iberian Peninsula, it was common practice to represent eyes by means of two punctiform depressions, separated by the nose. However, this example has three depressions rather than two, equally spaced and aligned almost horizontally, with the middle one situated in the central zone of the nose. A similar case exists with the stele of Arronches. In that case, although the drawings published by Breuil (1917) and Anati (1968) show only two eyes, a third depression has been identified more recently, located on top of the vertical line corresponding to the nose (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 2005). Finally, there are other cases that display three main horizontally-aligned depressions in the part of the monument corresponding to the head. These include the stele of Tabuyo del Monte, León (Almagro Basch 1972) and one of the steles of the Sejos group in Cantábria (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 2005). This particular feature does not seem to be due to chance, therefore, although at present it is difficult to interpret what it might mean.

2.- Nose: when a nose exists, it is usually represented by a simple vertical groove. However, in this case, it does not appear to have been like this. There are two oblique lines which converge at the bottom forming a V shape – or more probably a closed U. This has its best parallel in the stele of A-de-Moura (Guarda), where the nose is marked by a U-shaped groove, topped by the two eyes. Another stele on Portuguese territory where the nose is represented by two grooves converging in an open V is the recently published case of Castro de Barrega (Celorico de Basto) (Sampaio 2007).

3.- Mouth: this is represented by a short horizontal groove beneath the nose. It too has counter-

parts in the steles of A-de-Moura and Castro de Barrega, which is its closest parallel in Portugal. This type of representation is frequent on steles of the Iberian Peninsula. However, there are some that do not have mouths, such as the steles of Quinta do Couquinho (Moncorvo) and Crato. The latter is mouthless in the drawing presented by Vasconcelos (1910) and in the careful rubbing made in 2004 (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 2004a), though the stele of N. Sr^a. da Esperança, which had no mouth in the versions by Vasconcelos (1910) and Anati (1968) subsequently acquired one in the most recent known version (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 2004a).

4.- “Necklaces”: the three arcs of increasingly widening curvature found on this stele may be considered an example of what are usually interpreted as “necklaces”. They are an almost constant presence on the diadem steles of the Iberian Peninsula, but also occur in examples that are morphologically and iconographically very different and which do not have a diadem (and are therefore not included in this study). Examples of monoliths with “necklaces” but without diadems include the menhir statue of Boulhosa with a five-strand “necklace” (Vasconcelos 1910) that has been recently redrawn (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 2005); some of the unpublished steles of Cabeço da Mina (Vila Flor), and the stele of Alto da Escrita (Viseu), which bears a five-strand “necklace” and a belt (Carvalho *et al.* 1999). The “necklace” on the stele of Castro de Barrega (Celorico de Basto) also has five strands (Sampaio 2007).

On the other hand, examples exist that are stylistically closer to this stele but which do not have “necklaces”, though there may be diadems. The most clear-cut cases come from northern Iberia. There is the famous engraved painted rock panel of Peña Tu (Astúrias), drawn by Juan Cabré, and recently reinterpreted by Bueno Ramírez and his team (Cabré 1916; Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 2005); the stele of Tabuyo del Monte (León); the engraved stele of Garabandal (Cantábria), and the group of steles at Sejos (Cantábria), all of which have close affinities with each other, constituting a very homogenous group.

It should be pointed out that the number of strands identified on these “necklaces” may be inaccurate, as they are based only on the number of curved furrows. Indeed, unlike the stele under study here, it is frequent for the space between the

furrows to be filled in, which in those cases may suggest pectorals or a kind of stole with trimming around the edges. This is the case with one of the examples that is morphologically and geographically closest to the one studied here, namely the stele of Crato. In the latest published drawing (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 2005), the “necklace” of this figure is also filled-in with zigzags, similar to though less elaborate than the one at Granja de Toniñuelo (Badajoz) (Bueno & Balbín 1997).

5.- Headdress or diadem: the presence of diadems in these steles is clearly significant, to the extent that they have been categorised as “diadem steles”. This is particularly evident in the most recent examples, dating from the Late Bronze Age. There is considerable variation in the shape of this supposed adornment, ranging from a simple line (in the case of the stele of Quinta do Couquinho at Moncorvo) to a kind of grid, suggesting a type of hairnet (as with the stele of Crato), and even more complex representations, involving curved lines alternating with strips filled with lines of punctiform depressions (stele of N. S^a. da Esperança at Arronches). On the stele of A-de-Moura (Guarda), the headdress is represented by fine radial lines, which has obvious parallels with the example described here and with other Spanish examples, possibly representing a headdress made from loose horsehair.

In those diadem steles believed to be older, the headdress or diadem seems more discreet. The stele of Monte dos Zebros belongs to that group. In fact, this adornment is only suggested by fine radial incisions surrounding the head, framed by punctiform depressions which extend downwards, accompanied by radial incisions.

