

## SURVEY OF SOUTH INDIAN MEGALITHS

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

ONE of the problems with which Indian archaeology is concerned today is the problem of the megaliths of south India, which represent the largest number of extant relics of the protohistoric period of Indian culture—wide alike in their distribution and variety. Apart from a preliminary ground-survey with a view to locating all the monuments and their classification according to typological features, the much bigger tasks of excavating the representative types, preferably in association with the contemporary

habitations, if any, and arriving at definite conclusions as regards their date and their authors, the probable source of their origin and their relationship with the later historic cultures, of which we have more definite knowledge, await completion.

## 2. PREVIOUS WORK

The occurrence of megalithic monuments and urn-burials in south India has been noticed from time to time by scholars as well as laymen for well over a century. Thus, writing in 1872, James Fergusson dealt in detail with south Indian megaliths in his *Rude Stone Monuments in all Countries*.<sup>1</sup> The diggings made by Jagor of Berlin in 1876 at the famous urn-burial site of Ādichanallūr in Tinnevely District<sup>2</sup>, offered no small impetus for the further excavation conducted there by Rea of the Archaeological Survey of India between 1889 and 1905 and at Perumbair from 1904 to 1908.<sup>3</sup> In this connexion, the explorations conducted by Louis Lapique at Ādichanallūr in 1903-04 may also be mentioned.<sup>4</sup> About the same time as Jagor, Brecks, the Commissioner of the Nilgiris, recorded his observations on the rude stone monuments in the Nilgiris in his *Primitive Tribes and Monuments of the Nilgiris*,<sup>5</sup> and the vast collections therefrom form a valuable part of the prehistoric collection in the Madras Government Museum.

In 1882 Sewell published his list of antiquarian remains in Madras.<sup>6</sup> As most of Sewell's information was collected second-hand, he recommended an intensive exploration, not merely to test the truth of the information he had gathered but to form the basis for fresh evidences over a wider area. Robert Bruce Foote of the Geological Survey of India catalogued, in 1901, at the instance of Edgar Thurston, Superintendent, Madras Museum, the prehistoric antiquities that had been jumbled in the Madras Museum till that date and also the megaliths in south India.

The mass of megalithic material thus accumulated in Indian and European museums inspired a series of articles dealing with the Indian megaliths and their problems in the Special India Number of *Man* in October 1930. Next year, H. C. Das Gupta, of the Calcutta University, published a bibliography of megalithic and other prehistoric antiquities in India.<sup>7</sup>

## 3. RECENT EXPLORATION

But the recommendation of Sewell did not materialize till the end of 1944, when the Archaeological Survey of India took up in right earnest the much-desired and long-awaited exploration of megalithic monuments in south India on a scientific basis—a work which is still in progress.

<sup>1</sup>J. Fergusson, *Rude Stone Monuments in all Countries: their Age and Uses* (London, 1872).

<sup>2</sup>The work of Dr. Jagor is mentioned in Alexander Rea, *Catalogue of Prehistoric Antiquities from Ādichanallūr and Perumbair* (Madras, 1915).

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>J. W. Brecks, *An Account of the Primitive Tribes and Monuments of the Nilgiris* (London, 1873).

<sup>6</sup>R. Sewell, *List of Antiquarian Remains in the Presidency of Madras* (Madras, 1882).

<sup>7</sup>H. C. Das Gupta, 'Bibliography of prehistoric Indian antiquities', *Jour. Asiatic Soc. Bengal*, XXVII N.S. (1931).



Attention is naturally confined mainly to south India, where these monuments abound. So far, the District of Chingleput, covering roughly a little over 3,000 square miles, and the contiguous areas of the bordering Districts of North Arcot and South Arcot (Madras State) and Chittoor (Andhra State) have been thoroughly explored, resulting in the discovery of a homogeneous group of monuments located in the area. The number of such sites discovered in Chingleput alone is about two hundred. Besides, a thorough re-exploration based on the list prepared by the State Officers has also been undertaken during this period in Pudukkottai, an erstwhile State and now a division in Tiruchirapalli District of Madras State, and in Cochin on the west coast, and the monuments in these two regions have been found to represent two different, though basically homogeneous, typological groups.

