MEGAGEO

GEOLOGY

MEGA-TALITHS 2

Geodiversity and colour perception in the megalithic architectures of South Portugal: two examples.

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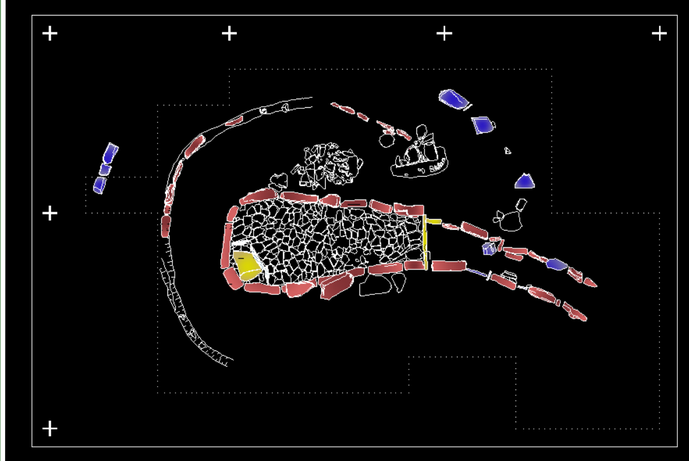
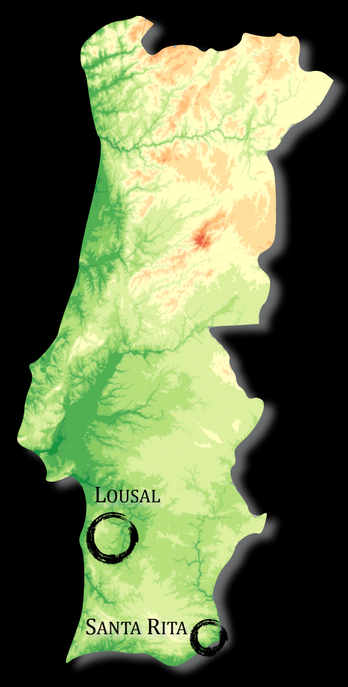


Introduction

From mental conception to the materialization of a megalithic tomb, issues such as choice of location, the selection of raw materials for its construction or the arrangement of various architectural elements obey to a project that is not immutable, but corresponds to a constant dialogue with the landscape that is integrated within the funerary space. The materiality of a funerary context is not the product of an arbitrary choice, but responds to a logic with a strong symbolic power. In this sense, two examples are shown where the selection of raw materials for the construction of megalithic tombs seem to have been determined by colour, in an attempt to incorporate in the same context a whole geological diversity and highlight different spatial environments.

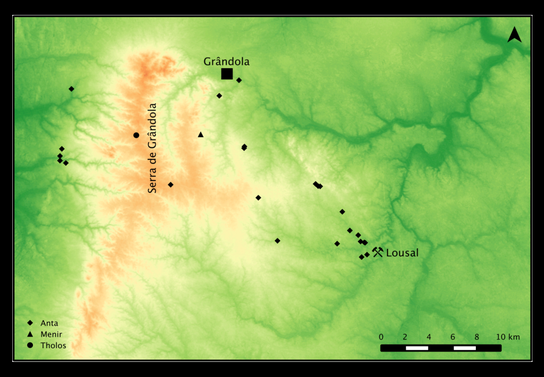


Megalithic tomb of Santa Rita

The megalithic tomb of Santa Rita was identified and excavated as part of a research project that brings together the Municipality of Vila Real de Santo António and the University of Huelva. It is located in an area previously explored by Estácio da Veiga who excavated other tombs in the late nineteenth century. The analysis of the archaeological record suggests that it was used only as an ossuary between the late fourth millennium B.C.E. and the middle of the third millennium B.C.E.

The architectural features of the megalithic tomb of Santa Rita allow us to consider it one of the most impressive monuments in southern Portugal. This tomb consists of a long passage that leads to a burial chamber. To mark both spaces, a monumental facade was erected consisting of two doorposts and lintel topped by a door that sealed the inside.

To enlarge the monumentality of the megalithic tomb raw materials from different lithology and colour were selected in order to create a suggestive scenic effect. The red sandstone was the preferred raw material in the construction of this monument but there are architectural elements in limestone that further reinforce its originality. This lithology was used only in two places: On the facade of the monument, limestone was the raw material selected for the lintel, a orthostate and the entry door, creating a visual impact and marking thereby the external space from the environment devoted to the ancestors. To enhance the social and symbolic meaning of the the compartment at the burial chamber, limestone was also the raw material selected for the floor.



The megalithic cluster of Lousal

The megalithic cluster of Lousal is located on the western tip of the Iberian Pyrite Belt, being part of a landscape between various geomorphological environments that form a natural amphitheatre with wide visibility to the south. The group of Lousal, which had approximately a dozen monuments, is defined by geographical proximity to each other. It obeys, however, to a clearly heterogeneous pattern with respect to the megalithic architectures present: simple megalithic tombs of rectangular or oval plan, passage graves and in more complex cases with a secondary chamber. Despite this polymorphism these monuments share some characteristics that identify them:

- Use of greywacke slabs for its construction taken from the surrounding outcrops, some of which weighing more than 1.5 tons;
- Location next to greywacke outcrops to the point of the monuments being confused with these natural elements;
- Use of milky quartz fragments in the mounds in order to enhance the visibility of the monuments;
- All the monuments seem to keep a close visual relationship with the gossan. These zones with a reddish surface colour, corresponding to the oxidation of polymetallic massive sulphide, constitute scenic landmarks that do not go unnoticed. This visual relationship is materialized, likewise, in the incorporation of lithologic fragments enriched in iron oxides (hematite) into the mound or the incorporation of small red ochre nodules in funerary deposits as elements associated with the ritualization of death by colour.

Acknowledgements

VILAREALSTºANTONIO

Centro Ciência Viva do Lousal
MinadeCiência

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U LISBOA

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FCT Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia