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The myth of the mother-goddess

Andrew Fleming

'The great megalithic tomb builders of Western Europe were imbued by a religious faith, were devotees of a goddess whose face glares out from pot and phalange idol and the dark shadows of the tomb walls, whose image is twisted into the geometry of Portuguese schist plaques and the rich carvings of Gavrinis and New Grange.'

These words, written by Daniel (1958: 74), represent one of the most vivid statements of a view which has gained wide acceptance. The most detailed presentation of this idea occurs in O. G. S. Crawford's *The Eye Goddess* (1957). Since the late 'fifties there has been widespread scepticism, much of it unpublished, but the theory has persisted. In 1967 Daniel was still able to link, in a short passage, such diverse sites as Tell Brak, Knockmany and Folkton (1967: 203). It is probable that such statements reveal more about the faith of prehistorians than about that of the megalith builders; there is in fact an urgent need to re-examine the whole hypothesis. We can do this with more confidence now that Ucko has shown (1968: 427–44) that in Egypt, Greece and the Near East the mother-goddess interpretation fits the facts much less well than several other plausible explanations.

The basis for the mother-goddess interpretation appears to be threefold. It is thought that where there are similar burial rites, there should be similarity in religious belief; that the west European megalithic tombs were inspired in some way from the east Mediterranean; and that parietal art and grave furniture present specific evidence for the representation of a female personage who must be considered some kind of deity.

It is agreed that the megalithic tombs of western Europe represent a very widespread and impressive type of burial, requiring not a little skill and hard labour, and presumably inspired by a corresponding intensity of religious belief. But there is no *a priori* reason why a similar burial rite should represent belief in the same deity. Indeed, the megaliths are so widely distributed both in space and in time that one might well expect a complex and changing situation, with fairly local cults normally prevalent. The spread of the worship of a mother-goddess is only one of a number of possible stimuli for the growth of collective burial in large stone tombs. It is equally likely that the rise of this custom is related to the prevalence of a certain type of social structure, and to the availability of certain types of stone. L'Helgouach (1965: 13 ff.) has demonstrated the close relationship between geology and tomb distribution in Brittany, and in Drenthe megaliths occur in areas providing suitable glacial boulders (de Laet 1958: 83). Anyone who has searched for megalithic tombs in the field will know that they often occur in regions where surface

formations of similar stone are common; sometimes these are disconcertingly suggestive of the tombs themselves, at any rate at first glance. In some areas the abundance of this stone, or its mode of occurrence, may well have stimulated the development of the earliest tombs. There must also be a relationship between some megalithic tombs and the need for field clearance. This has been suggested by Piggott for Wayland's Smithy (Atkinson 1965: 127), and probably operates in many areas.

In any case, there is less certainty nowadays about the strength of the contacts once thought to be implied by the widespread distribution of these tombs. It is generally agreed that most tombs fall taxonomically into local groups; so do the grave goods as a general rule. Basic, generalized types like the Gallery Grave and the simple chamber have multiple origins, and their widespread distribution is not accorded much significance. At first sight the widespread occurrence of the porthole slab invites our interest. But as Daniel has pointed out (Clifford and Daniel 1940: 162) this is a device which could have arisen independently in several areas, in response to a need to constrict entrances or subdivide passages. And, indeed, if one compares the manufacture and use of the portholes at Los Millares (Leisner and Leisner 1943: tafel 20), in Hérault (Arnal 1963: fig. 12), and in the Paris Basin (Bailloud 1964: 160–1 and plate IV, 4), it is clear that nothing more than a vague idea has been diffused, at most.

The most persistent and convincing candidate for the status of international type is the Passage Grave. But even amongst the Passage Graves there are important local differences. The Leisners' well-known reconstruction of a Millaran tomb (1943: tafel 85) does not bear a close resemblance to L'Helgouach's drawing of Er-Mané-de-Quéric-la-Lande (1965: fig. 6), and neither is very like the picture which has emerged at New Grange (O'Kelly 1968: 41). Yet the Passage Grave *idea*, without insistence on detail, is widespread.

In the cases where diffusion may have occurred, there is little evidence of the nature of the mechanisms involved. Corcoran (1960: 136–7) talks of a generalized megalithic tradition, which is a fair way of describing how, particularly in the Irish Sea area, different and fairly widespread traits could occur in different combinations. It looks as if these ideas were spread by itinerant traders and inter-tribal envoys, and discussed at rural fairs and gatherings of the type which are thought to have taken place in the southern English causewayed camps (Smith 1965: 19). Certainly religious beliefs *might* spread in this fashion; if we are to accept the idea that the spread of megalithic tombs represents the growth of one basic idea, we must also accept that the accompanying architectural details might be spread very casually, and might come under strong local influences from the beginning.

The second assumption which is challenged is the east Mediterranean derivation of these tombs, which allows for the possibility of a religious link with that area. The east Mediterranean prototypes of the megaliths have always been nebulous. Now that there is a good series of early dates from Brittany (Daniel 1963: 143) with some support from Denmark and Britain, there is an almost unanswerable case for a western origin for them. The many areas of northern and western Europe with suitable and suggestive stone could easily have developed their own megalithic traditions, and very probably one or more of these did so without any influence from the east. This does not, of course, rule out the entirely separate introduction of an east Mediterranean fertility goddess; although as

Ucko (1968: 427–44) has so ably shown, the very existence of such a personage there at this early date is questionable.

The mother-goddess hypothesis rests most heavily, however, on the art and ritual equipment found in the tombs themselves. Carvings and relief sculpture on tomb walls, pottery and figurines are generally held to constitute the main evidence. In western Europe, it is clear that anthropomorphic figures of this kind are less easily seen the further north and north-west one goes; this is usually explained by supposing a gradual schematization of the original cult figure as the associated belief spread further from its east Mediterranean source. In the final stages, only an eye here, a breast there, are visible to the believer.

It is now time to turn away from general theory and to see what emerges from a study of the material, fully recognizing the difficulty of saying anything useful about prehistoric beliefs and the probability that several classes of material evidence are lost to us: wooden figures, for instance, of the type suggested by Atkinson at Wayland's Smithy (1965: 131), and perhaps wall hangings.

As was said earlier, if there is a truly international type it is the Passage Grave, and if there is really a single primary idea behind the megaliths, or any kind of initial spiritual unity, it must be searched for first amongst the Passage Graves. Those of Brittany must, on any chronology, stand early in the Passage Grave tradition. Yet the art here is almost totally devoid of anthropomorphic character (Péquart and Le Rouzic 1927: *passim*); the axe is the only clearly recognizable design, amid much whose significance is in doubt. The meaning of the famous 'buckler' figure (fig. 31*f*) is uncertain, but there is no evidence that it represents a deity. There are no face-pots or figurines in the Breton tombs. The Gaignog *stelae* (L'Helgouach 1965: 87) may indeed represent an anthropomorphic concept, but not necessarily a female one. In the end, the strongest possibility is the presence of an axe-cult, which at least would tally with the fine broken axes found in some tombs (Crawford 1957: 76), but not, surely, of a mother-goddess.

The concentric semi-circles at Gavrinis have been linked with both the goddess cult and with the Boyne carvings. However, they are neither anthropomorphic nor feminine, and furthermore stand out clearly from the bulk of Breton Passage Grave art. Indeed, they are distinct stylistically from everything in Brittany, except, perhaps, Conguel pottery. They do not compare closely with the Boyne carvings; the concentric semi-circles are in contrast to the Boyne preference for spirals and concentric circles (see Péquart and Le Rouzic 1927: plates 99–133). At Gavrinis these carvings almost certainly are skeuomorphs of hangings, similar to those at Göhlitzsch (Merseberg) (Clark 1952: fig. 129) or Dolauer Heide (Powell 1960: plate 20), and their uniqueness in Brittany is possibly explained by some theory such as that of L'Helgouach (1965: 89), who is prepared to consider the site as much a temple as a tomb.

In Ireland many of the designs look purely decorative: the pecked triangles and lozenges, the famous threshold stone at New Grange, and the St Andrew's crosses above the entrance there. Convincing representations of eyes are almost non-existent in Ireland; they occur at Knockmany (O'Riordain and Daniel 1964: plate 61) and possibly in the north side-chamber at New Grange (O'Riordain and Daniel 1964: plate 28). But there is no evidence that these eyes are intended to represent female personages. Many of the

Figure 31 Sites and objects mentioned in the text: (*a*) schist crozier, Portugal; (*b*) plaque from Vega del Guadancil, Cáceres, Spain; (*c*) *symbolkeramik* from Monte do Outeiro, Alentejo, Portugal; (*d*) statue-menhir from St Théodorit, Gard; (*e*) carving from Les Pierres Plates, Morbihan; (*f*) carving from Mané Rutual, Morbihan; (*g*) statue-menhir from Ciudad Rodrigo, Cáceres, Spain; (*h*) statue-menhir from l'Isle-sur-Sorge, Vaucluse; (*i*) statue-menhir from St Sernin, Aveyron; (*j*) statue-menhir from Lauris, Vaucluse. (After Arnal and Hugues, Crawford, Gagnière and Granier, and L'Helgouach.) *Not to scale*

designs look as if they have some magical meaning, but the only tentative identification is that of sun symbolism (fig. 33*i*).

Even Crawford, never a sceptic in these matters, realized that the trail was running out in Scandinavia. He cites the face-pots from Danish Middle Neolithic contexts as evidence, but these probably have no more significance than do our Toby jugs. Nor do the Scottish or the Hérault Passage Graves produce convincing mother-goddess symbolism.

This leaves Iberia, and here most of the evidence is to be found in funerary deposits rather than on tomb walls. Most prehistorians would look to the *symbolkeramik* and the evidence of figurines from the south and west to support the mother-goddess hypothesis. The importance of the *symbolkeramik* is debatable. Most of the figures are not specifically female – the fine pot from Monte de Outeiro (Leisner 1965: lieferung 3 (2), tafel 168) (fig. 31*c*) stands out as an exception here – and their divinity has not been established. Are the stags on the *symbolkeramik* also to be considered divine? In any case, pots may have been thought of as female, and perhaps linguistically they were feminine in gender. A possible parallel would be the Cycladic 'female frying-pans' (Childe 1957: fig. 24).

