

Terceira Island as a “megalithic station” Factual description of some archaeological materials

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INTRODUCTION

The Portuguese in general, but Azoreans in particular, learn to see their islands (situated in the middle of the North Atlantic) as having been discovered by the Portuguese, with a history of human occupation starting in the 1430s, with Flemish and Portuguese populations.

This version became rigidly imposed, in spite of contradictory information occasionally showing up along the centuries¹, until the present time, when further freedom of speech and of vision took place.

However, the former position is so well established that the reaction towards a new prospect is of disbelief from the part of the population. The same happens from the authorities, denying permission for archaeological studies.

The picture bellow shows four of the main areas where conflicting materials can be observed (and judged) and are still waiting for scientific definitions.



¹ Brought firstly by cronists like Francisco Ferreira Drumond, Gaspar Frutuoso, Maldonado and others

AREA 1
SERRETA

Within the North-West limits of the village of Serreta, as part of an area of forests, there are two or three Km2 (maybe more) of mysterious ruins of constructions, standing on a sterile terrain, covered with trees which impair a clear view of the settlement. Some sort of roads cross the entire area.



The shape of many of the constructions is round and some of them show no passages in between.



The general view is of a chaotic effect, due to the fact that the nature of these constructions is not clearly defined, at least in a familiar design. But the amount of them, as well as the volume of work involved in transporting and placing heavy rocks in walls, without a clear purpose, turn the entire area into a confuse enigma hard to be solved, especially within historical context. Besides, this place is not classified or registered in any documents or civil offices' cadastral.



The only information about it is related to one or two couples who planned to start a vineyard plantation in the local. In fact, down on one end of the site, there are two or three organized constructions which could be from their place, but immediately before and after, it is possible to observe amounts of the strange ruins.

AREA 2

MOUNT BRASIL

The "Phoenician Sanctuaries"

A group of structures excavated on the rock, found in the Mount Brazil were recently identified as probable "Sanctuaries" and "Hypogeum", which may be Phoenicians and/or Carthaginians².

Because they are visible from the passage way and do not need any sort of manipulation or excavation for this first phase of characterization (as a possible future study), and just out of curiosity, especially due to the fact that they do not show any features related to the construction habits of the actual inhabitants³, two of these structures were considered (by myself) as susceptible of immediate study, namely of bibliographic scrutiny (even before any authorization):

Proceeding to a first approach (which both share with the others) here are some peculiarities:

1st – The geographical location

The great majority of the structures already "discovered" are located on the Pico of the Zimbreiro, the west peak of the Mount Brazil.

Lucian of Samosata, a Syrian/Greek writer from the II cent B.C., frequently referred for proto history issues, especially due to his travelling on the Middle East⁴, explains that:

Phoenician sanctuaries are also called "high places", although being placed not on the top of the mount, but on the slope, especially on the west side for a better exposition. They always integrate in their structure a river, creek, fountain or cistern, because, following the Assyrians, Phoenicians and Hebrews "God only reveals himself close to the water"⁵

These same conditions are present, as will be seen on the selected specimens, among the five structures visible on Pico do Zimbreiro (and we been informed about the existence of many others). They are on a mount, although on the dawn part of it; they are positioned on the west side of the mount; one has a cistern, while the other has a system for gathering and distributing the water to some cavities on the ground; they are facing the sea, at a distance of about 30m.

All these conditions coincide with the referred sanctuaries.
On a second phase I have approached:

² An elevation of about 300m high, on the entrance of Angra Bay, Terceira Island, Azores

³ So defined by the archaeologist Nuno Ribeiro, still unable to proceed to the necessary field researches due to bureaucratic impediments

⁴ Referred by Moisés Espírito Santo, using a French translation from Mário Meunier; using also an English translation from A. M. Harmon.

⁵ *The Syrian Goddess*, Lucian, in E. Santo, Moisés, *Origens do Cristianismo Português*, Lisboa, 2000 p.38

2nd – The nature of the divinity

In the case of being Phoenician⁶, the divinity would be Astarté/Tanit. The Phoenician goddess Astarté was passed to Cartage (the translation of which means "new Phoenicia"), under the designation of Tanit, preserving there some of her attributes⁷, such as: fertility, pleasure, beauty. Her cult was established along the Phoenician/Carthaginian route and on the city states created, being Cadis/Gades (in Spain) one of them.

Either with the designation of "Astarte" or other, the meaning has been applied to many interpretations of the feminine sacred throughout a vast geographic area. Although acquiring in that dispersion several other peculiarities, it also preserved the essential, as a manifestation of a deep archetype which has arrived to the Romans "Mother Goddess", proceeding from the Sumerians (Ishtar/Inanna) and Mesopotamians (Asherah/Aserá/Ninsuna), passing by the Greek polymorphisms (Afrodite/Hera/Demeter) and Egyptians (Ísis/Hator/Anat), all apparently belonging to the same origin.

It is possible to attest her archetypal nature through the easiness of adaptation to the most diverse cultures.

Also the domain of feminine figures topping the pantheon of the peoples from these areas, from Elam (Iran) till Syria, to Mesopotamia and after through the margins of Mediterranean (as well as the north of Europe) took a matriarchal political form, which stayed until the implantation of the Biblical Hebrew God. She shared yet with him during sometime (as the feminine counterpart, on the new patriarchate) that high position, but was then gradually depreciated and degraded.

Astarté/Tanit is represented by a complex symbol which reveals the magnitude of the vast religious paradigm there involved.

On its personification of Tanit, it was proceeding from Ugarit, on the north of Syria, but was known until the Egypt as Anat or Anta, which symbol was:

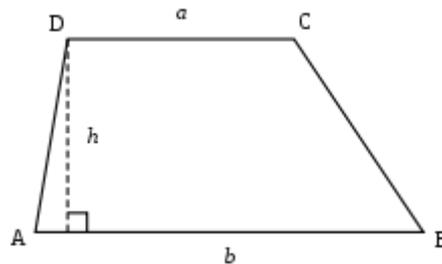
⁶ The hypothesis is explained by the fact of several other vestiges with the same nature having been found along centuries and also because the Phoenicians are known as great sailors.

⁷ Tanit shrine excavated at Sarepta in southern Phoenicia revealed an inscription that identified her for the first time in her homeland and related her securely to the Phoenician goddess Astarte (Ishtar). One site where Tanit was uncovered is at Kerkouan, in the Cap Bon peninsula in Tunisia.



Tanit was also a goddess from the Berber people, where she kept the same symbol. With a trapezoid form, it is closed on the top by a horizontal line and topped by a circle.

Later on this form was substituted by an isosceles triangle. However, either in one model or the other, its simplicity is an illusion.



The trapezium is a complex figure which may have just two parallel sides, but also may have none.

The most common symbol of Tanit, the trapezium, frequently found in old inscriptions and sculptures of the goddess, is very used in the high mathematics and calculus.

This is the form of the two caves here in study

3rd – The geometric form

Both caves follow a trapezoidal plant. The one of the cistern is even a trapezium without any parallel side, while the other keeps the entrance (representation of the head?) parallel to the base line, on the backdrop or the bottom of the cave.



The sensation resulting from this modification of symmetries, where the rectangles are not present, ends up by being uncomfortable, given the difference from the usual. This is reflected even on the niche occupying the down wall of the cistern cave, which keeps the trapezoidal form, similar to the door of the temple of Tanit in the Palace of Ugarit, here presented on the side photo.



This geometry, by changing the usual sense of symmetry, eliminates the notion of "centre" most common, being especially notorious on the case of the cave of the "hollows".

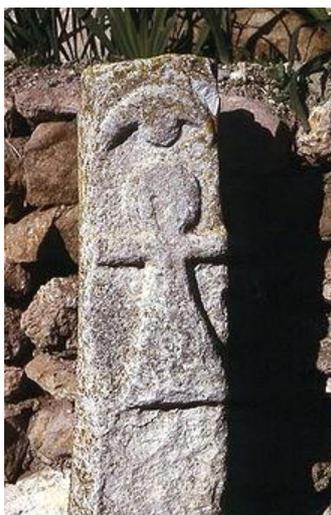


4th – Representations and the cult of the divinity

The geometry founded on the plant of these two caves corresponds to the three-dimensional figuration of the divinity, as it has been represented and condensed on its abstract symbol. As it is possible to see on the examples presented down, and by the different materials used, the diverse utilizations which were given suggest the way this divinity was present on the day-to-day life of these populations



Representation of the lunar goddess Tanit, Museu Nacional El Bardo, Tunes.
(photo Juan A. R. Rivas, July 2005)