#### 4. MEGALITHIC TYPES

Alongside the inauguration of a systematic survey came the necessity of a standard nomenclature of the different types of monuments. Previously field-workers described them by different names adopted from the existing European terms, with little success in conveying their sense. Hence the Department of Archaeology evolved a standard nomenclature,<sup>1</sup> which is now extensively followed in classifying the monuments.

##### A. CHINGLEPUT

The monuments of Chingleput District consist of the following types: (1) cairn-circles (pl. XXXVIII A); (2) dolmenoid cists made of dressed slabs of stone covered by a capstone; (3) dolmenoid cists of rough unhewn boulders; (4) dolmenoid cists with the capstone lying flush with the heap of cairn (pl. XXXVIII B); and (5) barrows or little cairn-mounds marked by quartzite chips. All these types, except the last, are invariably surrounded by a stone circle and occur together promiscuously, though here and there, at the same site, typological segregation has also been noticed. While the dolmenoid cists have been found to cluster on the rocky high ground, the simpler cairn-circles have been found to cling together on the slopes or on the farther peneplains. The field-data suggest the interment of urns, single or multiple (pl. XXXIX A), in cairn-circles or barrows, whereas legged terracotta coffins (pl. XXXIX B) or sarcophagi (pl. XL A), single or multiple, are to be expected in dolmenoid cists of all types. The barrows are seen to contain only urns and, rarely, sarcophagi. The urns are usually large in size and pyriform in shape and have a pedunculated bottom, the same shape as of the urns found in the urn-graves at Adichanallūr. The pyriform shape of the burial-urn with an extended bottom was made the basis of a speculation by Logan that it resembled the human uterus and interment in this symbolized man's return to Mother Earth.<sup>2</sup> This feature, together with the similarity of other accompanying interment-goods, specially pottery, links them up with the megaliths, some of which entomb urn-burials—though the barrows are undefined by bounding circles—and leaves no doubt as to their intimate relationship with stone tombs called dolmenoid cists. It may, therefore, be reasonably postulated that they are also of the megalithic order.

<sup>1</sup>V. D. Krishnaswami, 'Megalithic types of south India', *Ancient India*, no. 5 (1949).

<sup>2</sup>W. Logan, *Malabar*, I, pp. 180-82.



## B. AREAS ADJOINING GHINGLEPUT

While the attention of the exploratory survey was confined primarily to Chingleput District, the peripheral areas of the adjacent Districts were also surveyed for comparative purposes. The search was not without avail, as it led to the discovery of transitional hybrid types of monuments as at Tiruvālangāḍu in Tiruttani Taluk of Chittoor District (Āndhra State) and at Ariyur and Karikantāngal in Arkonam Taluk of North Arcot District (Madras State).

At Tiruvālangāḍu there is a gigantic slab-stone dolmen consisting of a massive capstone slab resting on only two dressed orthostatic slabs, held together by notches cut in their top corners. This is also distinguished by a port-hole. At Ariyur a port-holed dressed-slab dolmenoid cist of granite is surrounded by a circle of upright slabs. At Karikantāngal occurs a really hybrid dolmenoid cist, marking the transition from the rude stone dolmenoid cist to the port-holed dressed-slab one. At the centre of a large circle is a small dolmenoid cist with a port-hole on its eastern slab and surrounding this is an inner ring of rude stone boulders supporting an enormous monolithic capstone, about 18 ft. in diameter and upwards of 2 ft. 6 in. in thickness.

## C. PUDUKKOTTAI

The monuments of the Pudukkottai region consist of transepted port-holed dolmenoid cists (pl. XLI A and B) with urn-burial interment together with the bounding circle and the cairn-circle, enclosing single and multiple urn-burials. The sarcophagi-interment is unknown here.