As for the idols, it has been too readily assumed that we know their function and their sex. In the past, anthropomorphic intentions have been inferred for whole groups, largely on the basis of evidence provided by one or two individual members of these groups. This is exemplified in the latest treatment of the baetyls, or short stone pillars (Almagro Gorbea 1968): the important undecorated type A, found in Portuguese Estremadura and Almeria (mostly at Los Millares), has to be related to the decorated Portuguese type B, whose anthropomorphism has in turn to be adduced from baetyls like those from Caisanhos and Folha das Barradas (Leisner 1965: lieferung 3(2), tafel 150). There is no evidence that they are feminine.

Of the phalanges, most have no decoration at all (Leisner and Leisner 1943: tafel 181) and very few are definitely female. Most of the schist plaques, too, are both eyeless and shoulderless. The delightful plaque from Vega del Guadancil (Leisner and Leisner 1959: tafel 55, I) (fig. 31*b*) could be a portrait of a female uncertain of the degree of modesty required of her; but it is equally possible that a loin-cloth, rather than a pubic triangle, is represented here. In any case, this one is exceptional; most of the other plaques give no information about their sex. The same is true of the long-bone idols from Almizaraque and Almagro's cruciform type II, which are certainly anthropomorphic, but not clearly female (Almagro 1966).

While it is probably permissible to use those few idols which are specific as evidence that the plain ones are anthropomorphic in concept, it is much more questionable to claim that they are all female on the basis of one or two. The most female class of all is Almagro's group VIII, clay figurines from Almizaraque and Vila Nova de São Pedro (Savory 1968: fig. 53c) – interestingly enough, from settlement sites. These probably represent cheerful local pornography. These graphic clay figures prompt another reflection; it is strange that a people whose culture was so technically accomplished should not have made any sustained attempt to reproduce the really sensuous aspects of the female form, if a mother-goddess was important to it. There is nothing here of the smoothness of the Ozieri figurines, or of the comfortable curves of the Maltese Fat Ladies.

In any case, the divinity of some of the figurines may be questioned. For instance, what is the status of the schist plaques, some of which may have been worn round the neck, as

the perforations indicate? What of the baetyls, in their enclosures outside the tombs? The idols have become articles of faith for those who believe in the mother-goddess hypothesis; but were they such for their makers?

It has been argued that the evidence for mother-goddess worship by the builders of the Passage Graves and other relatively early tombs is really very exiguous. What of later groups?

In southern France and Iberia there are the statue-menhirs, which are only occasionally found in association with megaliths. It is surprising, therefore, to find that they are sometimes supposed to shed some light on megalithic religion. Setting this question aside, it is interesting that on analysis they fall into distinct local groups, which reinforces the initial suggestion that the religious situation in prehistoric Europe was probably fairly complex.

The Iberian examples are distinguished by the fact that they most commonly wear a necklace (Crato), a head-dress (Nuestra Senhora de la Esparança), or both (Ciudad Rodrigo) (fig. 31*g*) (Breuil 1935: vol. 4, plate XLII, 1, 2, 3). The well-known example from Peña Tú (Crawford 1957: fig. 22b) is probably within this group, though not a statue-menhir. No indication of sex is given, and their links with the megaliths are not well established. They are predominantly western in distribution.

In southern France, several groups may be established, as follows:

1. *The Aveyron group* (e.g. fig. 31*i*). This group is stylistically distinct, and occurs '*hors de tout context*' (Arnal 1963: 220). Its dating depends largely on the correct identification of the '*objet*'. The suggestions of Balsan (1952) have been recently confirmed by the finding of the Foumendouyre statue, whose '*objet*' has two lateral holes, bringing it into close relationship with jet and bone objects of the Seveyrac type (Arnal, Hugues and Rodriguez 1966: fig. 4, 4). These objects occur in some Aveyron dolmens, so that in this case it is possible to link the statues with megalithic tombs. A little dating evidence comes from Gard, where a statue-menhir from Colombier, Euzet-les-Bains (Arnal 1963: 220) carries an '*objet*' and was found in association with Chalcolithic pottery. According to Arnal and Hugues (1963) masculine statues, which carry the object, greatly outnumber female ones, distinguishable by their breasts. (In fig. 31*i*, both are marked; the '*objet*' is vertical and gives the appearance of a badly-tied necktie.) The ratio between male and female statues, and the compulsory sex change which was undergone by statues like that from Arribats, are seen as evidence for the late spread of the female form.

2. *The Gard group*. The members of this group are not a closely-knit taxonomic unit. There is the Bouïsset-Bragassargues type, with staring eyes and suggestions of a facial tattoo like that of the Aveyron statues. Arnal (1963: 94) says that these are Neolithic to Chalcolithic in date, and that they are sometimes associated with '*tombes en ruche*'. They are not necessarily female. One of them, Bouïsset no. 2, has a 'crozier' (Arnal 1963: 93). Secondly, there is the Collorgues type (Audibert 1962: 154) (fig. 32*c*), supplied with breasts and usually a crozier. This type is normally assigned to the Chalcolithic, and a link with the Aveyron group is provided by the example from Rosseironne (Arnal and Hugues 1963: plate IV, 3), which has both '*objet*' and crozier. Thirdly, there are less conventional types like St Bénézet, Cazarils (Arnal and Hugues: plate III, 5 and IV, 1) and St Théodorit (fig. 31*d*). Of those whose sex can be determined, more are female than male, taking the group as a whole (Arnal and Hugues 1963: 13).