These fine radial incisions on the top of the stele, whose closest parallel is the already cited stele of A-de-Moura, has an equivalent in the red radial filiform representations on the upper part of the Peña Tu idol, which apparently symbolise a hairnet made of loose horsehair. In some cases, the diadem, which covers the top of the head, is extended by the “necklace”, which delimits it at the bottom, though without suggesting continuity. This is found on the stele at Agallas (Salamanca) where there is nevertheless space for the representation of fine radial lines over the head (Sevillano 1991), similar to that found at the stele of A-de-Moura and many others. In other cases, there is clear break between the diadem and the “neck-

lace”, as in the stele of Hernán Pérez VI (Almagro Basch 1972) and the present exemplar.

The lines of punctiform depressions surrounding the face and “necklace” of the Monte dos Zebros stele reinforce the decorative effect of the diadem, headdress or hairnet. The stele of Granja de Toniñuelo, like those of Arrocereso (Cáceres) (Bueno & González Cordero 1995) and Robledillo de Gata (Salamanca) (Sevillano 1974, 1991), also include the motif of the diadem, with predominantly radiating decoration. It is curious to note that even in later steles of the Final Bronze Age/Iron Age I, this decorative theme associated to the diadem persists, as in the example from Capilla I (Badajoz).

4. Sex, chronology, function

The presence of “necklaces” has been used by various authors to admit that such steles represent female figures (Almagro Gorbea 1993 a, 1993 b). This has precedents outside the Iberian Peninsula. For example, Jean Arnal, studying various groups from the south of France, considered that there was a clear distinction between female figures (all of which wore necklaces and had breasts) and males (who carried weapons). That is to say, these features seemed to be mutually exclusive. He also considered some hybrid cases, in which attributes seem to have been deliberately altered or added, possibly indicating a subsequent reformulation involving the transformation of male steles into female ones, and vice-versa (Arnal 1976).

With regards to steles of the Iberian Peninsula, the presence of weapons in steles that have diadems or other forms of headdress is considered to be important for the attribution of sex, although the possibility of conversion of the genus that occurred in France should not be overlooked. None of the diadem stele found in Portugal have such characteristics. However, in Spain, the referred association between weapons and diademed steles were valorised early at Peña Tú, where the idol was associated to a long carved dagger, identical to that found in Portugal in the Late Bell Beaker cist at Quinta da Água Branca (Vila Nova de Ceveira) (Cardoso 2002).

It should be noted, however, that in the version published by Cabré (1916), the dagger has five red points next to the hilt, which might correspond to

rivets, suggesting an Argaric rather than a Bell Beaker model, endowed with a tang, as suggested by various authors (Anati 1968). This interpretation seems to be the correct one, not only because Juan Cabré already had a great deal of experience in this kind of work by the time he did the rubbing of the panel, but also because his later conviction that the figure in question represented a tomb rather than a dagger makes the real existence of those points even more likely. It is worth transcribing his words, for the importance that they have for the interpretation of this representation and consequently for the respective chronology.

La figura grabada, que en un principio creímos dada su forma indicaba un puñal, creo mas bien debe ser una sepultura, indicadora de un enterramiento en cuya memoria se hicieron dichas pictografías, simbolizando la imágen de la derecha la divinidad generatriz a la que dirigieron sus invocaciones en el sepelio y confiaron el cadáver los deudos del enterrado, el signo-puñal el sepulcro, la escena humana la danza fúnebre (...).

El origen de nuestro error se basaba en la forma estilizada de la sepultura, y mas aún por los cinco puntos que aparecen en el tercio superior, los cuales nos movieron a creer, que significaban los clavos de remache de la empuñadura con la hoja del supuesto puñal. Dichos puntos no deben relacionarse con el gráfico y pueden pertenecer a las series inmediatas de puntuaciones (Cabré 1916, p. 26).

[The engraved motif, which we had at first believed to be a dagger because of its shape, now seems more likely to be a tomb, indicating a burial that was commemorated in pictographs. The image on the right thus symbolises the generative divinity to whom invocations are addressed during the burial and to whom the body was entrusted, the dagger-sign is the tomb, the human scene the funeral dance....]

Our mistake was due to the stylised shape of the tomb, and particularly to the five points that appear on the upper third, which we had believed to signify the rivets joining the hilt of the supposed dagger to the blade. In fact, these points were probably not related to the image and could belong to the immediate series of marks.]

However, Cabré’s first idea was the right one, as today no one truly doubts that the motif in question represents a weapon. Breuil strongly believes that the weapon has rivets, conclusion reinforced after he had seen the panel *in loco*; he offered the following conclusions about the matter:

L’une figure évidemment un grand poignard triangulaire d’environ 0 m. 65, à manche court, du type classique du début de l’âge du bronze ou de la fin de

celui du cuivre, avec cinq rivets peints en arc de cercle sur la garde (Breuil, 1933, p. 41).

[One of the motifs is obviously a large triangular dagger around 0.65m long, with a short handle, of the type that was classic at the beginning of the Bronze Age or end of the Copper Age, with five rivets painted in an arc on the hilt].

Thus, it is strange that the rivets, which are so clear in Cabré's drawings and confirmed by Breuil (both very experienced specialists) no longer appear in the version published by Bueno Ramírez *et al.* in 2005, in accordance with these authors' attribution of the idol to the Chalcolithic (unless of course they have disappeared in the meantime due to natural causes).

If, like other authors (Sevillano 1982), we assume that there *are* rivets on the hilt of the weapon, the representation associated with the idol of Peña Tu would necessarily have to date from the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age, according to the concept presented in Cardoso (2002), i.e. from the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC. The stele of Tabuyo del Monte (Leon) would also be attributed to this period as it depicts on both sides a halberd of the Carrapatas type, with triangular blade, and a short-handled dagger similar to that depicted on the painted panel of Peña Tú (though without rivets, which is comprehensible, given that this is an engraving), which in turn has a parallel in one of the Cantabrian steles of Sejos.

In the stele of Hernán Pérez VI (Cáceres), published by Almagro Basch in 1972, an filiforme engraving of a halberd of the Carrapatas type has recently been identified, attached to the belt of the figure represented (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 2005). Another of the same type has been recorded on the stele of Agallas (Salamanca) (Sevillano 1991). A particularity of this stele is that the halberd, which is in all respects similar to the previous ones, was carved after the piece had suffered a fracture on its front surface. As there is also (in accordance with the most recent illustration of it, published by Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 2005) a motif on the lower part of this surface that seems to evoke female genitals, and which appears to date from the time the monument was made, this might be a similar situation to that described by Arnal with regards to some of the steles in the south of France when female figures were transformed in male ones. It is interesting to note that the halberd was carved exactly on the fractured surface of the stele corre-

sponding to the area of the "necklace" (a female attribute), which suggests that this part of the stele may have been deliberately obliterated.

On the Agallas stele, the female organ is represented by two slightly convex vertical lines, which join at both ends, similar to the representation on the stele at A-de-Moura, mentioned above. It is interesting to note that a similar motif also occurs on a schist plaque at the anta of Couto de Vale Magro (Crato) (Isidoro, 1971), which also has filiform arms and fingers on both sides of the figure, exactly like in the stele at Agallas. This method of representing the female sex occurred alongside the more usual way (an inverted triangle), which is also seen on some sandstone plaques of the Upper Alentejo group, such as that recently published from Anta da Horta (Crato) (Oliveira 2006).

This formal similarity may suggest that these decorated plaques were precursors of the steles from the group under appreciation, as argued by Bueno and collaborators in various works, following Vasconcelos (1910), and also put forward by various authors in the context of monuments from other geographical areas (Arnal 1976). It is worth recalling some of the observations made by one of the most famous pioneers of archaeology in Portugal:

...existe parentesco dos monumentos da Boulhosa, do Couquinho e do Crato com a placa de lousa de Alcobaça, que provém de uma região chalcolithica, e posso incluir na mesma parentella uma placa de lousa de Idanha-a-Nova, achada num dólmen (Vasconcelos 1910: 38).

[There is a kinship between the monuments of Boulhosa, Couquinho and Crato and the schist plaque of Alcobaça, which comes from a Chalcolithic region. Another schist plaque from Idanha-a-Nova, found in a dolmen, also displays a similar kinship].

Another common feature between the schist plaques and the steles under appreciation is the existence of "necklaces"; these are one of the most marked features of the steles and sometimes occur on the plaques. One of the best examples is the plaque above mentioned by Vasconcelos from a cave in Cabeço da Ministra (Alcobaça) (Gonçalves 1978), although this is a region where no steles have been found. As seen in some steles, the "necklace" on the obverse of the plaque is defined by two lines, the space between which is filled in with oblique strips, suggesting a stole. On the back, a similar design can be seen, which reinforces that interpretation.

The eastern part of the Upper Alentejo, extending southwards in Portuguese territory from Beira Interior (region of the international Tagus), is the region that has the greatest concentration of schist and sandstone plaques with anthropomorphic representations similar to the more elaborate steles, with heads, arms and hands. Some also have adornments of the “necklace” type, inscribed on both surfaces, as in the plaque from Alcobaça. This seems explicit in the case of dressed figures, seen both from the front (where the arms and hands are also depicted) and the back. This is the case with the example from the dolmen at Horta (Alter do Chão) (Oliveira 2006), and the one already mentioned, collected by Vasconcelos from a dolmen in Idanha-a-Nova (Ferreira 1973), which have clear affinities with each other. Moreover, these similarities may be extended to some examples from the province of Cáceres, such as the one found in the dolmens of Lanchas 1 (Valência de Alcântara) (Bueno Ramírez 1992) and Vega del Gadancil. In this monument, an anthropomorphic sandstone plaque with the representation of the female pubic triangle, was found associated to a “necklace” schist plaque (Leisner & Leisner 1959: Tf. 55, nº 1, 2).