## D. COCHIN

The exploration of Cochin led to the discovery of a large variety of megalithic and associated monuments:

- (1) dolmenoid cists without port-holes, surrounded by a single stone circle;
- (2) dolmenoid cists with port-holes;
- (3) urn-burials indicated by a gneissic capstone;
- (4) *kudakallus* or hood-stones consisting of a large dressed circular slab of laterite with hemispheric top and flat bottom placed on the ground (pl. XLII A). This type may correspond to an urn-burial placed in a pit approached by a series of steps with a ledge round the top for containing the burial-furniture;
- (5) multiple *kudakallus*, arranged in groups of three or five, each group surrounded by a large stone circle (pl. XLII B);
- (6) *topikallus* or umbrella-stones consisting of a dressed circular stone—in fact a truncated cone—with chamfered edges at the bottom, supported on four dressed slabs or orthostats, planted firmly into the ground in the shape of a square at the bottom and so arranged as to taper to a smaller square at the top, flattened to receive the capstone called *topikallu* (pl. XLIV A);
- (7) menhirs or big stones planted vertically in isolation and without any other megalithic appendages (pl. XL B). They are not found in alignment. The stones usually have a north-to-south orientation. The biggest stone noticed measured 16 ft. in height, 12 ft. in breadth and 1 ft. 6 in. in thickness.



(8) underground caves excavated into the lateritic subsoil which are found in association with megaliths, as at Kāṭṭakampāl, near Kunnampulam, Cochin (pl. XLIII). The reported discovery of pottery and metallic objects in them points to their connexion with megaliths. They are usually in the nature of a circular vault, with a lowered rectangular court on one side (usually eastern), containing steps cut into the rock for access. The steps lead to one or two square or rectangular openings on the vertical face of rock at one end of the lower court, which is large enough to allow access to an adult. The vault is oftentimes supported by a monolithic rock-cut pillar, and sometimes, when the pillar is missing, a large circular hole connects the vault with the outside. The floor of the vault itself contains multiple benches cut out of the rock. Such monuments are characteristic of the soft lateritic hills of the west coast of peninsular India.

#### E. OTHER REGIONS

Though the megaliths are ubiquitous all over the south, a few have been reported from near Nagpur in Madhya Pradesh, near Delhi,<sup>1</sup> Almora in the north, Baluchistan and Karachi in the north-west, in the Leh valley on the borders of Tibet and in vestigial and symbolic survivals in central and north-eastern India.

### 5. EXCAVATIONS OF MEGALITHIC SITES

#### A. BRAHMAGIRI

The first systematic excavation in recent times of a megalithic site was conducted at Brahmagiri in Molakalmuru Taluk of Chitaldrug District in Mysore State in 1947 by the Department of Archaeology in collaboration with the Archaeological Department of Mysore.\* The megalithic monuments of the place, comprising port-holed dolmenoid cists (pl. XLIV B) and cairn-circles enclosing pits, yielded definite chronological evidence, connected that the site was with a habitation-site, the cultural levels of which could be dated, within an allowable time-scale, with the help of datable pottery. The cranial and skeletal remains of these tombs are under examination by the Department of Anthropology.

Suffice it to note here that the megalithic culture as represented at the habitation-site of the place was found to be associated in its earlier stages with late survivals of a stone axe culture and to continue for a good length of time down to the beginning of the Āndhra culture and has been dated from the third century B.C. to the middle of the first century A.D.

#### B. COCHIN

The excavation at Brahmagiri was followed by the excavation of a single monument at Porkalam, Cochin, in 1948, resulting in the discovery of an urn-burial placed in a pit covered by a granite capstone and surrounded by a straggling circle of laterite, the local

<sup>1</sup> *Ancient India*, no. 4 (1947-48), p. 302.

\* R. E. M. Wheeler, 'Brahmagiri and Chandravalli 1947: megalithic and other cultures in the Chitaldrug District, Mysore State', *Ancient India*, no. 4.



stone. The circle-stones were submerged under accumulated earth. The skeletal remains in the urn were fragmentary and placed in a bowl inside the urn.'

### C. ŚĀNŪR

After the completion of the exploration in Chingleput District, excavation was taken up at a representative site in the southern granitic zone, called Śānūr, about 45 miles south of Madras. During two seasons of work in 1950 and 1952 five megaliths were excavated here; of these three turned out to be of the dolmenoid cist type (pl. XLV A), made of rough unhewn boulders, of which two had their capstones flush with the cairn-heap, and contained single as well as multiple sarcophagi (pl. XLVI). One of these tombs contained skeletal remains consisting of two skulls, long bones, etc., found in the sarcophagi. Of the two others, which were superficially only cairn-circles (pl. XLV B), one contained a sarcophagus, and the other proved to be an example of pit-burial containing post-exarnation fragmentary and multiple skeletal remains, including one skull.

Though no fresh datable material came to light in the course of these excavations, enough evidence was found to establish their cultural affinity with the Brahmagiri megaliths. A study of the skeletal remains from Brahmagiri and Śānūr may throw significant light on the race of the megalithic folk.

## 6. THE INDIAN AND WESTERN MEGALITHS

Though it is hardly necessary to reiterate that megalithic monuments are essentially burials or tombs, it is desirable to examine the characteristics of Indian megaliths in terms of what is understood by megaliths in other parts of the world, as such monuments are found not merely in India but in the Atlantic and Mediterranean littoral, viz., England, Portugal, Spain, France, Germany, Sweden and on the eastern shores of the Black Sea among the European countries, in north Africa, in the Caucasus, Palestine and Iran in Asia. But beyond these limits and until the peninsular part of India is reached, the vast expanse of space is without any report of megalithic monuments. This gap is not only spatial but also chronological. The monuments in Europe have yielded Stone Age implements, on the basis of which they have been dated to about 2000 B.C., though the dolmens in the Caucasus area are assigned a slightly later date of 1500 B.C. But the Indian megaliths contain a profusion of iron implements and wheel-made pottery and have been ascribed, on the basis of available evidence (below, pp. 112 f.), roughly to the third century B.C. and later. This chronological gap, therefore, would indicate the urgent need for an exploration and intensive examination of the intermediate region.

Though etymologically the word 'megalith' is composed of two Greek words *megathos*, meaning 'huge', and *lithoi*, meaning 'stone', not all megaliths are built of huge stones; nor can all structures built of enormous-sized stones be called megalith. Megaliths are indeed built of stones, but their prime characteristic is that they are sepulchral in nature. Gordon Childe<sup>2</sup> suggests that all these burials are or ought to be collective burials, and, as evidence has shown in Europe, all the corpses were not laid simultaneously in the tombs, which were used successively over a longer or shorter period.

<sup>1</sup>B. K. Thapar, 'Porkalam 1948: excavation of a megalithic urn-burial', *Ancient India*, no. 8 (1952).

<sup>2</sup>V. Gordon Childe, 'Megaliths', *Ancient India*, no. 4.



## *SURVEY OF SOUTH INDIAN MEGALITHS*

If the number of corpses was small, the use of a megalithic tomb as a burial-vault was probably restricted to a family, but if the number was fifty or more, 'their use might have been permitted to a group larger than the natural family, to a clan'. Though the Indian megaliths do sometimes show evidence of multiple burials, the number of bodies or their fragments is much smaller, and there is also no evidence of the successive use of the same grave.

Childe has also pointed out that while the distribution of megaliths in the west is coastal, i.e., along the shores of the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the North Sea, in India this culture penetrated far into the interior and probably travelled from the west, but how and when is not yet clearly known.

### 7. SOME ASPECTS OF THE INDIAN MEGALITHS

#### A. INFLUENCE OF GEOLOGY AND CLIMATE

The location of the megaliths in Chingleput District and the neighbouring areas has thrown interesting and important sidelights on the effect of geology and climate upon not merely the structural form but even the situation of the burial-tombs. These monuments have invariably been found to occur on rocky high grounds, which are themselves unfit for cultivation, in close juxtaposition to a hillock and an irrigation-tank, but in very close proximity to arable land. The hills supplied the material of the structures and, by the nature of the rock, influenced their shape; the irrigation-tank, intended to hold rain-water perennially owing to the lie of the land, made the cultivation of the adjacent arable land possible. It can, therefore, be inferred that megaliths sprang up where population could thrive, and populations could thrive only where the climate was clement in the form of abundant rains to make irrigation possible.

The larger, therefore, the irrigation-tanks, the larger was the concentration of megalithic monuments near them. It is, therefore, reasonable to ascribe the introduction of the irrigation-system in south India to the megalithic folk.

In fact, the tours of exploration organized by the Department have been planned in advance with the help of the Survey of India maps to the scale of 1 in. to a mile, by picking out on them places at or near which are indicated both rocks or hillocks and tanks, and this index has proved successful in locating megalithic sites in nine cases out of ten. But even in the exceptional cases where megaliths have not been found, the absence could be attributed to deliberate destruction by the local people for stone.

About the influence of rock on the shape and structure of the monument, the example of Chingleput District should be convincing. The District can be divided geologically into two zones, viz. the granitic zone of the south and the lateritic zone of the north. As granite is harder and less easily handled or dressed, the monuments in the southern zone are mostly made of unhewn and undressed boulders, and in the few cases where slabs have been used no attempt has been made to shape them; in the northern zone dressed-slab cist-monuments built of soft (cheese stone) laterite predominate.

#### B. THE ASSOCIATED POTTERY

By far the largest quantity of grave goods contained in the tombs, as found by excavation or chanced upon during salvage of rifled tombs, is constituted by pottery. A large number of pots, of all shapes and sizes, have invariably been interred in each tomb,



but among them a distinctive ware, called the Black-and-red Ware, has established a definite place for itself in the corpus of Indian pottery-types.

This Ware is produced by a technique called the process of inverted firing,<sup>1</sup> whereby the pots, kept inverted during firing, turn black at the places of direct contact with the fire, viz. the inner surface and the exterior edge around the rim, while the rest of the exterior surface turns red. This Ware varies from coarse to medium in texture, is polished and treated with a slip, is usually thin and, though turned on the wheel, is rather fragile owing to insufficient firing. It is also sometimes salt-glazed to present a shining though crackled appearance.

This Ware is common to megaliths all over the south and, on the basis of the date of megalithic monuments as based on the excavation at Brahmagiri in 1947 and other evidences (below, pp. 112-113), can be placed between the third-second century B.C. and the first century A.D.

### C. THE PORT-HOLE AND EASTERN OPENING

An interesting feature of the slab-cist dolmens is the occurrence of a circular port-hole on the eastern slab, ranging normally from 22 to 18 in. in diameter but dwindling down in a few cases to 4 to 5 in.<sup>2</sup>

This feature in the form of a gap or opening, which sometimes takes the form of a passage with flanking stones on the eastern side of even a multiple rough stone orthostat dolmen, has been noticed at several places in Chingleput District. It has also been noticed in the dolmenoid cists excavated at Brahmagiri (above, p. 107) and Śānūr (above, p. 108), where, in one of the dolmenoid cists, a regular passage on the eastern side is unmistakable.

### D. ORIENTATION

Incidentally, it may be pointed out that the dolmenoid cist-chambers have an east-to-west orientation, and this is indicated in the laying of the capstone also even in the rude stone monuments. That the occurrence of the port-hole on the eastern orthostat in the slab-cist dolmens or of the opening in the case of rude stone dolmens on the eastern side and the invariable east-west orientation of dolmen-chambers are interconnected cannot be disputed.

## 8. THE URN-BURIALS

As stated above (p. 105), another class of interments called urn-burials, without any lithic appendage in the form of a bounding circle, has been found in large numbers at Ādichanallūr in Tirunelveli District in the extreme south of the Indian peninsula.<sup>3</sup> Though these burials cannot be brought into the orbit of megalithic monuments by any orthodox standard of definition, they commend themselves for inclusion in this study by

<sup>1</sup>A. Lucas in *Jour. Anthropological Inst.*, LIX (1929), pp. 121-129.

<sup>2</sup>Meadows Taylor, 'Description of Cairns, cromlechs, kistvaens and other Celtic, Druidical and Scythian monuments in the Dekhan', *Transactions Roy. Irish Academy*, XXIV, pt. iii (1862), p. 331.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, *op. cit.*



virtue of the affinity of their contents with those of the real megaliths in the form of iron implements, Black-and-red Ware and fragmentary burials. Urn-burials have indeed been found within the enclosures of bounding circles in Pudukkottai, Cochin and even Chingleput (pl. XXXIX A), where they have also been found in barrows undefined by circles. Urn-burials are mentioned in the *Maṇimekalai*<sup>1</sup> of the Śaṅgam Age, alongside pit- and cist-burials, and may have, at the early stages, been without the bounding circle and, in the process of evolution, been gradually admitted into the megalithic family, as their co-existence with dolmenoid cists in the places noted above would suggest. Significantly enough, a comparative study of the pottery from the pure urn-burials of Ādichanallūr and the megalithic pottery from Pudukkottai and Chingleput shows a comparative primitiveness of the former.