3. *The Lower Durance group.* These form two stylistic groups; first, the Isle-sur-Sorge type, with two examples (Gagnière and Granier 1963: 52 and fig. 34) (fig. 31*h*). These are not definitely female, and the dating is based on very thin evidence – an alleged association with Chalcolithic flintwork, and a sun-symbol compared with Early Bronze Age carvings at Monte Bego. Secondly, there is the Orgon-Lauris type, T-faced and occasionally with eyes and geometric 'tresses' (fig. 31*j*). Here the dating is based on a possible association with a 'Lagozzian' flint industry and the situation of typical sites in positions liable to flooding, which is a characteristic of these 'Lagozzian' sites. No sex is marked on these small statues, and only one occurs in a funerary context.

The features of some of these southern French statues have sometimes been compared, rather loosely, with those of other groups of art. Many of these comparisons can be dismissed with ease. A T-face, for instance, is a simple way of depicting a face for the unskilled carver; there is no need to compare the lower Durance figures with Moncorvo and Asquerosa. Nor is there any warrant for claiming that the Collorgues 'crozier' (fig. 32*c*) has anything to do with the schist croziers of Iberia (fig. 31*a*), or that facial tattooing, as apparently seen on the Aveyron statues (fig. 31*i*) and the Iberian plaques (fig. 31*b*), was not a common custom in several areas of Europe. The same may be said of the wearing of pendants (Coizard, fig. 32*e*; St Théodorit, fig. 31*d*) and necklaces (Ciudad Rodrigo, fig. 31*g*; St Sernin, fig. 31*i*; Bellahaye, fig. 32*d*). Far from exhibiting wide-ranging links of this type, most of the art under consideration shows a distinctly local pattern – the Gard crozier, the '*objet*' in Aveyron, the head-dress in western Iberia.

Thus for southern France it has been shown that even if the statues can be linked to the tombs – which is frequently not the case – these links are not very strong. Femininity is restricted; female statues occur in the Collorgues group, and sometimes in the Aveyron group.

In Brittany, later megalithic art may be divided into two groups. First, there is the art of the deviant Passage Graves, notably Les Pierres Plates and Luffang (L'Helgouach 1965: fig. 74). The famous face from Luffang (Giot *et al.* 1960: plate 31) is not necessarily female, and the Pierres Plates carvings (fig. 31*e*) are incomprehensible. But the Breton Gallery Graves do carry a female figure. She appears at Prajou-Menhir (fig. 32*b*), at Mougau-Bian and at Tressé (L'Helgouach 1965: fig. 109). On two of these sites she appears in the antechamber. The form of this figure is quite close to the figure with breasts and necklace in the antechambers of five Paris Basin Gallery Graves (Bailloud 1964: 181 and fig. 37) (fig. 32*d*), and these may be compared with the figures guarding the entrances of the rock-cut tombs at Coizard and Courjeonnet (Bailloud 1964: 181 and fig. 37) (fig. 32*e*). These are all linked by tomb typology (including the chamber-with-antechamber idea), by position within the tomb, and by appearance, as well as associated cultural material (SOM pottery and its Breton equivalent). To this group belong the statue-menhirs of Catel in Guernsey (Kendrick 1928: plate V) and Guidel (Morbihan) (fig. 32*a*) (Giot 1959), which are similar to each other and to the larger group mentioned above, and which originate, in the case of Guidel, in an SOM or pre-SOM context.

The SOM associations of this group suggest a date in the first half of the second millennium, or a little earlier. This dating is confirmed by the association at Prajou-Menhir (fig. 32*b*) and Mougau-Bian with carvings of the 'Cypriote' daggers (L'Helgouach

