

VILAÇA, R.; CRUZ, D. J. da; SANTOS, A. T. & MARQUES, J. N. (2003), "A statue menhir from Ataúdes (Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo, Guarda, Portugal: a first notice", *in Livro de Actas. I Congresso Internacional de Arqueologia iconográfica e simbólica*, Conimbriga: Liga de Amigos de Conimbriga, pp. 104-119.

## A statue menhir from Ataúdes (Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo, Guarda, Portugal): a first notice<sup>1</sup>

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### 0. Introduction

In early July, 2001, the Institute of Archaeology (Faculty of Letters, University of Coimbra) was contacted by Paulo Santos, the historic preservation officer (“Técnico Superior”) at the city Hall of Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo, to assess the interest of an engraved menhir from Quinta dos Marcelinos. The pictures presented to R. V. confirm the archaeological interest of the monument, as well as revealing a new statue menhir which presents unusual decorative attributes. It was then decided to visit the site a week later in order to directly observe this fortuitous finding. The first direct observation by two of the authors (R. V. and J. N. M.) confirmed the interest of the monument and of its study. Necessary official contacts were then established with the Portuguese Institute of Archaeology (from hereon PIA) in order to proceed to the analysis of the statue menhir.

The authors checked with Covilhã’s extension of the PIA to make sure that there was no research project about this type of material culture/evidence and chronological period being conducted in the area. The landowner, Mr. António Amaro Fonseca, was contacted to give permission for the cleaning and study of the monument. The Mayor of Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo was also informed about the archaeological relevance of the finding, as well as the PIA, to which the researchers submitted the required authorization to study the statue menhir<sup>2</sup>.

Field work was undertaken from July 30 to August 2, 2001, under the direction of the authors. We received support from the Câmara Municipal<sup>3</sup> of Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo, the Institute of Archaeology (Faculty of Letters, University of Coimbra) and the Beira Altas’s Center for Prehistoric Studies.

### 1. Location of the monument and its geographic context

The statue menhir was found in “Quinta dos Marcelinos,” previously called “Quinta dos Ataúdes”<sup>4</sup>. This farm is located c. 2.7 km East-Southeast from Figueira de Castelo

<sup>1</sup> Translation by M. Dores Cruz (Department of Anthropology, Binghamton University, U.S.A.).

<sup>2</sup> The authors would like to thank Mr. António Amaro Fonseca for the extraordinary support provided during the cleaning and the drawing of the monument. Mr. Fonseca's support to our work included access to water for cleaning and electricity to allow the drawing of monument. This last task was accomplished completely during night time. We would also like to thank Eng. Armando Pinto Lopes, Mayor of Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo, who understood all too well the interest and historic value of the this remarkable archaeological find, and provided our team with housing during the period in which we undertook the field research. Also our acknowledgment to Dr. Paulo Santos, the historic preservation officer at the city hall for his support and help during fieldwork.

<sup>3</sup> City Hall (translator's note).

<sup>4</sup> This toponymic designation has certainly archaeological interest (“Ataúdes” means “coffins”; translator's note).

Rodrigo. Access to the farm is through the municipal route 607, which starts at the county seat and leads to the dirt road that connects the different rural properties of this area.

The geographic coordinates of the site are: 40° 53' 43" N of longitude; and 02° 11' 49" E (from Lisbon's meridian). The site is located at an altitude of 620m ("Carta Militar de Portugal", 1:25.000, fl. n. 162– Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1995). "Quinta dos Marcelinos" is located in the parish and county of Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo, district of Guarda.



**Fig. 1:** Localization of the statue menhir ("Carta Militar de Portugal", 1/25.000, fl. n. 162).

The statue menhir was placed in a broad area of lowlands, defined at south by a group of residual relief, roughly aligned east-west (Cabeço do Seixo, 645 m; Nave Redonda, 777 m; Castelo Rodrigo, 821 m). The area is well irrigated by a series of minor water courses, belonging to the drainage basin of Ribeira de Aguiar, which, at c. 2 km NE, runs SW-NE. This differs greatly from other areas of this region where the average rainfall is very low, less than 600 mm/year (Carvalhosa, 1959: 16; Ribeiro, 1985). The region of Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo comprises schists and migmatite formations (mixed rock formations of metamorphic and magmatic material). The lands in this area are of great agricultural potential. The settlement, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, of the monastery of Santa Maria de Aguiar in these lands may have been related to the high quality of the land. Cereals, wine and potatoes are the major agricultural produce of the region. The vegetation is characterized by occasional, localized patches of chestnut, oak and cork oak trees.

The monolithic piece is now located at the gate of Quinta dos Marcelinos<sup>5</sup>, out of its original placement site, although perhaps not too far away from it. Quinta dos Marcelinos presents a wide and flat land, slightly lower than its surroundings; it is located in the hydrographic basin of Ribeira de Aguiar. Around the farm there are small elevations, particularly at N-NE, where one can observe granite-quartzite outcrops, locally known as "Cabeço da Pedreira" and "Cabeço dos Ataúdes".

<sup>5</sup> The current placement of the monument, outside the main gate of the farm, must be understood as temporary, as it does not present any type of protection. The lack of protection against weather and human or animal action is particularly worrisome since the menhir is engraved. The relocation of the monument in a museum (or museological space) will be the best solution for its preservation, as the menhir is not *in situ* anymore.



Photo 1: Southeast overview of “Vale dos Ataúdes”

The region where the menhir is located belongs to “Beira Transmontana” (Riberio, Lautensach and Daveau, 1987: 146-147), which is characterized by a wide peneplain. The land slopes from north to south, from Barca de Alva (150m) to Sabugal’s region (1000m). The area is also known since the Middle Ages as “Riba-Côa” or “Raia” (Marques, 1995: 11). The area is fully integrated into “Terra Quente”, characterized by dry summers and mild winters, as well as by a Mediterranean flora, with trees such as oak, olive, orange, fig and almond (Ribeiro, 1985; Ribeiro, Lausensach and Daveau, 1988: 583)<sup>6</sup>.

The specific area that we are considering in this article, around Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo, is located between the Côa river and Ribeira de Aguiar, both subsidiaries of the Douro River. The Côa runs N-S in this section of Northeast Beira, while Ribeira de Aguiar runs SE-NW, parallel to the Águeda river.

The region is mostly flat, with occasional elevations; one such elevation is Serra da Marofa, a residual elevation prior to the flattening of the Meseta, and that resulted primarily from quartzite’s resistance to weathering<sup>7</sup>. This is the westernmost sector of the “surface of the Meseta”. The valley of Vale da Vila river, near Longroiva’s *graben*, demarcates the westernmost limits of the Meseta, to which follow the “Planaltos Centrais” and “Montanhas Ocidentais”<sup>8</sup> of northern Beira Alta (Ferreira, 1978).

Granites dominate, although they present mineralogical variability, which accounts for the different state of erosion, unusual east of the Côa (Ferreira, 1978: 51). The area around Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo belongs to the “schist-granite-migmatite complex” (“Carta

<sup>6</sup> “Beira Alta and Beira Transmontana, united and separated by mountains, both granitic plateaus, are different due to altitude, medium altitude in the first case, high altitude in the second case. They are equally separated by the vegetation, and by the means of life and the social life of the populations. One region is fertile, densely populated, green, welcoming. The other is poor, cold, barren, greyish, sparsely populated, grim, and that communicates sadness. A west-east bound itinerary, from the ocean to the border, shows here more than anywhere else, through gradual transitions or sudden changes, the rich variety of the Portuguese landscape, the aptness of the mountains and the different human vocations” (Ribeiro, 1985: 745).

<sup>7</sup> “The alignment of Marofa’s elevations’, vigorously rising from an almost flat surface, constitutes an important geographic accident and its unmistakable silhouette is visible from far away” (Ferreira, 1978: 57).

<sup>8</sup> Central Plateau and Western Mountains (translator’s note).

Geológica de Portugal”, fl. 15-D–Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo–1:50.000, 1960).

Mineral resources are abundant in the entire county, particularly wolframite, cassiterite, galena (argenteous), pyrite, chalcopyrite, etc, all important ores mined in the past, but today almost abandoned. The mines of “Vale do Torno” and “Ribeira de Frades”, near Almofala (Carvalhosa, 1959: 13-14; Thadeu, 1965: 35; Silva, 1991: 480) were particularly famed.