In these cases, the so-called “necklaces”, which cover the shoulders and chest of the figures, may actually represent some kind of stole or other form of apparel, or even the U- or V-shaped edge of a cloak decorated with geometric patterns. In fact, the relationship between the geometric patterns on the schist plaques and the items of clothing that depict similar patterns has been highlighted by various authors, in the wake of the Bueno Ramírez’s suggestion concerning the relationship between these anthropomorphic stele and the Alentejan plaques of the Crato-Nisa-Castelo de Vide group (Bueno Ramírez 1991). It should be noted, however, that the geographical distribution of this type of plaques does not clearly correspond with that of the steles in question, as this continues westward to the Upper Ribatejo, as proved by the fragment collected from the anta of Penedo Gordo in Gavião (Cunha & Cardoso 2002/2003). Moreover, such plaques are residual in the province of Cáceres and non-existent in that of Salamanca, which are the areas where most of these steles originate.

If the hypothesis is correct that some of the anthropomorphic plaques from the eastern Upper Alentejo and Beira Beixa group display cloaks, then some of the steles may also have similar fea-

tures. This is particularly true of those from the northern group, such as Peña Tu, Garabandal, Tabuyo del Monte and Sejos, whose iconography of horizontal strips filled with zigzags and triangles is common to the plaques. However, given the complete absence of schist plaques in the region where these steles originate, it is more probable that any similarity is merely the result of formal convergence.

In conclusion, while the hypothesis of a relationship between certain Chalcolithic alentejan plaques and steles is an attractive one, it cannot be proved, as two conditions remain unfulfilled. Firstly, there is the question of geographical distribution, as there is only a residual overlap. Secondly, and more importantly, there is the matter of contemporaneity. This is directly related to the formal evolution of steles, a subject that has been broached by various authors based on their iconographic characteristics and the contexts in which they are found.

Almagro-Gorbea (1993 a; 1993 b) suggests that the older steles display less elaborate designs, with fewer anatomical details. In Portugal, this first stage would be represented by the steles of Crato and Quinta do Couquinho (Moncorvo) (Vasconcelos 1910; Anati 1968), and also by the Monte de Zebros example, as this has a clear parallel in the Crato stele, as has already been mentioned. It is also possible that the stele of Arronches belongs to this first group, although this cannot be asserted as it is very incomplete. In our opinion, the insertion of this group into the Early/Middle Bronze Age is supported by the presence of characteristic weapons, such triangular-blade halberds of the Carrapatos type and riveted daggers, as is the case of the dagger with the red-painted rivets at Peña Tu.

The next stage, attributable by Almagro Gorbea (and also by us) to the Middle/Late Bronze Age, is represented by more elaborate examples, possessing arms and hands, as well as “necklaces”. This group would include, in the Portuguese territory, the steles of A-de-Moura (Guarda) (Silva 2000) and Castro de Barrega (Celorico de Basto) (Sampaio 2007), which has well-developed arms and hands with fingers. An important feature for establishing the chronology of this group is the presence of a Carrapatos-type halberd on one of the stele included in it (Agallas), added after the piece had been finished. In fact this stele is very similar

to that of A-de-Moura, an interpretation that is reinforced by the engraving of the female sex, identified in the last published rubbing (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 2005).

Thus, if we accept the attribution to the Middle Bronze Age, the hypothesis that this group was inspired by Alentejan plaques with similar iconography is not easily sustainable. There exists a time lapse of over 500 years between the two groups, as the schist and sandstone plaques are unlikely to date from after 2500 BC. Frankowski (1920 : 136) had already pointed out:

Supongo que todas estas piedras, y especialmente las três de Portugal [Crato, Quinta do Couquinho e Moncorvo], no son ni ídolos, ni tampoco unas representaciones de la diosa protectora de los muertos, sino que guardan cierto parentesco ideológico con las placas de pizarra, encontradas en los dólmenes (...)

[I suppose that all these stones, and especially the three from Portugal (Crato, Quinta do Couquinho and Moncorvo) are not idols, nor representations of a goddess protector of the dead, although they have a certain ideological kinship with the slate plaques found in the dolmens...]

In the context of our present knowledge, this suggests only a formal kinship, not sustainable from the archaeological point of view. Therefore, within the context of our current knowledge, there is no solid justification for attributing the steles from this group to the Chalcolithic, as most of the examples have been taken out of context. The claim made by Bueno Ramírez & Balbín Behrmann (1997, 2003) that the stele of Granja de Toniñuelo (Badajoz) is Chalcolithic (based upon a hypothetical relationship with the megalithic tomb that exists there) is also unfounded, as this too depicts a similar belt.

Also false is the claim, repeatedly made by these authors, that the anthropomorphic steles of Crato and Esperança are related to megalithic tombs, invoking the testimony of the authors who first published them (Bueno Ramírez & Cordero 1995; Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 2004a, 2005; see, for all, the passages contained on pages 671 and 594 of their last two publications, respectively). On the contrary, as is clearly stated by the authors that first studied these and other examples (Vasconcelos 1910; Breuil, 1917), the archaeological contexts and the respective chronology were not recognised, and there was nothing that could associate them to any megalithic tomb constructions, a situ-

ation that is in fact extended to the most recent finds made in Portugal of the steles with diadems and “necklaces”. The situation described seems to be common to Spain, particularly as regards the area where these pieces are most concentrated, namely the provinces of Cáceres and Salamanca, which is why they are known in the literature as the Hurdes-Gata group, corresponding to the findings from the western foothills of the Iberian Central Massif. As Sevillano (1991) points out, only a minority of the known steles may be confidently associated to small cists, of indeterminate period, since the most reliable record conserved was the discovery in a cist situated near the stele of El Cerezal I, of “an urn or cooking pot” (Sevillano 1991: 100), which however, is sufficient to prove the relationship of that stele with burial use.