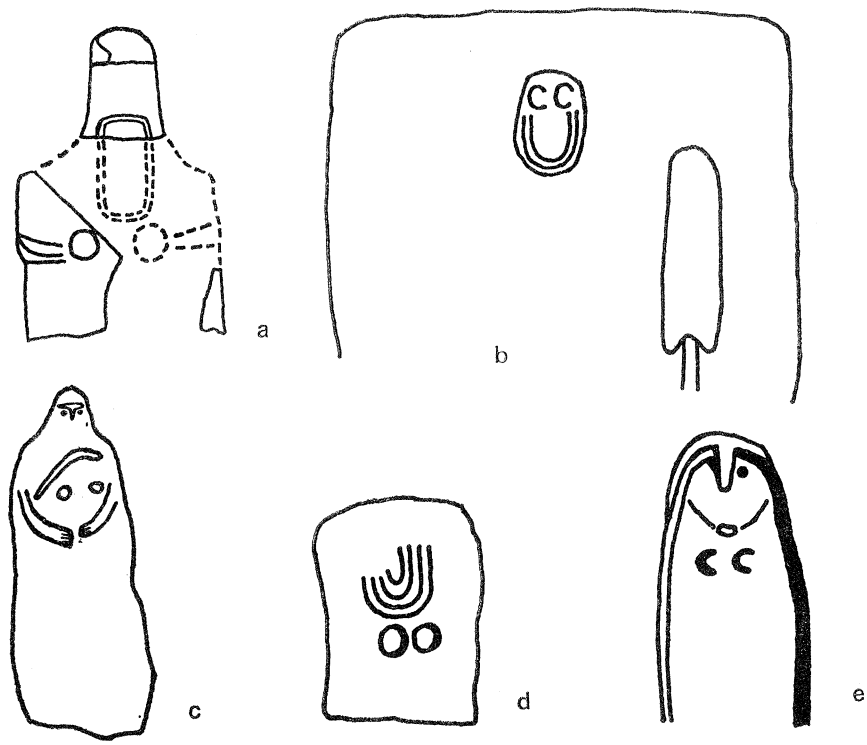

Figure 32 The French mother-goddess province: (*a*) broken statue-menhir from Guidel, Morbihan; (*b*) carving of goddess and 'Cypriote' dagger, Prajou-Menhir, Côtes-du-Nord; (*c*) statue-menhir from Collorgues, Gard; (*d*) carving from Bellahaye, Oise; (*e*) carving in rock-cut tomb, Coizard, Marne. (After Daniel, Giot, Kendrick, and L'Helgouach.) *Not to scale*

1965: fig. 109) which occur in the Plouguerneau hoard (Briard 1965: 60) in association with flat axes.

Thus in France (fig. 32) there is a northern mother-goddess in Brittany, the Channel Islands and the Paris Basin (see map, fig. 34) and a southern one in the Collorgues group of statue-menhirs, perhaps spreading into the Aveyron group somewhat later than the male deity apparently existing there already, if one follows Arnal and Hugues. The chronological relationship between the northern mother-goddess and the southern remains obscure, as does the absolute dating of the southern type. The southern French statues are, as mentioned above, often attributed to the Chalcolithic, which might place them anywhere within the 2500–1500 B.C. bracket. At Lébous (Arnal, Granel and Sangmeister 1964: 195) two statue-menhirs stood in a fort which produced a radiocarbon date of 1920 B.C. ±250. So a chronological overlap between north and south is a distinct possibility, especially since the dates from Les Matignons (Burnez and Case 1966: 193) have demonstrated that flat-based, thick-walled pottery of the SOM general type may start as early as the middle of the third millennium. Whether the two areas can be linked is uncertain, though it should be remembered that this is the time of the Beaker movements, the trade in Grand Pressigny flint (Arnal 1963: 206) and in Breton axes of group A dolerite and group C fibrolite (Giot *et al.* 1960: 81). This provides a context for the spread of

a belief in a mother-goddess at this time, though it is difficult to insist on this hypothesis, or to be dogmatic about the direction of movement.

It is possible that both Sardinia and Malta should be included in this late mother-goddess province. Both of these areas probably entertained rather complex religious beliefs, to judge from what has survived, but both include unambiguous female figurines (Guido 1963: plates 5 and 6; Evans 1959: plate 65). Bray has documented quite clearly the links between France and Sardinia at this time, and he has suggested that there were even closer links between the Sardinian Ozieri culture and the Tarxien phase in Malta (1963: 174 ff.). It is possible that one component of the Ozieri culture came from Malta during the Tarxien phase, possibly as a result of deteriorating agricultural conditions in their homeland (Trump 1966: 51). Now, the Maltese Fat Lady is an important element in what is known of Maltese religion; the temples themselves provide evidence that this religion was a compelling one, run by a well-organized priesthood of some kind. If there was emigration from Malta to Sardinia, the best chance of success for the would-be colonists would lie in departure in a strong, well-organized body, accompanied by the appropriate religious advisers. A group of this sort would certainly stand a good chance of establishing its beliefs in its new environment; the tomb at S. Andrea Priu (Guido 1963: fig. 10), which has been so plausibly compared with the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum in Malta, could well be evidence for this. From Sardinia, these beliefs may have spread to France.

This is only a tentative suggestion, and must remain so, especially in the absence of a closer chronology. But I hope that I have shown that firm evidence for a mother-goddess is confined, in Europe, to the province Malta–Sardinia–France; that the mother-goddess is linked more to the idea of collective burial than to megalithic tombs as such (and here one may cite the rock-cut tombs of Malta, Sardinia and the Marne); and that there is no evidence for any mother-goddess worship in most of the cultures associated with the building of megalithic tombs. The mother-goddess is thus both late in date and limited in area of dispersal.