## 2. Circumstances of discovery

As referred to above, the menhir was a fortuitous find. The monument is not *in situ*, which was attested by the farm’s owner. According to Mr. António Fonseca, the “rock” was located in 1989, during excavation work to expand a dike built 18 years before. Before the excavation work the “rock” was already visible, emerging from the soil for about 0.50 m. The block, slanting to the north, was used as a bench, since it was located near a natural water source, at about 20 m from a group of rock outcrops, and it was used by hunters and farm workers to take their *merendas*<sup>9</sup>. According to our informant, who directed the work to expand the dike, the monolithic block was deeply buried in alluvial soils. To unearth the menhir it was necessary to use a backhoe. Mr. Fonseca told us that after that the “rock was also used as a small bridge, laid with the grooves underneath.” The current placement of the menhir dates from two years ago, when it was erected near the farm’s gate.

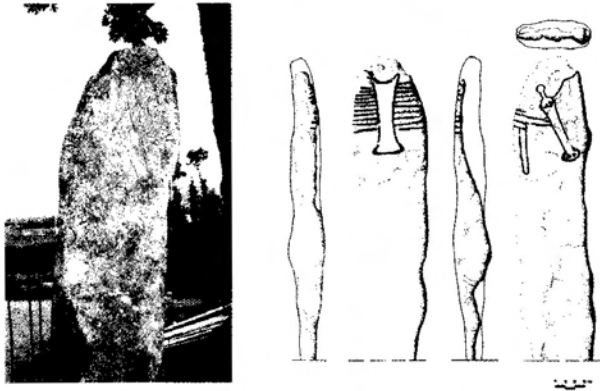
This first hand account, unquestionable but certainly filtered by the passing years, tells us that the statue menhir was perhaps *in situ*, but already fallen and buried by alluvial processes. The menhir was perhaps erected in the alluvial area, near a water source, or a stream and not far (c. 20 m?) from the bottom of the granite outcrop which is visible in this side of the valley, NE of the dike.

## 3. Work methodology: cleaning and drawing of the menhir

Considering the characteristics of the monument, we decided to adopt a methodology similar to that used in the study of rock engravings. Therefore, after photographing the menhir, we started to clean it by removing lichens through non-abrasive processes. To do so, we used water, small brushes and wooden spatulas. Following the cleaning of the statue menhir, we drew it on mylar (with adequate thickness and transparency) at 1:1 scale. This phase of the work was done at night, using artificial light. Each step of the process was recorded with photos (using black and white, and color photography, as well as slides). A cross-section of the monument was also drawn, according to the longest axis of the stone block. The drawings were inked in black (we used 1 mm ink pens for the limits of the menhir faces, and 0.5 mm for the fractures) at 1:1 scale. The stone block was carved away to leave the designs in bas-relief; this technique is marked in the drawing by dotting. Only after the

<sup>9</sup> Mid-day snack (translator’s note).

drawing was completed did we proceed to do reductions of the drawing. The finishing of the drawings was done at the laboratory (at the Archaeology Institute, University of Coimbra) by José Luís Madeira.



**Photo 2:** Ataúdes statue menhir before cleaning and the begin of research work.  
**Figure 2:** Statue menhir of Ataúdes (reduction based on a scale 1/1 drawing; drawing by José Luís Madeira).

#### 4. Physical and iconographic description of the statue menhir

The menhir statue of Ataúdes was carved on a granite block, roughly with a form of a parallelepiped. The granite is of medium grain, with occasional large feldspars grains. The menhir was certainly carved on a natural stone block that may have resulted from fission. The front and back of the block were roughly shaped, as well as its sides which are rounded in form. The upper part of the stone block was carved in order to define the head and shoulders of the statue.

The monument presents a sub-rectangular shape, with a winding profile. The statue menhir is 2.96 m tall and 0.79 m in its maximum width. According to the information given by the farm's owner, the menhir's total height may be approximately 3.15m<sup>10</sup>.

Originally a significant part of the statue may have been buried. The menhir was partially mutilated, perhaps during transportation to the current site; older destructions affected mostly the area corresponding to the head and the sides.

The engraving is limited to the upper third of the menhir. Relief and engraving were used together. The second technique was achieved through indirect percussion followed by abrasion; the former resulted from rubbing away of the surface around the motifs previously defined. To engrave the artisan used a sharp tool, probably made of metal. The

<sup>10</sup> As previously mentioned, the monument is standing near the property's main gate; the menhir's buried part is calculated to be c. 0.20 m.

lack, or invisibility, of isolated pecked lines or “mistakes” may result from the fact that they are difficult to identify in this type of support material. In addition, the use of a different technique, allowing the carver to have more control of the process, may have also resulted in the lack of pecked motifs. The carved lines are very regular in shape and depth; they may have been achieved by continuous friction done with an abrasive tool. On this menhir there is no evidence of painting<sup>11</sup>.