Concerning the Hernán Pérez group, the following observations should be borne in mind: Steles I, II and VII were found isolated in the terrain, while Steles III, IV, V and VI were grouped together in a restricted space, according to oral testimony, where there was also found a stele of the “warrior” type. Most were still standing in the ground, near rectangular tombs of large schist slabs (Almagro Basch, 1972, p. 91). Thus, we may conclude that the steles may mark the site of a necropolis of cists, and that they include one of the “warrior” type (Almagro Gorbea 1977: 199). This has led the author to surmise, correctly, the existence of a “functional relationship” between these two types of decorated pieces. In the light of this conclusion, it seems likely that the whole Hernán Pérez group dates back to the Final Bronze Age, a hypothesis that has recently been defended (Santos 2009, 2010). At first sight, this hypothesis does not appear to be contradicted by the iconography, based on an aspect valued by M. Almagro Gorbea in his suggested periodization, though it has been downplayed by the author quoted. In fact, of the seven steles considered to be female, four bear a belt that is entirely filled with points, which would seem to represent metal studs. For example, this feature is found on the famous Portuguese stele of São Martinho I (Castelo Branco), which is unquestionably from the Late Bronze Age (Almagro Basch 1966: Lám. 2), and also on various steles from the same epoch, such as those of La Lantejuela (Seville) and Torrejón del Rubio II (Cáceres).

However, the decision to attribute the Hernán Pérez diadem stele group to the Final Bronze peri-

od has been undermined by the identification of a halberd depicted on Stele VI of the group, accompanied by another, that of Agallas (Salamanca). In both cases, these are unmistakably halberds of the Carrapatas type, given the short triangular blade, not found in any other known type. In any case, this type of halberd is not evident after 1700/1500 BC, and is included in the last copper productions, immediately prior to the introduction of bronze metalwork from the northernmost regions of the Iberian Peninsula. In fact, in terms of distribution, Carrapatas-type halberds are geographically restricted to the Douro basin, while Cano- or Montejicar-type halberds (which are more recent, though still preceding the Final Bronze Age) are found exclusively in the south of Portugal and in Andalucía (Senna-Martinez 2007), and have, like the Argaric halberds, a blade that is much narrower and proportionally more elongated. Thus, we may conclude that the group of diadem steles that includes those two examples may be dated by the presence of that type of halberd, which go back at least to the Middle/Late Bronze Age and thus clearly precede the “warrior” steles. The apparent association of two types of monuments in Hernán Pérez can be explained with reference to the powerful symbolic charge of that space, which would still have formed part of the collective memory of the peoples of the Late Bronze Age, when the “warrior” stele was erected. This is a well-known mechanism that has been described in some detail by various authors (Díaz-Guardamino 2006), and which can also serve to explain the proximity of the seven steles from older megalithic tombs, occupying the same space (Almagro Basch 1972: Fig. 2).

As regards anthropomorphic diadem steles, there have been no major changes to our understanding of the situation since the work of Sevillano (1991), and it is accepted that they may well have associations with Bronze Age cist necropolises (cremation and/or inhumation), but not with megalithic monuments, given the absolute lack of concrete reliable evidence (Díaz-Guardamino 2006; Santos 2009, 2010).

Thus, as the more recent specimens of this sequence clearly date from the Late Bronze Age, Almagro-Gorbea’s proposal (1993) concerning phasing remains current. Indeed, it has an internal logic, as there seems to be a continuous evolution in the female diadem steles, starting at the Early/Middle Bronze Age (northern group), pass-

ing through the Middle Bronze Age (Salamanca/Cáceres group) and continuing for over a thousand years to the late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, coexisting with the so-called “warrior” steles of the Guadiana/Guadalquivir basins.

More modern diadem steles, while clearly revealing a certain continuity with steles from the Middle Bronze Age as regards the representation of various iconographic features such as belts, which continue to be represented by punctiform decorations, probably representing bronze studs, as observed in the diadem steles of the Late Bronze of La Lantejuela (Seville) (Oliva Alonso, 1983) and Torrejón del Rubio II (Cáceres) (Almagro Basch, 1966, Fig. 27), also have distinctive characters that allow them to be easily differentiated from their older counterparts of the Meseta (Santos 2009, 2010). In fact, while the supports of the Middle Bronze Age steles are completely adapted and occupied by anthropomorphic representations, particularly as regards the face and attributes associated with it, the diadem steles of the Late Bronze Age invariably show complete human figures in schematic form, sometimes including compositions of differing degrees of complexity. Even the features present on the steles of the Middle Bronze period vary, as regards their relative dimensions: this is the case of the diadem, which becomes proportionately larger as the “necklaces” become smaller or are even eliminated altogether, suggesting that only the former remained valid as a social marker (Celestino Pérez 1990, 2001), maintaining the female connotations of the entities represented. This is well-expressed in the steles of Torrejón del Rubio II, Capilla I and Belalcazar I (Badajoz) (Enríques Navascués & Celestino Pérez 1982, 1984), which not only have a large diadem but also breasts, represented by punctiform depressions. It should be noted in passing that breasts are rare on the older diadem steles of the Iberian Peninsular, with the exception of the example from Salvatierra de Santiago (Sevillano 1991).