One important group of decorated tombs remains to be considered. In northern Portugal there are around forty painted and engraved tombs (de Albuquerque e Castro 1962). The designs vary considerably in size and content. They mainly comprise wavy lines and elaborate geometric patterns which look very much like skeuomorphic hangings. The designs at Pedralta, Cangas de Onis and Antelas are good examples (Powell and Daniel 1956: figs 11 and 12; Savory 1968: figs 35 and 36). It has been suggested that these designs find their closest parallels in the Irish Passage Graves (Powell and Daniel 1956: 50–1). The comparison is a fair one, though the similarities could result from separate and parallel development if both are thought to develop as tapestry skeuomorphs. However, there are other close links between western Iberia and the British Isles.

A comparison between the illustrations in Sobrino-Buhigas's corpus (1935) and the Scottish carvings illustrated by Simpson (1864–5) indicates some close similarities between Galician and Scottish rock art. It has been suggested that Ireland shares in this community (MacWhite 1946). This similarity is illustrated briefly in figure 33 (*c* and *f*). If it is thought that this kind of parallel, close as it seems, is generalized enough to result from coincidence, it is hard to ignore the evidence of the Tagliatella-type labyrinth. This

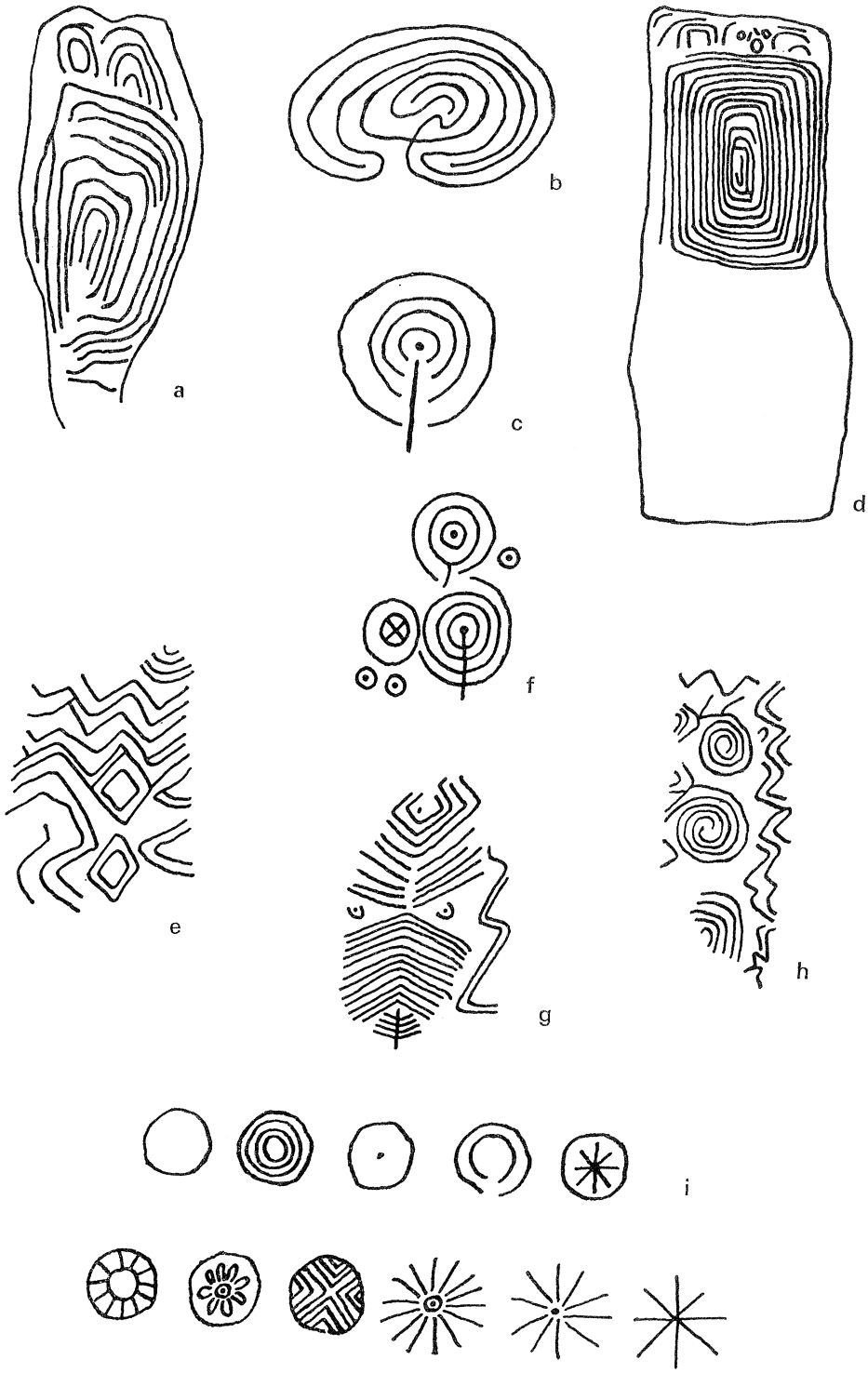

Figure 33 The Atlantic art province: (*a*) carving from Knowth, co. Meath; (*b*) Tagliatella-type labyrinth carved on rock, Mogor, Galicia; (*c*) rock-carving from Salcedo, Galicia; (*d*) carving from Casal, Minho, Portugal; (*e*) geometric carving from Barclodiad y Gawres, Anglesey; (*f*) rock-carving from Mevagh, co. Donegal; (*g*) tomb carving of 'anthropomorphic figure' from Châo Redondo no. 2, Aveiro, Portugal; (*h*) carving on slab from Clear Island, co. Cork; (*i*) possible sun symbols from the Irish Passage Graves. (After Breuil, Albuquerque e Castro, Eogan, MacWhite, Piggott, and Powell and Daniel.) *Not to scale*

highly specialized design is found at Mogor, Galicia (fig. 33*b*), at Holywood (Wicklow) and at Tintagel in Cornwall (Lorenzo-Ruza 1956), though the last two examples occur isolated from other art.