This monument presents two main motifs, centrally and symmetrically located, but one on each opposite face of the menhir. We consider that the front of the statue menhir is the face that bears on its center a sub-trapezoidal figure in relief, in which the longer sides are accentuated and concave; the vertices of this motif are also accentuated<sup>12</sup>. This motif was obtained by carving down the area around it; thus it may have first been engraved in this side of the stone block. The surface around the motif is considerably eroded and abraded. The abrasion on this side of the menhir may have been the result of, on one hand, the smoothing and re-regularization of this face to prepare it to be carved, and, on the other hand, the result of the use of the statue menhir, during several years, as a bridge. The sub-trapezoidal motif described above is usually identified as a power “insígnia” that was worn on the upper body over, or integrated in, the dress/ cloak of the person depicted.

Each side of the menhir, roughly on the upper two thirds, presents ten and eleven pecked lines, respectively, that were first carved and then abraded. The well-marked lines are asymmetrical and parallel and partially contour the left and right sides of the figure. On the thinner and rounded sides of the stone block one can observe only nine grooves.

The interpretation of this sequence of grooves that originate on the central “insígnia”, continuing to the sides of the statue, is controversial. Indeed, the grooves are often interpreted as a warrior’s harness; another interpretation for the grooves is that they represent the ribs of the individual. The two contrasting archaeological hypotheses are referred to in this article as a means to facilitate the description of the remaining motifs.

As mentioned above, the area that corresponds to the head was certainly modified. The head was polished to achieve an anthropomorphic contour. The head is also marked by a deep groove that separates it from the top of the “insígnia” previously described. The face presents some reliefs, but they are difficult to evaluate due to the poor conservation of this part of the statue. The shoulders were also clearly marked, through carving followed by evening out. The shoulders project outward in relation to the upper body and the head.

<sup>11</sup> So far evidence of painting was not found in monuments of this type; however, bearing in mind the case in point of Preixana (Lérida, Catalonia; Maluquer de Motes, 1971: 476; Bueno Ramírez, 1995: 96) in which was found evidence of ochre, as well as reference to painted motifs on some statues menhir from southern France, Switzerland (Sion) and Italy (Aosta; Anati, 1977: 45), possible existence of painted motifs should always be considered. <sup>12</sup> This motif has the following measurements: central vertical axis: 0.74 m; central horizontal axis: 0.165m; maximum internal width between the two upper vertices: 0.305 m; maximum width on the lower vertices: 0.32 m; maximum height between the left side vertices: 0.87 m; maximum height between the right side vertices: 0.80 m.

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The conservation of the left shoulder is very good compared to the head and the right shoulder. It is possible to see a small groove that starts at the upper left corner of the central, “insígnia” motif. The groove crossed over the shoulder, continuing on the back. It is interpreted as the sling holding the sword carved on the other side of the statue menhir.

The back of the statue menhir is also engraved, but only on the upper one third of the monolith. The sling, that in the back angles slightly, is well defined and connects to the sheathed sword. The weapon is placed diagonally (oriented from left to right) on the center of the figure’s back. The sword has a prominent hilt with a knob-shaped pommel; the grip is riveted to the blade by two clearly defined rivets (there is a chance that there may have been four rivets). Although sheathed, the blade seems to be wide and perhaps with straight edges. The scabbard ends on a ellipsoidal crampet or chape, strengthened by a central bar. The sword is 0.85 m long and 0.16m wide (at the rivets area). The sword was executed by indirect pecking followed by abrasion; the crampet is in relief, resulting from a partial grinding of the surface around it.



**Photo 3:** Detail of the statue menhir: head and shoulders contour.

**Photo 4:** Back of the statue menhir.

To the left of the sword, parallel and near the edge of the left side of the statue, there is a sub-rectangular and long figure. It is perhaps the handle of another weapon; this motif may have been the last to be carved. The fact that this elongated figure, and other engraved elements with which it is associated, are located near the left edge of the statue’s back, and often indistinct from the grooves on the left narrower side of the menhir, makes difficult their clear interpretation. Indeed, to include the identification of the location of those elements on the back of the monolith depends greatly on the observation point; since the narrow sides of the block are rounded, their limit and distinction from the back of the statue is very imprecise.