Stele with Tanit symbol, topped by a moon. Tophet of Cartage, Tunisia.
(photo Michel-George Bernard, 1975)



Pendent with the shape of the "symbol of Tanit" found in Ashkelon (Modern Israel)⁸

Tanit was the divinity protective of Carthage where after the V cent B.C. her name was associated to Baal Hammon (Hebrew God), designated as "Rabat", the feminine form of "rab" (chief), as well as the epithet of *pene baal* (Baal's face), on the beginning of the change to the patriarchate (Markoe 2000:130). Following Patai, the original meaning of the name "Astarte" is "uterus", womb, or what is related to "uterus"⁹, on the wider sense, as a goddess of fertility. And it was due to this integration in the culture of the entire region of the Middle-East that a connection to the Jewish religion took place, or that its name appears in Biblical texts describing the Syria/Canaan religion. However it is clear right from the beginning the intention of withdrawing her from the power position, either by always presenting her as "Baals", referring to the great variety of interpretations of the divinity, or on the example of the fusion with Anat and still more evident with the "Queen of the Heaven"¹⁰.

However, accepting her as spouse of Yahweh implied the recognition of her creative/fertile capacity, her lascivious and sensual aspect, which was not accepted for too long, having been just one phase on the initial Hebrew religion.

The water has always been one of the representative elements of the fertile side of the divinity. Many of its rituals demanded this symbolic example. Due to this exigency, the humid and moist places, with natural fountains were preferred on the selection for the sanctuary places of the goddess.

On the relationship of the goddess with the water, several authors refer the characteristic that many of her sanctuaries, besides having access to

⁸ photo from Stephane Beaulieu

⁹ *The Hebrew Goddess*, p.57

¹⁰ As "Queen of Heaven" in the Book of Jeremia (7.17-18 and 44.15-19)

water¹¹, resulted from excavations on the rock to which was given the shape of a uterus¹².

The understanding about this characteristic of the goddess is expressed on this group of citations from different authors, selected by Johanna Stuckey, specialist of this thematic and Emerit Teacher of the York University:

Since one of her epithets was "Creatrix, or Progenetrix, of the Gods" (Coogan 1978:97), and her sons numbered seventy, that is, a great many (Coogan 1978:104), Asherah was probably a "mother goddess." Certainly, as "creatrix" and "wet nurse" of the gods, Asherah was "somehow related to birth and fertility" (Hadley 2000:43). However, given her authority and her role as power broker, it is unlikely that she was only a fertility goddess.¹³

Atargatis, life-giving divinity associated with rivers and springs, motherly protector of humans and animals.¹⁴

This is the case of several of the caves found on Pico do Zimbreiro area.

The photos bellow presents some of the water running ways, visible on the caves in study and in another one nearby.



But Asherah was also goddess of the sea. She is called "Lady Asherah-of-the-Sea" in a poem reproduced by Michael Coogan (1978:100), in which El (Baal) also calls her "Mother of the Gods".

In her protective quality, as sailors patron, and as for the city of Cartage¹⁵, Tanit had a position to defend and a warrior characteristic which was also present on the selection for the sanctuary places, reason why many of them are situated close to the see.

¹¹ Moisés Espírito Santo, *A Deusa Síria*, p25

¹² Nuno Ribeiro

¹³ "Asherah, Supreme Goddess of the Ancient Levant", article from the Journal MatriFocus Cross-Quarterly

¹⁴ Stuckey, Johanna, Atargatis, the "Syrian Goddess", (Canaan) Beltane 2009, Vol 8-3

¹⁵ Stuckey, Johanna, *Tanit of Cartage*, Lammas 2009, Vol 8-4

On the photos below, part of the west slope of Pico do Zimbreiro is seen from a level above the one of the caves (identified by the arrow), on the limit between the forested part of the hill and the one subjected by a strong erosion.

This situation of the caves/sanctuary seem to reveal an intentional selection possibly having in mind the symbolic attributes of the goddess



5th – Conclusions

The interpretation here presented, suggested by the nature of the monuments found in Mount Brazil, did not have in consideration the geographical remoteness which separates them from their similar congeners from the Mediterranean and Near-East.

The difference found between these and what is known to be the architectural shapes from Portuguese and Spanish from XV and XVI cent. (the time of the settling and occupation of the island) has been, however, a motive of reflection.