It has always been difficult to separate totally the rock art of Ireland and north Britain from, on the one hand, the art which occurs occasionally on cists containing Food Vessel or Beaker burials, and on the other hand the art of the Irish Passage Graves. Recent finds from New Grange have emphasized the links between the rock art and Passage Grave art (O'Kelly 1964: 289); and indeed O'Kelly suggests a re-examination of their relationship. The parallelism between Galicia and Britain suggests that the geometric decoration of the Irish and north Portuguese tombs may also be directly related, and that tapestry skeuomorphs were developed in one area and passed to the other. A third factor in this relationship may be the designs which have been alleged to be anthropomorphic. Peña Tú (Crawford 1957: fig. 22b) may be a representation of the deity with the head-dress mentioned above. But it is possible that the figure from Châo Redondo no 2. (fig. 33*g*), claimed by de Albuquerque e Castro as masculine, may be related to figures of the Barclodiad y Gawres type (Powell and Daniel 1956: fig. 11) (fig. 33*e*). Furthermore, stelae like Pola de Allande (Powell and Daniel 1956: plate 33) may be linked with those from King's Mountain and Clear Island (Powell and Daniel 1956: plate 32 and fig. 11) (fig. 33*h*). It is interesting also how close is the newly-discovered 'anthropomorphic figure' from Knowth (Eogan 1967: plate XLI) (fig. 33*a*) to the long-known stele from Casal (Breuil 1935: vol. 4, plate XLII, 5) (fig. 33*d*). The concentric squares with rounded corners and the two 'eyes', themselves surrounded by concentric grooves, amount to quite a close correlation.

This Atlantic art province, then (fig. 33 and map, fig. 34), includes cup-and-ring markings, Tagliatella-type labyrinths, geometric paintings and engravings inside tombs, and possibly a very schematic human figure, of uncertain sex, in a few tombs and on *stelae* set in isolation. It is difficult to gain a clear impression of the religious concepts represented by these designs, especially since little work has been done on the province as a whole. One possibility is that sun-worship was involved. There are numerous sun-symbols on the Irish Passage Graves (O'Riordain and Daniel 1964: plate 43) (fig. 33*i*) and it is interesting that at Antelas, in Portugal, a clear sun and moon are represented together (de Albuquerque e Castro 1962: tav. CLXIV, 3). Into this picture would fit sites like Granja de Toniñuelo, Badajoz (Breuil 1935: vol. 4, plate XL, 1 and 2), with its possible sun-symbols. The significance of the cup-and-ring markings, the labyrinths, and the anthropomorphic figures – if this is what they are – is unclear, and further work is required here.

How were these motifs and ideas diffused, and in which direction? In the absence of good dating evidence, this remains uncertain. The carbon dates from New Grange (G. E. Daniel, pers. comm.) suggest that the Irish Passage Graves may date from at least the middle of the third millennium. The magnificence of sites like New Grange and Knowth, with its sun-symbols, is in great contrast to the poverty of the Portuguese sites, and is far more appropriate to an area where a cult is strong and important. It must be admitted that the Irish climate of today provides a complete explanation of any prehistoric efforts to placate the sun!

The north English/Scottish cup-and-ring markings are normally referred to the Bronze