On one hand we can accept the existence of a horizontal blade, long and narrow, with a slight constriction near the handle. In this case it is defined by two grooves tapering towards its right end, near the scabbard. Those two grooves extend to the left side of the statue becoming part of the harness/ribs motifs on the front of the statue, and previously referred to. Above the thin ‘blade’ there is a groove that also starts on the left, but which is interrupted near the edge of the thin blade. This single groove may be interpreted as a strap possibly connecting to the sword. In this case, it is possible that the groove was only partially preserved. This is a working hypothesis, since the groove may also be a slight continuation, by mistake, of one of the side grooves. Near the thin blade, and crossing the handle, there is a well defined groove that can be interpreted as a strap of this possible weapon, but in this case the strap is only present on the left side of the statue’s back.

Since this depiction does not seem to be a weapon with a handle, a possible interpretation for this set of grooves located on the upper part of the “handle” area, and which can be mistaken with the grooves on the left side of the statue, is that they may be identified as straps: one connected only to this handle; the two other straps holding the swords, but one of these straps is also connected to the handle previously referred to; the last groove, that starts on the left side of the statue, is short, unlikely to be connected to the sword or to this long “handle”. Although the interpretation of this long, sub-rectangular motif, associated with a series of parallel grooves, two of which continue to the scabbard, raises some questions it is possible that it is the representation of a weapon, possibly a thin bladed halberd.

##### **5. The Ataúdes’ statue menhir in context of the Western Peninsula proto-statuary**

As a result of its morphological and iconographic characteristics, the statue menhir of Ataúdes can be integrated in an extensive group of similar objects, which includes statue menhir similar to this one of Ataúdes, as well as statues with different support material and different characteristics. The statue menhirs, connected by a similar sculptural conception, appear mostly in the northwest and center of the western part of the Iberian Peninsula. The particular characteristics and the iconographic elements of the Ataúdes’ statue menhir requires a wider spatial and cultural interpretation, and as a consequence a more heterogeneous contextualization.

The elements to have in mind when analyzing the statue menhir are the anthropomorphic morphology, and the different carved elements: the sub-trapezoidal figure, the horizontal and parallel grooves, the sword and the elongated, sub-rectangular figure as well as other linear motifs.

As previously mentioned, the sub-trapezoidal figure is usually interpreted as a power “insígnia” (López Almeida and Jorge, 1979: 18; Almagro Gorbea, 1993: 126; Jorge and

Jorge, 1993: 41; Plaza *et alii*, 1996: 298; Cruz, 2001: 176)<sup>13</sup>.

Besides the Ataúdes statue menhir, there are other eleven cases where the “insígnia” motif occurs. However, the configuration of this motif presents a certain morphological diversity, as well as it may be a representation of different realities. In most cases – including the Ataúdes case – the “insígnia” motif appears isolated and applied over the body of the human figure. In some cases (e.g., Longroiva [Meda], and Preixana [Lerida]; Maluquer de Motes, 1971:476) it represents the body of the human figure.

In addition, the micro-topographic analysis of this figure type reveals that in most of known cases the implement was most often used on the front, but occasionally also on the back. In the cases of Boulhosa, Monção/Paredes de Coura (Vasconcelos, 1910: 32), Longroiva, Nave 1<sup>14</sup> and Nave 2, Moimenta da Beira (Cruz, 2001: 173-178), S. João de Ver, Santa Maria da Feira (Jorge and Jorge, 1983), cases in which the statues have a head and/or face marked (even if very slightly), the figure is most often on the front of the statue. In four of the previous statues it appears on the front and only in the statue of S. João de Ver, which also has a helmet, it is on the back of the statue. The uncommon character of this last statue can be explained by its late chronology, possibly Iron Age (Jorge and Jorge, 1993: 41). In another statue from Chaves, the “insígnia” motif is also on the back. The Chaves statue is a phallic figure, in which the face is anatomically identified by two cup marks used as eyes, and by another carved motif, possibly symbolizing the masculine sexual organ (Jorge and Almeida, 1980: 10). The statues of Faiões, Chaves (Almeida e Jorge, 1979) and Bouça, Mirandela (Sanches and Jorge, 1987), the lack of clear anatomical attributes makes it more difficult to read the monuments. The authors who have studied those monuments choose to place the “insígnia” motif on the face interpreted as the back of the statue. However, we believe that in the statue menhir of Faiões it is possible to interpret the “insígnia” motif as located on the back of the statue. This interpretation would be possible if we consider that the circular grooves usually interpreted as “necklaces” are instead ruffles of a cloak. In the statue from Tremedal de Tormes (Salamanca), although the face is broken, it seems very clear that the “insígnia” motif appears on the front of the statue (López Plaza *et alii*, 1996).