## 9. THE STONE CIRCLES

The prime common characteristic of the megalithic monuments, leaving aside structural vagaries and regional differences, is the almost universal presence of a bounding circle of dressed or unhewn stones of irregular shape and size, varying in diameter, from exterior to exterior, from about 18 ft. to 139 ft.<sup>2</sup> The barrows in Chingleput District occurring within the megalithic zone, which are merely low circular mounds strewn with chips of quartzite but are not surrounded by stone circles, recall the urn-burials of Ādichanallūr, specially because they also contain urns.

Childe has pointed out that the main function of the circle was only to support or sustain the cairn of stones or tumulus covering the tombs,<sup>3</sup> and we find in India that the tombs which the tumuli cover are not always either megalithic or collective.

## 10. CHRONOLOGY

### A. LITERARY EVIDENCE

The *Rigveda* mentions both burial and cremation as approved modes of disposal of the dead.<sup>4</sup> In the south a good volume of literature on this subject was produced in the early historic period,<sup>5</sup> and there are references to megaliths as we understand them today. Even inscriptional evidence is available in respect of this mode of entombment. The Śaṅgam literature, produced in the first three centuries of the Christian era, describes a state of civilization, as it is admitted on all hands, between the third century B.C. and the third century A.D. The *Maṇimekalai*, which shares with the *Silappadikāram* the plaudits of being representative of what is known as the Augustan Age of Tamil literature, mentions five methods of disposal of the dead, viz. cremation, exposure of the dead, inhumation, cist-burial and pot-burial. Apparently all these modes were practised in those days, probably by different sections of the contemporary population.

<sup>1</sup> K. R. Srinivasan, 'Megalithic burials and urn-fields of south India in the light of Tamil literature and tradition', *Ancient India*, no. 2 (1946).

<sup>2</sup> This longest diameter has been noticed at Settupattu, Kānchipuram Taluk, Chingleput District.

<sup>3</sup> Childe, *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> A. A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology* (Strassburg, 1897), p. 165.

<sup>5</sup> Srinivasan, *op. cit.*



The urn-burials are variously called *Tāḷi* or *mudumakkaḷ-chāḍi* or *immattāḷi* in Tamil literature of the period from the third century B.C. to the twelfth century A.D. The stone circles are called *kaṅkidai* in a Tanjore inscription. The Tamil grammar *Tolkāppiyam*, the earliest extant Tamil work of its kind of the Śaṅgam date, mentions *naḍukal*, meaning the erected stone or menhir, which may be the precursor of the *vīrakkal* and *satī*-stone of later times.

But the method of burial in an urn covered by a lid seems to have been practised largely in the Śaṅgam epoch even for the funeral of kings. These references point, however, to the full interment of the body in a large pot. Nevertheless, by the eleventh or twelfth century the custom of urn-burial had become nothing but memory.

Nor do the present-day names of the megalithic monuments indicate the survival of any significant tradition about their origin among the people. In revenue-registers they are recorded as *kalkuttu*, 'places where stones are planted or pitched'. They are also locally known as *madamadakkattāḷi*, which is an obvious corruption of *mudumakkattāḷi*, 'the urn or receptacle in which ancients or ancestors are buried'. Another local name is *Pāṇḍavarkuḷi*, interpreted as meaning 'the burial-pit of the Pāṇḍavas'; it may be the derivative of some word corrupted beyond recognition. Megaliths are also sometimes known as *kurāṅgu-pattadai*, 'the workshop of the monkeys', a corruption of *kurakkupattadai* or *kurakkupattadai*, mentioned in a Pāṇḍya inscription of the thirteenth century and meaning 'a sepulchre or tomb lowered into the earth'. In the Kanarese districts they are called *moriyar mane*, the meaning of which also is obscure, and *Pāṇḍava mane* or *Pāṇḍu pare*, again interpreted as the 'home of the Pāṇḍavas', without any apparent bearing on their real purpose. In Tamil parts, in addition to the names given above, they are variously known as *nari-vaṅgu*, 'fox-hole', *nari-vīḍu*, 'abode of the foxes', *Lambāḍi iruppu*, 'gypsy hutments', *Vāli kuḍiyiruppu*, 'Vali's abode' and *eduthuvachān kallu*, 'erected stones', according to the fancy of the local people. In the Telugu country Sewell noticed the name *rākshasa gullu* or *goli*, meaning 'the graves of the *rākshasas*'.<sup>1</sup>

## B. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

### (i) Coins

The evidence of coins for dating megaliths is meagre but nevertheless convincing.