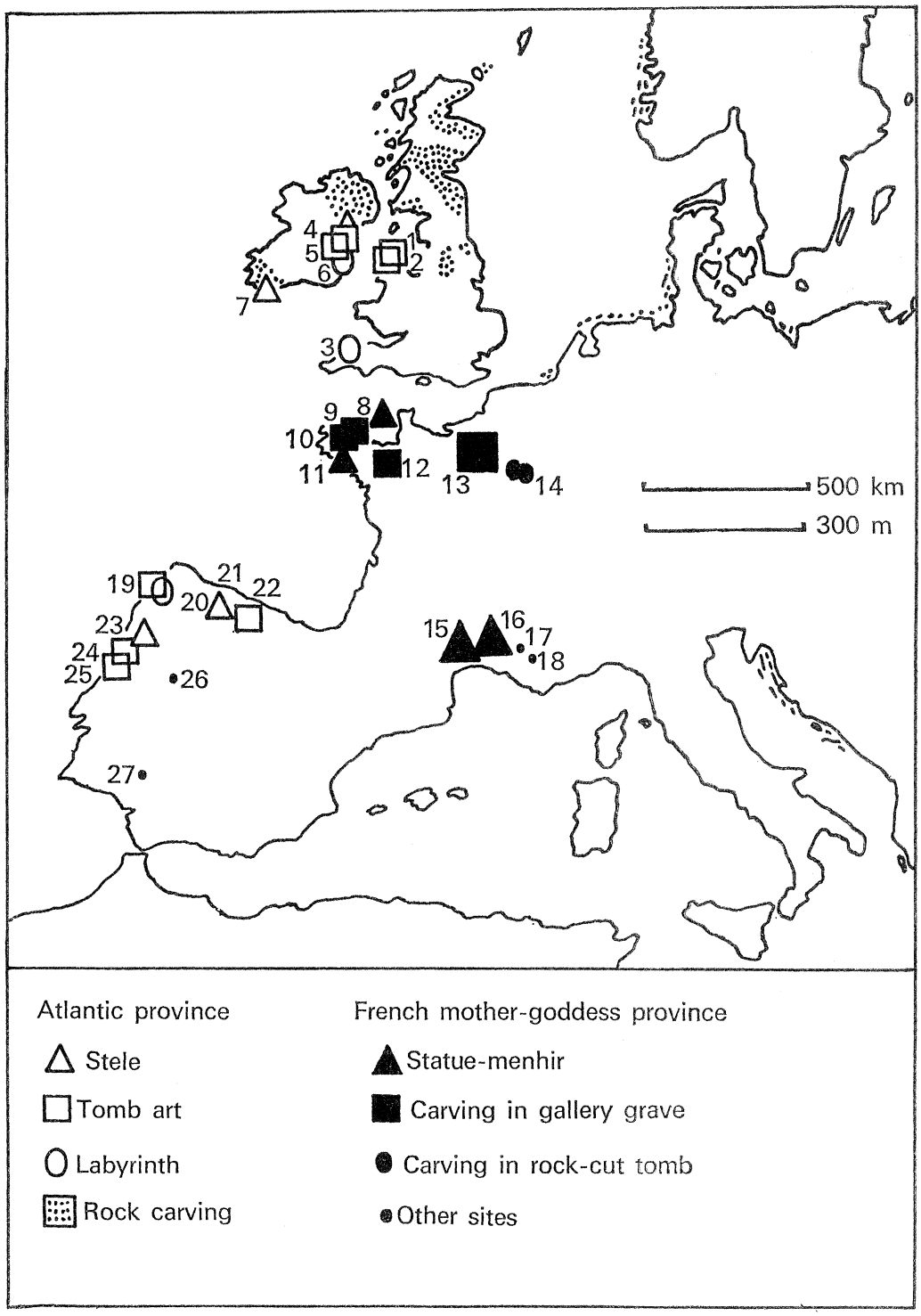

Figure 34 Map of western Europe showing the two main provinces of megalithic and associated art. The numbers refer to sites as follows: 1. Barclodiad y Gawres; 2. Bryn Celli Ddu; 3. Tintagel; 4. King's Mountain; 5. New Grange and Knowth; 6. Holywood; 7. Clear Island; 8. Catel; 9. Prajou-Menhir; 10. Mougau-Bian; 11. Guidel; 12. Tressé; 13. Paris Basin sites; 14. Coizard and Courjeonnet; 15. the Aveyron group; 16. the Gard group; 17. L'Isle-sur-Sorge; 18. Lauris; 19. Pedra Coberta; 20. Mogor; 21. Pola de Allande; 22. Cangas de Onis; 23. Casal; 24. Pedralta; 25. Chão Redondo; 26. Ciudad Rodrigo; 27. Granja de Toniñuelo

Age, and may date from a time when Irish metallurgists were exporting their products, and perhaps their beliefs, across the Irish Sea (Megaw and Hardy 1938). Their activities in the export field are clear by now in Denmark and the Low Countries (Butler 1960: 201) and in north-western France (Briard 1965: 51–77). Whether they worked in Galicia is at present uncertain. At any rate, these highly mobile smiths are obviously possible agents for the diffusion of the putative sun-cult, a full 2,000 years before the missionary activities of their more celebrated descendants.

The two distinct provinces of megalithic art, including related art in rock-cut tombs, on *stelae*, and on open rock surfaces, are indicated on the map (fig. 34). The art of Ireland and western Iberia should be completely separated from that of France. Stylistically, the two provinces could hardly be more different – this seems clear whether or not my tentative ideas on the beliefs of the two areas are accepted.

One point which emerges from this study is that in both provinces the relevant art was only partially connected with megalithic tombs. In the mother-goddess province, for instance, there are numerous isolated statue-menhirs, while in the Atlantic province art may be found on rock surfaces and *stelae*, as well as in tombs. This serves to emphasize what I said at the outset – that the practice of a religion and the choice of a particular burial rite are separable, and in many cases probably were distinct.

These two groups of art are unrelated to the earliest of the European megaliths, and there is no good evidence yet for any date of before 2500 B.C. for either group. So we still know little, far too little, about the genesis of megalithic tombs and the rituals and beliefs which informed the building of the earliest examples. In the past, the acceptance of the simple hypothesis which has come under criticism here has seriously held up study of the rituals implied by grave goods and tomb design. The mother-goddess has detained us for too long; let us disengage ourselves from her embrace.

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