The great symbolic dimension of the diadem in these later productions may in fact be shown by the real size of these objects, which can be up to 15 cm in internal diameter, taking into consideration the example recovered from Tomb 101 of the La Colombine necropolis (Yonne), which forms part of a rich collection of female objects datable to the 9th century BC, considered to be the most expressive formal parallel for the diadem steles of the

Iberian Peninsula (Celestino Pérez 2001: 252). The adornment is executed in bronze wire around a great inner defence of wild boar, forming three longitudinal arches fixed by nine bundles of finer radial wires, topped by 10 circles formed of spirals. This morphology shows a clear similarity with some diadem representations, particularly the later ones, such as the steles of Capilla I and El Viso V (Celestino Pérez 2001: 401), which are bordered by external lines of points, a feature that also appears on the steles of the previous group, such as in Arrocerezo (Cáceres) (Bueno Ramírez & Gonzalez Cordero 1995: Fig. 2), whose exuberantly-large diadem is similar to those of the whole-body steles further south.

Finally, in the stele of El Viso III (Celestino Pérez, 2001, p. 401), two armed figures are represented in confrontation, which are clearly categorisable as warriors. They are separated by an unarmed female figure wearing a diadem. Thus, this stele establishes the missing link between the most recent diadem steles and “warrior” steles, and may be added to the other discoveries, already published by this author. The most remarkable case is the stele of Almadén de la Plata (Seville), in which two figures are represented side by side, one bearing an outside diadem, the other, flanked by a round shield and sword, with a horned helmet (García Sanjuán *et al.* 2006: Fig. 5).

5. Geographic distribution, socioeconomic incidences

The geographic distribution of diadem steles has revealed the existence of three distinct groups, as mentioned above, which will now be summarised briefly.

1.- The first group corresponds to the steles of the northern Iberian Peninsula (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 2005), called “rectangular steles” in previous works, and to the carvings and paintings on rocky outcrops (Díaz-Guardamino 2006: 22), also known as “parallelepiped figures” in more recent studies (Santos 2009: 15; Santos 2010: 54). This last author considers these representations to be distinct from those bearing a diadem. Nevertheless, the group includes the Peña Tu idol, which appears to possess that attribute, corresponding to a series of short radiating segments, immediately above the face of the figure represented (Cabré 1916). The

simplicity of the diadem and of most of the other iconographic features in this group can also be found in the Crato example, in sub-parallelepiped format, which constitutes the southernmost occurrence of this group (Santos 2009 : 16, nota 2). As the Monte dos Zebros stele is the most similar to the Crato one, out of those known to date (separated from it by a distance of around 80 km as the crow flies in a NW direction), it may possibly be considered as an extension of the northern group. This could only be explained by the existence of trans-regional circulation corridors running in a North-South direction, which are indeed clearly marked in graphic terms in Spanish Extremadura (Barroso Bermejo *et al.* 2002/2003), with expression also in the west of Portuguese territory.

In fact, without wishing to debate the meaning and purpose of these monuments, it seems clear that, beyond their female and funerary associations (which show remarkable continuity with previous Neolithic and Chalcolithic representations), they are sometimes located in mountain passes or at crossing-points of rivers, compulsory points of passage for anyone travelling between different geographical areas of the Iberian Peninsula (Díaz-Guardamino 2006). This author indicates more recently that this group belong to the Early/Middle Bronze (Díaz-Guardamino 2008), similar to the propositions in this paper.

2.- The second group of steles differs from the first on account of the richer iconographic detail. The diadems are now more explicit, like the “necklaces” and other accessories of clothing (belts) or weaponry (halberds), and there are anthropomorphic features that were previously unknown, such as arms and hands, with the representation of the face, which constitutes the dominant feature. As regards the geographic distribution of examples collected on Portuguese territory, it now becomes clear that there is an East-West relationship, particularly with the cluster of steles from the Meseta. This is the case of the stele of A-de-Moura (Guarda), which has clear affinities with some steles from the province of Salamanca, such as Agallas; the example from Quinta do Couquinho (Moncorvo), which, due to its format, is included in the “pebble idol” group of the Western Meseta; and, finally, the stele of the castro of Barrega (Celorico de Basto) (Sampaio 2007) geographically at the westernmost edge of the Central-Western group of Bueno Ramírez *et al.* (2005).