The discovery of a corroded bronze coin in a cist-grave at Sular in Palladam Taluk of Coimbatore District, which was dated by John Allan to the third-second century B.C., on the basis of its similarity with an Eran coin,<sup>2</sup> marks the earliest date so far available for this kind of tomb.

The discovery of a silver coin of Augustus in association with a hoard of punch-marked coins in a megalithic tomb called Pāṇḍukuḷi in Coimbatore takes the date forward to the age of Augustus<sup>3</sup> (27 B.C.-A.D. 14).

A gold coin discovered in a barrow in the Nilgiris<sup>4</sup> may have been a Roman aureus of the period following the shifting of the capital of the Roman Empire to Constantinople (beginning of the fourth century A.D.) pushes the survival of this culture into the historical period.

<sup>1</sup> R. Sewell, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-58 and 60.

<sup>2</sup> H. C. Beck, 'Notes on sundry Asiatic beads—beads from megalithic tombs and middens in Sular Taluk and neighbouring districts', *Man*, special India number, XXX, no. 10 (October, 1930), p. 172.

<sup>3</sup> *Madras Journal of Literature and Science*, 1884, p. 214; *Indian Antiquary*, II (1873), p. 241.

<sup>4</sup> J. Hough, *Letters on the Climate etc. of the Nilgherries* (London, 1829), pp. 82-84.



## (ii) Pottery

The pottery found in association with the Eran coin at Sular contains a type distinguished by a decoration of wavy lines in yellow on a red ware. Two such pots were apparently found by Rea in the course of his excavation at Perumbair, in Chingleput District, though he left them out of account in his description of the excavation. If the pottery of Coimbatore could be dated on the basis of the Eran coin to roughly about 300-200 B.C., the megalithic pottery of Perumbair also can be similarly dated.

A further dating evidence is the unpublished discovery in 1947 at Arikamedu (Pondicherry) of the distinctive Black-and-red (megalithic) Ware associated with typical Arikamedu pottery of the early or middle first century A.D.

Russet-coloured pottery having a general similarity with the yellow painted Āndhra ware has been obtained from a port-holed cist in Cochin.<sup>1</sup>

## (iii) Beads

Beads of glass, faience and other materials have been sporadically noticed in the megalithic tombs. One of the earliest literary references to glass or quartz is a Tamil word *palingu* used in the *Maṇimekalai* (3, 64), possibly a corruption of the Sanskrit word *sphaṭika* through the Prakrit *phalika* (quartz), occurring in the Bhaṭṭiproḷu inscription of the second century B.C. The beads found in the megalithic tombs may, therefore, be as early as 200 B.C., if not earlier.<sup>2</sup>

## (iv) Stratigraphy

Rea found seventeen urn-burials in a group below a small Buddhist *stūpa* at Amarāvati.<sup>3</sup> This small *stūpa* can be taken to be anterior to or at best contemporary with the Main *Stūpa* at the site, the beginning of which is dated to *circa* 200 B.C. Even if it is posterior to the Main *Stūpa*, the date of the urns can be placed around 200 B.C.

To all this must be added the evidence of the excavation conducted at Brahmagiri in 1947 (above, p. 107), where the megaliths have been dated from the third-second centuries B.C. to the first century A.D.

## 11. ANTHROPOLOGICAL DATA

The question as to who were the megalithic folk has long engaged the attention of researchers in the field. The limited study by Zuckerman of the cranial and skeletal finds from the urn-burials at Ādichanallūr points to the responsibility of the Dravidian race<sup>4</sup> for these urn-burials. Another noted anthropologist, Christoph Fürer von Haimendorf, arguing on the basis that of the two early Brahmagiri cultures (above, p. 101) it could

<sup>1</sup> Govinda Menon in *Man*, 1937, article no. 179.