The interpretation that we adopted for the “insígnia” motif– standardized symbol of power– seems to be the most credible among scholars who have studied this issue (Almeida and Jorge, 1978: 18; Jorge and Jorge, 1993: 126; López Plaza *et alii*, 1996: 298; Cruz, 2001: 176). The lack of concrete similar objects makes it difficult to be very specific about what

<sup>13</sup> The interpretation of this trapezoidal figure as a braid or spine, as it is done in the monument from Muino de San Pedro, in Verín (Taboada Cid, 1988-1989: 81) does not seem plausible. If we compare the drawing of this monument (which was published without a scale) with the detail photo of the Ataúdes motif (Photo 3), it is clear that the Verín monument should be re-drawn and reanalyzed.

<sup>14</sup> The statue of Nave 1 was not yet published, although it has been presented in a tourism pamphlet: *Moimenta da Beira– Circuito Pre-histórico da Nave*. Arqueohoje, Câmara Municipal de Moimenta da Beira.

the “insígnia motif” really represents. Its identification as “stole” or some type of ceremonial stylized garment (Jorge and Jorge, 1993: 39), opposes/counters Almagro Gorbea’s suggestion that it may be an apotropaic necklace (*kardiophilax*), that is, intended to ward off evil (Almagro Gorbea, 1993: 126). In 1979, Almeida and Jorge had already considered the hypothesis that the “insígnia” carved motif could have a function similar to that of the “anchor-shaped object” present in the Alentejo type monuments (Almeida and Jorge, 1979: 18). Previous to this 1979 study, it had been suggested that the “anchor-shaped object” could represent a power insígnia, perhaps related to social and power status of its holder (Gomes and Monteiro, 1976-77: 309).

The set of horizontal grooves finds typological parallels in the monument of Valdefuentes de Sangusín (Santoja Gomez and Santoja Alonso, 1978), and especially in the monument from Tremedal de Tormes (López Plaza *et alii*, 1996), both in the region of Salamanca. In the first object, the grooves are located on the side, dwindle on the front of the statue, dominated by a sword and a halberd on the chest. In the statue from Tremedal de Tormes, like on that from Ataúdes, the grooves start from the central sub-trapezoidal motif and extend to the sides of the statue.

In the previous cases, scholars have considered that the grooves are the ribs of the individual represented on the statue (Santonja Gomez and Santoja Alonso, 1978: 20; Bueno Ramirez, 1991: 84; López Plaza *et alii*, 1996: 302). We consider that this hypothesis was not convincingly demonstrated. More convincing seems to be the interpretation also proposed that the grooves may represent a harness (Bueno Ramirez and Balbin Behrmann, 1998: 55)<sup>15</sup>. Inspiration for interpretation of the grooves originated in figures slightly similar which are found in the mediterranean areas of Languedoc, Cosica, etc. (D’Anna, 197: 94; Chenorkian, 1988: 96).

A carved sword occupies a central and dominant position on the monument’s side that we considered as the back of the statue, parallel to the central dominant position that the “insígnia” motif occupies on the other side of the statue. The possible highly symbolic value of the sword, as a new type of weapon, is difficult to evaluate correctly. The symbolism of the two carved motifs (the insígnia and the sword) seems to be comparable. From a technical point of view, that can also be perceived from a symbolic perspective, the two motifs appear to be similar: the sword and the trapezoidal figure are the only motifs to be in relief instead of engraved. However, the similarity in treatment disappears when we analyze the surface finishing of the two sides where the motifs are located: the surface where the sword is located was only roughly evened out.

<sup>15</sup>Although they represent a completely different cultural and chronological reality, we should note the existence of naked warriors among the engravings of the nearby region of Vale do Côa (namely in Vale da Vermelha). These warriors present at mid-body a series of broad bands made by parallel grooves, and which have been interpreted as wide belts (Gomes and Baptista, 1998: 74), or harnesses (Abreu *et alii*, 2000: 404).