A comparison was established going through the most relevant characteristics and the parallelisms found, departing from already existing academic studies, particularly in what concerns: a) the location of the caves (facing west, close to the sea); b) the geometry of the plant, identical to the symbol of Tanit; c) the omnipresence of the water.

The following phase, which will include the application of tests defining the age of the caves materials, as well as excavations to provide other information, are procedures which require now the access to the necessary authorization.

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AREA 3

THE MEGALYTHIC COMPLEX OF "GROTA DO MEDO"

Hidden in a geological formation of enormous rocks, now covered with vegetation, but which emerged from a special eruption running from the edge of the northern limit of the city of Angra, to about four kilometres towards the centre of the island, stands the now (2012) officially classified "Archaeological Site of Grota do Medo".

In a dense concentration of about 200 m², of what will become objects of archaeological study, lies a conjunct of stones which shape has been submitted to comparison¹⁶ (at face value) with analogous from Atlantic continental façade, especially Ireland.

The site contains remains from occupations chronologically differentiated, except for the first one, which could be compared to the megalithic culture.

Caves

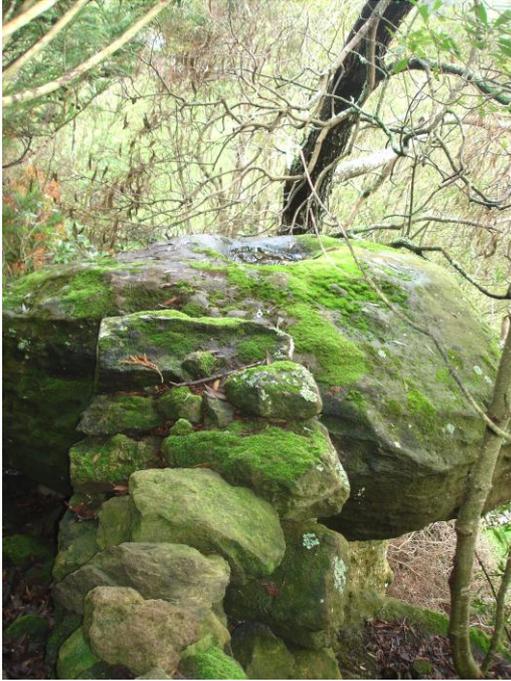
From this one, there are caves (6) similar to Dolmens, revealing a lost knowledge of construction.



Concavities

On the top of some of this caves, and disperse through significant places, there are many examples of what in Ireland is called Bullauns, circular small cavities probably for ritual usage. When they totally perforate the rock, forming one orifice (like the one bellow), they where used to cure maladies, by passing the ill member or person through it (especially children or women trying to become pregnant).

¹⁶ By myself and his first researcher, Félix Rorigues, PhD Phisics, University of Azores



The holed rock of the photo was found hidden in a secret "chapel", probably from a romantic (XVIII cent.) period.

Devil's Chair

Another of the legends of the Megalithic culture, or posterior to it (possibly created by the Celts), is the "druid's chair" or the "chair of the devil", a rock sculpture seen in northern France and England.

At least three of these can be found in the Grota do Medo site



In the side of one arm there are two concentric circles.

Cup Marks

Cup marks like those from the photos are very common in Terceira's site, just as they are widespread in Ireland, where the study of their meaning has reached no conclusions.



Inscriptions

One last feature of this complex is the entails or inscriptions, which present no possible comparison with known alphabets. They cover large surfaces of some rocks (situated only on the entrance of the site, except for one, standing in front of one of the caves). The designs have been sent to some epigraphists without results, in terms of recognition.