<sup>2</sup> For the evidence of etched beads, see Thapar, *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Rea, 'Excavations at Amaravati', *An. Rep. Arch. Surv. Ind.*, 1908-09 (Calcutta, 1912), pp. 88-91.

<sup>4</sup> S. Zuckerman, 'The Adichanallur skulls', *Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum, N.S.*, General Section, II, pt. i (1930), pp. 19-20.



obviously be the megalithic that could be associated with the Dravidians,' seems to confirm the above view.

This proposition of Haimendorf purporting to equate the megalithic builders of south India with the Dravidian speakers is based on the following assumptions:

1. The megalithic culture, consisting of an improved ceramic technique and the use of iron, was an extraneous intrusion on the local primitive neolithic culture at Brahmagiri.

2. The edicts of Aśoka, found in three contiguous villages in the neighbourhood of the site at Brahmagiri, could have only been addressed to the more advanced iron-using megalith-builders rather than to the primitive neolithic folk of the locality.

3. Since the entire south India, which also marks the bounds of the distribution of megalithic monuments in all their varieties, speaks only Dravidian languages today, these could only have been introduced by the more vigorous intruders.

As regards the origin of the megalithic folk he is inclined towards a western source, viz. the Mediterranean region, on the analogy of port-holed cists and assumes that the first point of contact was on the west coast. He leaves the intervening lacunae in space and time (above, p. 108) to be filled up by archaeologists.

While the first and third assumptions can be easily conceded to, in respect of the second it may be stated that Aśoka's edicts make mention of four well-established Tamil kingdoms beyond his frontiers, which would indicate an earlier settlement of the 'superior Dravidian folk', at least in areas further south of the Aśokan empire.

If the megalithic folk are to be equated with the Dravidian-speaking people of the south, we have also to take into consideration the fact that at least one of the Dravidian languages, namely Tamil, had a developed literary form by the beginning of the Christian era, if not a little earlier, and as such would presuppose a sufficiently long background through which it should have existed as a *patois*. All this would mean that a date earlier than 300 B.C. for the megalithic folk in south India has to be looked for.

In this connexion, Haimendorf would agree with D. H. Gordon in considering the period between 700 B.C. and 400 B.C. as the most likely period of the immigration of the iron-using people into south India.<sup>2</sup>

This view, therefore, drawing attention to an interesting and important aspect of the problem, deserves careful and detailed examination on the field, as well as by linguists and anthropologists.

When the study of the skeletal material from Brahmagiri, Śānūr and Maski, as well as those coming from the current excavations in Chingleput District and the proposed ones further south in the Tamil country are completed, we shall perhaps get nearer to the solution of the problem. In the present context Ādichanallūr and its material, akin in some respects to the megaliths but differing in their large contents of bronze ware and gold diadems, seem to stand apart, and their correlation with the megalithic complex is another problem facing us today.

<sup>1</sup>This view was first expressed by Haimendorf in his Presidential Address to the Anthropology and Archaeology Section of the Indian Science Congress, Poona, 1950, and elaborated in his lecture on 'New aspects in the Dravidian problems' at the Fourth Session of the International Congress of Anthropology, Vienna, 1952. A brief report of the lecture appeared in the Indian press, including the *Hindu*, Madras, September 1952.

<sup>2</sup>D. H. Gordon, 'The early use of metals in India and Pakistan', *Jour. Roy. Anthropological Inst.*, LXXX (1950).



12. CONCLUSION

Though the megaliths of India do not follow the same pattern even at the same site and are marked by structural differences, they have definite common features which make all of them representative of one common culture, i.e. the megalithic culture. The common features consist of the use of iron implements, which, at least at one site, viz. Brahmagiri, was an intrusion into the earlier stone axe culture which it ultimately supplanted, the wheel-turned Black-and-red Ware and post-exarnation fragmentary and collective burials. Even the urn-burials of Ādichanallūr are bound with the megalithic culture by these common features, though they do not have the megalithic appendages of either a circle or a dolmenoid cist. It has not yet been possible to assess fully the point of time when this distinctive culture first emerged upon the Indian soil, nor when it died away, as even today this mode of burial is practised in parts of India in a symbolic and conventional form by many primitive tribes.