The two statue menhirs geographically closer to Ataúdes - Tremedal and Valdefuentes - do not help in terms of the details referred to above. In the Tremedal's case the face of the statue is un-mistakable and it is here that the trapezoidal insígnia is placed. The sword and a dagger are placed on a secondary position at one of the flanks of the statue. Contrasting with the main insígnia motif, the sword and dagger were less emphasized and imperceptibly carved. In the statue from Valdefuentes, the front is also clearly identifiable. But unlike other cases referred to here, the sword, associated with a halberd, is placed on a central position at the front of the menhir statue. Thus, we conclude that the swords could be used on the chest of the individuals, i.e., on the front of the statues. In both Tremedal and Valdefuentes statues menhir the back of the stone block does not have any decorative motifs.

In addition to the sword we can observe the sub-rectangular figure, occupying a secondary, marginal position. The interpretation of this motif arises some questions: it is possibly a weapon, a halberd with thin blade. There is no clear evidence supporting this interpretation, but it is a possible explanation resulting from its common association with swords and halberds, observed on other northern Iberian statues. The association of the trapezoidal figure with weapons appears also on stela from southern Portugal (the so-called stelae of Alentejo type), with the core provenience area in the Beja district (Gomes, 1994).

The statue menhir from Ataúdes exhibits weapons. The sword is the only element that objectively permits the monument's approximate dating. The typology of the sword suggests a chronology of end of Early Bronze Age/transition to Middle Bronze Age (end of the first quarter, beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C.). It is possible to compare this sword with Almagro Gorbeas' group II (1972: 70), that this author considers to have a Middle Bronze Age date. The Mouricos stela, with a sword's crampet or chape similar to that of the Ataúdes' statue, has been classified as part of the stelae group C (without anchor-shaped object and with sword on a central place).

The chronology of this stelae group has been attributed to a period between 1300-1200/1100 B.C. (Gomes, 1994: 131; cf. Jorge, 1999: 114-115), therefore after the chronology we suggest for the Ataúdes' statue menhir.

The sub-trapezoidal figure by itself cannot be used for chronological purposes. This figure is usually considered to have a long chronology, spanning from the Early Bronze to the Iron Age (Jorge, 1999: 121). Statues presenting this motif (e.g., Faiões, Chaves and Bouça) have been considered to belong to the Late Bronze Age. Bueno Ramirez (1991: 84, 94) suggested an earlier date, closer to the date we propose for the Ataúdes statue menhir.

The typology of the sword and other decorative elements suggest that the Ataúdes' statue is contemporary of those from Tremedal and Valdefuentes. In addition to their

geographic proximity, and in spite of their morphological differences, these three statues menhir constitute a homogeneous group of sculptural conception.

The unusual monument of Longroiva (Meda), long recognized as sharing characteristics with statues menhir (Souton, 1967:190), has a similar date, perhaps even slightly older than that of the Ataúdes' statue. It is also significant, the recent finding of a statue menhir at A-de-Moura (Guarda; Silva, 2000), which can be considered to belong to the group coined as "Hurdes-Gata" by Bueno Ramirez. The date of this group is also earlier than that proposed to Ataúdes' statue.

As previously mentioned, the statue menhir from Ataúdes is located on flat land in the hydrographic basin of Ribeira de Aguiar. Evidence suggests that the statue was originally placed near a water course, on marshy lands. The multiple functions of monuments such as stelae and statue menhirs are in the origin of a long archaeological debate. Their broad chronological and spatial variability, on one hand, and on the other hand, their different forms, size, attributes and typologies, calls our attention to their multiple functions. Statue menhirs and stelae were likely reused, greatly contributing to the difficulty in the interpretation of their functions. Archaeologists have defended the funerary character of these monuments, confirmed by similar evidence from southern Iberia. Other interpretations suggest a signaling function: the statue menhirs would have been used as territorial or route markers. Both the size and the manner the statues were positioned are evidence that they were created to be highly visible, i.e, to serve as a reference of something or to someone.