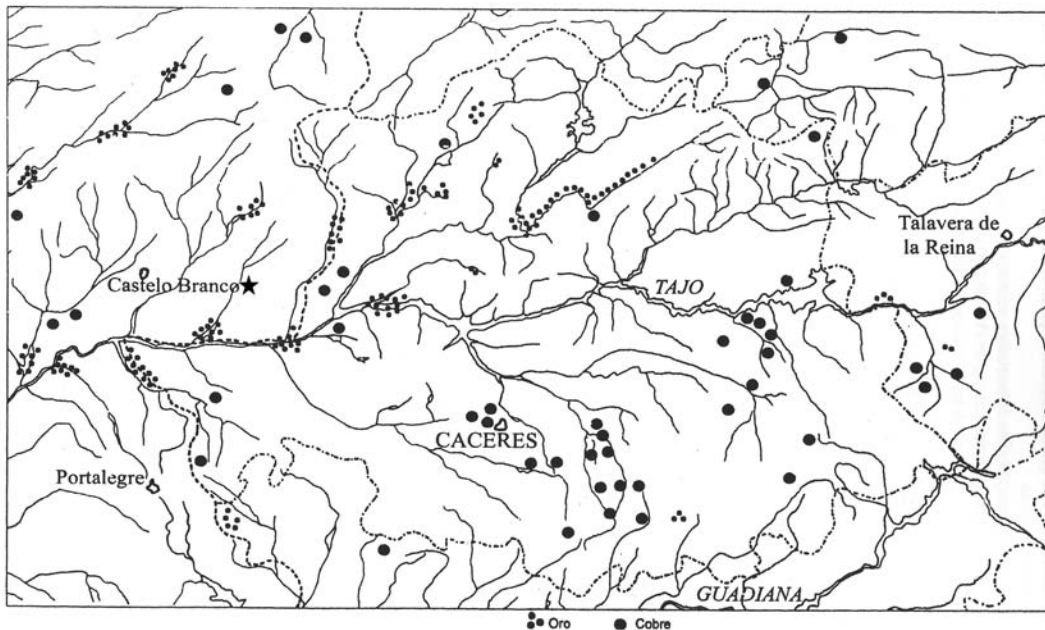


Figure 5.- Possible locations for the extraction of alluvial copper and gold in the Middle Tagus basin. The location of the Monte dos Zebros stele is marked with an asterisk (*), according to Barroso *et al.* 2002/2003.

There is a remarkable abundance of occurrences in the province of Cáceres, where these steles are most concentrated (Barceló 1988 Fig. 11), extending into the province of Salamanca – broadly corresponding to the so-called Hurdes-Gata group or, as Bueno-Ramírez *et al.* (2005) prefer, to the Central-Western Group – an area rich in alluvial deposits of gold and tin (Sevillano 1982), and also copper (Barroso Bermejo *et al.*, 2002/2003) (Figure 5). This mineral wealth explains the presence in the same region of metal items from the final Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age, as recorded by these authors. Almagro-Gorbea (1977 : 200) had already noted, on the other hand, the proximity of some diadem steles in the province of Cáceres (Robledillo de Gata, Hernán Pérez) to the gold deposits, mentioning that the region also contained deposits of copper and silver. Indeed, he concluded that they may have been related with metallurgist societies whose hierarchical organisation was proved by the existence of the steles themselves:

Así estas estelas corresponderían a jerarcas de grupos sociales, evidentemente mineros, cuya sacralización explicaría su relación original con el tipo de idolo con el cual parecen estar relacionados originariamente estas representaciones” (Almagro-Gorbea, 1977: 201).

[Thus, these steles correspond to hierarchies of social

groups, obviously miners, and their consecration would explain their original relationship with the type of idol to which these representations seem to be originally related.]

Together, these occurrences constitute a well-defined unit, distributed throughout the western foothills of the Iberian Central Massif (Santos 2009: 17) and extending into Portuguese territory through the occurrences mentioned above, which may possibly include the Arronches stele (Breuil 1917), although this is in too fragmented a state to enable detailed characterization.

If we accept that the Portuguese steles of Crato and Monte dos Zebros, with their greater simplicity, may be more clearly related to the northern group, dating back to the Early or Middle Bronze Age, and thus earlier than the diadem steles of the main cluster, located in the provinces of Cáceres and Salamanca, it is not clear why the Portuguese territory did not evolve in the same way (the exceptions being the isolated examples mentioned above, which are considered to be the westernmost extension of the main nucleus). It is likely that the scarcity of the more developed types of diadem steles found on Portuguese territory is due to the relative scarcity of mineral resources, which would have resulted in a less significant human presence during a period of time in the 2nd millennium BC.

In fact, although Barceló (1988) concluded, using methods of statistical analysis, that anthropomorphic steles constitute a homogenous spatial-temporal group in global terms, the reality seems to suggest a segregation of the older productions from the main centre between the final Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Ages.