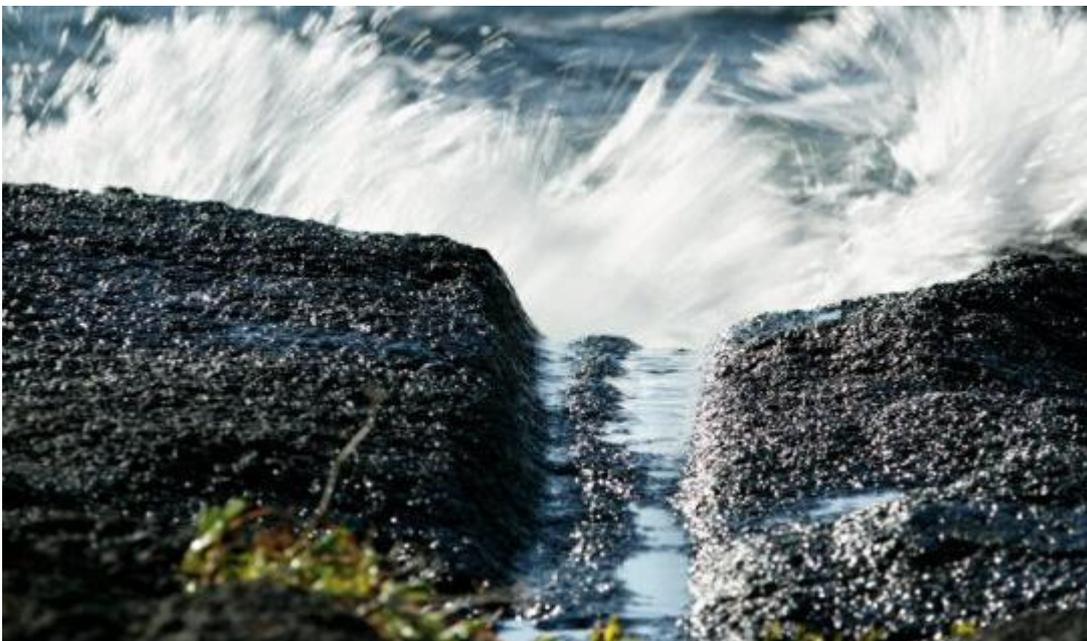
AREA 4

The Cart-ruts of S. Brás

Especially in Terceira (but also in Pico Island), the "cart-ruts" - profound fissures left in the hard basalt of the Azores have been seen as marks left by the continuous passage of heavy vehicles with wooden wheals protected with iron. Supposedly, this type of wheals, still used in the rural areas of the island, would explain the cleft.



However, this kind of erosion would take a long time to happen and historians do refer them already from the XVI century, as being part of mysterious constructions, historically inexplicable. They mention several places besides S. Brás. For example, in Porto Martins (and in Pico), they go to the sea, as in this photo bellow.



Similarly, in Malta, where they have been seen under water crossing from one island to the other, starting as in the photo bellow, they are thought to belong to the Bronze Age¹⁷.



A pair of ruts on the foreshore of St George's Bay, Birzebbuga, below the Bronze Age site of Borg in-Nadur, now runs into the sea. The silo pits of p.291 are a few metres off to the right.

Back in Terceira Island, in Santa Barbara's village the ruts cross a creek, coming out of (underneath) an old wall, which must be there for centuries.

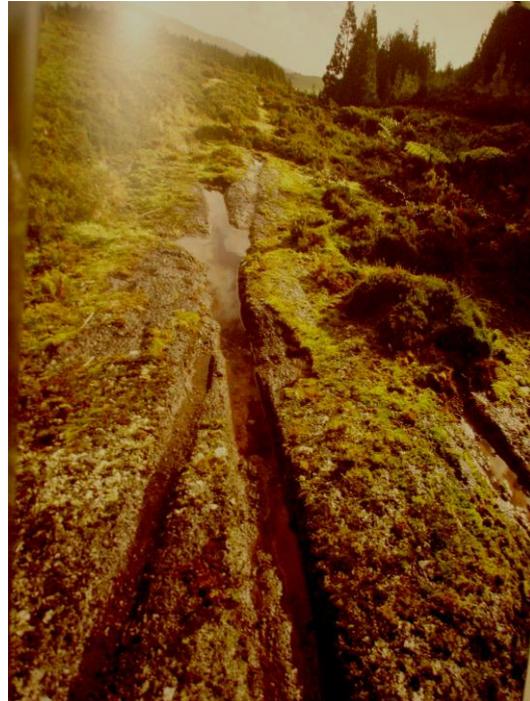


¹⁷ <http://www.ancient-wisdom.co.uk/portoazores.htm>

In the centre of the Island, the different type of lava is engraved just like the one in S. Brás, in the same way.



Another characteristic common in both places is the intersection the ruts do over each other, or the fact that they finish unexpectedly (Malta, left, and Terceira right side)¹⁸



Together with the other mysterious vestiges, they present new historic hypothesis to the evolution of mankind and its technologies.

¹⁸ Photos from Malta, and from António Araújo and Antonieta Costa.