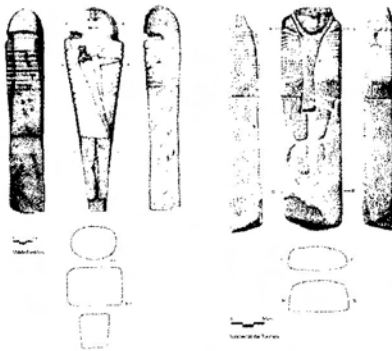
Statues menhir are often considered as associated to passage places. Thus, public places, such as paths or roads, that people travel are privileged locations to place the statues, and explain the location of many monuments in the proximity of ancient roads. As an example we should refer to Nave 1's monument, considered to be *in situ*<sup>16</sup>, on the side of a path. Furthermore, the practice of burying and honor the death on roadsides may have a more ancient origin than usually is considered. Other monuments, such as Valdefuentes, are located near water courses, also natural passage ways; the statues could signal places where it was possible to cross from one river bank to the other.

It is also likely that the statues were intended for protection. Their protective power resulted not only from being the "picture" of someone holding power, but mainly from the higher symbolic power of the elements carved, namely the weapons. Protection could be directed/intended to specific "goods", as well as more broadly to territories. We can point as examples of a relation with specific goods the monuments of Longroiva, Tremedal and Ataúdes, located near mineral water sources. Longroiva's and Ataúdes' monuments relate to alluvial tin and copper ores, respectively. For the second working hypothesis — protection

<sup>16</sup> We suggest that a sondage should be conducted in this site.

of territories —, we can suggest the cases of the monuments from Faiões, Nave 1, Nave 2 and Ataúdes, all of them overlooking vast agricultural fields and pastures. Here the protection function cannot be dissociated from that of a territorial marker. In our opinion, the Ataúdes statue menhir should be considered to have a marking and protective function.

#### 6. A brief note regarding the Early and Middle Bronze Age on the middle and lower Cõa region



**Fig. 3:** Statue menhirs of Tremedal (Salamanca; López Plaza *et alii*, 1996) and Valdefuentes (Salamanca; Santoja Gómez and Santoja Alonso, 1978).

The historical-cultural value of the Ataúdes statue menhir has to be analyzed in the context of the Early and Middle Bronze age on the middle and lower Cõa region. In this context it is necessary to consider the Longroiva stela and the settlements of Castelo Velho (phases II and III) and Castanheiro do Vento in Freixo de Numão (both currently being excavated; Jorge, 1993). Different survey projects, in the last few years, identified sites with archaeological material suggesting occupations broadly contemporaneous of the Ataúdes' statue menhir (e.g., Salto do Boi, Olga Grande 6, Castelo Velho de Chãs, Casa do Fumo, etc., Coixão, 1996: 50-51; Aubry and Carvalho, 1998: 34).

Sites with Cogeces/Proto Cogotas ceramics, their distinct locations certainly related to distinct functions, are central to our understanding of the Early and Middle Bronze Age of this regions. In addition to the Cogeces ceramics from Castelo Velho — studied by Pereira (1999) — similar materials were found at Monte Santa Eufémia (Freixo de Numão; Pereira, 1999: 54), Castelo dos Mouros (Cidadelhe) and Castelo Mau (Almeida). The site of Castelo dos Mouros revealed a variety of Cogeces-type decorations: incision and different punctations, including some on a “wide horizontal rim;” the “boquique” technic, characterized by the use of a white paste to fill in incisions; herring bone, cross-hatched

<sup>17</sup> The survey in September, 2001 of Castelo Mau by R. V. and M. Sabino Perestrelo confirmed the Bronze Age date suggested by previous surface finds.

and zig-zag decorations (Perestrelo, 2001). While Castelo Mau yielded ceramics with herring bone decoration on both the interior and exterior of vessels<sup>17</sup>. The excavations at the two sites will be critical to date accurately their occupation. The current state of research in Beira Interior suggests that type Cogeces ceramics occur in Bronze Age archaic contexts (e.g., Castelo Velho), as well as in later, turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, contexts (e.g., Monte do Frade, (Penamacor) and Moreirinha, (Idanha-a-Nova; Vilaça, 1995: Est. LXXXIX-5, CV-1, CCXXIII-3).

Bronze Age archaeological materials have been found in the Middle and Upper Cõa regions, as well as in the Guarda area (some of this material is still awaiting publication). It is not possible to discuss here all the evidence from these regions. However, we should note that material culture dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium seems to be distributed along a strip of territory that broadly corresponds to the “Raia Beirã”<sup>18</sup>, and which appears to contribute for establishing, during the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, some sort of “cultural borderland” with Meseta type cultural characteristics.

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<sup>18</sup> “Raia beirã” corresponds to the Beira borderland (translator’s note.).

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