In a recent work from M. Díaz-Guardamino, it was referred the geographic distribution of some steles considered from the Early/Middle Bronze Age, such as the ones from Hernán Pérez as located in temporary or intermittent streams, a relationship also observed in the steles from Late Bronze Age to which, among others belong the one from Hernan Perez (Díaz-Guardamino 2008: 38). The author is clear in the chronological differentiation between the six diadem steles found and the single « warrior » stele, and we agree with such differentiation.

3.- The third group of diadem steles corresponds to schematic representations of the whole body, dating from the Late Bronze, as described above. These are distributed along the basins of the Guadiana and Guadalquivir. Contemporary with the “warrior” steles, the diadem steles of this group will have gradually evolved from the diadem steles in the region of Salamanca/Cáceres (Santos 2009, 2010). Thus, they correspond to a different geographic area. This suggests the existence of two groups with different chronologies, in which the older would be attributed to the Middle Bronze period (on the basis of the criteria described above), contrary to the perspective suggested by Santos.

Although this analysis does not include steles with facial representations in low relief probably dating from the Chalcolithic – which are grouped separately and include the Portuguese example from Moncorvo (Vasconcelos 1910) and from Castro de Santa Luzia (Freixo-de-Espada-à-Cinta) (Jorge & Jorge 1993: Fig. 13) and the Spanish example of Asquerosa near Granada (Paris 1903: 85) – the obvious similarities between them, despite being located very far apart, once more points to the existence of trans-regional circulation routes. These may be even more extensive than was first thought, given that it is possible to relate the Iberian examples cited with the steles from the south of France (i.e. those of Orgon and Trets, amongst others). Indeed, this has long been claimed in the pioneering work of synthesis carried

out by Octobon (1931 : 467, 468), which emphasises the Mediterranean character of all these nice objects (Arnal 1976).

6. Conclusions

The study of the diadem stele of Monte dos Zebros (Idanha-a-Nova) has yielded the following main conclusions, based upon geographical distribution, iconography and chronology (this not being the space for a discussion of the meaning of this type of monument, which has been extensively discussed elsewhere, specially by M. Díaz-Guardamino Uribe 2006, 2008).

1.- The monument is possibly related to a non-megalithic tomb structure, dating from the regional Middle Bronze Age, in the first half of the 2nd millennium BC. This enhances the interest of the discovery, given the scarcity of elements concerning the specific conditions of the deposit of this type of monument, despite what it is generally associated with the funerary world.

2.- The iconographic features suggest an ancient monument, in the sequence defined by M. Almagro Gorbea, and there are considerable similarities with the stele at Crato, situated some 80km to the south. That stele, for its part, has greater formal similarities with the northernmost cluster in the Iberian Peninsula, which includes, alongside steles, engraved or painted representations, including the famous Peña Tu idol. Thus, the stele of Monte dos Zebros, given its geographical location, may correspond to an intermediate occurrence, reinforcing transregional Iberian relations running in a north-south direction during the Early/Middle Bronze Age.

3.- Another important cluster of diadem steles is located on the other side of the border in the provinces of Salamanca and Cáceres, all bearing the same iconographic characteristics. Whenever the sex is represented, the figures are shown to be female. Thus, the presence of halberds, represented using other carving techniques, clearly subsequent to the execution of the steles, indicates that the figures were reinterpreted as male at a later date, as also occurred in other regions outside Iberia. From the typological point of view, these halberds are of the Carrapatas type, which did not occur after 1700/1500 BC. That is the most recent date for the steles, which are clearly from the Middle Bronze

Age, and in all cases prior to the Late Bronze Age.

Vestiges of these productions extend westward into Portuguese territory. Thus, although the oldest examples (represented by the steles of Crato and Monte dos Zebros) are found along the border strip, the subsequent development of these steles also took place in that region, which may be explained by the greater abundance of mineral resources (copper, tin, gold), resulting in greater population densities. The examples from Portuguese territory come from the border area and have affinities with various steles from the Meseta (the steles of A-de-Moura near Guarda and the stele of Quinta do Couquinho near Moncorvo, the “pebble idol” in Portuguese territory). The only exception is the stele of Castro de Barrega (Celorico de Basto, district of Braga), which is furthest away from the original cluster in Extremadura, some 200 km to the west.

4.- The last phase of production of these diadem steles corresponds to the Late Bronze Age. There are now notable iconographic differences in relation to the previous group, corresponding to schematic whole-body anthropomorphs with outsize diadems. They are often associated (sometimes on the same support) with “warrior” representations from the Late Bronze, and their chronology is confirmed by the types of some of the artefacts represented, such as elbow fibulae. The spatial segregation of these later productions (they cover a quite different geographic area to the previous ones, being located further south, including the basins of the Rivers Guadiana and Guadalquivir) reinforces the conclusion that this is now a different cultural and chronological reality, though inheriting aspects of the previous one, as is evident in the formal continuities.

NOTES

1. A preliminary version of this study was presented at the 4th Borderland Conference (*Jornadas Raianas*), “Steles and Menhir Statues: from Pre- to Proto-History”, held in Sabugal (Portugal) in October 2009, organised by the Centre for Archaeological Studies of the Universities of Coimbra and Oporto, and by Sabugal + Empresa Municipal.

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